

EMPIPHANY

BY

STEVEN J. GUSCOTT

Chapter One

She gripped his wrist lightly and he cherished the feeling of her smooth skin against his. It was a familiar grip that had happened thousands of times to them both, from hundreds of people, but to Blair her touch was unique and desired above all the others. Her fingers tightened ever so slightly and he felt the sudden influx of positive emotion. With a reflex action Blair's hand opened from a tight fist into an open fan, each finger spreading as far as they could go. Turning his head he directed his gaze slightly to the left, pretending to casually look passed her. However, he was unable to control himself. His eyes flickered to glance at her face and he struggled to stop them lingering.

It was the first day of the week and the morning break between their classes. The large High School of Sector Twenty Five was full of students. Some gathered in small groups throughout the corridors, some made their way towards the next class, and some were outside enjoying the good weather. The High School was the typical large square within square design and each of the Forty-Nine Housing Sectors had at least one. The first square was made of four three levelled corridors with class rooms, and in the centre was a second square courtyard of open space with benches, tables and greenery. The building was decorated brightly with large glass windows and plenty of welcoming flowers at the front entrance. A road separated the front entrance from a long row of houses and to either side of the school were parks for the residents. Open grass fields provided space for sport and leisure activities at the rear and behind them a row of trees created a natural barrier to the gardens of another long row of houses.

Standing by a bench in the courtyard Blair inhaled slowly, the Transfer of positive emotions sweeping through him and lifting his melancholy mood.

"Thank you Jessica," he said.

The Transfer finished and he turned his head back towards her, hoping she hadn't noticed his glances. It didn't help that a gust of wind caught her hair, making it flow gracefully back and forward like a ballet dancer. He struggled not to stare as the dark brown waves created a vision of natural beauty. The wind passed as soon as it had come and her hair rested at its usual length, slightly below the shoulders. Her eyes were brown too, and she had a face where her eyes, mouth and nose complemented each other in a simple beauty. A beauty that was not imposing, but once noticed was not easily forgotten.

"You're welcome Blair," Jessica replied, removing her hand gently from his wrist and meeting his eyes with hers. With a friendly smile Blair tried to hide how his breathing had changed and how his heart had started to beat faster. He took a step back.

"You know we are always happy to help," Jessica continued as he moved away from her.

Blair's eyebrows lowered and came together, creasing the skin in between, but they quickly relaxed again as he controlled his annoyance. She had used the collective 'we.' All he wanted was some sign that she liked him the same way, but it never came. He searched her emotion Transfer every time, hoping for a hint of love amongst those feelings of happiness and joy, but once again he had been disappointed. As he thought about this a wave of sadness and longing came over him. The positive emotions she had just Transferred began to fade as a result and his shoulders started to slump. Jessica didn't notice, but his need for the Positive Transfer always concerned her, and before Blair could divert the conversation onto their morning classes her questioning started.

"Do you feel better?" she asked as she sat down on the bench.

Blair sat casually beside her and forced a smile. "Yeah, I do," he replied.

It was partly true.

"Do you know what's wrong?" she continued.

Blair shrugged his shoulders, but before he could change the subject the bell rang, its high pitch clanging signalling the end of their break.

Jessica's line of questioning often followed when he asked her for a Transfer; it was one of the reasons he begrudged having to get one. However, he had known Jessica all his life so accepted her help without too much resistance. The truth was he didn't really know why he was sensitive to feeling sad, angry, frustrated, jealous and lonely. It was just the way he was, and the way they knew about fifteen percent of the population were. He was a Negi, short for Negative, and that was all there was to it. The recent Audit by the Council of Higher Positives had brought about the label and statistic, changing the once unquestioned acceptance that people were different, and could have the Positive Transfer if and when they wanted, into a quantified and highlighted political/social issue where transfers were all but forced physically upon the Negi's.

"I feel fine now. That's what's important," Blair said as the ringing faded from their ears. He added what he hoped was a reassuring smile and they both rose from the bench.

"Yes. Yes it is," Jessica smiled gleefully, the thought dispelling her concerns and returning her to her normal positivity.

They had the same class so walked side by side as they left the greenery of the courtyard and entered the sunlit white corridor of the school. As they walked down the crowded corridor three boys from their year approached purposefully. The boy in the middle was tall and athletic, almost a mirror image of Blair, except Blair's hair was blond and Jack's was jet black. Jack was the same age too, sixteen, and Blair was becoming regrettably familiar with him. However, neither Jessica nor Blair had noticed him and his companions today.

As the distance closed between the two groups Jack moved with singular purpose, filling the space in front of Blair's oncoming shoulder with his own. The surprise and force knocked Blair a full one-eighty and Jack continued to walk, muttering, "Stupid Negi," and his friends laughed.

A few of the other students noticed, but no one did anything, continuing happily towards their classes. Blair struggled to control himself as a sudden rage came over him, telling him to run and grab Jack, and return the favour with a fist to the face. This new powerful anger and frustration was becoming a frequent reaction to what was happening around him, but Blair knew he couldn't do anything and with Jessica softly holding his arm he tried to compose himself.

"You alright?" Jessica asked.

Blair took a deep breath and straightened. "Yeah, but this is happening too often," he replied with a shake of his head.

He then side stepped to the edge of the corridor, still struggling to stay calm. Jessica followed and continued to talk.

"I know," she said. "I've seen others do the same since the results of the Audit came out. All you need to do is stay happy and positive and they'll get bored of it soon enough."

"I don't know about that," he said apprehensively, not wanting to contradict her, but feeling she was wrong. "There's been too much effort put in by the Council to highlight the differences, and it has led to this problem."

"The Council are only trying to help. If everyone knows who the Negi's are then they can get more Transfer's to help them be happy. Don't you want to be happier?"

"I guess," he said without really thinking.

This rationale had been used since the Audit started and he struggled not to roll his eyes while he spoke.

"But so far that's not what's happening," he continued, his voice rising as some of the frustration took over.

“Give it time, you’ll see,” Jessica smiled after a pause.

“Fine,” he sighed, his anger deflating with her smile.

He didn’t want to argue anyway, so gave himself a half shake, and took the lead by continuing to walk towards their class. The corridor was nearly empty now and Blair glanced at all the new posters that had emerged, reading the familiar slogans:

‘Befriend a Negi.’ ‘Offer your hand and help the Community.’ ‘Are you a Negi? Let a Posi help you today.’

Reading them didn’t help his frustration and he tried to ignore the Higher Council’s attempt to achieve their Prime Objective of making everyone happier.

Nothing more was said between them and Blair managed to put his frustration aside as they reached the classroom. On the desk at the front was the sign-in sheet: Posi’s in one column; and Negi’s in the other. Blair and Jessica signed their respective columns and took their seats. It was Maths and Blair paid attention at times, but today, like many days recently, he sat back in his chair, observing his classmates with curiosity and hidden amusement. It was fascinating that in every aspect of their lives his class mates were so happy and wanted to achieve, even when it came to answering the Teacher’s questions. And there he was, barely scraping a pass. He had got away with it before, but his indifference to the majority of classes was becoming more obvious thanks to the Audit and the label, ‘Negi,’

When Blair wasn’t observing, or attempting some work, he thought about how baffling it was that only just over a week ago that none of these problems had really existed. People had known there were Negi’s and Posi’s, but until the Audit they had never had that name. The differences had just existed, and people would Emotion Transfer when a ‘Negi’ wanted, but not until then. Now people were trying to encourage Transfers all the time. It puzzled him that things could have changed so quickly, and he realised that as a result of the Higher Council’s campaign to make everyone happier he actually felt even more unhappy and different.

Then again maybe Jessica was right, he countered, the little hope he did have trying to sprout and grow. Maybe in time things will get better?

However, the cynical side that dominated didn’t really expect them to.

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The rest of the school day felt long and Blair was thankful when the last bell rang and he could jump on one of the many trams that wove throughout the Community. Alighting from the tram he walked down the path of the neat and tidy garden, and entered the brightly yellow painted house. As he walked through the front door, and entered the living room, his parents began the routine questions.

“How was your day?” his father asked.

“It was fine,” Blair replied, lying in the hope it would stop further questioning.

“Please don’t use that word?” his mother asked softly.

‘Fine,’ had become a swear word in this house of two Positive parents.

“Sorry. It was good,” Blair said, trying to fake enthusiasm.

“Is everyone trying to help you out?” his mother continued.

“Yes, everyone is great,” he said, still lying.

“I’m so glad they did the tests,” his mother beamed as Blair continued through the room to the connecting open plan kitchen. “We were always worried about you. I’m so grateful for the Audit, and how people actively help each other to be happier. George was great wasn’t he?” she finished as Blair reached a cupboard, opened it, took a couple of biscuits, and turned back to face her.

George was Jessica's father. He was a Higher Positive and therefore a member of the Council of Higher Positives. They were a unique and small group of Positives who functioned as the leading body in the Council Building at the centre of the Community. Their Transfer was different from normal Positives, because they could call on any past positive emotions and Transfer those instead of what they felt at the specific time of the Transfer. Everything the Council of Higher Positives did stemmed from their Prime Objective to make sure everyone was as happy as they could be. They were helped by a large team of employees, who kept the Community running, and whether it was making sure the various Sectors for industry were working hard, or the broadcasting and leisure facilities were functioning properly, or enough recreational space and housing was provided; their motivation was always to keep the people positive and happy.

George and Blair's parents had been friends since they were at school and the two families often spent time together at the weekends. It was from him that they first learned of the Audit and he had attended Blair's testing.

"Yes. He's always helpful," Blair replied with a hint of sarcasm that escaped his smiling parents. "I'm going to go to my room," he continued, and began walking towards the stairs that faced the front door.

"Wouldn't you rather go and see Jessica?" His father said with a playful grin.

"I've got homework to do Dad," Blair replied shortly. "I'll see her later or tomorrow at school."

"Good thinking, your grades could be better," his father replied. "I know you struggle, but putting in the work will raise them and you'll be just like everyone else."

A shiver went down Blair's spine at that last comment, but he said nothing and gave a weak smile, reached the stairs and went up to his room.

His room was large and spacious, with a ceiling that gave a metre of space above Blair's head. He walked across the carpeted floor to the double bed, which protruded into the room from the centre of the far wall to his right. Dropping his schoolbag to the floor he sat on the bed and debated what to do. Finally he decided to ignore the schoolbag and the homework within. Rolling over the bed he grabbed the paper, pencil and A4 sized drawing board that sat on a desk against the wall opposite the door. As he did he felt the warm sun coming through the long horizontal window, which stretched across the whole wall, about two thirds of the way up.

The desk was where he started most of his drawings, enjoying the warmth of the natural light as he processed his thoughts and creativity. However the paper he currently held had a nearly finished drawing on it and once he had it, he rolled back off the bed, stepped over the bag, and sat on the soft corner couch by the door. Knowing how the picture was going to evolve the corner couch became the place to relax while he drew, so he sat back, enjoying the softness of the cushions as he worked.

The drawing was a familiar style he had been attempting recently. These were based around one concept, like a word, and he weaved in shapes and symbols that he felt were aesthetic. Tonight's drawing was a spiral of hexagons with shapes in them, and this drawing was based around the mathematical symbol pi. As he drew he thought about school and the other Negatives.

I wonder how they feel about everything that is happening?

He had never really spoken to any of them; there had never been any need to. They had never crossed paths, and they had their own friends like he did. It wasn't like being a Posi, or a Negi, was a reason to be friends; well it hadn't been until the Audit.

Should I try talking to them and see if they feel the Audit is wrong like I do? he wondered.

But he knew he had to be careful. He was unsure as to where this division was going, and he didn't want to make the Positives at school think the Negatives were joining up against them. They would never hear the end of it then. He decided to leave this open and see what happened; if things got worse he could speak to the other Negatives.

An hour went by and the drawing was finished. He put it on his bed and decided to do some exercise. An intense upper body work out of press-ups, and lifting of free weights he kept under his bed commenced, and tomorrow he decided he would push himself in their running session during Sport, Health and Wellbeing Class. It was the one thing his parents were actually proud of; he excelled at sports in school. This was because he actually enjoyed these classes, but once again this had begun to change because of the Audit. It no longer felt like a competition between everyone, but a competition between Positives and Negatives. During breaks between his exercise Blair started to think about this and wondered if it was happening elsewhere amongst the people, but he had only seen this at his school and there was no way of telling if it had.

He continued his work-out and knew dinner would be ready soon. Once he had finished he sat back on the corner couch trying to control his breathing. He decided to occupy his mind while he waited by turning on the television that took up the remaining wall to his left. Grudgingly he took the remote and pressed the on button. He disliked television and only had one because his parents insisted, telling him it was what the Council of Higher Positives would want, as 'it brought positivity and happiness to those who watched.' Every channel was plagued by massive grins and bright colours. Blair felt it was an over exaggeration of how things were and that every show was trying too hard. It made him feel uneasy, like when his stomach digested something badly. The current channel was showing a promotional programme to encourage people to use the facilities available throughout the Community.

'Why not come to the amphitheatre for one of the incredibly popular outdoor plays, where all your happy endings come true.'

If only the ending would result in a tragedy, like a death. That would be entertaining, he thought. They aren't real, so surely doing this would be okay in a story, it would be different, and that would be a good thing.

He sighed, feeling trapped in his own thoughts. If he told a Positive this they would be abhorred by such an idea and he realised he was being negative.

Guess I better get Jessica to Transfer again, he told himself.

He switched the channel over and it was an advert for encouraging Positives to reach out to Negatives. He quickly lifted the remote again and turned the television off in frustration, wondering why he couldn't have been born a Positive. A few minutes went by while he brooded on his frustration. The call finally came and he took a few deep breaths, struggled to force a smile in preparation, and left the room.

Dinner was the usual clucking chatter between his parents and Blair nodded and feigned smiles when required. Once he was finished he thanked them for the food and left the table to actually do his homework. He really couldn't be bothered and just wanted to draw, but he was coming to realise the less he stood out, the less attention he would bring on himself from those Positives who seemed to want to remind him he was different. He decided he would do his best to stay clear of them and get Jessica to Transfer more often so he was happier. Deep down he didn't want to have such frequent Transfers, but as Jessica said, people would see the change and leave him alone.

After pushing his own wants aside he did his homework, not bothering to re-read and check for errors like his teachers had encouraged him to. He just lay in bed caught in two minds: one side

complying and telling him to get more Transfers; and the other wishing he could do something to stop those who were making him feel even more different for simply being himself. He knew with his height and strength he could put up a good fight against Jack and the others at school, but that would just draw unwanted attention and he would become the bad guy. Despite knowing this he pictured himself fighting them as he lay on his bed and fell asleep with similar dreams.

Chapter Two

The following morning Blair decided to meet Jessica outside her house and request the Positive Transfer before they got the Tram to school. As she walked towards him he was surprised to see a worried look on her face. It was such a rare sight and concern for her pushed aside thoughts of the Transfer.

“What’s wrong?” he asked as she walked up to him.

“Something has happened. I don’t really know how to explain it,” she said, talking faster than usual.

“Start at the beginning and go from there,” Blair encouraged, wanting to know the source of her distress.

“It may take a while, and I’ll try and remember as much as I can,” she said, tucking her hair behind her right ear nervously. “Would it be okay if we walked to school? It may help to calm me down, and I’ll get a Transfer when we get there. I didn’t want to make my parents suspicious by asking them for one.”

“Of course, walking is fine. We should get there as the bell goes,” Blair said as he looked at his watch.

And the walk will be a nice change to hanging around like we usually do, he thought.

They walked passed the brightly coloured houses of her street and continued by the place they would have got the Tram. The air had an unusual chill to it this morning and the sky was greyer too, but neither of them paid it any attention as Jessica began to tell Blair all that had happened the night before.

“I heard Dad leave late last night, it wasn’t the first time, and this time I was more curious, but I ignored my curiosity and went to sleep.

I was woken in the early hours when he came in and I heard him talking to Mum. Their voices were hushed and I couldn’t tell what they were saying. I knew it was something important from their tone so I decided to listen from the stairs where they couldn’t see me,” she stopped talking but kept walking.

Blair kept pace and waited for her to continue, but she didn’t so he broke the silence.

“Whatever it is, you can tell me Jessica. You can trust me.”

She gave him a quick smile and a nod.

“Thank you Blair, I know I can,” taking a deep breath she continued. “Dad told Mum the Council of Higher Positives had been keeping a secret from the people for a few months now. He said that they only did it because of the severity of the situation. He told her he couldn’t keep it from her anymore, as it felt wrong to do so. He said the reason he left earlier was to meet with his fellow Higher Positives at the Council Building. He said that it was because another abduction had occurred.”

Another abduction? Blair thought, taken aback by this information. He let her continue despite the shock of this information and his curiosity.

“Dad said that a Posi had gone missing a month earlier, and all the troubles had begun...” she paused, “Six weeks ago I think he said? About three weeks into the testing and Audit. He said it had begun with the discovery of Higher Negatives and these are people who can Transfer their worst feelings and negativity onto people...”

HIGHER NEGATIVES! Blair thought, his mind trying to keep up and take in this new information. This was something completely unexpected and he wanted to ask her for specific information, but knew it was best just to listen so held back his questions again.

“...A Tester had discovered this Higher Negative because he was erratic with the intensity of his Transfers, and he was just like a Higher Posi because he could Transfer different levels of his emotions at different intensities, but it was always negative. They kept this Higher Negi at the Council Building for questioning and more tests. That was when they first realised that he was a Higher Negi. It’s really strange isn’t it Blair?” she exclaimed, pausing and looking at him for his response.

“It certainly is,” he agreed after a pause when he realised she was waiting for him to reply.

His mind had been racing with other thoughts, *Could I be a Higher Negative?* He had been thinking about his own testing. *Was mine similar and erratic like the Higher Negi?*

He remembered how George and Jessica had been there for his testing, and how all he could think about was Jessica. He had worried that the Tester would feel the feelings he had for her and tell George about them. However at the end of his week of testing he had been pronounced a Negative and nothing else had been said. To this day he still didn’t know if his feelings had been felt and mentioned to George.

After this quick flashback Blair knew he wasn’t a Higher Negative. Something in him was a little disappointed, but mostly he was relieved because being a Higher Negative would have complicated everything. Not having to worry about that was certainly a good thing he knew. He still had questions though, but wanted to get the full story so encouraged Jessica to continue.

“What happened next,” he asked after agreeing that it was strange.

“Dad continued telling Mum that the man had been kept under surveillance while they decided what to do with him. He said they didn’t know whether to let him go and tell the people, or to control the situation and keep him there. They were worried if people learned there were Higher Negi’s they would become afraid and this was a negative emotion so they didn’t want the people to feel that way.

Dad and the Higher Positives said this must be avoided at all costs, but before they had decided on what to do the man had disappeared at night time. When Dad and the others went to speak to him the following morning they discovered he was gone. They searched for him at his house and asked people if they knew where he might be, but no one knew where he had gone.

And then the following night another incident occurred. A man who worked for the Council was found ranting and raving down a street a couple of Sectors from here. Dad said the neighbours had called the Council Building in the early hours of the morning and requested the Council come and find out what had happened. This was the first time Dad had been called out at night.

They found the man, Benedict I think Dad said his name was, screaming and rolling on the floor, holding his head and foaming at the mouth.”

Jessica stopped talking and stood still, her breathing erratic and eyes closed. Blair stopped too, noticing how difficult she was finding this.

“It’s all so scary Blair,” she said opening her eyes and looking at him. “The poor man,” she said hoarsely.

Blair was caught between not wanting to upset her and wanting to know more. Unsure of what to do he just stood there, hearing the Trams go by behind him and realising what she was telling him changed everything. Finally she broke the silence with a sniff and a deep breath before she continued speaking,

“Thank you for listening Blair. Although some of this is hard to talk about I’m glad I can talk to you,” she gave him a big smile that seemed out of place considering she was upset, but he knew she was doing it to fight the negativity she felt.

“Do you want to tell me the rest later, once you’ve had a Transfer from someone at school?” he asked, his concern for her winning over his desire for more information.

Jessica took another deep breath. “I’m okay. I think I can manage the rest and I’ll get a Transfer as soon as we’re at school.”

“Okay,” Blair said reassuringly.

Jessica started walking again and continued while Blair listened intently.

“Erm... where was I?” she began, tucking both sides of her hair behind her ears this time. “Oh yeah...Benedict,” she said solemnly. “Dad told Mum that this was the man that all the news reports said had been bitten by a wild animal and caught a disease, well that was the cover story the Council told everyone.”

Blair nodded, knowing the story she talked about.

“When they found him they had tried talking with him but he acted like they weren’t even there, and Dad and the other Higher Posi’s decided to put him in a van and take him to the Council Building. Once there they tried to ask him questions again, but nothing he said made sense. He screamed a lot and all they could do was sedate him. Dad said that even after a few days they had seen no change to him, but they had come to understand one word amongst the babble, ‘Negi...’

Interesting...I guess that’s where the phrase must have first come from, Blair thought to himself.

“Dad said it was this that made them fear and wonder if the Higher Negi that had escaped had Transferred onto Benedict and the shock of the Transfer driven him insane. After discussing this theory the Council of Higher Positives said it was too cruel and that no one would do such a thing. They decided to continue the Audit and if any other Higher Negi’s were found to take them in and monitor them twenty four hours a day until they knew what the best and safest choice was.

Dad said they continued the testing for the Audit and discovered another Higher Negi. They took her in like they had the first. However he said that this person was gone the next morning as well, and the guard they left was found unconscious. I think Dad said this happened just over a week after Benedict and the first Higher Negi had gone missing. He said that all the guard had remembered was a blinding pain like nothing she knew, and then being woken by her colleague the next morning.”

She paused for a moment, taking yet another deep breath and continued.

“They continued to worry, still not knowing what to do and waited to find another Higher Negi, hoping they would get answers this way. However when they did find another Higher Negi they had no idea what they were, and just thought they were a normal Negi. They didn’t even know what a Higher Negi was. Once again the Higher Negi was taken in but the same thing happened and they disappeared over night and the guard was found unconscious.

This happened once more and as four Higher Negatives had vanished the Council decided to set more people to guard the next Higher Negative they found. They hoped this might help them find out what was happening.

It did happen again, but this time a few guards had said they saw something and it was strange figures in black hoods who had come towards them, ignoring their calls to stop. The figures had touched them and they felt the same agonising pain as the previous guards had. After that all they could remember was being woken the next morning and the Higher Negi they had found was gone.

The Council were in disbelief and shock and still had no idea what to do. Fear and terror were spreading amongst those who knew about what was happening, but Dad told Mum they had decided to still keep it a secret; they didn’t want to scare the Community as well. He said they kept

going with tests and sticking to the goal of the Audit. As they did things began to quieten down, as no more Higher Negi's had been found.

Dad was very quiet at this point, but after a short pause he finally told Mum about how they got reports of Posi's being abducted and just disappearing. It had been the thing to push the Council towards acting with more force to stop what was happening. They came together and thought of ways to stop whatever these Higher Negi's were doing. It was decided that a device would be made that used electricity to stun someone and immobilise them. As much as they didn't want to they knew they had to try and stop whatever was happening."

Jessica suddenly stopped talking, her steps shorted and she slowed to a brief stand still. Blair had been listening intently and hadn't noticed all the other students around them. His eyebrows and the corners of his mouth rose briefly in amused surprise. He looked ahead of him and saw the school further up the street. The brief surprise passed and he turned to look at Jessica. She wasn't beside him, but had walked to a bench that faced away from the road, in the direction of the open grass and plant covered recreational area next to the school. Blair joined her and they sat on the light brown bench. They continued to ignore the chill of the morning and Jessica tried to finish the story before the bell rang.

"In the last week of testing they found two Higher Negi's and waited over night at the Council Building with the devices, ready to stop those who would try and free them like the others. However they managed to escape again, but Dad said they had managed to stun and capture one of those who had come. Unfortunately it didn't help because he wouldn't tell them anything.

That was only a week ago, Blair. Since then more Posi's have been abducted and the phone call last night told Dad that some of those who had gone missing had been found at the edge of the Community, in some sort of permanent unconscious state."

Jessica had been speaking to the open air as she related the last part of the story, but now she turned on the bench to face Blair.

"It's so strange. Dad and Mum continued to talk, trying to make sense of it, but they couldn't and Dad Transferred his happiest experiences to Mum. Then she did the same but using the positive feelings Dad had just given her.

They made their way towards the stairs and it took me a second to realise because I was in shock, but I managed to creep quickly and quietly back to my room. I sat on my bed and thought about it for a while, but I didn't know what to think. It's so terrible and scary that Posi's are going missing. I knew I had to tell you straight away. I eventually thought about happy things and managed to relax and fell asleep. I knew I would feel better once I spoke to you and after I had a Transfer."

There was silence for a few moments. Blair then shuffled slightly, making sure he was facing her as much as the bench would allow, and did his best to console her.

"I'm glad you told me. I'm sorry that this has happened and it has frightened you, but I'm sure your Dad and the Higher Council will be able to find the Higher Negi's and stop what's happening."

He didn't believe what he was saying, but he knew he had to reassure her. Being a Posi she was easily affected by such things and he knew it would take her awhile to get back to the normal level of happiness. The sooner she got someone to Positive Transfer to her the better. He stood up,

"Come on," he said smiling to try and help her feel positive. "We need to get you a Transfer."

She gave a soft smile in return and nodded as she stood, following him to the school.

As they walked the bell rang and the mass of students who were still outside began making their way into the school. Blair kept a look out for one of Jessica's Posi friends, but until he found one he couldn't help but ask some questions, even though he knew it might upset her.

"Why would the Higher Negi's be Transferring on to Posi's?" he said, just before they entered the school.

"I don't know? It's horrible that they would do such a thing."

"I know," Blair said sympathetically, "but surely there must be a reason? Are we even sure this is the answer to what's happening?"

"What else could it be? The mad man... Benedict, had said 'Negi,' and why would he say that unless he was thinking that, and trying to warn the Higher Posi's."

"I don't know," Blair confessed, still looking for a Posi they knew as they walked down the corridor. "It's all so strange. There must be a reason. If we knew more about these Higher Negi's it might make more sense."

There were a few theories circling his mind and as they walked he began to think to himself. Jessica saw this and didn't say anything.

Has this happened because of the Audit? Was this the affect the Audit was having amongst the rest of the people? Have the Higher Negi's felt it wasn't right and acted to try and stop the Audit?

To Blair this was the logical conclusion. It all seemed to point to the Audit and the results. He didn't say anything to Jessica, and began to wonder if maybe the Council of Higher Posi's were the problem.

It was they who had taken the first Higher Negi in, he realised. Maybe this provoked others to act the way they have? Maybe they feel like I do and didn't want to be made to feel different and wrong? But then again abducting people and doing what they have, if this is what they have done, is wrong. I wish I had more information about these Higher Negi's.

It was a lot to think about. Knowing he couldn't talk to anyone about his concerns, because no one else knew, and because the Posi's wouldn't understand why he was partly sympathetic to these Higher Negi's, made him feel even more isolated and alone.

As if she had read his thoughts Jessica spoke,

"We mustn't tell anyone what we know. Hopefully it'll all go away and the Council will solve it."

Blair struggled not be angry, *Once again she actually believes that by ignoring the problem it might just go away.*

He knew this was too serious for that to happen, but there was no point in making things worse for her, so he calmed himself and agreed that he wouldn't tell anyone else.

There's nothing I can do, so why let it bother me, he told himself. Yet, deep down the whole situation was still bothering him a lot and he began to realise what he wanted.

They were on the stairwell now and Blair spotted one of their friends. Jessica got the Transfer and it made a remarkable change to her mood.

"I should give you a Transfer now," she said to Blair cheerfully as they continued up the stairs to their class.

"I'm going to pass," he said casually, hoping he hadn't given away that he felt more negative than he ever had.

A Transfer would vanquish these feelings, and he realised he didn't want that. These were his feelings and with everything she had told him he couldn't help but be stubborn. If there were others who felt this was wrong he needed to stand up for himself somehow. He knew it had little

consequence on anything, but he wanted to be true to who he was, even if it didn't make a difference to anything else. There were people out there who felt the Audit was wrong and although he didn't know anything about them he no longer felt completely alone in his feelings. He would make his own personal stand by having no more Transfers.

Jessica accepted his rejection of a Transfer and hummed a song to herself as they reached the first floor and as they entered the corridor of their first class said,

"I have a feeling everything will be fine. I'm glad I could talk to you as it helped me to feel better. When you do need a Transfer please let me know because there's no point in feeling worried about something like this. The Council will fix it."

"I'm glad I could help," Blair said, his previous thoughts being pushed aside as he focused on her and making sure she was happy.

They reached their class and it was similar to the previous day's Math class, Blair watching the Posi's in the class compete for attention and praise. When he wasn't watching he was thinking intensely about the new information Jessica had given him. He really wanted to know if the Higher Negi's had been abducting people, and why?

Should I go looking for them? he wondered. What would the Council do if they knew I was looking? Would they take me in too? Would I be rescued and freed by the Higher Negi's?

He had been going over and over this when suddenly he was brought back to his surroundings by the bell signalling the end of the class. Shaking his head to try and clear some of the chaos he met Jessica at the door and said the routine, "see you later," as they went in opposite directions to their separate classes.

Once again Blair was lost in his thoughts in the second class. It was becoming too much for him. He wanted to do something, but realised it was pointless to think that he could find the Higher Negi's.

If the Council can't find them how could I? He realised.

To distract himself he began doodling on his work book. About half way through the class there came a knock at the door; he casually looked up. Jessica walked into the room and with mild surprise he let the pencil fall the short distance from his hand to the work book. She looked at him for a second and then focused on the Teacher.

"The Principle has requested to see Blair," she said politely and smiling.

"Thank you," the Teacher replied. "Blair you're excused."

Blair continued to look at Jessica and she nodded at him with encouragement. Once the slight confusion passed he packed up his work quickly and followed her out the classroom. As the door shut behind them Blair began to question her.

"Why does the Principle want to see me?"

"It's not the Principle," Jessica said, whispering quickly. "It's workers from the Council. They've come to take all the Negi's to the Council Building."

Blair stared at her, confused for a few seconds. Taking a few side steps away from the door so they couldn't be seen, and matching her whisper asked,

"Why?"

"I don't know," she said, "but I guessed you wouldn't want to go."

Blair was a little surprised she had been so perceptive to his feelings. She had said not to worry and that everything would be okay, but here she was going against the Council by telling him.

She noticed the surprise and spoke as quickly as she could. "We've been friends a long time Blair. Our differences don't matter to me. I know you well enough to see this is something you don't agree with. What's happening is strange and personally I think everything will be fine, but if you

don't agree with what's happening you shouldn't be forced to change. I knew you wouldn't want to go so I want to help you. That's what friends do."

He felt bad for miss judging her, and not having the same faith in their friendship.

"Thank you," he said with more gratitude than he had ever expressed. "What now?" he continued.

"I don't know?" Jessica replied. "If you don't want to go we need to leave the school."

"What do you mean by we?" he asked.

"Well I have to make sure you don't get stopped by the Council Workers," she replied, grinning.

"Are you sure?" Blair asked. "I don't want you to get involved in this. You should go back to class. I can leave across the back fields and decide what to do from there."

"I'm coming with you Blair," she said. "We've been good friends for a long time and I'm not going to leave you now."

"Thanks Jessica, but you could get into trouble if they think you're helping me. I think it's best if I do this by myself. I don't want to put you in any danger."

"I said I'm coming with you," she said smiling, but forcefully at the same time.

"Okay," he said reluctantly.

He was concerned for her safety, but at the same time he did wonder if he was blowing this whole situation way out of proportion.

Maybe speaking to the Council representatives would be okay, he wondered.

But he pushed this aside quickly as he knew he couldn't compromise who he was anymore. He didn't want to risk being pressured to change by the Council. Accepting this he knew he had to get away, and against his better judgement he would have to let Jessica come too.

"Okay okay," he repeated, "but we must move fast before they realise I'm gone. We can decide what to do once we're out of here."

They walked briskly in the opposite direction she had come, reached the end of the corridor and walked down the stairs two steps at a time. It brought them to the back of the school right beside the sports department. They left the building through the doors that gave access to the sports fields, fortunately they were empty. Seeing this they broke into a run. They reached the far side, passed the line of trees and looked back once. There was no one there. Continuing they jogged through the lane and emerged onto a street of houses. Once they were out of sight of the school they stopped.

Chapter Three

Panting they took a few minutes to recover. Blair sighed and exhaled slowly in one last effort to bring his breathing back to normal. Jessica copied him. Once recovered she smiled and gave him a questioning look as if to say, 'what now?'

"It's just not right," he said shaking his head in response. "All this highlighting of Negi's as being something bad and wrong. Things worked before, but now it feels like we're being forced to be something we're not," he took a deep breath. "I think that's what these Higher Negi's feel, and they've hidden themselves away from the Council.

I don't know what they're doing, or if it is them who are Transferring onto Posi's? I can't imagine why? I'm a Negi and I don't want to Transfer. I know people don't want that, but I'm okay with being the way I am." He paused again trying to focus his thoughts. "I just want to find answers. Like why the Higher Negi's are hiding? And if it is them who are Transferring? If we can find them we'll get answers."

There was a brief moment of silence while Jessica thought about what he had said.

"I think I understand," she replied. "I know I wouldn't want to be forced into being something I didn't want to be. But what if these Higher Negi's are the ones who Transferred to make Benedict suffer so much that he couldn't speak or be himself anymore? What if they're the ones abducting Posi's? It's so horrible that someone would do that, and you want to go looking for them?"

"It's the only way I can get answers," Blair replied. "I need to do this, but as I said before I think you should go back to school. This could be dangerous and I don't want to put you at risk."

"If there's danger I'm not going to let you go alone," she said trying to act braver than she felt. "We'll be safer if we're together."

"Okay," he said reluctantly knowing that arguing with her was pointless.

"Good," she smiled. "So what now?"

"Well I was thinking and the only idea I have is to go to where Benedict was found and see if there's anyone we can talk to. They might be able to tell us what happened?"

"That sounds like a good start. Dad said it was Sector Twenty Three. It's only a couple Sectors over from here. We better start walking."

They made their way towards Sector Twenty Four, both unusually quiet as they walked, the sense of foreboding almost tangible.

Blair ran through different scenarios and wondered where the Negatives could be hiding. *Were they still in the Community? Or have they had fled into the areas outside the Community to hide? Or maybe they have found a way to hide themselves in the Community?* He just didn't know.

Jessica however was feeling a nervousness she hadn't felt before, and wished she could get a Transfer again. She trusted Blair and went along with his plan, but couldn't help imagining Benedict the way her father had describe him. She decided it was best to distract herself so eventually began to talk.

"So how was your class before we ended up here?"

Blair went to answer honestly, but stopped as he realised what she was doing. He lied to try and keep her happy and distracted.

"It was fine. History of our Community's growth is interesting. We were talking about the discovery of electronics and what inventions it led to, and how we can use these inventions to be happier. What about you? How was your class?"

This was what she wanted and the distraction helped. She talked about what they had been doing with excitement and Blair listened intently, smiling to himself. He was happy that he could help her, and feeling this positive was a rare occasion for him. It didn't last though. The sign of Sector Twenty Three appeared and as they approached Jessica went quiet, while Blair began to think about finding the Higher Negi's again.

Side by side they made their way to White Wolf Street and as they turned onto it they stopped and took a moment to look. Each house was almost identical in size and shape. They had a front and back garden and a small metre high fence surrounding the property. The noticeable difference to the houses was the colour. It was the same through-out the Community and Blair found it almost intrusive to his eyes. Each house was painted in the favourite colour of the owner and this made the street a rainbow of bright colours. The gardens were different too: some people liked trees, some flowers, some had animals in the front gardens like rabbits, a couple even had sheep, and occasionally they had nothing but well kept grass, enjoyed because of its simplicity.

Blair hesitated, unsure where to begin, and took a few slow steps forward, Jessica following a pace behind. He wondered if knocking on doors and speaking to people would be the best way, and suddenly he realised that most people would be a work. It was the only option he had though and hoped some people would be in.

"I think we should try the houses and see if anyone knows about Benedict."

"Okay," Jessica said acceptingly. "Which house shall we pick?"

Blair chose one at random and walked up the path of the bright orange house, trying to ignore it by focusing on the door in front of him. With Jessica about half a pace behind, he knocked on the door twice. They waited but there was no answer. He knocked again; still no answer.

Well that was a great start, he thought.

They turned around and walked back down the path. Looking across the road they saw someone in the house opposite. Jessica pointed it out first and they made their way across the road and up to the house, knocking twice as before.

A woman, about thirty years old, answered the door with a baby balanced on her hip. As the door opened the cries of the child poured out and Blair watched as the woman casually put her hand on the baby's arm and Transferred. The crying stopped immediately and the young woman spoke to Blair and Jessica, not even giving the baby a second glance.

"Can I help you?" she said.

"Yes... err thanks," Blair stumbled. Composing himself he used the story he had made up. "We are part of the school Newspaper and we heard there was some sort of commotion and trouble here not too long ago. We wanted to write an article about it and wondered if you could tell us what happened."

The woman just smiled and replied.

"Yes, there was some commotion I guess, but it's nothing to worry about. There are plenty of other happy things that need reporting."

Blair pressed her.

"So what do you know about the commotion?"

"Not much really. Council representatives came when there was a noise disturbance, but they said it was nothing to be concerned with, and if we had any worries to Transfer more. They came back later and said the man had been bitten by an animal. I'm sure you saw it in the news reports and how others had similar problems."

We are nowhere near the outskirts where animals might venture into the Community, Blair thought to himself. It was so rare and it was always dealt with straight away. How could no one have realised this flaw? he wondered.

“And you just accepted that story?” Blair said rudely, frustrated at the woman for her complete acceptance of such a poor explanation.

“Of course,” she replied, shocked by Blair’s frustration.

Jessica intervened. “Thank you for your time. We hope you and your baby have a lovely day.”

“Thank you very much,” the woman replied, shock turning into a bright smile and she began closing the door. Blair and Jessica were already half turned to leave when she opened it again.

“If it’s something you feel is worth reporting then you’re best going and asking people at the far end of the street, that’s where most of the Council Workers were.”

“Thank you,” Blair said as politely as he could.

Jessica smiled at the lady and the door closed.

“At least that was of some help,” Blair commented, as they turned back onto the street.

“That was good thinking to say we were with the school paper,” Jessica commended.

They walked up the street and when they were near the far end they picked a random house on the same side and knocked once more. This time an elderly gentleman answered. He was obviously retired and looked up at them through squinting eyes and gave them a warm welcoming smile. When his eyes focused, and he saw who it was, he smiled wider.

“Why hello there,” he said in a soft but squeaky voice. “I must say it’s nice to get some visitors, but shouldn’t you be at school?”

Blair took the lead again. “We’re on a school project and part of the schools newspaper. We want to write about something that happened to a man on this street. They said he was making a lot of noise and a disturbance.”

The old man paused to think, “I don’t imagine it’s worth reporting again,” he said finally.

Blair sighed at the identical response to that of the woman’s, but he kept listening.

“I do remember it,” the old man continued, and without any more prompting went into a story. “I had fallen asleep in my chair, as I often do, and I was woken from a nice sleep to a horrible sound. I had never heard anything like it before. At first I was scared, but then I decided to go see what it was. I looked out my window and there in the street light was a man holding his head and at times shaking violently. Then at other times he kept falling over and getting back up. At first I was terrified but the Council were their usual prompt selves and turned up and helped this man into a Council Van and they have looked after him no doubt...”

Blair noted the pause the old man took, and seized the opportunity to ask a question that he hoped would help. “What did they say was wrong with him?”

“Oh, nothing of consequence,” the old man said still smiling. “They said the man had ventured beyond the Community into the wild, I can’t imagine what for, and he got bitten by an animal. The animal gave him some sort of illness that the Council were going to cure. They were really nice and gave me a Transfer to keep me calm. I’ve been round my neighbours from time to time to get more Transfers if I start remembering the sounds of his screams. Poor man though, I hope he’s okay? I’m sure the Council cured him, right?”

The old man’s words hadn’t revealed anything and Blair was annoyed at how easy it was for the Council to cover this up with a quick story and Positive Transfers. In his annoyance and thoughts he hadn’t replied to the man’s questions and after a few seconds Jessica replied for him.

“I’m sure he’s fine too. Thank you for telling us what happened.”

“You’re very welcome young lady. I hope the report you do is good, but I can’t imagine why people would read something so negative and something already reported. You should report on something better, like how lovely this street’s gardens are. We do have some of the best gardens in our street. Take the woman across the road for example. She used to have an okay garden, but in the last few months has made it into a lovely paradise. That would be news worth reading about.”

“I’m sure it would be,” Blair said, having listened fully to the man’s response this time. “Is there anything else you remember about that night though?” he asked, desperately trying to get something that could help.

“Nothing at all son. It was something different, but no use thinking about it anymore really. The Council sorted it and hopefully the man will think twice before venturing beyond the Community. I hope that’s enough for you. I think I’m going to get back to my book now if that’s okay?”

“Of course,” Jessica replied. “We hope you have a pleasant read and a wonderful day.”

“Thank you my dear. I hope you both have a lovely day too.” With that he shut the door slowly.

Jessica turned around and Blair did the same, but slower. He was thinking about the last statement the old man had said.

Could there have been some truth to the cover up? Had the man come from the lands beyond the Community? Was he right that this was where the Negatives were hiding? It would make sense.

He explained his theory to Jessica as they walked to the pavement and road.

“I don’t like the sound of venturing beyond the Community, that’s too dangerous,” she said.

They reached the road.

“Is it dangerous? How do you know?” Blair said.

“Because that’s what everyone has always known and said,” she replied.

“Yes, but no one’s ever been beyond the borders of the Community? How do we know what’s out there?”

Jessica paused to think. “I guess we can’t know for sure, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“Not if the truth is out there. Let’s go take a look at the outskirts at least. We’ve never even seen it before.”

“No I guess we haven’t,” she replied reluctantly.

“Once we’re there we can decide what to do?” He said excitedly. Feeling strongly that this would lead them to find the Negatives somewhere beyond the Community. He began to walk in the quickest direction that lead to the periphery of the Community and started mapping out their path in his mind, taking into account they would need food and drink before they set out. After a few steps he realised Jessica had not moved. He turned around and saw her looking across the street.

Following her gaze he saw a garden that stood out more than the others and realised this was the ‘paradise’ the old man had mentioned.

“Do you want to take a closer look before we go,” he smiled.

It was more a statement than a question as he knew the answer. She grinned cheekily and they crossed the road. Jessica beamed at all the colourful flowers, her head darting from one group to another as she tried to take it all in. Blair had a strange feeling that something wasn’t right with this garden, it was almost too elaborate. He kept quiet though and let Jessica enjoy pointing to and naming all the flowers.

“So which one’s your favourite?” he asked.

“Well you know my favourite colour, so you might be able to guess?”

Yeah, a tedious game, he thought, but played along for her amusement. Looking around he saw a few different types of flower that were blue. He was about to guess when he spotted some flowers that were blue and almost purple and decided that if she was to like one of the selection it would be these ones.

“Well, I’m guessing those blue-purple ones over there,” he said pointing at them.

“Yep! Those are my favourite,” she laughed. “They’re Blue Tulips,” she said and Blair decided to lock that away for a gift idea if he ever needed one.

“Shall will go then?” he said finally, wanting to get on with his plan. If it wasn’t for his desire to get answers he would have stayed here with her for as long as she wanted, but the more time they spent lingering the more likely the Council would find him.

“I guess,” she said slightly deflated by having to leave the beautiful scene.

At that moment they heard a noise from the house, and they both looked in the direction it came from. The door of the plain white house creaked open and a lady in her fifties stepped out slowly. Her back was slightly hunched and she had some pruning clippers in one hand. She wore a white lab coat over grey trousers and a black cotton cardigan. Her hair was short, curly and brown, with some grey streaks. She looked very pale and Blair wondered if she was ill. He watched as she shuffled up the path, not looking up at them, and moving in the direction of some roses. However about half way towards them she noticed the two onlookers who hadn’t known what to say, or whether to leave as they had been about to. Jessica decided she wanted to praise the lady on her wonderful array of flowers and called out a second after the lady had noticed them.

“Hi there,” Jessica began. “I love your garden.”

The lady straightened a bit and Blair noticed a wide smile that to him looked so unnatural and out of place that he wanted to leave right away, but the lady was walking towards Jessica now.

“Hello,” the lady said in a sweet voice. “I’m sorry I didn’t see you standing there. Sometimes I get so focused on my garden I’m oblivious to the things around me. Do you like my garden then?”

She reached them by the last sentence and only the fence separated them.

“I do love your garden. It’s the prettiest I’ve ever seen,” Jessica replied.

“Why thank you. You’re very kind. Seeing as you have an eye for beauty how would you like a flower?”

“Really?” Jessica exclaimed with pure delight. “I love your Blue Tulips, would it be okay to have one of them?”

“Of course you can. You shall have a Blue Tulip,” the lady said, slowly walking away with her cutters.

When she was out of hearing distance Blair whispered to Jessica.

“Something’s not right here. I think we should leave.”

“It’s okay Blair, don’t be so rude. This lady is giving me a gift. When the conversation is over we shall leave, but I don’t want to be rude to this lovely lady.”

She was coming back with the flower at this point and they broke off their conversation. The lady handed it to Jessica and spoke.

“So what brings you two to my street? I don’t think I’ve seen you around before and I’ve lived here a long time. Should you not be in school today?”

Should you not be a work, Blair wanted to reply, knowing she was a bit young to be retired. Jessica used Blair’s original cover story.

“We’re doing a report for a school newspaper and we were given permission to come out here.”

Blair turned to her, struggling to cover up his shock. She had lied so easily. Being a Positive it was not in her nature, but she did it as if it had been the truth.

“And what are you reporting on?” The lady asked. “There has been nothing here worth reporting, unless you have come to report on my beautiful garden,” she laughed.

“No. We’ve not come to report on your garden,” Jessica laughed back. “But now I’ve seen it hopefully we will in the future.”

Blair felt the point of politeness had passed so before Jessica or the lady could continue he tried to end the conversation.

“We didn’t find anything to report on so we best be getting back to school.”

“I’m sure they won’t miss you for a couple more minutes,” the old lady said turning to Blair and smiling the uncomfortable smile only he seemed to have noticed.

“So what’s your report about?” she repeated.

Jessica answered as Blair had given up. “It was here they found a man who was raving and screaming. We want to write about what happened.”

Blair had been watching the lady’s face and a subtle spasm had rippled across it with this information and Blair wondered what that meant.

“Oh that,” the woman said quickly, waving her hand in a dismissive gesture. “That was nothing, just some poor man bitten by an animal and infected with some illness. I’m sure the Council found a remedy for him.”

“Yes, that was what we were told by the old gentlemen across the road,” Jessica replied.

Blair’s mind had been racing as he thought about all that had happened while here with the lady. This garden, the twisted smile and the spasm, it made him curious. He couldn’t tell if he was being paranoid, or if there was something more to this woman, but how could he find out? He decided the best way was to play along with this charade.

“They said the screams were terrifying and upsetting, and that the man couldn’t even speak coherently. Did you see the man?” he asked.

He continued to watch her face closely and with the mention of screams there was a momentary look of pleasure in the woman’s eyes that Blair had not expected, and then it vanished as if it hadn’t even been there. The smile also changed slightly, and it looked like a genuine and more natural smile.

“I didn’t see the man,” the lady replied. “I did hear him though, but I know when to stay away from such things. The Council came quickly and told us what had happened. They have been back since, but only to reassure us that we shouldn’t worry about what happened, and that it’s a lesson to all that bad things happen if you go beyond the Community.”

It was Jessica who wanted to leave now. She was embarrassed of Blair for pushing this kind lady to talk about the horrible topic of what the man had suffered.

“I guess we should be getting back to school after all,” she said trying to draw him away.

“Do you have to? I can show you more of my garden,” replied the lady.

Blair was still suspicious, but couldn’t think of any way to try and get answers from her. It was pointless so he changed his mind.

“Okay, Jessica you are right, we better get moving.”

Jessica went to thank the lady again and Blair watched as she did. The lady had a look of desperation on her face mixed with curiosity.

“Your name is Jessica?” she asked.

“Yes,” Jessica said.

“I thought you looked a bit familiar. I’m guessing that your Father’s name is George? And he is a member of the Higher Council?”

“Why yes,” Jessica said confused.

“I know your father from work. I worked in the Council until recently. How is your father?”

“He’s well,” Jessica said hesitantly, finally starting to get a slight taste of the suspicious feelings Blair felt.

“If I had known that, I wouldn’t have you stood out here while we chatted. Why don’t you come inside for some drinks and food, it’s nearly lunch and I imagine you’re hungry?”

Blair answered before Jessica could. “Thank you, but we must be going.”

“Surely ten minutes to have some food and drink won’t get you in trouble. Plus I have a back garden full of flowers like these. It’s even better than this display, sort of like my own personal sanctuary. I even have some rare ones you may not have seen before.”

She directed this last statement at Jessica who, despite some hesitation, took the bait.

“Oh, okay. I’m sure ten minutes wouldn’t hurt,” she said looking at Blair. “She knows my father and I would love to see some more flowers.”

Blair was torn. He really felt they should leave and that maybe this whole adventure had been a bad idea, but his curiosity was winning. He sensed something unique about this lady and a bigger part of him wanted to find out what it was.

Maybe staying for a few minutes will give me answers?

“Okay,” he said reluctantly. “But only for ten minutes. Then we must get going.”

Will I get any answers? He wondered as he walked down the path behind Jessica, who walked beside the lady. Blair suddenly realised he didn’t even know her name.

“What did you say your name was again? I have such a bad memory,” he lied, knowing she hadn’t given it to them.

“It’s Helen, love,” she said looking back at him briefly, but turning forward again as she put her hand on the handle of the door. “And what’s yours?” she said turning her head back again as she swung it open and walked through.

“Blair,” he replied hesitantly, following her, but turning back to take a last look at the garden. He pictured that almost sinister smile at the same time and with both images: one through his eyes, and one in his mind, and he realised why he was suspicious of her. Everything she did felt forced. Not like the Posi’s who had big smiles because they were oblivious to bad emotions, but forced like she was trying hard to give the appearance of being happy, but it looked like it hurt her. Suddenly he recognised it. It was behaviour he had adopted most of his life. A behaviour only someone like him would adopt. He understood his suspicions now, *Helen is a Negi*.

Chapter Four

Ten Weeks Earlier...

Sunlight poured into the main entrance of the Council Building. As with the schools the front wall was made entirely from large glass panels and Council Workers were cheerfully entering ready for another day of work. The building was one of the largest structures in the Community and had an assortment of offices and departments; each focusing on the happiness of the people.

“Good morning, Helen,” the receptionist called from behind the Welcoming Desk.

“Morning,” Helen said and nodded back in the flat tone of habit.

Helen had been employed in the Council Building her whole working life. Thirty years to the day it had been, and the only reason she knew this was because in the last few years thoughts of retirement had often entered her mind. It had always been the way for employment: your last day would be the same date as your first. It was still another ten years away and she wondered if she would even be doing the same job in ten years. Despite some progress recently she knew it wasn't likely.

Walking passed the left of the Welcome Desk Helen made her way to the back wall and took the door directly in front of her. It was one of eight in the entrance lobby that led further into the Council Building. One door on either side of the walls, two on the back wall, and then up the stairs that ran either side of the room there was a balcony protruding out a third of the rooms length, and it had the same pattern as the doors below.

Thankfully the large corridor she entered was quieter than the chatty hustle and bustle of the main entrance and she made her way through the building. As she got closer and closer to her laboratory she actually began to feel excitement for the days work. In all the years of being employed as a scientist she hadn't had much success achieving the Prime Objective. Over the years her department had dwindled in size and the resources allocated by Council of Higher Positives had been given to departments with more tangible success. It had put a lot of pressure on Helen to achieve and she was at the point of giving up. However, the previous day had finally given her something that she might be able to show the Higher Council of Positives. If the experiments went the way she hoped, she would finally receive some recognition for all her hard work over the years. All those years and the only thing she had to show was a long list of failed theories and experiments that followed her around like the darkest of shadows.

With her team she had tried to enhance Positive Transfer through: natural means, by using medicines and drugs; through positive reinforcement; and recently she had been testing theories on intense exposure. It had been a struggle since day one; gaining permission to do these things wasn't always the easiest of tasks. Ethical beliefs and Council ignorance were what she believed stopped her from moving the work forward. It didn't help that the work she was allowed to do always ended with inconclusive correlations or evidence. Every time she finished an experiment, or study, she had to conclude that each individual was just that, an individual, and therefore reacted differently to the tests.

In the last few years she had been concentrating on a branch of her work that focused on both the Positive and Negative aspects to the people, and not just the Positive. She enjoyed this new research as it required other Negatives to be involved and working with them gave her a glimpse of belonging she had never felt before. The beginning of this work revolved around trying to understand: What specifically affected the people to be a Negative or a Positive? What affected the

rates of depletion in a Positive or Negative Transfer? And how long it took to revert back to their original state before a Transfer was needed?

The understanding of genetics was limited so studying how environment affected them was the focus of her tests. She studied the environments affects and wanted to see if this made a person a Positive or Negative. It had never been looked into before and she tried to discover if the people became Positive or Negative while they were growing up. She knew that if she found out it wasn't environment then it had to be something you were from birth.

Recently she had needed to move passed this as her findings suggested it was something you were from birth. Her findings suggested this because some Negatives came from completely Positive families. On the basis of this she had been working to try and understand the genetics better, but resources and permission to do testing had been denied. As a consequence she decided to follow the avenue of Transfer depletion times.

Helen's plan was to find a way to slow, or stop Negatives reverting back to feeling negative after a Positive Transfer. It had been a difficult choice, as there was something inside her that was repelled by this idea of stopping Negatives being what they were, she was one after all. But it was her work and she took pride in it. She wanted to discover answers to these questions and it finally felt like progress was being made, how could she stop now?

The recent testing had begun by measuring the length of time it took for not just Negatives to revert back to their base-line feelings, but Positives too. It had been a considerable risk and she hadn't told the Council of Higher Positives yet, they would not agree with Transferring Negatives to Positives. It was a rejected practice. No one had ever done it, and there was no record of it in the history books. She had lied to the Positives who participated in the experiment and made them sign a confidentiality document, telling them they couldn't tell anyone until the results had been released. It hadn't been too difficult to convince them this was for the best. They would do most things if they thought they were helping, and once the experiment was over they received a Positive Transfer to make them feel better. That had been yesterdays work, and it was now time to repeat the experiments and see if there was a trend.

As Helen reached the end of the corridor to her lab she turned left and pushed through the double-doors. Taking a lab coat from the pegs to her right she saw her assistant.

"Morning Benedict," she said as she put the coat on with an abnormal amount of excitement.

"Good Morning," he replied as he turned to her, putting down a clipboard on the lab bench he was standing at.

Benedict was a tall man in his mid twenties. He had short blonde hair and square glasses that covered grey-blue eyes. He had been working with Helen for a few months, and she suspected he had been posted there by the Council to report back if there was any reason to close her department down. To her surprise Benedict had become a good friend, and in fact her only friend. It helped that he was enthusiastic towards the work, and this, along with his youthful energy, made him easy to like, even to her.

"Let's go over what we did yesterday?" Helen said. "Before the volunteers arrive for re-testing."

"That sounds like the best thing to do," Benedict replied. "I have all the findings here," he said looking down at the papers spread over the work bench.

Walking over Helen stood beside him, looked at the clipboard and began scanning the work that Benedict had laid out in front of them. After ten minutes of looking over the results Helen repeated them out loud to try and make sure they both understood what had happened.

“After testing the Transfer time of Positive Transfers to Negatives, and Negative Transfers to Positives, we learned that Positives revert back to being Positives quicker than Negatives revert back to being Negative. We’ll run these tests again to make sure the results are the same.”

Benedict nodded in agreement. The volunteers began arriving and they took their seats on the stalls around the benches, ready for the Transfers.

Helen stood at the front of the room and each volunteer came forward and gave her a Transfer. She took a scale of how Positive or Negative the Transfers were, comparing them to the previous day’s base-line feelings. With this done the experiments could begin. One of the Negatives Transferred onto each Positive for five seconds, every three minutes for an hour. Once the Transfers were finished they were left for fifteen minutes. Results were taken by the Positives Transferring back onto Helen and she recorded the feelings that were Transferred. The results were similar, but something new happened. Some of the Positives hadn’t gone back to feeling the way they had after the fifteen minutes.

“This is interesting,” Helen said to Benedict, who was writing down everything that happened. “Give them another fifteen minutes of recovery and we’ll test them again.”

They tested them again and this time they were back to normal.

“So after two days of Transfer, it appears they take longer to get back to their base-line,” Benedict said.

They took a break to make sure everything was recorded and after an hour wait they repeated the experiment. Once again it took longer for the Positives to return to their base-line and Benedict had to give them a Positive Transfer after the thirty minutes for them to feel as happy as they normally did.

Thinking about the Transfer Helen wanted to use a Higher Positive on the normal Positives, after they had a Negative Transfer. She wasn’t sure why she thought this, but every avenue had to be tested. The problem was it would give away what they were doing, plus their Transfers were different and not needed for her original experiment. The positivity from a Higher Positive Transfer only gave a brief, but intense improvement; there was no real lasting effect. This was why a basic Positive Transferring to another basic Positive person was the norm in the Community. It increased the person’s happiness over a long period, and a whole life of exposure helped increase happiness long term. However, with these new results Helen longed to see what would happen and felt it was worth the risk.

“Benedict?” she said as nicely as she could. “Do you think you could convince a Higher Positive to come down here and help us? You don’t need to tell them what it’s for exactly, just tell them we need some help and a few Transfers from them would be appreciated.”

Benedict looked at her intently for a few moments then smiled.

“I’ll go now and find one, I’m sure they’ll be happy to help.”

I’m counting on it, Helen thought.

Benedict left and Helen repeated the experiment on the Positives. He arrived in time with a Higher Positive. She was tall with long blonde hair and Helen recognised her. She had seen Benedict talking to her from time to time and Helen wondered if he had used a certain amount of charm to convince her to help. As Helen smiled to herself Benedict introduced the Higher Positive.

“This is Stacey. She has offered to help.”

Helen welcomed her and Stacey looked round the room seeing the sullen positives.

“They certainly look like they need my help,” she smiled, her concern over shadowed by her positivity and desire to help.

Stacy Transferred her intense level of happiness from memory to each Positive. Straight away there was a noticeable difference in the Positives. Helen panicked, hoping Stacey wouldn't notice and quickly thanked her, showing her the door. Benedict assisted too by talking and distracting her all the way up the corridor, but it wasn't long before he came running back in.

Each volunteer had gone to the other extreme. They had wide smiles and almost blissful looks about them. After five minutes it wore off and they Transferred onto Helen and were interviewed. The Transfers were a slightly higher level of positivity, but when interviewed they said they felt a higher level of happiness and bliss than they had ever felt in their lives. They had felt overjoyed, which was partially expected, but as they monitored the Positives, Helen noticed it took a lot longer than anticipated for them return to their base-line positivity.

"Do you see this Benedict?" Helen said with excitement.

"Yes. Yes, I do," he replied grinning.

"By exposing them to negativity first, then to a Higher Positive Transfer, they become happier for longer," Helen said. "This is it! This is what we've needed. If we show the Higher Council of Positives this they will give us more credit and maybe more funding and support. We've found a way to improve people's happiness in a significant way. Imagine how it would be after weeks and months and years of exposure. We've discovered something incredible," she finished, feeling excited and relieved, and more positive than she had in her life.

"It's fascinating, but we need to do lots more testing?" Benedict replied. "We can tell the Council of Higher Positives what we're doing and that we have evidence to support it," he laughed joyfully.

Once they had calmed down they dismissed the volunteers and together sat at the bench writing up the findings and checking all the recordings. Helen wrote how it had never been done in the Community, mixing the Transfers this way. She continued her write-up by documenting that Transferring Negatives onto the Positives appeared to build up what seemed to be some sort of resilience. Or maybe an increased experience of feelings that meant they would be able to be happier. It helped achieve the Prime Objective the way they had always tried to. Concluding that only Transferring Positives to Positives, or Positives to Negatives, wasn't the most effective way, but Transferring Negatives to Positives could actually be a good thing.

With the write up finished Helen ate her lunch, thinking about the reasons why the Positives became happier with this combination of Transfer, occasionally discussing her thoughts with Benedict. As she did the double door to the lab opened and she was interrupted by a short stocky man.

"Hello Helen," he said.

"Hi," Helen replied, barely acknowledging him.

"Your presence is requested by the Council of Higher Positives," he said theatrically.

"Do you know what for?"

"No. I'm afraid I don't. I think there's going to be a big meeting soon, but all I know is they wanted to talk to you first."

"Fine," Helen sighed, wondering why she was being interrupted. "I'll finish my lunch and meet with them. I'm assuming they want to meet in the Council Hall?"

"Yes, that is correct," he said. "I hope you have a pleasant lunch. Goodbye."

Helen shrugged, looked down at her food and continued eating. Her thoughts moved away from the results to speculating about the rare summons. She wondered if she should tell them her findings, but it felt too soon. A little more work would be needed with reports before she could

present it and convince them to back her. Their reaction to using Negatives on Positives would have to be tackled carefully.

When she finished her lunch she dragged herself off her chair and walked slowly towards the Council Hall, still wondering what they wanted. When she arrived she was ushered in by an assistant to the Council.

“They’ve been expecting you and will be delighted you’ve arrived.”

Helen thanked her without looking at her, and as the door was opened she walked into the Council Hall. It was a large room, brightly lit by artificial lights with its only source of natural light coming through windows high up the walls, close to the ceiling. The room itself was square and it had two doors, one on either side. One was for those summoned and the other led to the offices of the Higher Positives. These offices had individual rooms used to check reports and meet with people from different departments individually. Around the edges of the hall were seats set in a circle, on a decline, looking down on a circular table in the middle of the room. This table had space of about twenty metres diameter in the middle and seats on both sides. It had gaps at each ninety degree angle to allow access. For this meeting the Council sat on the outside of the circle, which was the usual place for when they met with an individual or small group. If it was a very large group they would sit on the inside of the table, facing out to the seats where the people would be seated.

Helen walked in silence. As she got closer, the Council members stood up and welcomed her with beaming smiles and warm pleasantries. She smiled weakly back and thanked them for their welcomes. When she was in the centre they sat back down and the appointed spokesmen, known as the Principle Speaker, addressed her.

“We are glad to see you, Helen. It has been some time since we spoke to you and we’re thankful for your continued reports over the years. Your service to our people has been lengthy and we’re all very grateful for this. However, compared to our other departments there has been little you have done to help in the unified cause of increasing the splendid happiness we enjoy...”

Well it’s finally come, Helen thought. They’re going to shut me down right at the point my work may have made a difference.

But as she thought this the speaker continued.

“...until now.”

Until now? She repeated in her mind. How could they already know the things I’ve found out today?

Again the speaker continued.

“We know that recently you’ve been working more with both Positives and Negatives and this had led to some new ideas we are eager to implement.”

Helen’s curiosity grew.

“The way you have highlighted the differences in our people, and through reports over the last years and months about the origins of these differences, has led us to the conclusion that we want to quantify the extent of the differences that we have in our Community. We want to see how many Negatives we have and how many Positives we have. This way we can identify the Negatives and help them to be more positive by regular Transfers. This way they won’t feel so negative. We hope that in time we can discover the origins of what makes people Negative, and then we can fix the problem and as a collective we will be much happier.”

Helen’s curiosity had turned to fear and anger by the last sentence. This was not her intention, or the design of her work. They were twisting it to inadvertently segregate the Negatives.

“This isn’t right,” she called out loudly, unable to control herself. Seeing the expressions of shock on the Council member’s faces she breathed deeply trying to calm herself. They might suggest a Transfer and she didn’t want that.

“Sorry,” she continued. “What I mean to say is that the outcome of such a survey would only highlight the difference in a negative way, making those who were Negatives feel like they were not wanted. It would take away unity, not create it.”

One of the other Council members stood up to speak and the Principle Speaker nodded and sat down.

“We respect that you may have these concerns, but remember you are a Negative and it would be your first thought to say this would be a bad thing. We’ve discussed this and all of us feel an Audit of the people will allow us to target those who are Negatives and lift them in a more efficient way than we do now. This is the common goal of our people and we hoped you would help us as it is because of your work this path has come to light. With you leading the Audit you can support the Negatives and encourage them to participate so we can help them be happier.”

What they were suggesting repulsed her and she couldn’t help speaking out again.

“I will not lead such a blatant step towards division and forcing the Negatives into being something they’re not. They know they can get uplifted by the Transfers when they want, but this is their choice. If this Audit happens then they’ll be forced into changing. You do understand that this is wrong, don’t you?”

“I don’t see why you object to this Helen,” the same Higher Positive said. “It has been your work to achieve this and to allow the Negatives to be happier.”

“Yes, but it would always be their choice. All of what I’ve done is because it would be interesting to know answers and any ways to ‘help’ would only be offered as a choice. I never thought it would be used to forcibly change Negatives.”

“Then you are clearly not committed to the Prime Objective, Helen.”

“I’m committed,” she protested. “But not to doing it this way.”

She was beginning to panic. They were trying to take away the negatives identity, her identity.

Would they force it to be taken from her? She wondered. Would they make the Transfer an obligatory part of life?

She realised they would. Struggling she decided to tell them what she had discovered, hoping they would postpone this idea of an Audit until she could legitimise the findings.

“What you’re suggesting does not need to happen,” she began. “I’m making progress with ideas and experiments that came from my studies about the division of Positives and Negatives we have in the Community. I’ve looked into exposure to Transfers and how Positives are affected by Transferring to each other and also how Negative Transfers affect Positives.”

There were gasps and shocked looks on the Council Member’s faces. She had expected this so continued quickly.

“It has been very beneficial. It has helped us discover that with some exposure to negativity, then a Transfer from a Higher Positive, the Positive gains a higher level of happiness than they’ve ever felt. This does level out, but their happiness lasts longer than the previous exposure to just a Higher Positive. It all has something to with the first Transfer from a Negative. It needs further research, but I believe over time the levels of happiness in Positives will increase the way we always have, but at a much faster rate. Negatives will always be needed to allow this to happen. This shows a good harmony in our society that we are working together. Negatives can still do as they’ve always

done and ask for Positives to Transfer to them if they wish, but it's not forcing them and taking away their identity like you've suggested."

The Council were still in shock, but had been patient and polite, letting her say her piece. However, the Principle Speaker took the lead and stood up slowly.

"What you've done goes against everything we stand for and have worked towards throughout our history. You've done that which we know from records has never been done. Transferring Negatives to Positives is the opposite from what we are trying to achieve. You should have put your ideas to us before going ahead and doing this, then we could have stopped this from happening. You've shown your true nature as a Negative by lying and doing that which should not have been done. We had wanted your help and expertise in the upcoming Audit but you have lost this right. I propose to the Council that Helen be given a retirement package and requested not to work here anymore and more importantly, never to do the experiments she has done again."

Helen was shocked. They were firing her. They wouldn't word it that way but that's what was happening. She struggled to know what to do and looked from Higher Positive to Higher Positive hoping for some sign one of them might understand. But the looks of repulsion said there was no hope. She went to argue and convince them her way was a better way than what they were doing, but the voting had already started.

"All those in favour of my motion please stand," the Principle Speaker said.

The whole Council stood in one unified motion.

"It is with much regret that we have taken this course of action, but we cannot allow you go against everything we stand for. It's the best way to keep to the Prime Objective. We request you pack your belongings and enjoy the retirement package you deserve for the work over your years of service. We only wish things had been different, but we wish you all the happiness in the future. We also suggest you get Positive Transfers to help you put aside your contentious ideas."

Helen didn't know how to respond. She knew she should have expected it. There was something in her gut that said everything they were doing was wrong and she wished they had listened to her so she could continue the tests to shed more light on what she had discovered. After a moment of trying to decide if she should say more she realised it would be pointless. Taking a last look at each of their faces again, their repulsion now blank smiles, she began to hate them. She wondered if they even knew what remorse was, yes they had said the words, but saying they were sorry with such blank eyes and smiling faces made her realise how twisted their happiness was. A shiver ran over her entire body as she looked at them and said the only thing she could think of.

"Thank you for your time."

She had tried to be genuine, but sarcasm broke through. They didn't notice.

"You're welcome Helen," was the unified response, and another shiver went down her back as she turned and walked away.

As she walked slowly through the corridors her mind was a hurricane of emotion and disappointment. By the time she reached her lab she realised she couldn't let this go, this was not the end of it. She pushed the doors hard as she entered and the anger was so obvious that even a Positive like Benedict couldn't help but notice it.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"The Council have their own agenda now," she blurted out hotly as she began pacing the floor. "You will hear about it soon no doubt, but as for our work we must stop."

Benedict was confused. "Why?" he asked.

Helen decided to tell him more.

“The Council are going to use my work for something I don’t want. I told them about our work here to try and change their minds, but they’re forcing me to retire.”

Benedict took a few moments to try and understand what she had said. He decided to be honest with her.

“We always knew it was risk. I always worried it was wrong, but we’ve found answers Helen and had some good results. We knew they wouldn’t be easily persuaded about the work we’re doing, but your work is so fascinating that it should be explored. I know its taboo, but the volunteers are soon restored to positivity and the negativity is only for a brief moment. Surely for the possible benefits we’ve found they would let us continue?”

Helen had stopped pacing and listened to every word with interest. She grew even fonder of Benedict for his willingness to put aside the ‘Positive’ mentality and see the progressive side of what they were doing. His desires to explore such avenues made him unique from all the other Positives she had met and she wondered if he was Positive, and not just a very optimistic Negative. She laughed inside at that thought and responded.

“They won’t let us go on. I want to, but I’m not sure how I could. No doubt the Council will be contacting you and all the others that work in the areas of Council Building to unveil the plans they’ve revealed to me. It’s all because of me that they have decided to do what they’re going to do,” she sighed regretfully.

Saying this out loud hit home. It was her fault this was happening. Guilt began to build as she projected the possible consequences of her actions. Once the Audit was done Negatives would always be highlighted in the Community and made to feel like outsiders. They would be made to feel inferior and not good enough, all because they weren’t a Positive, and it was all her fault. This fuelled her desire to rebel against the Audit, and she knew that when she got home she would make a plan. She had to find a way to stop the segregation and forceful elimination of the Negatives choice and identity. In all the years she had worked for them, the Council had never really listened to her and all because she was a Negative.

Well no more, she thought. I will put this right.

With this decided she asked Benedict to help her pack all her folders and reports. After an hour of packing another messenger arrived and told Benedict he needed to go to the Council Hall.

He looked at Helen and she nodded that he should go.

“Goodbye, Benedict,” she said sadly.

He looked at her, stepped forward and hugged her tightly. As they did the skin of their faces touched and briefly Helen felt an immense feeling of friendship and respect, and knew it came from Benedict. She wasn’t sure if he had meant to do it, but he was willing her to feel it either way, and as they pulled away from each other she smiled weakly.

He left with the messenger and she packed the last of her things, taking a last look at the office room and labs that had been her life for so long. She was filled with regret, anger, frustration, annoyance and many other negatives. Finally, she turned and went in the direction of the main reception to tell the receptionist that the boxes of work were packed and needed to be transported to her residence.

As she walked through the halls she passed the hustle and bustle of people heading to the Council Hall and she knew they were about to be told about the Audit, and regrettably she knew they would all think it was a fabulous idea. She sighed at this, continued to the reception, left her request, and walked out of the building for the last time as an employed worker.

Chapter Five

It was strange to be in the house on a work day. The mid-afternoon light cast long shadows as Helen sat in a chair unsure of what to do. Work had been her life, nothing else had existed. Finally, she stood up, wondering if her work would be transported soon, or if it would arrive the next day. The Council were efficient so she guessed, and hoped, it would come today. All she wanted to do was look over it, at least then she would have something to do.

After she stood up, she walked round her whole house. It was like seeing it in a new light, as if it was for the first time. It certainly was her home now and the place she had to stay. After looking at every room with this new perspective she made her way to the basement. It covered the space from the front of the house to the end of her back garden, about fifteen metres in width and twenty five metres in length. It had been used a lot during her studies of plants and her work to find medicinal ways of increasing the longevity of Transfer. However, it hadn't been used for that work in a while.

Opening the door she walked down the stair and stood at the bottom, looking at the neglected basement. She saw some plants she had continued to nurture and they were the only sign that the basement was still used for anything. At the back right corner of the basement was a walk-in freezer she had used to store different substances in for work, it hadn't been used in a long time either. Walking around the basement she took a closer look at the flowers on the work top island that stood in the centre of the room. Sighing she knew something was needed to keep her busy, like a hobby, and the plants were the only thing she had ever really enjoyed. She had never planted them in her front garden, but some were in the back. That was going to change she decided. It was time to make the plain gardens into beautiful displays that she could appreciate and would keep her busy.

Taking a couple of plants she left the basement and placed the flowers in the hall, ready to be planted. The following morning she would go to the shops to buy more flowers and would plant them when she got back. Money wasn't a concern as she didn't spend much, and there was the retirement fund too. With this decided she did some cleaning, but by late afternoon disappointment set in, her work hadn't arrived. She sat in her chair again and couldn't think of any more distractions. It wasn't long before the bitterness she felt for the Council rose to the surface of her thoughts and grew.

How can I change the Councils mind and stop them doing the Audit? She wondered.

Over and over it played in her mind, but it was futile. The Council would do what they thought was right and she hoped she was wrong about the Audit segregating the Negatives. Every once in a while she realised she would miss Benedict a lot, but these were rain drops in a sea of frustration and feelings of injustice. The only plan she could think of was to try and continue her work, and get more conclusive evidence, but how?

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Coming out of her thoughts with an abrupt start she wondered if the Council had sent her work. Walking out the living room she turned right down the corridor and opened the front door. To her surprise it was Benedict, carrying a box full of papers. Behind him on the road was one of the vans the Council owned. He smiled a big grin and after the momentary surprise she gave a small smile back.

"I asked if I could be the one to bring your work and the Council said it would be okay," Benedict elaborated.

"Thank you," Helen said, grateful for both her work, and his accompanying it.

“It’s no problem,” he shrugged. “I knew it would give us time to talk. We didn’t really get that with the shock of what happened, and then being called away to the meeting with the Higher Council of Positives.”

“Do you understand my meaning now, that the Council have their own agenda?” Helen asked as they stood at the door.

“Yes, the statement makes sense now.”

“What did they tell you?” Helen asked, almost totally sure she knew the answer.

“Shall I get the rest of your work in first?” Benedict suggested.

“Oh. Yes, of course.” Helen agreed.

They spent the next half an hour moving labelled boxes, which had been removed from filing cabinets at the Council Building, and placed them in the basement. Helen felt this would be the best place for them and would organise it all over the days and weeks ahead. As the last of the boxes were placed Helen asked,

“Where’s the most recent work? The stuff that got me fired?”

“They weren’t going to let me take it, but I managed to persuade them. It’s all over there,” Benedict replied.

He pointed to a couple of boxes that were separate from the others and she thanked him again. With the basement littered with boxes they went upstairs to the living room. The discussion about the Council’s plans started.

“So what did the Council tell you exactly?” Helen asked as she cradled some tea she had made.

“Everyone was gathered in the meeting hall and the Principle Speaker told us how some work that had been reported over the last few months had proved very interesting. He told us that it highlighted the differences we all knew, but fresh ideas had come from it. This idea was that they wanted to do an Audit of every person. To find out if they were Positive or Negative, and this way we could help the Negatives be happier through an increase in Transfers.”

Helen interrupted before he could continue, “How did people react?”

“Well they thought it was a brilliant idea, as did I. But as they explained what they were doing, and how they would go about it, I remembered your tone and disapproval. I couldn’t help thinking about it. It took until close to the end of the meeting, but I realised why you don’t like the idea.”

“Yes,” Helen encouraged, hoping he had had the same opinion as she did.

“It’ll be forcing Negatives to change. It will highlight their differences in a way that says they’re wrong and should be the same as us Positives.”

Helen nearly clapped out loud. She couldn’t believe he had understood it the way she did. He was more open minded and critical thinking than any positive she had met. She showed her gladness and appreciation for this.

“It’s very unique that you can see this potential outcome. The Council couldn’t see this, but you could. That makes you special Benedict. It’s nice to know a Positive that isn’t naive.”

Despite his agreement with her, Benedict felt defensive of his fellow Positives.

“Then again we could be wrong. The Council may be right, and if they do what they’re going to we will achieve a new level of happiness in our Community. That’s what’s important, and our whole purpose in life.”

Helen was disappointed he had gone back to this attitude and way of thinking, but realised it had to be expected.

“Sorry Benedict I feel strongly about this and I guess it shows too much. I’m glad you can see both outcomes and are willing to think about these. It’s amazing. I’m thankful for you being like this.”

Benedict blushed a little, “So what are you going to do now?”

“Well, I’d love to continue our recent work, but I don’t know how to go about it. I would need people to test, and a Higher Positive, and that’s not going to happen. If only I could come up with more evidence that I could show them. Then maybe they would listen and let me go back to my work. It would give me a chance to show them that what we’ve found could benefit our people, bringing them together because of their differences, and not separating them and wanting the Negatives to suppress who they are. If only I had more people on my side to go before the Council, then they would have to listen. I just don’t know how Benedict? Perhaps there’s nothing I can do,” she said despairingly.

“I don’t think you should give up,” he comforted. “I believe you have the right to think that the Council could be wrong, and they certainly should have listened to you more, but they’ll go ahead and move this Audit forward.

“Maybe we can still work on what we were doing just in case we have the chance to show them? We’ll then have evidence to show them another way if we need to. If I can understand this then maybe there are others who’ll see it too, if they’re shown. We can show them if we need help to get the Council to listen.”

“Thank you for your support, but how am I going to do this, Benedict? We would need a Higher Positive to help us. They’re all on the Council and will not listen.”

“I guess,” Benedict said in a defeated tone, which suddenly changed to hope as he had an idea. “What about a different angle? It’s a bit of a different experiment, but similar enough. What if you Transfer to me? I’ll get a normal Positive to give me a Transfer and though it won’t be as intense as a Higher Positive one, maybe over a longer period it will have the same effects?”

Helen sat back in her chair. It was an interesting idea, and she saw that he might be right. Was it worth a try to prove that there was a better way of making people happier? If Benedict became happier, and it was clear to those around him they would ask why, and then they could convince people with this evidence.

“It’s worth a try,” Benedict said, seeing that she was deep in thought and debating it.

“You’re right, Benedict. It’s worth a try.”

“Good,” he exclaimed, happy that they were going to continue the work. “Shall we start now?” he said excitedly.

Helen paused, looking at him hesitantly. “I guess,” she smiled, starting to get more enthralled by the fact her work would continue.

Benedict held out his arm with a big smile on his face.

“That smile may not last long,” Helen said. “I’ll try and be gentle.”

It was a pointless sentiment because she couldn’t control the Transfer, but she had said it to try and prepare him.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” He said, suddenly concerned: being a Negative she had never Transferred before.

“I’ve seen it done enough times, it should be easy,” but she wasn’t entirely convinced by her own words.

Pulling her chair forward to face Benedict, she placed her hand on his wrist. She gave him a weak smile and he gave an encouraging one back. It wasn’t necessary, but she closed her eyes to focus. Searching her emotions she projected them and the strongest were a combination of

frustration, anger, annoyance, hurt, and determination to stop the Council. She felt the muscles in Benedict's arm tense and she knew it must be working. Continuing she willed her feelings on him, but tried to limit its intensity. Opening her eyes slowly she saw his face screwed up tightly and sweat breaking out on his forehead. Quickly she removed her hand.

"Are you okay?"

He took a moment to relax, the muscles in his face softening.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said finally, trying to put on a smile but finding it hard. "That was...err...intense. I've never felt such strong negative emotions. You feel like this often?"

"In a lesser degree. But yes, most days," Helen replied. "It's who I am."

"Of course, sorry." Not sure what to say, Benedict rubbed his wrist. Thinking hard he continued, "Shall I come over in the morning for another? Then when I get to work I can get a Positive Transfer."

"That would be best. You will most likely return to your base level soon. Are you sure you want to do this?" She asked concerned by what she had seen on his face.

"Yeah, I'll be okay. I'm just looking forward to the Positive Transfer in the morning. Let's hope over time my levels of happiness increase and we can show this to others and the Council."

"Let's hope so," she agreed feeling a bit guilty.

She could see him relaxing again and his optimism was a sign he was returning to his base-line already. She was thankful for that.

The conversation continued and they discussed a recording method, deciding they only needed to record his level of happiness after the Positive Transfer, and how long it lasted above what his norm was. He would record this throughout his day at work and discuss it when he came to see her in the evening. Once this was agreed Helen asked him what he was going to do at the Council now that he wasn't working for her.

"Well, ironically enough they have me very involved in the Audit," he replied. "In the meeting they told us we would be used for our analytical skills and ability to give detailed reports. I'm not exactly sure what this involves, but I'm sure they'll tell us as the plans for the Audit go forward. It's very helpful that I get to be so closely involved because it'll help us in our observation of the Audit."

"Hmm...it'll be interesting to hear what they're doing from you," Helen concluded.

It was passed the usual dinner time now and Helen realised she was hungry so changed the subject and they had dinner. After this they said goodnight and Benedict would come by in the morning for another Transfer.

Helen spent the rest of the evening trying to organise her work in case she wanted to look at it in the future. The most recent reports were made more accessible and she decided to look over them tomorrow. As she moved the folders and boxes the negative feelings and thoughts intensified once more. Having to unpack everything and set it up here in her house was such an inconvenience.

All I was trying to do was what the Council wanted me, she thought to herself. They have rejected me because of it and because they can't accept the truth.

It was becoming a regular pattern and she became angrier and angrier. As the thoughts spiralled, a determination to stop the Council's, 'Audit of segregation,' became stronger and stronger. Even thoughts of trying to change the current system of having the Council of Higher Positives in charge crept in. It was pointless thinking she knew, how could one person make such a difference? The hate grew inside her until it was time to get some rest after the stressful day. Slowly, as if her feelings weighed her down, she made her way to the ground floor and then up the second lot of stairs to the top floor. Walking past the bathroom and several bedrooms she opened the door to

her own. Exhausted, she begrudgingly went through her nightly routine and finally got into bed. Lying there she mulled over her emotions. It kept her awake for a long time, but finally she fell asleep.

*

Waking early her mood had barely changed. She was slightly less angry, but all the negatives remained inside her and she tried to bury them. Breakfast was made and she read over some work notes as she waited for Benedict. She also made a list of flowers for her garden and later in the day she would go into the shopping area and get some essentials she needed. There was a knock at the door and putting the list to one side she answered the knock. It was Benedict and she invited him in. They made their way to the living room, taking the same seats as the night before.

“How are you feeling today?” Helen asked.

“Great,” he said. “I think it was a good idea to have a Transfer in the mornings for this experiment. It has completely worn off since last night.

“I thought it would. Are you ready for another before work?”

“Yes.”

Benedict rolled up his sleeve. Helen brought her chair forward again. Sitting close to him she placed her hand around his wrist and the Transfer began, her eyes open this time. His face screwed up tightly and he winced in pain. Helen let go.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, I just don’t remember it being that hard to endure?”

Helen remembered her thoughts of the night before and how her current mood was still consumed with negativity.

“I’ve been thinking too much about what has happened and it makes me angry and frustrated. I’m sorry that it’s a lot to handle.”

“I’ll be fine,” he said, trying to reassure himself. “Just try and make your current mood less intense,” he smiled.

“I’ll try,” she said.

The reality was she was remembering how she felt the night before, how intense those emotions had been, how angry she felt about not having her labs, and angrier still because she was having to Transfer that negativity onto her friend as a result. Taking a slow breath she finally put her hand back on his wrist and Transferred. No sooner had it began he yelped and pulled his hand out of her grip.

“What was that he exclaimed,” a scared look on his face.

Helen was confused for a second. Thinking fast she realised the truth. For a split second she nearly blurted it out in excitement, but quickly clamped her mouth shut. Fear of what this meant took her and stuttering she tried to cover it up before he realised.

“I... I was just angry that we can’t do the same experiments that we were doing in the lab. You must have felt it in the Transfer.”

It was a half truth. In reality it had come from emotional memories she had from the night before. This was something only Higher Positives could do she knew. She wasn’t just a Negative, she was a Higher Negative.

“I’ll not think about it, don’t worry,” she said to reassure him once more.

“Okay, but your current mood is very intense, I hope you find something to help calm you down.”

“I’ve my flowers that I want to buy. That’ll keep me busy and just thinking about it should be enough to help me and make the Transfer less intense.”

“If you’re sure?” he said, still a bit taken aback by the level of intense negativity he had felt.

“I’m sure,” she said trying to sound confident. “Let’s try again.”

Curiosity was taking her and she wanted to experiment, but quickly decided against it, hiding the truth was more important. Benedict held out his hand, which was a bit tensed by his memory of her Transfer, and she placed her hand on his wrist, trying to think about how she had felt the previous day at the time of the first Transfer. Benedict winced, but a weak half smile came over his face as he felt he could endure it. Helen smiled back, relieved it had worked. His face tightened as the Transfer continued, and when a bit of sweat began to appear they agreed he had had enough.

Sitting back Helen watched Benedict and studied his face. It was strange to see him move with less enthusiasm, and his smile was slightly dimmer than normal. She hoped no one at the Council would notice this change before he got the Transfer.

“How does that feel?” She asked.

“Better,” he said simply. “I should get to work and complete the next stage of the experiment. I’ll take note if I feel happier than normal and how long it lasts. But I don’t think there’ll be an obvious sign this soon, if any. We’re taking a long shot with this aren’t we?”

“Yes, I guess we are? But we’ll see how it goes and if it doesn’t work we’ll stop and you won’t have to do this anymore,” she said, still caught between wanting to continue her work, and having to put Benedict through this.

“I really hope it works,” Benedict continued. “It’ll be worth it if we can show people it adds to the Prime Objective, in a way that helps Positive and Negatives understand each other. Even with these two transfers I feel like I understand you a bit better. I just hope that getting the flowers makes you feel better. If it does, please focus on it because such negativity must be difficult to cope with.”

“Thanks Benedict. I will,” she said, feeling guilty for keeping the truth from him. But she was too scared in case he told other people what she was. The Council wouldn’t like the idea that there was a Higher Negative. She temporarily put these thoughts aside and said goodbye to him, encouraging him to get a Positive Transfer as quickly as he could. He said he would, and left to go to the Council Building.

Chapter Six

The front door closed behind Benedict and Helen returned to her chair. Bewildered she sat in silence for some time, but finally realised this discovery should have been obvious. If there were Higher Positives then it made sense there were Higher Negatives, and she was one.

What does this mean for me? She thought. What does this mean for the people? What does it mean for stopping the Council's Audit? Could I use this skill to threaten the Council? Would they listen to me if I Transferred onto one of them, and showed the power I could have over them?

Her mind was a whirlwind of questions and part of her liked this last thought. However, she knew she was being ridiculous. She was only one person and she would never do something so extreme.

There might be others like me, she realised. How would I find them? If we could find each other we could petition the Council to listen to us. We could even be involved in the Council, making decisions to create equality.

It was a dream though, and after thinking about this for a while she knew there was nothing she could do to make it happen. Continuing the experiment was the best course of action. If the effects of the Transfers on Benedict were conclusive they could start talking to others in the Council and hopefully they would listen. Yet, this new understanding of what she was meant there were still options available to her if the plan failed.

They're more extreme, but maybe it's the only way, she thought to herself.

Eventually, she realised sitting around and thinking about this wasn't helping. Taking a deep breath of acceptance she rose from her chair. Knowing she was a Higher Negative was exciting, but hard to process. There was nothing she could do at this time so taking her list of plants and shopping, she left the house. She decided to walk, as the Trams could be filled with people and she preferred to be on her own.

The multi-story shopping building stood before her and as with the schools and Council Building it was mainly built from glass. It contained all the shops that people would need or want. Helen stood watching all the people coming and going and sighed to herself. She wished it was quieter. It was her first lengthy visit to this place for a long time. Usually she grabbed the essentials and left as quickly as she could. However, this time she had to look at the map to find where the flower store was. It was in the leisure section of the shopping complex and she had to traipse through most of the building to get there.

As she entered the leisure section she passed shops selling brightly coloured art works, gyms for fitness and well being, stores for music, science, astronomy, history, and many more that catered for the activities people took part in for fun. Finally, she came to the plant section and smiled at seeing all the different kinds of flowers in the shop windows. She decided to look at them all, she had the time now, and would go back to the shops who had the flowers she wanted later. It was a pleasant and relaxing time, distracting her from the intensity of the past few days. After the lengthy browse she purchased all the flowers she wanted and felt a bit more like she used to. Still a bit angry at the injustices, but not the overwhelming hate she had felt recently. Each shop keeper took her address and the flowers would be delivered to her house, as was normal for such items, and Helen made the journey home.

It was lunch time when she returned and after eating and drinking, she went out to her front and back garden, mentally plotting where she wanted to plant the flowers. After lunch she wrote down a rough guide of where the flowers would go and went back to the basement to continue organising the years of reports she had. Having left the door of the basement open she heard the

knock late into the afternoon. Answering it she opened the door and saw the change in Benedict, he was back to normal.

But did he feel any happier after the Positive Transfer? She wondered. Once they sat in the living room she asked him.

"I'm afraid there was no change," he replied. "I didn't go above my baseline of happiness. It is quite hard to tell though. Hopefully in time an obvious difference will manifest itself."

"Let's hope so," Helen replied.

"So how was your day?" Benedict asked in his usual chipper way.

"It was pretty good," Helen said, reluctant to admit that for once she had almost enjoyed her day. "The flower hunt did help me feel better. They should be here soon I think."

"I told you," Benedict said with an innocent smugness.

"Yeah, yeah," she said, trying not to give him anymore satisfaction from being right. "Do you want to see where they'll go?" she asked.

"That would be lovely."

Helen took him on a tour of the back garden first, using the diagram to show where the different flowers would go, and then they went to the front. A few minutes went by and a delivery van pulled up. Two workers got out and began carrying the flowers from the back of the van to her house.

"Hello. Where would you like these to go?" One of the men smiled.

"Erm...I have a list of the ones for the front garden and ones for the back," Helen replied, holding the paper in her hands.

Handing it to him the two men began taking the plants to the allocated gardens. Once the plants were delivered the van left and Benedict marvelled at the array of flowers she had chosen.

"They're beautiful, Helen. What a splendid selection you have chosen."

"Thank you," Helen said blushing slightly. "I'll begin planting them tomorrow," she continued as she turned and entered the house.

Benedict followed, closing the door behind him. They went to the kitchen and chatted as Helen made dinner. Once the dinner was cooked they sat down and talked as they ate.

"Should we Transfer this evening?" Benedict asked.

"I don't know," Helen said. "Perhaps not. The whole point is to get a Positive Transfer after. That can only be guaranteed when you go to work. Maybe just wait until tomorrow morning?"

"That sounds best," he agreed.

They talked some more, discussing his day with the Council and how it was a beehive of activity as they tried to organise the Audit. It interested Helen, but unfortunately brought the hatred and negative emotions to the surface, she managed to hide them from Benedict though. The conversation continued and finally it was late and they said their goodbyes. For the second night Helen made her way to her bedroom wrapped in anger and a desire to make a change. As she lay in bed hypothetical situations continued to build. Her last thoughts were of a test she could do that would put any doubts of her Higher Negativity to rest, and finally she fell asleep.

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The routine continued and Benedict arrived the following morning. Helen had been up for an hour and focused on thoughts of her flowers, trying to block out her negative feelings, but it felt like a losing battle.

"Good morning, Helen," Benedict beamed as she opened the door.

“Morning,” she said, giving a slightly forced smile.

It always fascinated Helen how happy the Positives could be. She wondered if they ever felt okay or fine, never mind sad or angry. “Do you want some breakfast?” Helen offered as they made their way to the living room.

“I didn’t want to put you out so had some before I came,” he replied. “Shall we do the Transfer? There’s a lot to do at work and I better get in early.”

“Okay. Take a seat,” Helen replied as they entered the living room.

Sitting down she was ready to test her new skill, still finding it hard to believe she was a Higher Negative. She put her hand on his arm as usual, and Transferred her current feelings of frustration and anger, watching Benedict’s face closely. His reaction was similar to the day before, not too much pain, but still tense. It’s what she had hoped for. After that split moment of Transfer and observation she took her hand off abruptly.

“Two moments,” she said, excusing herself and looking at him apologetically.

Benedict looked at her confused, but didn’t ask any questions.

Helen used her emotional remembrance of the day before and brought to the forefront of her mind her feelings towards the people at the shopping complex. It wasn’t as extreme as the hate and anger she felt towards the Council, but the feelings towards the people’s ignorance and blind compliance were more intense than she had been feeling that morning. Placing her hand back on his wrist she Transferred the memory of those feelings and watched. Benedict’s face tightened more than it had done and she smiled to herself. Quickly letting go she hoped he hadn’t noticed the difference.

“I’m sorry, Benedict,” she said, rubbing her hands together. “I just don’t like putting you through this. I wish we still had the volunteers in the lab.” It was a half truth.

“I do too, Helen, but I’m okay with this. I’m happy to help. Go ahead,” he nodded.

“If you’re sure?” she said, and placed her hand on his arm for the third time, Transferring how she felt at the start.

She watched his face again. It was more relaxed, like the first Transfer.

There’s no doubt now: I’m a Higher Negative, she thought excitedly.

The Transfer continued until Benedict said he was feeling as negative as the first time they had done it. When she let go he asked the question she feared the most.

“Did you notice the change when you Transferred to me the second time?”

Helen paused for a split second, but gathered her thoughts and spoke as calmly and casually as she could.

“What do you mean?” she said, feigning ignorance.

“Well, during the second Transfer it felt more intense than the first and the third, did you notice it?”

“No,” she lied. “I was just having doubts about it all so struggled to continue the Transfer.”

“Hmm?” he exclaimed. “It was like it changed...like the Higher Positives way of Transferring?” Suddenly, he had what he thought was an original idea and shouted it out.

“Do you think there could be Higher Negatives?”

Helen faked a shocked and interested look, paused and pretended to think.

“Wow...I don’t know?” she said finally, playing along.

“Wouldn’t it be interesting if there were Higher Negatives?” Benedict continued, raising his hand and rubbing his chin as he sat back in the chair.

Helen expected him to be more excited about something like this, and realised the Negative Transfer was effecting him this way.

“That would be interesting,” she agreed, trying not to give away the truth, but wondering if she was trying too hard. Thinking quickly she attempted to distract him.

“If you think about it, it would be very difficult...” she paused and shook her head, “no... almost impossible...to find out. The way the Community is there would be no way of knowing.”

Benedict paused for a few moments, thinking hard, then surprised Helen.

“If you were one, you’d tell me right?”

His manner was abnormally serious. Helen couldn’t tell if it was the effects of the Transfer or if Benedict had genuinely started to believe there could be Higher Negatives.

She laughed nervously, “Of course I would, but I’m not.”

He thought for a second more. “Yeah of course not,” he continued, his seriousness fading and he gave a short sharp laugh. “What’d be the chances of you being a Higher Negative, even if such a thing did exist?”

Good old rational Benedict, she thought.

She knew she had him now. Even with the Negative Transfer he was still a trusting Positive after all. He would move away from this now.

“Well, you should probably get to work and get your Positive Transfer,” she said making sure.

“Oh, of course,” he said. “My mind just got caught up in the idea.” He shook his head to discard these thoughts. “I’ll see you this evening,” he said, standing up from his chair.

“I’ll have dinner on,” she said, sighing inside with relief.

“Okay,” he replied simply. No, thank you or exclamation of enjoyment at the prospect.

They said goodbye and Benedict took the next Tram to the Council Building.

Helen watched him go, relief turning to a sly happiness. She had pulled it off and a smile crept across her face. It was unfortunate that she had to lie, but a necessity if she was going to keep her secret from the Council of Higher Positives. Returning to the house she took out the plans for the front garden. It would be a useful distraction from the negativity that still brewed inside her. The day was spent planting and watering the flowers. It kept her feelings at bay and by the time Benedict was back she was almost in a good mood as she opened the door.

“Hi, Helen,” he said cheerily, in complete contrast to when he had left. “I love what you have done to the garden.”

He turned at the door step to survey the newly created scene, taking a deep breath of satisfaction to enjoy its aesthetic beauty. The sun was low in the sky and the fresh smell of the flowers filled the air and Benedict took it all in, adding to the happiness he already felt.

“Thank you,” Helen said, taking pleasure in his approval.

“Do you want to show me each plant?” he asked.

“It’s not finished yet, when it’s complete I will give you a proper tour.”

“That sounds good. I look forward to it.”

Helen stepped away from the door and Benedict entered closing the door behind him.

“So you’ve had a productive day?” he grinned to Helen.

“Yeah, I guess so. Did you?”

“Very busy, but first to the matter of this mornings Transfer.”

Helen liked this about Benedict, straight to the point and first things first. She looked at him questioningly as they sat in the living room.

“Still no change,” he replied. “When the Positive Transfer is over I’m back to normal.”

Helen debated whether to increase the intensity of the next Transfer, but decide against it for now. It was too soon and more fluctuations might arouse his curiosity again.

“We’ll try again tomorrow then?” Helen said.

“Yes, we will. I know we’ll have success soon,” he said optimistically. “Now on to my busy day,” he said without any further to do. “The Council have released their plans on how the Audit is going to be organised. They have taken the Forty Nine Sectors of our Community and divided them into seven areas. Each group of seven will have someone overlooking the testing. I’ll say more about that in a minute. The person overseeing the group of seven Sectors is responsible for the Testers and the Testers report the results to them,” he paused with a cheeky grin. “Oh, and guess who gets to be one of the Testers? Yep. Me!” he laughed.

“Congratulations,” Helen said, but felt indifferent about a lot of this. Curiously she asked, “How will the tests actually be done?”

Benedict paused nervously, the smile fading slightly. “Don’t be angry, but they’ll have each person Transfer onto the Tester. This will prove if someone is Positive or Negative...”

“...But that goes against everything they said!” Helen exclaimed loudly. “That’s the reason they stopped us doing what we were!” she paused, breathing heavily. “Transferring Negatives to Positives...hypocrites!” she said shaking her head.

“I was worried how you’d take the news,” Benedict said. “They apologised a lot, telling us it was a necessary, but temporary measure. Those having Negative Transfers would get lots of Positive Transfers to counter the negativity.”

“It’s still hypocrisy,” Helen said folding her arms.

“There’s nothing we can do about it. I’m sorry,” he said, trying to comfort her with a smile. She said nothing and Benedict, not sure what else to do, continued his report on the Audit.

“Erm...where was I...oh yeah... Each person in charge of the seven Sectors is from the Council of Higher Positives and I think the name of mine is, George? I’ll find out tomorrow when I meet him. I think I’ll be testing this Sector as it’s mine, and I think that’s what they wanted. I’ll make the testing more personal and a positive experience, no pun intended,” he laughed.

Helen smiled weakly, almost ignoring the statement and Benedict continued once more, composing himself.

“It means we have direct access to the tests from this area and can follow closely what the Council are doing. Then hopefully we can do something if the Audit is bringing about inequality.”

Helen leant forward, showing a bit more interest at this, and letting go of some of her anger. She was grateful for Benedict’s enthusiasm in what she felt was her campaign. She wished all Positives were like him, but every single one she had met was so narrow minded and would think what they were doing was wrong.

But I know otherwise, she thought. I have evidence showing they can be happier in an equal society, with Transfers between both Positives and Negatives. I have to show them this. There’s no other way to convince them. Benedict’s the key. I hope there’s a change in him soon.

Noticing a silence had developed she spoke.

“It’s an interesting plan the Council have devised...If you ignore the hypocrisy. What time scale have they given for when they want all the testing to be finished by?”

“Well, if every person is tested the way they plan on doing it, a test each day over five days for each person, it will take about three months.”

“Good,” Helen said. “That gives us time to work on making you much happier, and we can show them we were right. Hopefully then we can convince them. Plus we’ll have access to those who are Negatives in this Sector, through you, and we can tell them about how the Audit isn’t fair and that there’s a better way.”

Benedict had a concerned look on his face.

"I'm not sure if that would be a good way of doing things," he said. "It seems too dishonest. The report is for the Council and if I give the results to you I'm lying to them. It doesn't feel right."

"This information is vital," she said, placing her hands on her knees. "If we can use it to show others what we're doing then it won't just be you and I in front of the Council, but lots of people. They're more likely to listen if that were the case."

Benedict thought about what she had said.

"It'll help in what we are trying to do, but it doesn't feel right," he repeated.

"Trust me Benedict," Helen said, trying to give a reassuring smile. "This will be the most effective way to make a change. You were there in the labs. We both saw that positivity can be increased with Transfer of Negatives to Positives and then an intense Higher Positive Transfer. If our current experiment works it'll prove that even without a Higher Positive, Negatives are useful. This way we can help our Community be happier and united, instead of divided. It'll be the best way to live for everyone," finishing she sat back in her seat her arms moving to the rests at the side.

"Wow," Benedict said. "You should be in the Council, you make a very valid point and in a way that's inspiring."

"Thank you, Benedict," she said calming down a bit, but having lost all the effects of the flower planting's distraction. "I just feel strongly this is the way forward," she continued, her indifference completely gone.

"I'm glad we talked about it," Benedict replied. "What you've said has given me a stronger conviction that you're right. We'll use the test results to help us in our goal to increase everyone's happiness," he said firmly, nodding his head.

"I'm glad to hear it," Helen replied.

Getting up she excused herself and walked out the living room across the hall and into the kitchen to make some dinner. Once it was ready they ate and talked about Benedict's new role as a Tester. They discussed how all the Transferring was going to affect the experiment, but agreed as long as he had the morning Negative Transfer from her, and a Positive Transfer straight after, their experiment was safe. They talked and speculated on this until he left to return home.

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Benedict arrived in the morning as usual and the Transfer took place. It had its effect and his mood changed and enthusiasm dissipated. He left straight after and continued the pattern of a basic Positive Transfer as soon as he could. Helen continued to plant and think of other flowers that might compliment the garden. As she did Benedict's statement of her being on the Council came to the forefront of her thoughts.

If I was on the Council I could make changes with ease, instead of the difficulties we currently face. But how could I make that happen? I'm deluding myself. Then suddenly she realised how far their ideas had come already. *Maybe what we do will have such a positive impact on the people that I could be on the Council one day.*

She laughed at the thought of, 'positive impact,' because the positivity in this situation came through giving those who were Negatives more of a voice, and using them to help Positives be happier through Transfer. On the surface it all seemed like a contradiction, but in reality it made sense to her.

You cannot have happiness unless you have sadness, she realised. The happiness we currently have is a hollow shell of optimism, but with an understanding of negativity we'll have more happiness and appreciate the positivity more.

These thoughts felt like an epiphany, and she focused on them as fuel to endure what was to come. It was her motivation to keep Transferring to Benedict and to seek out Negatives to join her on what was starting to become her revolution for equality. A revolution she realised she was willing to act for, not just talk and think about.

Chapter Seven

The following morning Benedict told Helen how the tests would be done and how they would be reported.

“The Tester visits each person, tests them, and takes a note of whether they’re Positive or Negative, then goes to the next house to test the people there. The following day the tests are repeated on the same people. This is done for five days to give a conclusive result. It’s pretty simple but it’ll require a lot of people to do the testing. Most of the Council Workers have been assigned to be Testers.”

“I guess it’s the best way of doing the tests,” Helen shrugged, having accepted there was nothing she could do about the Council’s hypocrisy, but having added it to the growing list of reasons to stop them. “It’s good that you’ll be able find out what the data shows and keep me updated as the Audit happens.”

“It’s going to be a lot of work,” Benedict continued. “I’m in early Monday to pick up the list of those I’ll test and work all through the day, only stopping for short breaks to eat. I’ll have to come here a little earlier if we are going to continue our experiment.”

“Coming earlier is fine,” Helen said. “It’s important we do this. In time we’ll have our results and be able to change the Councils mind about Transferring. Keep a track of all the Negative’s you find, we may need their help at some point to achieve our goals.”

“That’s a good idea. The Council have also assigned people to be Positive Transfers, in the very slim chance a Tester has a string of Negatives and needs a Positive Transfer. It’s unlikely, with most people being Positives, but precautions must be taken I guess. It’ll be good for us because I can use them for my Positive Transfer if I have to.” He hesitated slightly. “I think people might be getting suspicious of my need for Positive Transfers each morning. I’ve tried to vary it, but there’s only so much I can do before people begin to notice. The excuse of having tested someone who’s a Negative should help keep any suspicions at bay,” he glanced at the clock. “Look at the time, I better get moving.”

He held out his arm and the Transfer took place, his mannerisms changing subtly. Yet, to Helen they seemed a bit more obvious than when they started. She chose to ignore it for now and said goodbye to the slightly deflated Benedict who walked to the Tram Stop.

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The remaining two days of the working week continued like this and Benedict told Helen the testing would start the beginning of the following week. With these two days passed Helen was now almost sure Benedict was actually becoming more negative and not positive, and it worried her. She didn’t say anything to him, hoping a positive change might appear suddenly. *Patience is the key*, she told herself. The weekend came and they decided to have a break and would Transfer again at the beginning of the week. Helen continued her gardening and when she wasn’t pruning or watering she sometimes put on the television out of interest. News of the Audit had been released and most shows reported on how spectacular it was going to be and how they would be happier because of it. It only angered Helen and sooner or later she would switch it off in frustration.

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Monday came and Benedict arrived a bit earlier than normal. The Transfer took place and a couple of hours later he had returned. He had his first list of people to test and wanted to show Helen. Entering the house he talked about his schedule for the day.

“You’re on my list,” he grinned. “Might as well get it done while I’m here?”

“Must you test me, Benedict?” Helen protested. “You know I’m a Negative. Just mark me down and save yourself some time.”

“It would save time,” he replied, and thinking to himself. Then shook his head, “but this must be done properly.”

Always the methodical Benedict, Helen thought. I guess I can’t begrudge your commitment and how thorough you are when it’s also helping me.

“Okay,” she said acceptingly, holding out her open hand to repeat what had only been done a few hours before.

Helen knew he would be paying more attention this time so worked especially hard on staying constant and not giving away her secret. Benedict held up his arm and Helen held it loosely, Transferring the same intensity as she had that morning to keep any suspicious fluctuations in check. It didn’t take long and once more Benedict’s mood changed. He made a mark on his clip board and said, “Definitely a Negative.”

Helen smirked a little in her mind. He had said it in such a drab tone and wondered if Benedict realised how negative he was after a Transfer. They said their farewells and he went off to the next house on his list; fortunately it was a Positive Transfer.

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The following day Helen waited eagerly to hear how Benedict first day of testing had been. She hoped he had found some more Negatives, but was also curious to see what would happen if a Higher Negative was found. It hadn’t escaped her attention that this might happen, but she hoped if there were any other Higher Negatives they weren’t discovered. If they were her plans would be thrown into chaos and she continued to fear what the Council would do if they were discovered.

As she sat in her chair, waiting for Benedict, she began to think about the experiments and her desire for evidence so she could begin getting more support, but a lot of doubt crept in.

What do I do with Benedict? She thought to herself. He’s only getting more negative and people will notice soon. I need to get him a Higher Positive Transfer as our attempt to try it with normal Positives isn’t working. But how to do that? It’s too risky. If for some reason it doesn’t work they’ll not be happy. I need people with me when I go to the Council to reveal the truth, that way we will have a better chance of convincing them. It’s risky but I’ll have to keep monitoring Benedict. He may just need time to adapt and will become happier soon.

The knock at the door interrupted her thoughts and she opened it to let Benedict in.

“What? Not one other Negative?” Helen said when he showed her the results of the day before.

She struggled with this and couldn’t believe that out of all the people he had tested yesterday she was the only one who was different. A feeling of loneliness swept over her. It added to the growing determination to change things. With this news they Transferred and he marked her as a Negative again and went on his way. It put Helen in a sombre mood.

Why don’t I have more power to change this? She thought angrily, as she continued to sit in her chair. It’s so much effort to prove what I’ve discovered creates a fair world that actually accomplishes their stupid Prime Objective. I have such a lack of control... it shouldn’t be this hard.

Sitting there for a long time she finally knew there was nothing she could do and went to her garden to try and calm down. As she took care of the plants she realised time was on her side and eventually she would make the changes she wanted.

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The week went by in a similar fashion and when Benedict arrived the first day of the following week his results brought Helen nothing but disappointment.

“Still no other Negatives?” She said in a disgruntled and disappointed tone.

“No others,” Benedict replied quietly, sensing her annoyance. Shuffling in his seat he plucked up some confidence. “I’m sure I’ll find one this week. I’ve heard other Testers mention that they’ve found some Negatives. It’s only a matter of time before I find one. Then we can explain to them that the Audit isn’t the best way and tell them about how Negatives can have a role in the happiness of the Positives.”

“I guess you’re right,” Helen admitted unenthusiastically. “I just wish there was more that I could do. I do my gardening and go shopping, but that’s it. I want to make a change, but can’t do anything about it.”

“We’re doing something about it,” Benedict encouraged. “We’re doing our experiment.” He paused. “Although, and I hate to tell you this, but I’m not sure if it’s working the way we hoped. With the record I’ve been keeping it appears my mood and negativity is getting worse. I’m not getting back to baseline of positivity the way I did at the start. Do you think I should seek out a Higher Positive to see if the same outcome occurs again as it did in the lab?”

Helen thought quickly as he spoke, worrying that he had finally noticed what she had. Despite her desire for action and change, something in her was still reluctant to agree. There were still too many risks and she wanted it done her way.

“I’m sure it’s just the negativity making you think you’re not back to the baseline. You seem fine to me,” she lied. “Let’s give it another couple of weeks and see how you feel then?”

He paused. “Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he finally agreed. “Let’s do the Transfer and I’ll get to work.”

Benedict left the house feeling weighed down. For the first time in his life he felt like skipping work and going home. It was a fleeting temptation and he fought it off. Sighing he continued his journey to the Tram Stop, got on the first one that arrived and sat on the only empty seat. At the Council Building he reported to his Higher Positive.

“Good morning, Benedict,” George said in a bouncing tone that sounded like it was the first time he had ever seen a rainbow. He wore a bright blue cotton jumper and dark green trousers that were held up by a bright yellow belt. It was a stark contrast to the greying brown hair and wrinkling skin, but it was the normal style for the Positives who, as with their houses, favoured bright colours.

“Good morning,” Benedict replied, his shoulders slumped and tone noticeably different.

“Are you okay, Benedict?” George asked, watching him closely through thin rimmed glasses.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Probably just need a quick Transfer? I’ll get one off the allocated person.”

George looked down at his clipboard and turned a few sheets.

“But you only had one Negative last week?” He said. “You should have recovered by now?”

“I guess I’m not used to it,” he lied reactively, surprising himself. “Do you have this week’s list for me?” He said quickly, trying to distract George.

It worked and after a moment’s pause George put down the clipboard, picked up a few sheets of paper and handed them to Benedict. Benedict took the list and forced a smile, trying to convince

George he was more positive than he felt. Turning, and bidding George a good day, Benedict left to get his Positive Transfer. With the Transfer complete he felt more upbeat about the days work, but an underlying feeling of indifference remained, scratching gently below the surface.

He continued to fight it over the next two days and by the middle of the week he was sure he had found a Negative. This news had lifted Helens mood a little, but it was his own mood that was becoming a problem. The scratching had become harder to ignore. Once the Negative Transfer took place his motivation was almost depleted. He tried to keep going for both Helen and George, but it was too much. By the last day of the week all motivation was gone. Leaving Helen's house after the Negative Transfer he could no longer be bothered with all the effort.

My report to George is due at the end of the day. I'll just copy the results from the last four days and take them to him later, he thought as he looked back to make sure Helen wasn't watching. She wasn't and he began walking home.

He sat slumped in his house with the T.V. on and for the first time he got fed up with the predictability of the programmes. All the bright colours and over enthusiastic people felt intrusive to him and he decided to read one of his favourite books. It wasn't long before this annoyed him too. Putting the book on the floor he decided to lie on the couch and just stare at the ceiling. Time went by and he was content for a while, but slowly he began to go back towards his baseline positivity. He didn't reach it, but felt like putting the T.V. back on, not minding the shows so much this time. Finally, he realised he should be working and felt guilty. Shocked and confused at what he was doing he began to question the effects of Negative Transfer. It wasn't working he realised. If anything it was having completely the wrong effect on him. He decided he would speak to Helen over the weekend.

Leaving his house in a rush he went to the Council Building for a Positive Transfer, using the other Negative he had found as an excuse. Once done he tried to finish his last tests of the day. There was no way to do it all in the short time so he marked down those he had meant to see in the morning as the same as they had been the previous four days. He put the Negative test down as occurring just before he had gone to get the Transfer. The rest of the tests were finished and he rushed back to hand in his report to George.

"You're late, Benedict," George smiled. "This isn't like you?"

"Sorry," Benedict said, breathing deeply from the rush to get there. "It's just been a tiring week. I found another Negative and the Transfers took their toll. I had to make a trip here and it put back the testing."

"Oh, okay," George said, shrugging casually. "A few others have had to the same. Are you feeling okay now?"

"Yes," Benedict nodded enthusiastically. "Much better thank you."

Benedict handed his report over. George looked at it.

"Why have you changed the routine for today?" He asked.

"For a bit of Variation," Benedict replied quickly, having prepared himself for this.

George paused, a bit taken aback, "Variation?"

"Yes, a change felt good," Benedict smiled.

"I guess there's no harm in it. It's just different," George said shaking his head and laughing. *Variation indeed,* he thought. *My colleagues are going to have a good laugh about this. Why change something that is already varied and has been organised. This Benedict's a strange one.*

"Are you happy with the work?" George continued.

"Yes. I'm happy," Benedict said, only half convincingly, but it was enough. They said their farewells and Benedict left.

Glad the week was over Benedict made his way home and began thinking about the Transfers again.

My Transfers are only leading to negative behaviour, he thought as he walked to the Tram Stop. But I want this to work so much. I want to help Helen. We've discovered a new way to help everyone become happier. What should I say to Helen though? She'll be disappointed if we stop. I don't want to disappoint her? I'll keep trying for her sake and because of the changes we can make if this does work.

The recent Positive Transfer had given him enough optimism to keep trying and he continued to think as he sat on the Tram.

I'll speak to her on Monday and relax this weekend. I must be as positive as I can so I don't repeat the mistake of skipping work. If only we had convinced the Higher Positives from the start this would have been a lot easier.

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"Hi, Benedict. How was the last day of testing?" Helen asked on Monday morning. Benedict hung his head and admitted to having struggled to work that day.

"You have to make sure that doesn't happen again," Helen said forcefully. "If they find out what we're doing before we have any conclusive evidence then they'll make sure we don't meet again. They don't force many things but in this case they think we're trying to sabotage their happiness, way of life and their Prime Objective. I don't know far they'd go to protect it. Maybe banish us or something like that. We cannot let them find out."

"I know," Benedict said, "but it's just so hard to control the negative feelings. I get such a strong desire to do what I want."

"Well, once you have the Transfer, I'll be able motivate you to go to work so you don't give us away."

"I think it'll be enough having the reminder," Benedict said.

Everyday of that, the third week of testing, Helen gave him a good talking to, lecturing him that he had to go work and get his Positive Transfer. It worked but Benedict continued the mindset that this was the last week he would try Transferring and if no results came he would find a Higher Positive to Transfer on him. A simple lie could bring this about and hopefully his happiness would exceed in intensity and duration. The Higher Positive would see it and be convinced to let them do more experiments. Helen wouldn't like it, and he didn't want to lie, but he felt it was the best option he had.

During this week of testing Benedict found three Negatives. It was almost too much and he had to get more Positive Transfers. He didn't mention how much he was struggling to Helen and by the last day his mood was bleak. Even the Positive Transfers after the three Negatives did very little to lift him and once again reporting to George didn't go as well as it should have.

"Another busy week?" George said, bouncing on his feet.

"Busier than you could ever know," Benedict said flatly.

"Are you alright?" George said, noticing the strangeness of Benedict's behaviour again.

"Just great," he replied sarcastically.

George struggled to understand, not familiar with sarcasm. He could sense Benedict wasn't being genuine, but the Positive side of him dominated and he replied in the best way he knew how.

"I'm the same. I'm so glad we'll be able to make a difference with this Audit." He looked down at the report Benedict had given him and noticed the three Negatives on the list. "I see you've

had an intense week with three Negatives. I think that's the most someone has done in one week. Have you had plenty of Positive Transfer's?"

Four Negatives actually, Benedict thought.

"I haven't had one this evening..."

Benedict was about to say he would go for one, but George interrupted.

"Well, how about you let me give you one," he beamed. "I know Higher Positives don't usually Transfer, but I'll keep the Transfer small. Hopefully it'll keep you constant and return your Positivity."

For a moment Benedict was reluctant as anything could happen. It might set off the extreme happiness now. It was a risk he was willing to take and part of him hoped it would as he was getting tired of feeling down all the time. As George made the Transfer Benedict held his breath with anticipation. Not much happened though. It was only a small Transfer and only had a small effect as George controlled the intensity. Benedict suspected with greater intensity he would have felt happier than he ever had, but it wasn't to be. He felt slightly better though, and with the Transfer over he thanked George and left.

Another week was over and there was no improvement. Walking down the corridor of the Council Building Benedict wondered what he could do. He didn't want to lie to Helen, or go behind her back, but he wanted to feel the way he used to.

Maybe I can convince Helen to arrange a meeting with all the Higher Positives, he thought. If we could convince them to Transfer onto me intensely they would see the evidence of what we discovered in the labs. That way the experiment will be over and I won't have to take a risk by myself. If we did it at the end of this up and coming week Helen can use the time to go to those Negatives I've found. She can see if they feel the Audit is wrong, and if they do they can go with us. If not I'm sure she would show them how wrong it is and convince them to help us. Plus if those negatives don't help there's always the list of all the Negatives found so far. Getting it might be a problem though, but I'm sure I can.

It felt like a good plan and he decided he would speak to Helen in the morning.

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George walked through the door of his house and was welcomed by the smell of a perfectly cooked dinner. As he closed the door his wife, Rose, came from the kitchen and gave him a kiss.

"How was your day darling?" she asked.

"Wonderful as ever," he replied smiling. "How's Jessica?"

"She's upstairs doing her homework."

"That's good to hear," he said proudly.

"Can you let her know dinner will be ready soon?" Rose said cheerfully.

George went up the stairs and knocked on the door to Jessica's room.

"Hi, Dad," she said, getting up from her desk and giving him a big welcome hug as he stepped in the room. They went through a familiar routine of talking about her day and discussing her homework. After a few minutes of this they went down stairs for dinner. At the dinner table the routine of pleasantries continued and Rose asked more questions about how George's day at work had been.

"Still very busy," he replied. "Ever since the Audit began we've been working a lot more, but that's good. We're achieving a lot already. It's nice to know what we're doing will have a positive impact on the Community," he chuckled. "Although I did have another strange encounter with the

Tester I told you about last week. I think the testing may have gotten too much for him. He had to test three Negatives this week and I can imagine that was a strain on him. It's an unfortunate consequence of this test, but it has to be done."

"What was strange about his behaviour this time?" Rose asked.

"I'm not sure. It's hard to describe, but he isn't the usual consistently positive person I remember him being. It's like his mood has changed."

Jessica had been listening while eating and laughed when her father had said this.

"It sounds like Blair," she said.

"Are you still spending time with him?" George asked. "I know he's our closest friend's son, but you don't have to spend time with him. I think he's on my list as a suspected Negative. I don't want his negativity stopping you from being as happy as you can be. It would be better if you spent more time with Positive's rather than him."

"Don't worry, Dad. He gets plenty of Transfers. Anyway I like spending time with him. He's more interesting than a lot of people at my school. He sees things differently and I like that about him. Plus you should see some of his drawings, he's very creative. I've seen nothing like it anywhere. He doesn't like to show it to people as he thinks people will think him too different, but I like him because he's different."

George was concerned as she spoke. The Community relied on consistency and positivity and any creativity was Positive. If his creativity was different then it was most likely negative and wrong. He hoped Blair's drawings were Positive and cautioned her.

"You may find him interesting, but be careful. I don't want you spending too much time with him unless you can be sure that you're having a positive impact on him, and not him having a negative effect on you."

"I'm a positive influence Dad," she said smiling warmly. "We're good friends and you know that. But I promise I'll be careful."

"Good girl," he said smiling back and cleared his throat. "As for my worker I think I'll limit people to two Negative Transfers a week, three appears to be too many. It'll be good when this Audit is over and we can begin making sure all the Negatives have regular Positive Transfers. Then we won't have to worry about Blair having a negative impact on you Jessica."

Jessica had gone back to eating but looked up when he said this and smiled politely. However, she began thinking about Blair and despite being a Positive she really didn't see what all the fuss was about. Blair was just Blair and wasn't hurting anyone, but she didn't give it any more thought and once dinner was over went back to finish her home work.

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Saturday morning arrived and Benedict went to Helen's determined to convince her that the experiment wasn't having the effect they had hoped.

"This is a surprise. I didn't think I'd see you until Monday morning," she said opening the door.

"There's something I want to discuss," Benedict replied.

"Come in then," she said. "Is everything okay?" she asked as they sat in her living room.

Benedict paused, trying to build up the courage to say his piece. "Err...not really. Yesterday I think I gave away that I was more negative than I should be. George was asking me questions and I was just fed up and may have been a bit too moody towards him."

Helen went to lecture him, but holding up his hand Benedict stopped her.

“Please let me explain and finish, this is important. I have been putting up with these Negative Transfers, but I don’t think it is going to work the way we had hoped. There’s no sign of me getting positive, and it’s actually having the opposite effect. I’m becoming more negative and it’s becoming noticeable. I want to go back to way things were before and feel positive again. If we finish this soon then I can do that. I think this week we should arrange to show our evidence to the Higher Council and take the risk of getting one of them to Transfer intensely onto me. Also if you speak to the negatives I’ve found we can take them with us and have some support. The Higher Council will Transfer when I tell them how negative I’ve become. When they see the effects, and the support we have, we can convince them things can be better doing it our way, or at the least they might give us a chance to do more experiments.”

Helen was angry, not at him really, but because this hadn’t worked the way she had hoped. She thought about his words and how his plan could work. She didn’t want to risk them rejecting it though. However, she knew she couldn’t keep going on with these Negatives Transfers, it wasn’t fair on Benedict.

“Okay,” she said regrettably. “We do need more support. If you give me the contact details of the Negatives I’ll finally do some work.”

Benedict nodded, smiling with relief.

“I’ll go and try to talk with them,” Helen continued. “I can find out their views on the Audit and try and get them to come with us when we go see the Council. How about we arrange an appointment? Not this coming week, I think it’s too early, but the first day of the following? This way I’ll be able to do what I need to do.”

Benedict thought about it and decided it was good enough for him, having that support was a crucial part of this.

“Okay,” he agreed. “I’ll arrange a meeting through George. I won’t tell him that anyone else is coming, as it might raise suspicions. If they find your coming they might reject it.”

“That’s a good idea,” Helen said.

“What about our Transfers?” Benedict asked, hoping she would make the suggestion to stop them, but she didn’t.

“If we keep the experiment going there’ll be a better chance that it works when the Higher Positive Transfers.”

Benedict sighed, knowing she was right, but didn’t enjoy the prospect of the week ahead.

“Okay,” he said again. “The sooner we get all this over with, and prove that Negatives can increase the level of happiness, the better.”

“You’ve been very helpful Benedict. I know it’s been hard, but together we’ll make the changes for the equality that’s needed.”

Chapter Eight

A month had passed since Helen's retirement and the Monday morning air was warming as she said goodbye to Benedict. A brief overview of the plan, and the Transfer had taken place, but it was now time for Helen to venture in to the Community. With the list of four Negatives in her hand she read over their names; one came from the second week of testing and three from the third. It felt too small a number. She hoped Benedict was successful in his plan, he said he would try to get a list of all the Negatives found so far, or at the least those who were in the Sectors closest to theirs. However, she wouldn't have that list until tomorrow morning so the four would have to do for now.

As always the weekend had been spent in deep contemplation. When looking over the list she noticed that those on it did similar jobs and lived in similar circumstances. Their jobs were limited in human contact and seemed to be menial. This was good as she could talk to them without any interruption or contradiction from anyone. During the contemplation she wrote down a list of why the Audit was wrong and why it should be stopped. It would help her stay focused when speaking to the Negatives. The experiment with Benedict was left of the list, but she had subtly put down the point that they as Negatives were useful to the Community and the goal of happiness. If she gained support and trust she would confide the truth of the experiment to those who showed enthusiasm to the cause. Those who joined would then be able to help her find more people and hopefully within the week she would have enough people to speak out against the Audit.

Folding up the list she put it in her pocket. She felt slightly conscious of her age and appearance and wore smart clothes to appear professional, hoping the Negatives would take her seriously. The first Negative worked in the Industrial Sector and as she took the Tram her desire for equality and change kept her motivated, but also her need for revenge and some control over these matters mixed with this too.

The Industrial Sector was where all sorts of products were made and provided many jobs for the people. There were Power Stations in the outskirts that produced the electricity they needed, and moving towards the Community were factories and businesses, all with the purpose to make the products that contributed to the Community.

The closer Helen came to the Industrial Sector the more nervous she felt, and she kept repeating her written down manifesto over and over to make sure she knew exactly what she was going to say. The man she was going to see worked in a medium size business that made scenery for theatres in the Entertainment Sectors. She had wondered if waiting until the evening was best but visiting them now felt like a better idea. If they were interested she could visit them again in the evening as they lived near her. On arrival Helen entered the warehouse building and walked up to the receptionist.

"Can I help?" the receptionist asked sweetly.

"I'm looking for Chris Raditch?"

"You're looking for Chris?" She asked questioningly. "Are you from the Council too?"

Helen realised Benedict most have come here to test him at his work and not where he lived. She stored that thought for when she saw Chris; it might be of some use.

"No, I'm not from the Council," Helen said politely. "My name is Helen. I've come to talk to Chris about an organisation I think he'll want to join. I wonder if it would be okay to have a few minutes of his time?"

"I'm sure that would be okay," the receptionist said. "He's usually very busy, and likes to be left alone when painting. I can take you up and see if he wants to talk, but I can't make any promises."

The receptionist led the way and they walked through the building, passing a couple of groups of people reading scripts and acting them out playfully. One person stood back pointing and moving around the group. Helen guessed this person was trying to get an idea of the surroundings so they could make the scenery for whatever overly optimistic story was being shown at the theatres. Eventually, they came to a side room and before knocking the receptionist turned to Helen.

“Chris doesn’t like to join in with the other workers, but he is exceptionally gifted so we’re happy to meet his needs. Don’t be offended if he just wants to get on with his work, he doesn’t talk to many people. He just comes in, does what he needs to and leaves at the end of the day.”

Sounds perfect to me, Helen thought.

“I’m sure he’ll talk to me,” Helen said, gaining some confidence from the empathy she had for Chris.

The receptionist nodded, knocked, and pushed the door inwards. The room had moderate lighting and was about fifteen metres squared and five metres high. The contrast with the rest of the brightly-lit building made it feel darker than it was and as the receptionist entered Helen followed behind her.

“Hi, Chris,” the Receptionist said almost nervously and apologetically. “You have a visitor.”

“Another?” Came the annoyed tone from the skinny thirty year old man in the centre of the room. He was surrounded by large wooden cut outs on the floor and amongst them were bits of paper with sketches and colours all over them.

“This woman...Helen, has come to talk to you about something she thinks you’d be interested in,” the receptionist said.

Chris looked up at her and nodded once.

“I’ll leave you to it,” she whispered to Helen.

“So what do you want?” Chris said flatly once the door closed behind the receptionist.

“I think I can be of some use to you,” Helen responded taking in his appearance and admiring his long dark brown hair that was uniquely tied back into a pony tail.

Chris turned from looking at his work, pushing his circular glasses up his nose. “Some use? And how might you manage that?”

Helen didn’t hold back and took the opportunity without hesitation.

“Do you know why the Council are doing this Audit?”

“I think everyone knows that,” he said sarcastically, “to make our Community happier.”

There was disdain in his voice and Helen’s confidence grew.

“Well, from your tone I’m guessing I was right to come and speak to you. I’m a Negative. I have always known this and felt different. This Audit is a problem for those of us who are Negative. It will highlight too much that we are different. It’s being done to encourage the Positives to ‘help’ us be more like them. Personally I don’t want this. The question I have come here to ask is, do you?”

Chris’ attention was now fully focused on her and he regarded her with curiosity and great interest.

“I guess I’ve thought about it now and then, but it’s just the way it is. I’ve learned to cope, and have a life that’s good enough for me. If the Council want to try and change us they can try but if we don’t want to I’m sure they’ll leave us alone.”

“At first maybe,” Helen said taking a step forward, “but their Prime Objective is a happier Community. Eventually the path they’re taking will lead them to take more extreme measures. They’re officially highlighting everyone who is a Negative. Once they have this information they’ll put pressure on us to have more Transfers, but what happens if we don’t want it. We’ll be the

percentage that doesn't follow the Prime Objective, and therefore not helping them achieve it. Once they realise this it's only a matter of time before they'll take more extreme measures."

"Hmm? I never thought about it like that," Chris said. "The Audit is very intrusive. I guess if they continue on this path it could go as you've said. What can we do about it though? As if they're going to stop the Audit?"

"That's why I'm here," Helen said. "I used to work for the Council but they fired me, even though I was only doing what they had asked me to do. However, this Audit was something I felt was wrong and spoke up about it. If I had been allowed to do the work I was doing I would have found a way of achieving the Prime Objective without the need for an Audit. They didn't agree and have put me in a position where I have to stand up against their way of doing things. I'm only one person though and they've not listened to me. Yet, if there are more people they'll have to listen to us."

"And how many people do you have?" Chris asked.

This took some of the wind out of Helen's sails and she winced as she spoke, "Well, apart from a friend who works in the Council, you're the first person I've spoken to."

"Ha!" Chris laughed. "You're crazy. How do you expect to change things with such a small number of people?"

Helen's forehead creased and fists clenched. She knew she could make a difference with some help. How to convince the first person to start the ball rolling? Extreme measures would have to be taken. It was a risk, but Chris had a lot of potential and she needed his help.

"We have methods of restoring balance."

The idea was cruel, but she wanted this more than anything. Chris would join if he could see her power.

"Hold out your arm," she ordered.

"Why?"

"I want to show you why I know we can stop the Audit if we come together."

"Fine," he said sighing, guessing she was going to Transfer negatively on him, but wondered why?

With his arm out stretch, and sleeve rolled up, Helen took hold. Using her Higher Negative Transfer she selected memories from a night she had been alone in her room, shortly after being fired, and exposed him to the hatred she had felt for the Council.

"ARGH!" Chris shouted out loudly, the noise echoing round the room. He withdrew his arm in a split second, and took a recoiling step back. He had shut his eyes and when he opened them he looked at her with disbelief.

"You...? How did you do that? When I Transferred to that guy he only showed a little discomfort."

"I'm taking a risk here, but I'm going to let you in on a secret that no one else knows. Why? Because I need you Chris, and I think you need me. I think you want a change, but you don't know how and you need convincing. This is your evidence. I am a Higher Negative."

Chris looked at her confused, not understanding fully, and Helen continued.

"I need you to promise me this stays between you and I? We can make a difference here Chris, but only if we believe in our strength to stop our Community becoming a place where Negatives are victimised and changed. Do you want to be changed Chris?"

"No," he said firmly, grasping what Helen was.

"Good. Then you don't have to. Will you help me Chris? My friend has a list of other Negatives and we can convince them if we work together. I ask once more that you keep what I've

shown a secret. The two of us will be able to convince others because they'll see they're not alone. Will you help them?"

Chris was taken by the speech and what she had shown him, and couldn't help but say yes.

"Thank you Chris. Can I come by your house tonight to discuss this further?"

"Yeah...errr...okay?" It was a lot to take in and Chris was still thinking about all that had happened.

"Shall I give you my address?" He managed to say.

"I have it here," Helen said. "Thank you Chris. You're about to become part of something incredible. I'll see you tonight. Goodbye."

"Thanks..." he stammered. "...Goodbye."

Helen left swiftly, trying to make a dramatic exit. As she walked through the building a few of the workers gave her odd looks and she realised they must have heard his shout. She just forced a smile and tried to act like a Positive and said, "Have a wonderful day." They replied with, "and you," which was enough to distract them and they got back to their work.

Feeling very pleased with herself, and liking that her Higher Negativity had been useful, she took the list from her pocket and went to the next person. This was an old man who had been allocated as a Negative the first week of testing. The information on the list said he was bed ridden and lived with his son's family. The house was next in order, going towards her house from the furthest point at the Industrial Sector. Her confidence was still high and she knocked on the door.

"Hi. I'm sorry to disturb your day, but is this the residence of Robert Smith?"

"I am he?" The man smiled.

This can't be him? Helen thought.

"Who is it Robert?" came a croaky voice from a room up the stairs.

Robert Junior didn't reply to the question and kept smiling, waiting for Helen to continue.

"Oh sorry... Robert Senior," Helen realised, correcting the mistake.

"Yes. That was Dad just now. He shouldn't really have visitors. It gets him agitated and riled up."

"I will only be a few minutes," Helen said. "I've come from the Council. I just wanted to discuss our findings with him," she lied.

The idea had come from the receptionist when she asked if Helen was from the Council and Helen was happy to adopt this lie as people would be more trusting.

"From the Council," the son replied. "Why didn't you say? Come in."

He took some steps back and Helen walked in and stood in the hall way."

"Can I get you something to drink?" Robert Junior offered kindly.

"No thank you."

"It's just me and Dad today. My wife is at work and the children are at school."

Helen wasn't good at small talk and didn't know what to say. Fortunately she was saved by the croaky voice from above.

"Who are you talking to Robert?" Then a mutter of, "No one ever listens to me."

Helen took note and her eyes moved towards the direction and Robert Junior took the hint.

"Sorry, of course. I'll take you straight to him. Is anything wrong?" He asked as he led the way up the stairs.

"Not at all, just some questions for your Dad. Nothing difficult, just to see what we can do to help the Negatives."

"That's good to hear," he said. "We Transfer to him, but he's still a grump most of the time. Maybe when this Audit is done they'll find better ways of helping those like him."

The statement was wrapped in pleasantness but the words themselves cut into Helen and she pitied the old man for having to endure this kind of narrow mindedness.

“It’ll only take a short time. You can leave us alone.”

“Thanks,” he said opening the door fully. “Dad this is...” there was a pause.

“...Helen,” she finished for him.

“This is Helen from the Council to talk to you.”

“Not another one,” the old man protested.

As at the front door Robert Junior ignored him.

“I’ll leave you to it,” he said to Helen and went back down the stairs.

Helen took a deep breath then spoke.

“Hi Robert, I’m Helen. I’ve come to see how you are?”

“Have you really?” the man said eyeing her suspiciously. “How would you feel if you were ignored most of the day and stuck in bed because your legs no longer worked?”

“I would hate that a lot,” Helen said pulling a chair up to his bed and sitting in it.

“Hate! Ha!” the man blurted. “You don’t know the meaning of the word.”

“I think you would be surprised?”

“Unlikely. Nothing you people do surprises me. You’re all the same.”

“Not all of us,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

“And what does that mean?” He asked intrigued.

“Well Robert, I’m like you. I’m what they call a Negative and I’m on a mission to stop us being ruled and oppressed by the Positives. I’m trying to restore balance and give Negatives a voice.”

The man was absorbed. Helen smiled seeing it and told him the plan. Once she was finished he went from an expression of captivation to frustration and disappointment.

“And you’re recruiting people to help you?”

“Yes,” She replied.

“I wish I could help more,” he said looking at her longingly.

“Knowing you would if you could is enough. There will be others,” she replied meeting his gaze.

“I know,” he said looking down disheartened. “But it’s about time something like this happened. I’m never listened to here. They ignore me like I’m invisible, but all I want is some genuine conversation and not their routine pleasantries.”

“It must be hard not being able to escape it,” Helen said. “In time maybe I can help change that.”

“That’s sweet, but I’m old, and I’ll be of no use to anyone soon. I’m just glad to have met you Helen. I hope you succeed.”

“It was a pleasure meeting you too Robert,” she said with a slight tear in her eye.

Standing she felt very sombre and respectfully said goodbye.

“Was everything okay? He wasn’t any bother was he?” Robert Junior said apologetically as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

“He was perfect company thank you. Very pleasant if given the time,” she said spitefully.

“Yes. Very pleasant,” he repeated.

There was no sarcasm, just complete agreement and it sent shivers up Helen’s spine.

“Thank you for stopping by,” he continued. “I hope the Audit continues to go well for the Council and we look forward to the results, and what the Council will do with them.”

“Thank you,” Helen managed to force out, but refused to wish him a good day like she would have in mimicry of the Positives. She left the house and heard him call,

“Have a good day now.”

Helen didn't turn back, wondering if he even noticed her attempt to give him a taste of what he gave his father. As she walked down the street she wished to herself that Robert had been younger and more physically able, but there was nothing that could be done. She took some solace in what he had said, and that she had been able to have a brief chat with someone who was like her in so many ways. It was a hard lesson, but she realised not every Negative was going to help, or be able to. She would try though, and every person counted.

‘Knock-knock,’ went Helen's knuckle on the door of the neglected looking house. The light-blue walls were bleached from the sun and clearly hadn't received a coat of paint in a very long time. The garden was overgrown and the windows were so dirty it looked like they had never been cleaned. The scene shocked even Helen and she wondered if anyone lived there at all. It was the penultimate recruit for the day and she hoped for better luck, but from the look of the house it appeared that wasn't going to be the case. The occupant was another male and was in his early forties. As Helen read the information on the list her eyebrows rose in surprise; he was divorced. Benedict's scribbled notes said Jake had pushed his wife too far with his criticisms and jokes. His wife had gone to the Higher Council and they had agreed to the couple divorcing. After a second knock, and some waiting, the door finally opened and an over-weight bearded man stood there looking very displeased.

“What?” he said sternly.

Helen got to the point.

“Jack, I presume?”

He nodded.

“I've come to tell you about an opportunity to make a difference for Negatives. The Audit that's being conducted is going to cause us a lot of troubles if we don't stop it, and I was wondering if I could talk to you about how we might be able to stop it?”

Jack looked at her blankly. She guessed he must be thinking, but there were no signs to indicate anything was going on inside his head. Then finally he responded.

“Sounds like a lot of work to me. The Positives live in their world and I live in mine. I work my delivery job and they pay me. This way I get to enjoy the quiet life. After that harpy of a woman left me I realised doing it their way was easier. Trying to change things is pointless. My ex never listened to me telling her things weren't right. She needed to open her eyes a bit more, but she took it as negativity and left me. Good riddance I say.”

Helen was a bit taken aback but tried to persuade him again.

“There's an opportunity to change all that. Let me talk to you about it. It'll be worth the effort...”

“No thanks,” he interrupted, and closed the door on her.

She heard a laugh from behind the door, and thought about knocking again. With her hand half way to the door she stopped, realising he wouldn't have been much use anyway. He clearly didn't care so she stopped herself. Disappointed she left, looking at the list as she walked down the path. The last Negative was a young girl of eleven and after the lack of success Helen decided there was no point even trying to recruit an eleven year old to this. *What was she going to do to help them?* She sighed. *At least I've found Chris and will see him later, she thought. I guess I might as well go home.*

With that she walked home, as it was close enough, and the streets became busy with children leaving school. Helen hurried on her way to avoid all the laughing and shouting, wishing they would be quiet for five minutes. Once home, and away from the noise, she had her dinner. Rushing it she didn't bother washing the dishes and went to see Chris.

When she arrived he invited her in. Helen noticed how different he looked from when she had seen him earlier that day. He appeared a lot more relaxed and calm and she wondered why. As she entered she noticed the painting coat he had worn at work. It hung in the hall and she looked at the colourful splashes of paint on it. Those colours were in complete contrast to what he wore now. He was wearing much darker clothes and the jumper was tight fitting. This highlighted his skinny frame, but it wasn't unappealing, and gave him a sophisticated appearance. Helen felt it complemented what she knew of his personality.

"I'm glad you came," Chris began. "I haven't stopped thinking about what happened and what you did."

Helen gave him a stern look and he understood it.

"Don't worry it will remain a secret. I was thinking about the challenge ahead but I think it would be worth it."

"It'll definitely be worth it," Helen affirmed, taking a seat in his minimalist lounge. It was very different from anything she had seen, almost cold in a way, but she liked it. Once again it felt very 'Chris.' "It's why I have come to talk to you again. If we go see people together then it will help us convince them to join us. My friend who works for the Council will get us a list of all the Negative's they've found and we'll select ideal candidates depending on the notes given."

"Did you have any more luck today?" Chris asked.

"I'm afraid not. It was an unfortunate selection. When we're able to we can pick those who are likely to join us."

"So what's the actual plan then?" Chris said after pouring a couple of drinks.

"Well, we have a week to get people together and present ourselves to the Council."

"A week?" Chris repeated in disbelief. "That's going to be difficult, especially as I have work."

"I figured I could do a bit of recruiting during the day if some of them don't work," Helen said, trying to reassure and ease his concern. "Then in the late afternoon and evening we can work together. It's the best we can do."

"I guess," Chris said, sitting on his sofa and looking deeply into his drink. "What happens if we go to the Council and they still don't listen?"

"There's something else we have to persuade them with," she said.

"Is it to do with your secret?"

"No," she said trying to be causal. "It's some work I've been looking into about Transfers and it should convince them. You are going to have to trust me on this," she finished.

"Okay. Only because I agree with what you're doing. A change to the Community is long overdue. Equality for Negatives is badly needed and I'm sure those we speak to will see it the same way."

"They have to," Helen said looking to the carpeted floor.

"You're really passionate about this aren't you?" Chris said.

"I just want to make a difference so the future is more suited to those like us. If we don't do something now then the individualism of Negatives could be lost in this mass attempt to make us Positive."

“It has gone on for too long,” he agreed. “This feels like it’s the start of something great Helen. I’m looking forward to being a part of it.”

“It’s going to be an interesting week Chris,” Helen said nodding. “I hope you’re ready for a lot of work.”

“With you leading I’ll be fine,” he said confidently and raising his glass slightly.

“Thank you,” Helen replied, feeling very proud of herself. She liked being complemented this way and looked forward to finding more people to continue such sentiments.

The discussion continued and they talked about themselves and their pasts. Chris laughed that the Council had employed a Negative, but Helen said things were more relaxed thirty years ago. Once more she left out the part about her work being rejected and that it had been her work that gave the Council the idea for the Audit. After a long chat Helen felt tired, it had been a long day, and she decided it was time to leave.

“Is it okay if I use your bathroom before I leave,” she asked.

“Of course. It’s up the stairs and on the right,” he replied.

Helen left the living room, walked into the corridor and climbed the stairs. At the top she saw a door to her left; one at the end of the corridor about eight metres ahead of her; and one to the bathroom on her right. The door at the end of the corridor was slightly ajar and she noticed a sleeve of another painting coat wrapped around the door, caught between the door frame and the door. It wasn’t splattered in bright colours like the one down stairs. It had blacks, dark blues, purples, reds, and some white on it. She cocked her head to one side then glanced back down the stairs. Chris was still in the living room and her curiosity got the better of her. Taking a few steps forward she opened the door to her right and closed it again. She then crept along the corridor and opened the door slowly, entering the room. It was dark but she could make out the silhouettes of axels and canvases. Wanting to see what the canvases had on them she closed the door behind her quietly and reached for the light. It expelled the darkness, but revealed something much darker. The first thing she noticed wasn’t the canvasses, but the walls. Each wall was a mural of twisted images and colours. At first it shocked her, but as Helen looked closer she was moved by an obscure beauty to them.

This is it. This is what I’m trying to save, well at least a part of it, she thought.

She looked down from the walls to the canvasses and similar images filled them, filling her with awe and a mixture of emotions. Finishing her surveillance of the room she saw paint pots and brushes littering the floor and quickly realised she better leave. This was something that should only be viewed with an invitation. As she sneaked out she knew Chris was a talented person and his negativity wasn’t something to be hidden.

It was something that should be thought about and praised for its uniqueness. It shouldn’t been hidden or rejected. Chris should want to share it with the world, not hide it away.

This thought riled her up and added to the ever growing list of reasons for doing what she was doing. She reached the bathroom, but there wasn’t time to go anymore. Quickly and quietly she snuck in, flushed the toilet and ran the taps, washing her hands anyway. Once down the stairs she thanked Chris for his hospitality and they agreed he would come see her the next day to discuss the list Benedict would bring.

Chapter Nine

Earlier that day Benedict had arrived at work for his Positive Transfer and to collect the list of people to test that week. As he entered the Council Building he thought about the full list of Negatives and how to organise a meeting with the Council for the following week.

Organising the meeting can wait until mid week, he decided. It's the best time to do anything. The start of the week is too hectic with of everyone getting lists and trying to organise transport to their Sectors, and then the end of the week is just as bad with all the reporting.

With this decided he got the Positive Transfer and felt ever so slightly better. His list awaited him and he went to get it from George. Once the lists were handed out he waited behind and as the others left George noticed him.

"Can I help you Benedict?" He said warmly.

Benedict decided to be as straight forward as possible.

"I was wondering how the tests were going? Are there any signs of the current ratio of Positives to Negatives?"

"I don't know I'm afraid. We won't get an idea until all the results are in and those storing the data have put it together."

"So who's doing all that?" Benedict asked.

George smiled and laughed a little.

"You're always so curious about everything." He leaned back against a table. "Well we've employed people to take the lists given in at the end of the week and these people write the data into a machine that has been invented. We're calling it a computer. It's like a television but it has letters and numbers you can press, and what you press appears on a screen and is stored there. It's all very clever and far more than I understand, but it really helps with the Audit. Does that answer your question?"

"Yes it does," Benedict said. "One last question I promise. Where's all this done?"

"We're using the rooms where we took enquiry calls from the public. It's been divided in two: one half for the calls, and one for the data collection and storage.

"Interesting," Benedict said casually.

"Well, you better get to work, there's plenty to do today," George said pushing himself off the table.

"I'll get straight to it," Benedict said trying to be enthusiastic, but had already begun thinking about how to get access to the computers and if he could get the data he needed.

I'm likely to miss a few lunch breaks this week, he thought.

Leaving the Council Building he made his way to the first on his list and planned a swap of the order so he could be close to the offices when it was lunch time. He had heard rumours of the computers, but didn't realise the Council had made them; envy circled him. He wished he had been involved in the Invention Sector where these computers, and all the technology, had been imagined and created. However, it wasn't to be and his skills were used by the Council.

Rushing through his days testing as quickly as possible, Benedict made his way back to the Council Building. He arrived in time for the lunch break and walked in the opposite direction to the crowd, staying close to the left hand wall of the corridor. The large room where the computers would be was at the back of the building and he realised it might have been easier to go through the back entrance. Apart from taking longer it was fine and meant he could get a good look in the room to see how many people were still there. If there were people he had a plan to ask for what he needed. He knew if he was confident no one would question what he was doing, why would they? But if no one

was around he would have to try and figure these new machines out for himself, and that could be difficult and time consuming.

On arriving at the offices he passed the last person leaving the room and apart from a person on the phones there was no one else there. Benedict saw the computers at the far end and casually made his way over to them. He arrived at a computer and sat down on the chair that had been left pulled out from the desk. Once seated he looked at the black screen and the panel on the desk in front of him. The panel had buttons marked with letters, numbers and some symbols he didn't recognise. The desire to look at the whole thing closely, and even take it a part to see how it worked, was overwhelming, but he knew that would be stupid.

Maybe one day when I don't have so much work I could get one and learn how it works? he thought excitedly.

"So?" He whispered under his breath. *How do you work?*

Not knowing what else to do he pressed one of the letters on the panel in front of him. The screen stayed black but a lot of white writing appeared on it and Benedict saw the letter he had pressed appear at the end of all the writing. He panicked a little, realising the person who had been working at the computer might notice the difference, but quickly relaxed as even if they did they wouldn't think anything of it. He began scanning the page and saw four boxes at the bottom of the screen. They were titled: New File, Old file, Save File, and File Complete.

Benedict looked down and saw the arrows on the panel. Shrugging he pressed the down arrow. The New File box highlighted and he pressed the arrow across to Old File. Scanning the panel he saw a button that said Select and he hit it, wincing in hope. The screen changed again and there appeared a list of every Sector from One to Forty Nine. Sighing with relief he pressed the arrow keys and went to Sector Twenty Three and clicked Select. All the data he and his fellow Testers had gathered from Sector Twenty Three appeared and he grinned, having a moment of self-indulgence. Once it passed he moved an arrow to a box that said Back and went to Sector Twenty Two and hit Select. The screen was similar to how it had been for Sector Twenty Three and was divided in to two columns: Positives and Negatives. There were a lot of Positives and only a few Negatives, but that was to be expected. Suddenly he realised he didn't know how to print the information and had no paper or time to write the information down.

He scanned the screen quickly. Nothing. Looking down at the panel to his relief he saw a button that said Print. Hitting the button he realised he had no idea where it came out. Looking around he didn't see any sign of a machine that would print this off. He looked at the wires from the computers all around him and saw the wires for power, but also saw other wires from each one going to a side room. As he focused in that direction he could just make out a whirring noise.

It must be the right place, he thought. So got up and went to the room, pushing the partly opened door. He saw two machines. One of them was making the noise and a bit of paper was slowly making its way out of it. When the paper fell into a tray Benedict picked it up and smiled. He took it back to the computer and clicked Print on Sectors Twenty, Twenty One, Twenty Four and Twenty Five. As he stood up to go wait for all the information he saw some people coming back from their lunch break. He sat down quickly and clicked Back several times, and luckily the screen returned to its original page, but how to make it go black? Benedict scanned the panel and saw three buttons in the left hand corner: On, Off and Standby. Standby it was, and once again he relaxed as the screen went black, and quickly, but still casually, he made his way to the printing room and waited.

Everything was printed and he gathered the sheets of paper up and walked out the room, passing the returning people, smiling at them as cover. Once he was in the corridor he smiled to

himself, *Helen will be pleased with the information I've got.* It wasn't everything, but it was a good start. He also looked forward to telling her about the computers and how life would have been easier for them if they had had such things when researchers for the Council. The discussion would have to wait until the morning though because he still had a lot of testing to do.

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The lists were folded in Benedict pocket and he pulled them out as he entered Helen's house the following morning.

"Is that the lists?" Helen said, seeing him unfold the papers once inside the house.

"Not the whole list, but Sectors Twenty to Twenty Four," Benedict said.

"That's good enough I guess," Helen replied. "It still gives me and Chris something to do and get the support we need for next week. How do you feel?"

"I guess I'm well enough. In all honesty I'll be glad when I don't have to receive a Transfer every day"

"Yeah, I guess it was a lot to ask," Helen said sympathetically. "But when we show the Council we have support they'll see we want a change. Then we can show them what happens when a Higher Positive Transfers to someone who has been exposed to Negative Transfers. Think about how happy you're going to be, the joy you will feel will be more than you ever imaged and it will last for a long time. I'm sure after this you'll only need the odd Negative Transfer and Higher Positive Transfer and you'll have happiness the Higher Council could never have achieved. It's worth the sacrifice isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess it is. I really hope it works." Bored of the subject Benedict changed it. "I take it the Chris you mentioned is the one from the list that I tested? How'd the recruiting go yesterday?"

She told him about it, but had to cut the conversation short as it was time for Benedict to go to work. Helen quickly told him the plan for the day and that she was meeting Chris later. The Transfer took place and as usual Benedict's mood became depressive. Helen attempted to make him focus on going straight to work for a Positive Transfer and he left to get the Tram.

Closing the front door behind her Helen went to the lounge and gave the lists a good look through, starting to pick ideal candidates for the meeting with the Council. A Sector a day seemed like a good idea. She wanted to write up some more manifesto type leaflets to show the points for stopping the Audit and making a change. It would have her contact details on it in case any candidates weren't sure and she could leave it with them to read. This way they would be able to contact her if they did change their minds. After she had drew up a good copy she decided to go into the shopping complex and take them to the Printing Press Shop. If they weren't busy she wanted to get forty made up, and if she could get that many it would be worth the strain of being there.

The shopping complex wasn't too busy when she arrived and the people that weren't working were going about their own business in their trance-like happiness. Helen went straight to the Printing Shop, avoiding as many people as she could. The shop itself was quiet too and they told her to come back in an hour for the pages she wanted.

An hour? She thought. Stuck in this place for an hour?

It wasn't her idea of a good time and she decided to go to the only place that held any credibility, the plant shops. While browsing she saw some beautiful tulips that were a blue that could almost be called purple. She fell in love with them straight away. Using some of the money she had saved from years of conservative spending she bought them. Taking the bunch of flowers she decided to get some food before going back to the Print Shop. Feeling full from the meal she had,

and carrying the flowers under her arm, she paid for the prints and was happy with how they had turned out. Once home it was time to relax and she planted the tulips in the front garden and did some pruning of the other flowers. By the time she did this and got cleaned up it was time for dinner and Chris would be over to begin the evenings work.

When the knock came Helen opened the door and Chris was perfectly on time.

“How was work?” she asked.

“Fine I guess. I enjoy painting, and although it’s someone else’s vision I do get some satisfaction from doing it. It’s not what I would personally choose to paint though.”

Helen understood more than he realised and she nodded.

“So did you get the list from your friend?” He asked.

“Yes. He’s very reliable. I have it here.”

She held out the papers and he took them from her. Looking at it he saw some of Helen’s notes, the days allocated to each Sector, and the ten names of the people she wanted to talk to from each Sector.

“Almost all of them live alone. Except these two?” he paused, rubbing his chin. “Interesting,” he exclaimed.

“You mean the couple?” Helen said, giving a knowing smile.

“Yeah, a married couple of Negatives. How strange. I guess they were lucky. I gave up years ago on relationships. Positives were just annoying when I went on dates and I don’t think I ever met a Negative girl to see if it would work. It was all too much effort for my liking.”

“I know what you mean,” Helen said reflectively. “Negatives don’t seem to pair up. Maybe we enjoy our own company too much?” She half joked.

“I know I do,” Chris shrugged, “so you’re probably right.”

“Shall we begin our work?” Helen said, trying to move away from that topic.

“Sounds like a good idea.” They left the house and Chris continued to talk. “So what do you want me to do?”

“Just be honest,” Helen said. “I’ll take the lead, and if you think you want to back up what I say, or can help, just find a place to talk and join in the discussion.”

“Okay, I’ll do my best. Some of these people do look interesting,” Chris said looking the lists up and down as they walked.

“Yeah, I’m glad the Positives took good notes, otherwise we would be going in blind. The Positives have been helpful in a strange way with this Audit. If they hadn’t done it none of this would have happened and we wouldn’t be trying to implement change.”

“I see what you mean,” Chris said reflectively. “I guess sometimes these kinds of events can be a catalyst to start the ball rolling for the change that is needed.”

“It’s ironic that their desire for change has lead to us trying to bring about ours,” Helen agreed.

They continued talking while on the Tram and when they arrived at Sector Twenty they went to the first person’s house.

“Shall we be as quick as we can?” Helen said.

“I guess that’s best, we don’t have enough time to be talking too long.”

“We can assess how committed they are as we talk, and if they’re not interest we don’t need to waste time with them,” Helen continued.

“That sounds a good way of being efficient.”

Their work had begun and Helen was very engaging and quite the convincer, but conversations with each person started to follow a similar pattern and finished the same way. They

were content in their own bubbles, and no matter how much Helen and Chris tried to persuade them most of the Negatives just weren't willing to do anything. With a lot of effort they did manage to get four Negatives interested in going to the Council on Monday. A small consolation amongst a lot of disappointment was one of the four was very enthusiastic. Her name was Claire and Helen was grateful for her.

"I guess that wasn't too bad?" Chris said once they got the Tram back to Sector Twenty Three.

"I had hoped for a lot more," Helen said, looking over the days list despairingly. "But then I forget people haven't experienced what I have with the Council. Their inability to see the consequences the Audit will have on us Negatives is so frustrating. How can they not see the Audit will take away everything that they are? Even if they won't help I'm going to do everything I can to stop that from happening Chris," she said gripping the paper tightly that it started to crease.

"I know," he said, admiring her passion.

They talked about the next days work and how if they could get four each night to come along to the meeting then they would have sixteen people. It wasn't as much as Helen hoped, but along with themselves, and Benedict's Transfer, it might be enough to show the Council that people weren't happy with the Audit, especially as this was from only five of the forty-nine Sectors.

When the Tram came to Chris' stop he said he would see her tomorrow and got off. Helen sat quietly on the Tram thinking about all that had happened in the space of a few weeks. As she thought she realised she was reasonably satisfied with the outcome so far.

The change will come soon. I'll have my revenge and justice for their ignorance. Even once we have convinced them to stop the Audit this isn't the end of it. I'll continue to befriend Negatives and hold meetings to try and show them they don't have to sit in their bubbles and do nothing. The Positives need to see that we are useful and if they want to achieve the most happiness they can then they'll have to come to us as the experiment showed. When Benedict gets his Transfer they'll not be able to deny there's something to this.

Then she had a thought that made her face screw up and twist.

What will happen if they still refuse to change?

That must not happen! I must convince them! I'll have to use all my energy to be as they are. If I act like they do then they're likely to listen more. But then that's not being true to me and what I am. But I have to make this work. I guess it'll only be for that meeting. It'll be worth the sacrifice... There are still other options if they reject me again.

A sinister smile crept on her face.

I have my Higher Negativity. One touch from my emotional memories and they'd cower before me and do anything I said to stop the pain.

But what would Benedict say? He would feel so betrayed that I didn't trust him. He might not understand that I was doing it for the benefit of all people. Maybe if I Transferred to him and kept him negative? Then he would see it my way. Eventually he might even forget his Positive nature and he might as well be one of us then... No, he is my friend, she thought guiltily.

Slightly shocked she stopped, trying to calm herself and get away from these thoughts. Yet, to have control over people made her feel alive and empowered. Her attempt to stop failed and the feelings remained.

I should be allowed to use my Higher Negative Transfer to make the change. I shouldn't be ashamed. That's who I am. I want to keep my integrity and be true to myself. Why should I do it their way?

Suddenly a nudge in her mind told her the next stop was hers. She blinked quickly, as if being woken from a dream. Her thoughts changed and she focused on the comforts of her home. Alighting from the Tram she made her way slowly to her house. It was dark as she walked down the garden path, looking at the flowers by the street light. Seeing them pushed the dark desires further inside and when she got into bed it had been enough to let her sleep without much difficulty. However, as sleep progressed they resurfaced, becoming a dream.

There she stood, leader of the whole Community and in control of the Council. If anyone disobeyed all she had to do was touch them and they would submit to her desires. In the dream she loved every thought, feeling, and image of this scenario. Yet, as she looked around this world, where she was bringer of fairness and justice, she couldn't see Benedict. She felt a pang of pain and confusion. Where was he? He was nowhere to be found. But the pang passed and she began to act like there was never a Benedict. This was her world and she triumphed in any law or goal she implemented. The dream ended and she continued to sleep until her alarm went off.

When she woke all that remained was a fleeting memory of power and control, and how good it felt. Shaking it off she got out of bed and went about her morning routine. Benedict turned up as always and they had a brief discussion about her night with Chris. He was happy they had had some success, but this ounce of positivity didn't last long as the Transfer took place. With the usual encouragement he went to the Council Building.

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The counter Transfer gave Benedict the strength and motivation to find George and arrange the meeting with the Higher Council of Positives. He rehearsed what he was going to say as he made his way through the building and felt confident the meeting would get approval. About half way through one corridor he saw a colleague, Jeff, coming towards him, a look of bewilderment and excitement on his face. Jeff saw Benedict and changed his brisk purposeful walk to intercept.

"I'm glad I found someone I know?" Jeff blurted out. "Did you hear about Ralph?" He said, talking so fast that Benedict nearly didn't catch what he said.

"No," Benedict replied, knowing the answer would surely follow.

"He tested a Negative this week," Jeff continued, confirming Benedict's assumption. "It had some really bad effects. The first day it nearly made him cry with pain. These Negative Transfers can be dangerous. I wonder if we should even be testing them. If they're hurting people the way they hurt Ralph, maybe we should have left them alone...?"

A bit late for that, Benedict thought, but nodded for Jeff to continue.

"...They weren't doing any harm then. Anyway, Ralph asked not to test the same person, but the Council said he had to and he was allocated a Positive to give a Transfer straight after. Apparently the second day wasn't too bad at all. However, Ralph said this morning was worse than yesterday, but not as bad as the first. It's all very strange. No one else has said this has happened to them with the Negatives. I suppose it hasn't happened to you has it Benedict?" Jeff laughed jokingly.

Benedict's mind was racing like a horse in full gallop.

This is similar to what had happened with Helen. Has she held the truth from me? But why? If this other Negative had inconsistent Transfers does it mean I'm right and Higher Negatives exist? I need to quiz Helen again and find out.

He realised Jeff was waiting for an answer.

"No. No, I've not," he lied, forcing a laugh for cover. "It's very strange," he continued, trying to justify the pause.

“I didn’t think you would have,” Jeff continued. “It’s just not the usual report we’ve had about Negatives. I wish I could see the Negative. Ralph said he’s built like a house, which adds more to poor Ralph’s fears. Apparently the Council are keeping a close eye on the situation, but no one seems to know what to do, or what this means. I’m sure once the surprise is over the Council will know what to do. Let’s hope Ralph’s okay during the next Transfer.”

“Yeah, I hope he’s okay,” Benedict said absentmindedly, his thoughts elsewhere.

Having passed the gossip on, Jeff said goodbye to find someone else to tell. Lost in his thoughts Benedict didn’t move.

Should I tell the Higher Council my theory? Should I tell them about Helen and my similar experience? Or should I wait and speak to Helen and find out the truth from her?

The latter seemed more rational and he thought about the meeting with the Higher Council, deciding to wait until he had spoken to Helen before arranging it. There were now two options circling his mind: *go straight to Helen’s? Or finish the days work?* Not wanting to draw any attention to himself, as he worried he might be blowing this out of proportion, he decided to do his days work first. The whole time he was out it was on his mind, and he tried to think about the reasons Helen would have for lying, and how she would react when he confronted her. Finally, the days work was done and he made his way to Helen’s house with apprehension and eagerness.

Chapter Ten

Benedict rushed to the Tram, wanting to get to Helen's before Chris in case he interfered.

Hearing another perspective might be good, but after I've spoken with Helen, he thought.

Walking from the Tram towards Helen's house he began to fill with excitement. Because of what Jeff had said he was convinced Higher Negatives existed, but the revelation threw everything they had known and done into chaos. So many questions needed answering. He hoped Helen would be able to answer them and maybe she would reveal that she was a Higher Negative. Jiggling slightly with nervous excitement he waited for the door to open.

"I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow?" Helen said questioningly. Noticing his unusual body language she asked what was wrong.

"I've got something to tell you. You might find it very interesting."

He was so pleased with himself, but Helen didn't play along by asking him what it was straight away.

"Well in you come then."

Benedict walked quickly to the living room and sat down, then stood up again deciding to stand to tell his story and question her. Helen slumped into her chair and he didn't wait for her to ask what was so interesting that it couldn't wait until the following day.

"Today I've learned something fascinating. Do you remember when I tested you?"

"Yes," she said, suddenly curious, but trying to be casual.

"Do you remember how I said it would be interesting if there were Higher Negatives like there are Higher Positivies?"

"Yes, I remember" she said leaning forward slightly as her curiosity grew and she began to worry.

"Well, I think I was right," he said proudly.

Helen looked at him closely then looked at the floor. What happened next would be very important and she tried to pick the right words to keep her Higher Negativity a secret. It wasn't safe to reveal the truth yet and it was bad enough Chris knew.

"What makes you so sure?" She asked

He paced the floor as he related Jeff's story about Ralph and when he had finished speaking Helen was deep in thought.

So there are more like me, she thought, not doubting that it was true, and by the time Benedict had finished she decided to test his own belief.

"So you really believe the man to be a Higher Negative?"

"Of course. What else could he be?" Benedict said and finally sat down. "This is something very different and I'm not even sure the Council realise what this man is. Surely they must know?"

"They may be in denial," Helen replied, not knowing what else to do but play along. "I'm sure they'll figure it out in the next few days if you're right."

"What do you think they'll do?" he asked.

It was a question Helen had been asking herself over and over, but she couldn't be sure. However, she had to make sure this played the way she wanted it to.

There's no way I can ignore this, she realised. *To dismiss it by saying he's over thinking would confuse him. He might question why I don't believe him. I'll have to play along for now and try to make whatever happens work in my favour.*

"I'm not sure what they'll do," she said, "but I don't think it'll be good." She looked him in the eye, pausing for dramatic effect then continued. "Think about what we're doing now to make

sure the Audit doesn't get finished. They're trying to change normal Negatives, but think about what they might do to Higher Negatives? A Higher Negative goes against all that the Council believe in and we don't really know what the Higher Negatives Transfers will do," she lied. "The Council will look on it as worse than the Negatives and try even harder to change Higher Negatives. They'll probably try and stop them from knowing what they are. Do you see that they'll have a greater distain towards them?"

Benedict was unsure what to make of it. *Yes, with the Audit and desire to change Negatives the Council would most likely react badly to there being Higher Negatives, but how could they be sure.* He decided to ask Helen for a more specific opinion.

"What do you think will happen to this man?"

"I don't know," she said. "It would be fascinating to meet him and find out what he's like."

"Hmm...yes," Benedict said, "that would definitely be interesting." He hesitated and glanced around the room. It was time to ask her outright.

"Helen..." He began, looking at her. "Now it's pretty much confirmed... Are you sure you're not a Higher Negative?"

Helen guessed he might ask again and looked him straight in the eye.

"Benedict, if I was, you would be the first person I told," she lied, feeling no remorse this time. The future was so uncertain and the less Benedict knew the more likely she would be able to achieve this mission to stop the Audit. This way Benedict couldn't accidentally let something slip to the Council. They couldn't learn the truth if there was no truth to give away.

"I know, I know," he said apologetically, shaking his head. "All this new information is making my head do summersaults."

"I can see that," she said forcing a smile, trying to calm him a bit. "I think we should wait to see what the Council do tomorrow, or in the next few days. Then we can decide what to do. Also if there's any way you can find out where this Higher Negative lives that might be helpful. Can you do that?"

"I can try. I might be able to get the information from the computers but it's likely it won't be there. The data won't be handed in until the end of the week."

"I think in this case they may have put something into the computers because of the uniqueness of the situation, it's worth a look," Helen replied.

"Okay, I'll do it. Oh, and I'm sorry, but I didn't get a chance to speak to George to arrange the meeting. I didn't know what you would want to do once you knew about the Higher Negative. I thought it best to wait."

"That was wise," she praised.

Despite her desires to stop the Audit, being a Negative in a Positive world had taught her patience.

It's important to see how the Council would react, she thought. The ball's in their court for a few days, but I'll be ready to react in a way that will beat them.

"We can hold off from our meeting for now," she continued. "But we'll be ready to organise a meeting as soon as we can, depending on what happens. You know this means you'll probably have to Transfer for longer?"

Benedict's heart dropped and it showed. In his excitement he had forgotten this. He wanted to tell her that surely they could leave the Transfers and just do one the day they were going to see the Council. However, he knew her commitment and didn't want to waste all the struggles by compromising the experiment now.

“Okay,” he said heavily, all the excitement of the day nearly vanishing. “The Council better change their mind when we show them the truth of this,” he said.

“They will,” Helen said without a doubt or unbelief in her voice.

And this will be the beginning of a much bigger change for Negatives and Higher Negatives. We will have more power to be what we want to be.

The fact that there was another Higher Negative had spurred her mind to think about her plans for more power, and the ideas lying under the surface of her thoughts started to brake to the surface.

If there was another Higher Negative there could be more, she realised, and with them, and other Negatives backing me, we could do wondrous things. We have the potential to create an environment where the Positives don't control us.

These thoughts flowered in her mind and were fed by the new dark-light, making aspirations for the new world grow inside her: their rejection the seed; the use of her ideas to come up with the Audit the soil; the belief that she could do something to change it the rain; and now this knowledge that she would have other Higher Negatives at her side the sun. All of it combined to form the flower of her revolution. Yet, there was still much to be done, these were only thoughts and ideas. A time would come for action, and it was soon.

“I really hope they do,” Benedict continued heavily.

“Your endurance and efforts will never be forgotten Benedict. I promise you that. Generations will be thankful that you endured so that they could have equality as Negatives. Because of you we're helping everyone become happier, but in a way that allows us to be ourselves.”

Benedict gave a weak smile. It was a nice thought.

“Well, Chris should be here soon,” Helen continued.

“Yeah...okay,” Benedict replied, the nice thought passing. “Are you still going to meet those you've found?” Benedict asked.

“Yes. We'll meet with them. They can learn more about what we're doing and we can start preparing them to help us find more Negatives.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Benedict said. “I'll go back to my house and get some dinner. I'll see you in the morning.”

He stood up.

“Thank you for telling me about this,” Helen said, standing up too.

“I'm just glad I can be of some use,” he said, still thinking about her words.

You've been more of a help than you can imagine, she thought as he walked up the garden path.

He waved goodbye as he turned out the garden and she gave him a brief wave back. Once the door was closed she thought more about what Benedict had told her, looking forward to Chris' arrival. He knew her secret and this meant she could speak more openly. There was so much to discuss and she realised visiting Negatives wasn't actually going to happen tonight.

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“There are more like you?” Chris exclaimed when she told him everything.

“Yes,” she said slyly.

“I really wish I was one,” Chris confessed, pausing nervously, but quickly plucking up some courage. “Could I test myself on you? Maybe Benedict got it wrong when he tested me?”

Helen thought about it for a second.

“Okay, why not?”

Holding out her arm she rolled up her sleeve. Chris slowly put his hand over her wrist and willed his negativity on to her.

“Try and remember your darkest moments and that negativity will Transfer to me,” Helen encouraged.

Chris focused and Helen noticed a deep pain in his face as he tried to Transfer whatever memories of darkness were playing in his mind. Wincing a little she closed her eyes briefly, feeling a small pang of negativity. It wasn't much though and she knew it was only what he felt at that time, and not the true essence of what he had once experienced. Chris opened his eyes looking at her hopefully.

“I'm sorry Chris, it would have been a lot worse for me if you could reach inside yourself and Transfer the pain you once felt. I hope you're not too disappointed. There's much to be done and you're a vital part of what we're doing. It makes no difference if you're a Higher Negative or a Negative, as long as you're not a Positive.”

“I guess,” Chris said, his shoulders dropping. “It would have been good to be like you and this other Higher Negative. I wonder how many there are?”

“I don't know. Ironically the only way we're going to find out is if this Audit continues. Then we can meet them and convince them that they have a greater purpose. I know the original plan was to stop the Audit but I'm seriously thinking that we let it go on until the very end. As long as we achieve the end goal of stopping the Council from forcing Negatives to change. How this happens is of little importance. We can try and persuade them to stop at any point. If we wait until the end it might be better for us as we'll have found more Negatives and Higher Negatives. What do you think?”

“Hmm... It sounds like a good idea. If we wait we'll get a long list of Negatives and hopefully more Higher Negatives. However what the Council do with the Higher Negatives remains a problem.”

“Yes it does...” Helen said, tapping a finger on her leg. “I think we'll have to wait and see. Once they have acted we can react accordingly. Personally I don't think they'll know what to do. They might even try to sweep it under the carpet and pretend this man isn't what he must be. However, if they don't we can use it to our advantage.”

Our two options are to confront the Council about the Higher Negative and tell them it's a sign that Negatives are important and they need to listen to us. We can do this with any Negatives we can find now and persuade the Council as originally intended. Or we can wait until the Audit is done, as I said, and have a bigger following of Negatives and Higher Negatives that we can find by using the Audit to our advantage. Once I get a report from Benedict in the next day or two we can decide. Give it some more thought and I will too,” Helen finished.

“I'm swinging towards the latter,” Chris said. “The Council will do all the work and Benedict can continue to get us the information we need to find the others like us.”

“Me too Chris, but we'll wait and see what happens and how the Council react to the Higher Negative.”

“Are we going to see any more Negatives tonight?” Chris asked.

“Not until we know what's happening,” Helen replied. “Shall I come see you Friday night? I'm sure I'll know what we should do by then?”

“That sounds alright with me,” Chris said, and they continued chatting and speculating late into the night.

Chapter Eleven

The fourth day of the week arrived and Benedict had his Transfers, completed half a days testing and made his way to the computers at lunch time. The room had more people in it this time and he wondered if this was a good idea. After a brief hesitation he decided to justify his presence by telling anyone who asked that George sent him to check some data. With this plan he confidently strolled up to a computer, sat down and pressed one of the keys. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a woman a few seats down looking at him. Ignoring her he went to Ralph's Sector and scanned the list for his name and found it.

"Excuse me," came a voice from the left. It was the woman. "I don't mean to be rude, but I was wondering if I could help you?"

Benedict looked at her, a bit startled, but seeing her pleasant smile he relaxed a little. That familiar smile reassured him he had nothing to fear; she would believe his lie.

"Thank you for your kind offer," he said, "but George from the Council of Higher Positives has asked me to find some information for him."

He noticed a split second look of suspicion in her face, but it vanished like it had never been there and she continued to smile as she spoke.

"If you do need any help just let me know."

And she returned to face her computer.

Benedict quickly turned back to his screen and scanned the people Ralph had tested, nothing. No mention of a Higher Negative, no notes on such a thing. He paused to think.

They must be waiting until the end of the following day to collect even this important information, he thought. It's a bit strange they haven't even put some notes on the system about this Higher Negative. I'll come in tomorrow and check again, just in case, and if it's not there I can find Jeff, or even Ralph, to find out what's going on. If that fails I came always come back on Monday and there's bound to be some information then. It's going to be a busy day tomorrow, he thought.

He had the final set of test to do, check the computers again and after that anything could happen depending on what he found. He was starting to realise this was a lot of work and hoped Helen appreciated it, and hoped everyone would appreciate it one day. *It better be worth it, he thought and pressed the back button several time and hit standby. Straining slightly, but doing it for good measure, he turned to the lady.*

"Thank you for your offer of help. Have a nice day."

He left to get his own lunch and returned to the days testing, knowing Helen was going to be frustrated at the lack of information when he saw her that evening.

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"Nothing at all?" Helen said flatly.

"Nothing yet," Benedict said. "There could be some information tomorrow and if not I'm sure it will be added next week. You know how meticulous the system is: Everything in order. Order in Everything."

It was a quote from the manifesto and a philosophy of the Higher Council.

"I guess it was to be expected. We'll just have to wait. Tomorrow might bring us news, or next week."

Helen tried to convince herself she didn't mind but she was more annoyed than she let Benedict believe. He did believe and was relieved she wasn't more upset. He had decided to

withhold the information about going and asking Jeff or Ralph as he didn't want to raise her expectation just to be disappointed again. With the update made and after some light conversation they said their farewells until the morning.

It was only twelve hours later that they met again for the Transfer, and Helen did her usual speech of encouragement. Telling him the difficult part he had to endure would be over soon, and it would have been worth all the struggles. Benedict followed the previous day's routine and went to the Computer's for his lunch break. As he clicked on Ralph's Sector he was disappointed with the lack of information. Putting his head in his hands he tried not to let the constant failures frustrate him but it took a few minutes before he composed himself. Removing his hands he hit the Back button and then Standby. It was time to find Jeff, and if not him, Ralph, but they would be out testing and he still had to do his.

Maybe I can catch them at the end of the day when the reports are handed in, he thought. If I do my tests as quickly as possible, and skip some of the testing, just filling them in as to what the last four days showed, then I can be the first to hand mine in and get away early to find Jeff or Ralph.

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"And today you're early?" George grinned.

"Keeping up with the variation," Benedict replied, panting a little from all the rushing around. He handed over the results and began to leave to go to the next rooms where the Council member who took the reports from Jeff would be.

"Where are you going in such a rush?" George laughed.

"I'm looking forward to the weekend and getting home," Benedict said dismissively.

"There's still some work to do," George replied. "We're going to have a meeting with everyone in the Council Hall."

"With everyone?" Benedict said, turning round sharply to face George.

"Yes, with everyone. All the reports will be handed in over the next thirty minutes then we will go to the Hall."

Benedict was intrigued and frustrated, but the intrigue won over.

Why were they having this meeting? It wasn't scheduled. What was the need?

A sudden realisation then occurred.

Could it be about the new discovery? Would they tell everyone about Higher Negative? It's a possibility?

"Sorry George, I didn't know," Benedict said, deciding to be compliant to see if his speculative guess was right.

"That's quite alright, no one does."

"I'll wait over here then?" Benedict said pointing to the side of the room.

"Yeah that'll be best," George agreed.

Benedict leaned against the wall, thinking about the meeting and barely noticing his fellow colleagues entering and chatting about the weeks work. Eventually all the reports were in and he heard the raised voice of George and snapped out of his thoughts.

"Thank you for staying later than you were expecting. This is important to the Prime Objective. If you can follow me we will make our way to the Council Meeting Hall for some further instruction."

George walked through the crowd of workers and they followed closely behind him as he led them to the Hall. The seats were already being filled when they arrived and George walked to the

centre of the room to join the other Higher Positives. Benedict and his fellow workers took their place in the seats and there was a lot of hustle and bustle as everyone came in and joined them. Once everyone was seated, and the Higher Council facing their audience, the Principle Speaker stood up and addressed the group.

“First of all I want to thank you warmly for the work you’ve done since the Audit began. I know it was a change from your previous duties, and it may have been hard to make the change, but you have all done this with a cheerful determination that is representative of our desire to be as happy as we can be. So thank you.

“Most of you have enjoyed the effects of receiving an increased number of Positive Transfers and this will give you a vision of what we want to achieve once the Audit is finished. There will be a more efficient push for Positive Transfers to all the people, but especially to those who have not been as fortunate as we have. Those who are Negative need our help to be as happy as we are and soon we’ll be able to help them all. It’s wonderful that we have this opportunity to bring happiness into the lives of these unfortunate people and the work we’re doing is building the foundation for this great change.”

He paused and smiled brightly, looking around the room at the workers.

“A new dawn is rising for our people,” he continued. “I look back and see how we were good at making sure people who wanted Transfers got them, but it makes me happier knowing everyone will be happier. A day will come when the happiness we experience now will be nothing compared to what we will experience in years to come as we focus on efficiently, and effectively, Transferring our positivity onto everyone.”

He stopped, his beaming smile hardly changing the entire speech, and those present begun to clap and smile at each other like children expecting a reward. Benedict started to clap too but he was less enthusiastic. He had been thinking about the Higher Positive and how he was clueless to the mistake he was making, and how if Helen had her way the future portrayed would come about by a much different way. Benedict realised that this was all there was to it. Helen wanted the same goal, but with the Negatives helping and using their Transfer to help the people be happier. If only the Council would have listened to him then none of this would be happening. He realised that as long as they listened when the time came none of that really mattered now. Noticing the claps fade he stopped thinking about it and a hush came over the room. The Principle Speaker continued, his whole face projecting happiness.

“Thank you for your commitment. The testing must continue and we still have a lot of work ahead of us. It will be good work, productive work, yet at times it may be difficult work. Those who have had to test Negatives know what I’m speaking of. When they Transfer onto you it can be difficult to endure the negative feelings. However this is more of a reason to continue our goal and mission. If we can find them all then we can focus on Transferring to them and making them happier. This is a good thing and is great motivation for having to suffer for a brief moment so we will bring greater happiness for everyone.

“As you know we are doing are best to help those who have to test Negatives by giving them a Positive Transfer straight after they have tested a suspected Negative. However we cannot always predict who is a Negative so if you find yourself testing a Negative that you didn’t know might be one you must come straight to the Council Building and receive a Positive Transfer. This leads me onto my final point and the reason you are gathered here today.”

Benedict straightened in his chair, curious to see if his guess was right.

“I have just said that sometimes we don’t know who is a Negative until we actually test them...”

He paused and looked down at the floor, his forehead creasing as he tried to find the right words. The smile remained, but twitched slightly as he thought. Clearing his throat the smile returned to fully and he looked back up as if he had never stopped.

“While testing we have come across something we did not expect. If we could we would keep this from you for the benefit of everyone, but as you are the Testers you may encounter what we have discovered this week.”

Benedict was all ears, knowing what must be coming.

“We have discovered something new.”

Workers looked at each other, unsure of what the Principle Speaker was talking about.

“One of our Testers experienced a new level of pain while testing a Negative and we are extremely sorry that he had to suffer this. However, after a week of testing and every precaution being taken, we have found out that the Negative was a Higher Negative.”

Smiles in the crowd faded into puzzled looks and people began to whisper to each other, confused by what had been revealed to them. Once the whispers faded the Principle Speaker continued.

“This is why we wish it could be kept from you. Not to lie, but to save you from the fear and worry you are now experiencing. As you can guess the Higher Negative can do what we Higher Positives can, but with Negativity. We have him here in the building and are going to be questioning him and running more test over the weekend.

“The reason we have told you is to prepare you in case you come across a Higher Negative. When you are testing you need to keep an eye out for erratic Transfers amongst those who are Negative. For those of you who have had Negatives Transfer on you, you know that each day it is the same intensity and has little or no change. It is how the person feels and is their core at that time; therefore they are classed as a Negative.

“However the Higher Negatives don’t know what they are and one day it can be intense and the next day mild. It’s erratic because they don’t know how to control it, as they don’t know what they are. It’s best if it stays this way. Therefore if you encounter what I have described don’t make any attempt to tell them what it is that they are. Come to the Council Building at the first sign and we will know what to do. This is very important.”

Benedict could sense the truth. They didn’t know what to do. They were assuming they would after testing and questioning the Higher Negative they had found. He looked around him and as he suspected no one questioned it; they all happily trusted the Council. The Principle Speaker continued.

“I ask you with all my heart not to tell anyone else outside these walls about what we have discovered. Think about how you felt when I told you that a Higher Negative can choose to Transfer intense negativity. You felt fear didn’t you?”

There were a few vocal yes’ and lots of nods.

“We must not fear. Our goal is for happiness and such negativity is in opposition to our Prime Objective. Therefore the fewer people that know about this, the less fear there will be. Do you all understand?”

There was an echo of, “yes” that circled the hall.

“Good,” the Principle Speaker said. “We’ll continue like nothing happened and we’ll make sure our goals are not compromised. That’s the end of our meeting and primarily we need you to be aware of what to look out for when testing. Remember what we have described and if you think you have found a Higher Negative report it to us immediately.

“I know everything I have told you will have come as a shock so I think it best if everyone gets a Transfer from someone sitting next them. If you do find yourself thinking too much about this and wondering what to do, do not worry, we have it under control and if these feelings come make sure you get a Positive Transfer as soon as possible. You may all Transfer now and have a pleasant weekend. I look forward to the next working week where we can all enjoy the satisfying work we are doing.”

The Principle Speaker sat down and all the Higher Positives began to Transfer to each other and a ripple of mimicking Transfers took place between everyone in the hall. Benedict shook his head slightly then stopped, noticing the woman to his left staring at him.

“Would you like a Transfer from me?” she asked, smiling as he turned to face her.

The question repulsed him and he struggled to hide it. With what he had just beheld he didn’t want one, and wondered if he ever would again. He needed more time to think about what had just happened, but had to respond.

With effort he forced a change in his body language and put on the mask that would convince her to leave him alone.

“Errr... No thank you. I’m perfectly happy, but thank you so much for offering.”

With this done he stood up and wished her a pleasant day. He was the first to break from his seat and glanced down at the Higher Positives. His eyes met Georges and the drooping smile quickly turned back up. He raised his hand and nodded once in a farewell gesture. George returned it with more energy and went back to Transferring amongst the Higher Positives. Taking a look around him Benedict let the smile drop to a flat expression and quickly made his way out the hall.

Chapter Twelve

Benedict walked briskly through the empty corridor, thinking about the options he had.

I need to tell Helen that the Higher Negative is being kept here, but what then? Will she risk coming to talk to him? We might be discovered? The Council would ask questions and wonder why Helen is in the building. Maybe we'll have to wait and see if the Council make any more announcements about the Higher Negative. Oh, wait... the Principle Speaker said that this is going to be kept a secret as much as possible.

He let out a slight throat growl in frustration as he walked.

I can't rely, or wait on more information. The time for waiting is over. I'm fed up of waiting, that's all I seem to do these days. I need to act. After seeing what I just saw I'm not going to take this slow anymore. The Positives just accepted what the Higher Council told them and the Transfer was a big part in this. Too much Positive Transferring is actually damaging to peoples ability to think freely and act for themselves, or to be aware of what was happening around them. It feels so wrong.

He shuddered slightly, reliving the scene in his mind. He was at the main entrance now and wondered if he should go find this Higher Negative by himself. Shaking his head he decided against it. Talking to Helen first would help let all these thoughts and emotions out. She was the only person who would listen and understand.

The early evening air had a slight chill and walking down the steps of the Council Building he breathed heavily, his breath slightly visible. He got the Tram to Helen's house, but on the way continued to think to himself, wondering how he had gotten to this place, and more importantly how the whole Community had gotten here.

No one must have noticed the point where our desire for a better life and happiness had led to us losing our freewill. It must have been so subtle that no one saw the line when we crossed it. Once over it our true perspective on the world had vanished and it might have gone on forever; always staying the same.

But what about me? How did I get to a point where I've changed so dramatically that I can stand beyond the herd and look in from the outside, seeing how wrong things have become? Is it the Negative Transfers? Am I just being cynical and paranoid? What if I'm wrong and the Positive way is the right way? In a way they are happy and that's good isn't it? Maybe I've gone back a stage? Consumed by chaos and a desire to disrupt anything I can. Or is there a point where people gave up on their desire to experience so they could only have happiness? Had they known the consequence of such a pattern of existence? No. It's too complex. There couldn't have been a specific point that this happened as a conscious act. That time to consciously act is now. And it is up to me.

He felt a huge weight of responsibility appear and slumped slightly under the pressure.

This is the point where we could loss a part of ourselves. This is the conscious choice, and I have to change what's happening. Whatever has happened to me it's important that I don't become drawn into the warm blanket of escapism through Positive Transfers. If this change in me has happened because of the Negative Transfers then the Negatives might have saved us all. As long as I can act and bring about the world Helen sees where Positives and Negative accept each other. Negatives are the balance to the Positives; both are needed.

It was done. Benedict had come to the conclusions he needed. He was totally committed and wanted to take more action to achieve the change. The slow and steady way wasn't going to be enough to tip the scales back into a better equilibrium of emotion.

Finally, the Tram drew to his stop. He got off and walked with purpose to Helen's house. He knocked on the door.

“We were wondering where you had got to?” Helen said as she opened the door, and he walked into the hall way.

“The Council kept us behind for a meeting. It has given the information we needed. I take it Chris is here then?”

He hadn’t met Chris since the testing, but there was something in Benedict that didn’t trust him. Talking to Helen one on one would have been better, but there was nothing he could do about it now.

Helen shut the door, “Yes, Chris is here.”

“I guess it’ll be good for him to hear the news I have and learn the new path we need to take as a consequence.”

Helen looked at him curiously, noticing that there was something different about him, a new confidence and purpose in his speech and body language.

“Well, he’s in the living room. Once we’re comfortable you can tell us everything.”

Following Helen into the living room, Benedict said a brief hello to Chris and Chris returned the pleasantries. Helen sat in her chair and Chris sat back in his once the formalities were over. Benedict stayed standing and told them what had occurred in the Council Hall and that the Higher Negative was at the Council Building.

“We must do something more extreme if we’re to make the changes necessary to stop our Community becoming a closed system with no hope of progression and creativity,” he concluded passionately.

No one said anything for a few moments, and the silence was starting to become awkward, but finally Helen cleared her throat.

“Are you sure Benedict?” she said. “If we do anything too drastic it might stop us from achieving the goals.”

She had listened intently and was moved by his new found desire to change the circumstances, but caution was still her priority, and she wanted everything on her terms.

Who is he to suddenly care so passionately about what is my struggle, she thought.

“If you had been there you would understand,” Benedict replied. “Sitting back and waiting to react to the Higher Councils blind desire for happiness isn’t going to be enough. We must act.”

Helen frowned, starting to dislike this new Benedict. He was trying to be inspiring, motivational and authoritative: that was her role, and he had followed, but now this was something different and new. She decided to see what Chris thought, surely he would be on her side and have the same concerns. He had been sitting in silence, his head leaning on his elbow, resting it on the arm of the chair.

“I’m inclined to agree with Benedict,” he said casually as he raised his head.

It was a shock to Benedict and Helen, but both kept it hidden.

“The current plan is good and it might be successful, but if we are to make a difference we must be more radical. With all we know now we can’t take the risk that the Council will listen to us when we present ourselves to them. We must show them we mean what we are doing. That way they cannot doubt that we are here to upset the status quo.”

Helen thought quickly, wanting this to be done her way. Although she had to admit taking a more radical stance, whatever it would be, appealed to her darker side.

Maybe this is my chance to use my Higher Negative skills to teach the Council a lesson. If Benedict wants radical I know I can do it. It’s more risky but in a way it’ll be better. It will allow me to get revenge and inflict pain on those who have shunned me.

She liked this thought a lot. The underlying and suppressed desires rose to the surface once more and finally she embraced them fully.

But we will do it my way. Benedict may have brought this about, but I will be the one to lead.

Chris and Benedict were looking at her expectantly.

Noticing it she smiled a sly crooked smile that made them suddenly feel uneasy.

“Radical it is,” she said keeping up the smile.

Struggling to get over the uneasy feeling Benedict spoke.

“Good. Well we shou...”

“...Hang on moment,” Helen interrupted.

“Oh, sorry,” Benedict said automatically.

It was exactly what she wanted, nothing like an apology to put the power struggle in her favour.

“We must consider how radical we need to be? Once this starts there’s no going back,” she continued. “Are we all completely comfortable with this? Despite my initial doubts I’m committed now. I see you were right Benedict, but if we opt for this route there’s no going back.”

The words were powerful and it made Chris and Benedict think hard.

They’re in my hands now. I can influence them the way I want, Helen thought as she watched them dwell on her words. I’ve taken some of the passion out of Benedict and can use his new found desire for upheaval to my advantage.

“I am one hundred percent committed,” Benedict said. “After everything I’ve been through tonight I cannot go back.”

“I am committed too,” Chris said, realising he was just a follower, but would play his part, knowing he would be remembered for being one of the first to bring about the new age where Negatives had more power.

“Excellent,” Helen said, her smile unflinching. “The first priority must be this Higher Negative.”

Benedict and Chris nodded.

“If we can free him from the Council it will show them they cannot just hold our kind and try to change us. I propose we go to the Council Building later tonight and find a way to get him out. We can bring him here and he can hide in the basement while we continue our search for more Negatives.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Benedict replied. “It will send the Council a message of resistance and we can learn more about the Higher Negative. I’m not sure what the next stage should be though? Are we going to wait for the Audit to be finished so we can find all the others like ourselves?”

He said ‘ourselves,’ Helen realised. Does this mean he considers himself to be a Negative now? He isn’t though, and will always remain a Positive deep down. Or has the Negative Transfers changed him more than I realised?

There wasn’t time to think about it and she cast the thoughts aside to focus. It was time to tell them about a plan she had been creating.

“Yes, Benedict,” she continued. “We should wait so we can gather all the support we can, using the Audit to our advantage. Once it is over we will have found all the Negatives and we can go to the Council to take control. If anyone tries to stop us we will Negative Transfer on them. It’ll be far more effective than presenting ourselves to the Higher Council and trying and convince them to change. We’ll be the Higher Council and Negatives will take control of the departments. This way we can restore balance to the Community.”

Benedict knew the forceful aspect was inevitable, but hearing it spoken made it real. A second of doubt crept in but was blasted by his desire to rid the image of the Positives ignorantly Transferring to one another. Yet, the end of the Audit was a few months away and he wanted a change now.

“Why not sooner?” he questioned. “If we actively seek them out each day our numbers will grow faster. We have the current lists to help us start, but if each Negative goes out looking for other Negatives, and so on, we will find them quicker than the Council. We can put posters up and hand out leaflets, and bring about the change in half the time.”

“Yes, but if you think about it that puts us in the limelight,” Helen objected. “The Council will see what we’re doing and if pushed they’ll try and stop us. They won’t risk losing their ignorant escapism. We must combine the patience of the last plan with the radical aspect of the new. We must stay in the shadows to hide what’s happening. When we’re ready we’ll appear and they’ll not be able to stop us.”

“We need to act. This way the change happens quicker,” Benedict continued to argue, but Chris spoke up before Helen could respond.

“You’re both right. Both ways seem to be effective, but this doesn’t need to be decided right now. Let’s go to the Council Building, get this Higher Negative, and find out what’s he’s capable of. With him on our side we can decide what to do in the next few days. Let’s focus on one task at a time.”

Helen and Benedict sat back in their chairs, seeing the logic in Chris words. Benedict quickly put the argument to the back of his mind. Helen did not.

How dare he try and contradict me, she smouldered. How have you turned against me when we were such friends? I’ve endured nearly twice the years of this ignorance as you, and you pay me no respect. I’ll be keeping a close eye on you Benedict. This all started with me and you’ll not get in the way of doing it my way. If you get out of line my secret will keep you in check. I’ll give you radical, she thought once more.

Suddenly she realised Benedict and Chris were talking about the Council Building and the best way to find the Higher Negative. She pushed her venomous thoughts away and listened closely, waiting for a chance to contribute as a leader, and not as a follower.

“...I can try the computers again,” Benedict was saying. “They might have put some information on there tonight, after the meeting. It might tell us where he is?”

Helen saw a chance to take the lead.

“That’s a good idea,” she said, “and while we’re there you can print off the up to date lists of the Negatives from every Sector. We may not use them now but we’ll need it at some point. The Council Building will be empty so there’ll be no reason to rush.”

Benedict wasn’t sure, it would be easier to go in, find the Higher Negative, and leave, but Chris spoke before his concern could be expressed.

“I think that’ll really help. Having the list is very important whatever course of action we take. Helen, do you have any ideas on how this is going to work?”

“I do,” she said confidently. “I propose that after midnight we walk to the Council Building. It’ll be empty, except for the Higher Negative being locked in a room somewhere, and the computer should tell us his location. If it doesn’t I will go to the Council Offices while the printing is being done. There has to be something there that’ll tell us where the Higher Negative is being kept.”

“That’s a good back up,” Chris said, and Helen continued.

“The door to the Higher Negatives room is bound to be locked, but the key is likely to be close so the Positives can use it to speak to him. Whatever happens we’ll free him and bring him back here. When we find him I’ll talk to him and he’ll come with us.

Chris I think it would be best if you came with me while Benedict is printing the lists. Having two of us will show the Higher Negative there are people trying to stop what the Council are doing. I’m sure he’ll be happy to join us after the Council have been questioning him and keeping him locked up.

Benedict, we will meet you at the Computers and the four of us can leave with the lists. Once we free him it’ll be good to get back here as quickly as possible to make sure we aren’t seen. We can make up excuses if we’re caught before we find him, but if we’re found after, it will be very difficult to cover up what we’re doing. It would be helpful if we can use a van from the Council Building to get us back. You drove in your delivery job didn’t you Chris?”

“Yeah, that’s right,” he nodded.

“Good. If we can do it this way then we limit the chances of being seen. If on the odd chance someone does see us we’ll be a van from the Council and people won’t think twice about it. I’m pretty sure that covers everything.”

“What happens if there are people in the building when we arrive?” Benedict asked. “The Council might have stayed later than we think to talk to this Higher Negative?”

Stop questioning me, Helen thought angrily.

“There won’t be anyone after midnight,” she said smirking at him. “You know everyone leaves by seven or eight at the latest.”

“I hope your right,” Benedict muttered.

Helen struggled but ignored him.

“If we do this right we’ll have another great asset to our plans. I’m looking forward to meeting this Higher Negative. Are we all confident with the plan?”

Chris nodded firmly. Benedict hesitated, but nodded when Helen looked at him sharply.

“We still have many hours before midnight,” she continued. “I suggest we try and relax and save our energy for the night ahead. I can make some food for us and we can pass the time talking or you can use the rooms upstairs to relax in if you wish.”

“Having some time to relax would be good,” Chris said. “It’s been a stressful time since you found me,” he chuckled, trying to relieve some of the tension.

“Well, if any of us think of ideas that might help in tonight’s mission then let us know.”

With this she stood and went to the kitchen to make some food. Benedict sat thinking as Chris stood up and followed Helen out the room, but went upstairs to relax. Benedict sat there in silence, knowing Helen was trying to maintain control of the situation, and there was a part of him that wanted to do the same. However, she seemed determined to put him down if he tried to contribute or take the lead.

I need to keep my thoughts to myself and watch her closely, he thought. *There’s something different about her since I arrived this evening. She’s more hostile towards me. The plan makes sense, even if it is a bit loose. She is right that there’s very little to fear, as there’s almost no chance of someone being there. But you can never be too careful and she shot me down when I tried to explain this. I think it’s best if I go home for a bit and maybe it will clear the air. I’ll come back later.*

“Helen,” he said as he walked into the kitchen. “I’m feeling pretty tired and going to go home for a little while. Thank you for the offer of food, but I’ll get something at home. I’ll come back about eleven and we can make our way to the Council Building.”

“If that’s what you feel is best, then we shall see you later,” she said casually.

“See you later Helen.”

Benedict turned and left the kitchen, ignoring the staleness of the conversation. The day had changed him and he felt like he had been beaten into that change. The mental tiredness was overwhelming and he looked forward to being in his own home to rest before more unknown stresses.

Helen continued to prepare the food and as the front door closed she realised Benedict was no longer the friend he had once been, too much had changed in too short a time.

We have to focus on achieving success despite our differences in opinion. As long as he lets me take the lead he wouldn't have a problem. If he doesn't I'm not going to let him jeopardise my plans with this new brash behaviour. Maybe at the end of all this we can find some way to be the way we were, but we're both so different now. I'm not going to compromise changing the whole Community for the sake of trying to save one friendship.

Finally, dinner was made and she called up the stairs to Chris. They ate in the living room and talked to about the plan. She was glad to have him as he was being more supportive than Benedict. After chatting some more they decided resting would be best so Chris went to the spare room again and Helen went to hers. The hours passed slowly, but finally ten forty-five arrived and Helen went down stairs to her chair, waiting for Benedict. A few minutes later Chris came down too, and apart from an initial acknowledgment they didn’t say anything to each other. The knock came and Benedict entered without waiting for Helen to answer. She was half way across the living room to open the front door when Benedict entered. A bit taken aback by his presumption she gave him a split second cutting look. Chris saw it and could sense the tension and nervous energy that had returned. He stood and before either Helen or Benedict said anything he spoke.

“Shall we make our way to the building then?”

It was enough to defuse any spoken tension and Helen changed her thoughts to focus on this.

“Let’s go help future generations,” she said, trying to be motivational.

“I’m ready for to go,” Benedict replied simply, still standing in the living room door way, holding the door open.

He turned around and Helen followed, Chris following behind her. They left the house and the silence of the night was eerie and unfamiliar to them. The silence was so heavy it almost forced them to keep quiet and as they walked they didn’t dare break it. The street lights cast many shadows, but only theirs moved, growing longer and shorter as they passed each street light. Knowing the plan they made their way towards the Council Building, passing house after house of the sleeping Community, all oblivious to Helen, Benedict and Chris’ goal to turn their world upside down.

Chapter Thirteen

After the five mile walk they approached the Council Building and Helen made sure she was the first to speak.

“We all know the plan so let’s follow Benedict to the computers. Once we know if the information is there you can begin printing out the lists we need,” she said looking at Benedict. “I’m quite interested in seeing these computers,” she said after a pause.

Chris nodded in agreement.

“This way then,” Benedict replied as they reached the top of the concrete steps. Chris and Helen followed and they walked through the dark empty corridors that were only lit by starlight coming through the windows, or the odd street lamp from outside. It was a fitting environment for what they were doing and they walked cautiously, unable to stay confident in the darkness that was almost tangible.

With a creak of the doors they entered the computer room and Benedict immediately put the lights on. The light made them blink rapidly and as Helen adjusted to the light she spoke.

“So these are the computers?”

“Yep, these machines store all the data,” Benedict replied as he walked towards one.

“It’s fascinating isn’t it Chris?” she said, trying to include him in the conversation.

“They’re a curious thing that’s for sure. So how do they work?” he asked.

“I don’t actually know,” Benedict admitted, reaching one. “I have a few theories, but until someone tells me, or I can take it apart, I won’t know for sure. However, to make it work you press this button.”

He pressed the on switch, but the screen remained black and nothing happened. After a quick pause he shook his head and sighed, “The power isn’t on.”

Slightly embarrassed he looked around. Seeing all the power points, he switched a couple of them on. A few of the computers made a low whirring noise and he realised the printers would also be turned off so pressed the switch that was connected to the cable that led to the printing room. As Helen and Chris stood watching he went to the printing room and checked the paper. There was plenty left and he returned. Pressing the button on the computer again he said,

“It should work this time,” and it did.

After a minute of more whirring noises the screen came alive and was full of writing Benedict hadn’t seen before. He looked at it for a few moments, scanning until he found a title labelled, Sector Testing Reports, and pressed the arrows until this was highlighted and then he hit Select. Chris and Helen continued to watch Benedict with expressions of interest and marvel; these machines were impressive and so was Benedict’s ability to work them. Helen watched more intently than Chris though, trying to learn how to use them in case she had to do it without Benedict.

Benedict went to Ralph’s Sector again, but there was still nothing new. He paused to think then pressed the Back option until he was at the opening screen. Scanning once more he looked for any title that might point to the Higher Negatives whereabouts, but there was nothing that stood out.

“There’s nothing here,” he said, hanging his head slightly. “I think you and Chris need to go to the Higher Council Offices. They might have something there as you said. I’ll begin the printing.”

“I’m certain there’ll be something there,” Helen replied. “When we return we should have our new accomplice and then we can take the lists you have printed and return to my house. We’ll be back as soon as we can.”

Benedict didn’t say anything and began selecting each Sector and printed what was required. Helen watched for a second then turned to Chris.

“This way,” she said, taking a half pace lead as he followed. “I worked here for a long time. I know where we’re going.”

“Good, because I would be totally lost,” Chris replied.

They left the comfort of the light and sounds, and became quiet again, the dark and silent corridors engulfing them once more. After passing through many corridors and rooms they came to the large meeting hall. The room was almost pitch black, but some starlight light seeped through the small windows high up the walls, and by the time they got there their eyes had adjusted to the darkness. Helen could see the outline of the double doors to the Higher Council Offices and briskly walked over to them, feeling a sense of urgency that they had to find the Higher Negative no matter what.

She had never been through the doors before and when she opened one of them there was a very long corridor which was even darker than the hall. To her right was a door marked stairs and this went up several levels with other corridors on top of each other. As her eyes adjusted to the darker corridor she saw that further down were doors on either side and she walked to the closet one, saw a name, and opened it. It was lighter in the offices because there were more windows and they were much bigger. She didn’t enter the room fully, but scanned it, her hand still on the handle of the door, and Chris waiting patiently behind her. There was a desk, a telephone and filing cabinets. She guessed every office was similar, but which one would have the information required? Withdrawing back into the corridor she begun to think and Chris struggled not to ask questions.

Thinking hard Helen recalled that it was Ralph who had discovered the Higher Negative and whoever Ralph’s Higher Positive boss was that person was likely to have the information in their office, but who was it? With her eyes closed she pictured the computer and Ralph’s page. She was glad she had been paying such close attention because on the previous page was the name of the Sectors Higher Positive.

“Claudia,” she said out loud, opening her eyes. “We need to find the office with Claudia’s name on it. You take that side I’ll take this.”

Chris did as he was told and they shuffled up the corridor. They reached the end, but didn’t find her name and Helen sighed disappointedly. Looking at Chris she pointed to the door with ‘Stairs’ written on it, which matched the one at the other end, and said, “This way.” Ascending the stairs they walked onto an identical corridor and started the search again. Halfway down they found the door with ‘Claudia’ written on it. Helen paused for a moment, nerves of excitement taking hold. It passed and she opened the door, entering the room with Chris still following. The door shut behind him and Helen had already started looking around the room, moving straight to the desk. There, as if it had been left just for her, was a folder marked, ‘The Higher Negative: Michael.’

Michael. So that’s your name, Helen thought.

“This is it,” she said, moving around the desk and sitting in the chair.

“What, just like that?” Chris said surprised.

“Yeah, right here on the desk,” she said flippantly.

“That was helpful,” Chris replied.

Helen opened the folder and read the first page. It had information like height, weight, age and a picture of him. He was six foot four inches and weighed twenty four stone, and she realised Michael would certainly stand out from others. But then she looked at the picture and there was nothing about his face that matched that thought. He was plain with short brown hair and brown eyes, if she hadn’t known his size, and that he was a Higher Negative, she would have assumed him just like everyone else. Turning the page she skimmed over the notes and detailed dialogue between Michael and those who had been questioning him. There was information about the intense level of

Transfers they had done on him and how they had managed to keep him compliant and subdued. Helen was disgusted and this gave her a stronger desire to free him. She turned the page roughly and had to read the next page twice to fully process the location of Michael.

In my lab? They're keeping him in my lab? She shouted in her mind. How dare they use the place I use to work to keep him prisoner.

"Right," she said banging the table with her fist. "I know where Michael is."

"Michael," Chris repeated under his breath.

"He's in my old lab," Helen continued. "It'll take us a few minutes to get there but when we do we'll be able to free him and meet with Benedict."

"Lead the way," Chris said stepping aside to let her pass.

Once more they walked through the Council Building and as they turned into the last corridor before the labs Helen stopped and backed into Chris, pushing them both back around the corner.

"Oww! What are you doing?" Chris said as he stumbled back.

"Shhhh, quiet," Helen commanded. "There's someone outside the labs," she whispered the frustration and confusion clear in her voice.

Composing herself she slowly peered around the corner to look down the corridor. Chris couldn't help but do the same. There at the end of the corridor was a man sitting on a chair breathing heavily. Helen let out a sigh of relief; he was asleep.

What now? She thought. What's the best way to get passed?

Leaning back for cover they both wondered what to do next.

Could we creep by him? Helen thought. It's too risky. What if he wakes when we pass him? The whole plan would be compromised. Could a diversion work? Probably not. A diversion would have to be something like a fire. That's far too complicated and risky.

Suddenly a dark thought entered her mind.

What about my Transfer skill? When I Transferred on Benedict he closed his eyes and cowered in pain. He said Ralph did similar a thing when Michael first Transferred. I wonder if being subjected to negativity would be enough to keep this man's eyes closed and under our control. Is it more risky than trying to sneak passed?

This option had too much appeal not to be dismissed. If nothing else she wanted to use her Negative Transfer to see what happened. Her concerns for the risks were put aside and she turned to Chris.

"I have an idea," she whispered. "Do you remember the pain you felt when I Transferred to you?"

Chris nodded.

"I want to try something that might help us get by the guard. I want to Transfer Negatively on him. I think the shock and pain would keep him distracted long enough so we can free Michael."

Chris gave her a concerned look.

"It'll really hurt him won't it?"

"Yes," Helen replied. "But we can't risk being seen. If he wakes while we're trying to free Michael we'll be caught and the Council will guess what we're doing. Let me ask you this, what was the first thing you did when I Transferred onto you?"

He thought for a second.

"I shut my eyes?"

"Exactly. If we both Transfer, and I give him quite a lot of my negative feelings from memory he'll definitely shut his eyes. It'll probably be best if you keep Transferring and I'll set Michael free. Then we can leave, and this Positive won't have seen who we are."

“I’m not sure if I like that we have to cause him so much pain?” Chris objected.

“What happened to all the commitment earlier?”

“It’s becoming more real now,” he replied.

“I know, but we have to do this. We can’t get caught. You must stay true to our purpose.”

“Okay, okay,” he said nodding. “I’m committed as I said I was. We’ll do as you said.”

“Good. We’ll put our hands on his neck and Transfer. After the initial burst he should be in enough pain to close his eyes. Then I’ll get Michael and we’ll leave. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” Chris repeated.

They emerged from their cover and crept down the corridor. Silently they reached the man and Helen stood on the side closest to the lab door and Chris stood on the other. Watching each others hand closely they simultaneously moved them towards the man’s neck. Chris’ shook slightly with nerves, but pressed against the skin at the same time as Helen’s. The man cried out in agony as all his muscles and features spasmed. Helen drew on the negativity she had felt towards Benedict that night, not daring to draw on her feelings about the Positives, those emotions were dark and growing darker with each day.

Chris jerked his hand back, the man’s cry and pain ridden face shocking him in the silence. Helen gave him a stern look. Hesitantly, and breathing deeply, he put his hand back on the man’s neck. It all happened in few seconds and the screaming continued as Chris started Transferring. Raising her voice above the scream Helen called to him.

“I’ll get Michael. Keep Transferring so he doesn’t open his eyes.”

Reluctantly she removed her hand. Seeing the effect of the Transfer made her feel strong and empowered, and she liked it. Taking a few steps back, but still fixated on the expression on the man’s face, she came level with the lab door and turned, pushing it. It didn’t move. She grunted in frustration, and taking a step back looked down at the keyhole by the door handle. Turning back quickly she looked at the man. His eyes were still shut, but he wasn’t screaming anymore, only breathing quickly and deeply. She scanned him from head to toe and back again, but no keys. Taking three quick steps she checked his pockets and to her relief she found the key.

“Don’t stop Transferring,” she said to Chris and went back to the door.

Once open she walked inside, turning on the lights to illuminate the darkness. The lights came on instantly and looking around the lab she saw a man sitting on a make shift bed staring straight at her. She hadn’t given much thought to what she would actually say when they first met and seeing Michael gave her a bit of a shock. His size was even more startling than she thought it would be and his worn clothes gave him a hardened look. But his face was soft and a blank smile provoked a lot of different emotions in Helen. After a few moments of them staring at each other Helen gained her composure.

“Hello. My name’s Helen,” she began. “I’m guessing you’re Michael.”

“I am,” he said in a deep voice.

Helen decided to be as efficient as he could.

“I’m a Higher Negative like you. I’ve come to take you away from here so the Higher Positives don’t Transfer and try and changed you.”

She stopped, waiting for a response. There was another pause and as she went to speak again he opened his mouth.

“Another Higher Negative? Interesting. What was that screaming outside?”

“Something necessary,” she said quickly. “You’ve two options Michael: Stay here with the Positives keeping you locked away, or come with me to be free from them. What’s it going to be?”

There was no pause this time.

“Getting out of here is the way for me,” he said, standing up and walking towards her.

“Good,” Helen said smiling. “This way then,” and she pushed the door open, holding it for him.

She smiled and nodded to Chris as Michael emerged from behind her. Chris gave a look of surprise and tipped his head back slightly to look at Michael’s face.

“We’ll have time for introductions later, let’s get out of here,” Helen said as she walked to stand beside the guard again. “Chris you can stop Transferring now. Take Michael to Benedict. I’ll keep the Transfer going until you’re out of sight, then I’ll follow and catch up.”

Chris took his hand off and Helen put hers on. She kept her Transfer mild, guessing it would be the same as Chris’. She was very close and the man’s expression of pain only changed subtly. She watched Michael walk passed her, noticing the giant steps he took as he did. When they were round the corner she decided to do something that had been playing on her mind from the moment she first Transferred on this man. Unrestrained she let loose a memory of all her hatred to the Higher Council for firing her, for using her ideas to instigate the Audit, and for letting the Community get to a point where they were trying to change people like her.

The man screamed out in deafening agony. It rang out for a few seconds but suddenly stopped, with only a brief echo remaining before it faded too. He went limp and fell from the chair. Helen watched him, a small smile creeping on her face. The man lay there shaking and sweating, deep rapid breaths replacing the scream. Helen watched him for a few more moments savouring the feelings of complete control and then snapped out of it; she had to leave. Before she did she dragged him into the lab and locked the door behind her, laughing as she imagined the expression on his face when he woke up, assuming he did wake up. With this done she darted down the corridor, turned right and ran as best she could. About half way towards the computers she caught up with Chris and Michael who were walking briskly, looking back for her as they walked. They heard her coming and slowed a little. As she came beside them Helen matched their paced and they continued with Chris leading the way. Michael and Helen walked behind him taking the opportunity to talk.

“What was that sound?” Michael asked.

She had hoped they hadn’t heard, “Oh nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

He looked at her inquisitively. However, he knew nothing about her and didn’t question it any further. He decided ask the other questions that were on his mind.

“So how did you know I was here?”

“We’ve been watching the Audit since the start,” Helen began. “It’s a long story really. We’ll talk about it later. What you need to know is that this Audit is wrong, as I’m sure you’ll agree?”

She was baiting him for a response to see if he felt the same way they did.

“I hadn’t really paid much attention to the Audit until this week, when they started testing me. That’s when I started to realise I didn’t agree, and having been locked up I’ve had some time to think. In short I’m angry with how they’ve treated me, and don’t like their attempts to keep Transferring on me. The effect it had was worrying so I’m glad you’ve freed me.”

She was happy enough with the response, but planned to tell him about the consequences of the Audit and how in time it would eradicate Negatives. She expected he would feel as strongly as she did once she had opened his eyes.

“Where are we going then?” he asked.

“We’re meeting a man who’s helping us here in the Council Building. He is a...” she paused. She was going to say friend, but changed her mind. “...old colleague from when I used to work here.”

He looked at her, questioning the latter statement.

“That story can wait as well,” she said.

They arrived at the computer room and entered to the sound of the printer still printing the lists. They saw Benedict pushing buttons on the panel and reading whatever was on the screen. He turned from the screen when he heard them and had the same look Chris did when he saw Michael.

Benedict stood up as they walked towards him.

“Is this the Higher Negative?” He asked looking at Michael.

“Yes, this is Michael. We can do introductions when we’re back at my house,” Helen replied. “Is the printing still going?”

“It’s taking a lot longer than I thought it would.”

“That’s not helpful. How long is it going to take?”

“I have no idea. Still some time I think.” Benedict glanced over to a pile of paper next to the computer, “That’s about half.”

“I think it’s best if we get Michael to mine as soon as possible. If Chris drives one of the Council vans then the three of us can go back. Chris can come back to get you, drop the van back off as if it was never taken, and then you can make your way back, or head home. If you want you can visit us tomorrow, after a good night sleep. Is that okay with you both?” she said looking between Chris and Benedict.

“I guess it’ll have to be,” Benedict said a bit annoyed at being left by himself.

“I’m okay with that,” Chris said. “I’ll be back soon,” he said to Benedict, “meet me out the front?”

Benedict nodded, and spoke to Michael and Helen. “I’ll come back so I can meet you properly Michael, and I’ll bring the full list.”

“That’s fine,” Helen said, as if she was giving him permission.

“I’m going to go home,” Chris said, “and I’ll come visit you tomorrow.”

“That’s fine. Let’s go,” Helen said.

They left Benedict alone again and he went back to reading through all various pages of data that he had seen the titles of on the first page. Helen, Chris and Michael went to one of the vans parked at the side of the building. Chris went in first, turning the dial half clock-wise and then back anti-clockwise so the engine started. Helen got in next and then Michael squeezed in too. Chris drove slowly and they trundled along; the exposure of being outside in the open muting their willingness to speak once more. Reaching Helen’s house Chris parked outside and Helen broke the silence.

“Tell Benedict we’ll wait for him and to get here as soon as he can.”

Helen and Michael shuffled out the van and Helen stood facing Chris, holding the door open and Michael stood behind her. “We’ll see you tomorrow,” she continued, “and update you on anything we talk about.”

“Thanks that would be good. The Council are going to have a shock when they find out Michael is gone,” he smirked.

They certainly are, she thought sisterly as she reflected on what she had done. She gave him a nod and sly smile in response.

“Thank you for your help. You should go get some rest,” she concluded, closing the door, and Chris turned the van, driving in the direction they had come.

Chapter Fourteen

“That was not how I expected to spend my evening,” Michael said as he and Helen walked to door and entered the house.

“I guess not,” Helen replied. “This is my home,” she said as she closed the door. “I want you to consider it your home now. I hope you understand you can’t go back to your own because the Council will come looking for you.”

“I understand. I can’t believe this begun just a week ago,” he said as he sat down in a chair Helen had offered him in the living room.

“It’s been going on a lot longer for us,” Helen said, as they continued the conversation that had started in the Council Building.

“I guess it has,” Michael mused. “I hadn’t really been paying attention to the Audit. I thought it was a bunch of nonsense. All I wanted to do was get on with my work as a lumber cutter. Then on Monday they turn up at my door in the evening and start ‘testing’ me. It was a shock when the Tester first recoiled from the pain he felt. I knew I was a Negative, but didn’t think I was that Negative. I was really angry that they expected me to do as they wanted without even asking. I do get angry a lot, but I just bury it and ignore it. I guess that anger came out in the Transfer. I tried to feel kinder the next day because I didn’t really want to hurt him, but I didn’t think it would make much difference. Everyone said Negatives were like the normal Positives. Then when I didn’t hurt him as much I realised I had some control over it. Is that how you found out?”

She had let him talk, as she could see he needed to, but decided it was time to discuss the whole situation in more detail.

“Yes, it was a similar way. I Transferred onto Benedict and had a similar experience, causing him a lot of pain. I wasn’t sure how he would react so convinced him it must have been his sensitivity. The next day I managed to control it and he thinks I’m a normal Negative. He thinks you’re the first Higher Negative he’s met.”

“I see. Why didn’t you tell him? He seems to be doing a lot to help you?”

“Benedict has been very helpful, but I didn’t trust him to keep it a secret. I just couldn’t risk the Council finding out. After what they’ve done to you I guess I was right. Chris knows because I had to convince him to join me. I showed him that Higher Negatives existed, and that I was out to make a change.”

It was time to tell him everything and she described her work for the Council and how it had led to her being given retirement early. She even decided to trust Michael with the truth about her Transferring on Benedict and the experiment they had been doing. Concluding she told him that it wasn’t the main focus anymore, but the goal was to get the lists and at some point recruit Negatives without the Council finding out.

“It sounds like quite the uprising,” Michael said, rubbing his bristly chin as he contemplated what he had just heard.

“Would you like to join me at the forefront of this?” Helen asked as she watched him closely. “Our skills can help make the changes we want. If we find other Negatives and others like us, we can achieve anything. We can use the Audit to find those we need, and before the Audit is released we can take over the Council Building and this will truly be the beginning of a better world.”

Michael was deep in thought as he listened.

Most of my life I’ve been angry at everything, but I never really knew why. Is it because I knew something was wrong with the world around me? My work always helped with the anger, but

why was I so angry? What Helen is saying makes sense. I've been angry because I don't like the world I live in.

"Before I say anymore," he began, having made his choice, "let me tell you what happened today. This afternoon the Council asked me to come to the building for some questioning. I didn't want to but one of them grabbed my arm and I felt subdued and happy. All I wanted to do was agree with what I was told, even though my initial thoughts were to stay at home. I remember the journey to the Council Building and being compliant until I was in the lab. I started to ask myself why I was there? And why I had been so willing to go with them? But before I got a chance to say anything they saw the change and Transferred onto me again. The man outside the door was there to make sure I had Transfers, but I hadn't had one for awhile and I tried to get some sleep. I was woken by the scream outside the door and I sat on the bed and waited for whatever came. I noticed I was starting to feel angry again and questioning why I had agreed to be there.

I'm thankful that you released me and that anger has slowly been building back to what it normally is and this is why I chose to help you Helen. They used their Transfers to change me. I see they'll try to change us all and I agree that something must be done to stop this."

Helen smiled her sly smile and replied.

"You and I, as the first two Higher Negatives, will work hard to gain support and many will join us. Then we will take over the Council one way or another."

Knowing what she meant he looked inside himself and liked what she had implied.

"I'm with you and will do anything I can," he said.

"Excellent," Helen grinned.

There was a question that had been building in Michael's mind since Helen had spoken of her Transfers with Benedict and he felt it was time to ask.

"You spoke of Transfer experiments?" He paused, trying to gain some confidence. "I was wondering what would happen if a Higher Negative Transferred to a Higher Negative? I know that sounds bad, but I'm a curious?"

"That's an interesting idea," she said leaning forward. "Let's try it," she continued, taking him by surprise.

"What? Transfer to each other?" Michael exclaimed.

"Yeah, you suggested it. Why not? It's the only way we'll find out, Transfer onto me. I'm curious too."

Michael hesitated.

"Go on," Helen encouraged, holding out her arm. "Transfer some of your anger and let's see what happens, I haven't had a Negative Transfer so I'm interested."

Michael took a deep breath, "If you're sure?" and stretched his arm slowly towards Helens. Once his hand was round her wrist he gripped tightly and willed his anger to Transfer, keeping his eyes on her.

Helen's eyes stayed open right until the Transfer started, but the sudden rush of negativity was intense and she shut them. Within a few moments she began to embrace it and enduring became a game for her. Her face began to relax as she grew accustomed to it and opened her eyes.

"You can stop now," she said.

Michael let go and waited.

"That wasn't too bad," she exclaimed. "I know it sounds strange, but there's something almost beautiful and meaningful about enduring it."

"So does it hurt?" Michael asked.

"Yes, but that's okay. Enduring it shows strength. You should try," she said encouragingly.

Michael felt he understood what she meant, but hadn't expected this reaction at all. Curious to see how it felt he agreed.

"Go on then, I'll try and endure it too," he said.

In a strange way it had become a competition and Helen reached for his arm and held it tighter than he had held hers.

"Ready," she said.

He nodded.

She Transferred the same as she did with Benedict during the experiments and she watched his face tense up forming crease lines over the skin. After about ten seconds his face began to relax and she increased the negativity. His face creased again and he kept his eyes shut, and didn't say anything. Sweat began to appear on his brow and she let go slowly. He was breathing deeper than normal and she watched as he composed himself.

"Good isn't it?" she grinned.

He looked up and focused.

"Yes. Yes it is. I see what you mean now. Something in me says I shouldn't like it, but I do. It feels like I've accomplished something by withstanding it. Do you think it's like exercise and we'll be able to endure more if we keep doing it?"

The question fascinated her and she admired his perspective on this situation. She realised the idea must have come from the exercise he did with his job as a lumber chopper. It was something she hadn't considered.

"Possibly?" she replied. "Only time will tell. How about we try it again?"

Michael smiled thinly, "Why not. You ready?"

Helen nodded and held out her arm. This time she stared him in the eye with a similar thin smile. They took the usual Transfer position and she felt the pain, her face straining, but her eyes stayed locked on his face.

"More?" he whispered.

She gave a small nod, not wanting to speak in case she lost concentration. The new intensity forced her eyes closed and she felt sweat on her face.

"Do you want to stop?" Michael asked.

She gave a small shake of her head, breathing as if she had been running very fast. Eventually she controlled her breathing, but perspiration still appeared on her head and a few drops had run down her face. Michael was concerned and as he was about to withdraw she opened her eyes again and the corners of her mouth rose.

"You can let go now," she said weakly.

He did and looked at her with awe.

"I think that was close to my max?"

"Really? That's good," and she let out a short laugh in between rapid breaths. "You should try a similar intensity? What a rush!"

Her eyes were wide with the thrill of the intense pain endurance. Michael was unsure but saw the excitement and was caught by it so held out his arm.

"Give me a few minutes," she half laughed, half panted, and sat back in her chair.

"Okay," he said, and sat back in his.

They sat in silence until she leant forward a few minutes later. Michael endured another Transfer and Helen increased the intensity. This time he snapped his arm from her grip as it was too much. As he recovered Helen spoke.

“I think you might be right about the exercise idea. The more we do it, I think the more we can endure.”

“It’s a rush unlike anything I’ve felt or done before,” Michael said. “Maybe in a few minutes we can try again?”

“Yes, that sounds good,” Helen replied, “but you better try harder if you want to endure as much as I did,” she boasted.

He accepted the challenge gladly. This went on and on for more than an hour, and just as they were going to Transfer for the last time, Benedict walked in, not even knocking this time. Michael and Helen just had enough time to wipe the sweat from their faces, hearing the sound of the door opening. As Benedict entered the room he was startled by what he saw and nearly dropped the big pile of paper he held in his hand. There sat Helen and Benedict both looking pale and exhausted.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

Michael spoke before Helen could respond.

“Practicing our Higher Negative Transfers.”

Helen realised the mistake and Benedict repeated the word which gave away her lie.

“Our...”

He gave Helen a confused look, and with the sudden realisation his face dropped, a look of betrayal and hurt replacing the confusion. Helen was in no mood to be apologetic and the combination of her own negativity, and the Negative Transfers, had destroyed any sympathy or compassion.

“O, don’t look at me like that Benedict. Surely you understand why I couldn’t tell you, I didn’t know what would happen.”

Benedict stood dumbfounded for a few moments, but finally managed to find his voice; all the emotions he felt rising to the surface.

“Why couldn’t you trust me...when I’ve suffered so much because of you? I would never have agreed to the experimental Transfers if you hadn’t persuaded me. Do you have any idea how much I have endured! And you couldn’t even tell me the truth about what you really are?”

“Benedict stop being so dramatic,” Helen said, waving a hand as if she was hitting away a fly. “Yes, I’m a Higher Negative, but it makes little difference to anything.”

“What were you doing then?” He asked.

Helen went quiet for a moment, deciding she might as well tell him the truth now.

“With our intense Negative skills we’ve been Transferring onto each other and increasing our ability to endure suffering. Something you clearly no nothing about,” she said, letting her spite and suppressed emotions get the better of her. “All you’ve done is moan from the first Transfer you got. And then you think you have the right to tell me we have to be more radical. Who are you to tell me what to do? You’re only a Positive anyway!”

Benedict looked at her, the betrayed expression turning to shock and anger.

“Only a Positive?” he said, his voice nearly breaking with emotion. “I thought this was about restoring the balance and given everyone their place? You sound like you hate the Positives rather than a hate for the world they, or should I say, we, have let happen.”

“That’s rich coming from you, do you not remember what you were saying earlier!?”

“Yes, I remember, but that hate was for the system that has been created, not for the innocent Positives who just obeyed and didn’t see what was happening. The way you said, “Positive,” it sounds like you’ve a personal vendetta against all Positives?”

Michael had sat back in his chair the whole time, not sure what to do, letting the argument continue, but in a way he was enjoying the show as he watched Helen continue the venomous battle of words.

"I guess I do! My whole life I've had to live in the shadows because of their way. Then I find out my uniqueness and they wouldn't respect or appreciate it. Look how they treated Michael! They will respect us soon though, and I will be powerful!"

"You're deluded!" Benedict shouted. "This isn't about you!"

"It was always about me," she replied in a sinister voice.

It was too much for Benedict and he couldn't find any words. Helen watched him, and all the hate boiled to the surface. Then he found his voice once more and said the words that made her snap.

"You can't do it this way! I wanted radical, but this is too much. You can't be left in control of all the people."

"You can't stop me!" she bated and rose from her chair menacingly.

In a flash she reached him and put both her hands on the sides of his face, transferring almost all her negativity into him. Michael had seen from her eyes what she was going to do and stood, but not knowing what to do just watched.

Benedict dropped all the papers he held, each sheet falling chaotically to the floor. He buckled under the intensity and fell to his knees, but still Helen kept contact, snarling and spitting as she did. Benedict went white and every muscle convulsed violently and he would have fallen forward if Helen hadn't locked him in the kneeling position. She continued to stare at him with pure hate and anger etched itself on every part of her face. Michael decided to act and put his hand on her shoulder. In a firm but composed voice said, "That's enough."

She didn't stop.

"Helen, that's enough!" He shouted disapprovingly.

She seemed to hear that time and snarling let go of Benedict, who fell sideways to the floor in a fit of spasms. Turning sharply Helen raised her hands towards Michael. He saw it coming and stretched to his full height and broadened his shoulder. Looking her straight in the eyes, and almost growling, commanded, "Don't."

She stopped, hands mid air. Coming out of her fit of violence she lowered them slowly. Grunting in frustration she turned back to look at Benedict, only a slight suggestion of remorse evident as she stared blankly at the now limp body of Benedict.

"What did you make me do Benedict?"

She sighed heavily and then knelt down to touch him. As her hand reached him she couldn't do it. Suddenly she stood up and took a couple of steps back, and Michael had to move out of her way. Helen backed towards her chair, and without breaking eye contact with Benedict's still body she sat down slowly. Michael crouched down and tried to wake Benedict, shaking his shoulders and calling to him,

"Benedict? Can you hear me?"

There was no response.

"What did you do that for?" He asked, turning to Helen as he crouched.

Helen turned her head slightly to meet his gaze.

"You heard him didn't you? He pushed me to do it. He said I was wrong. I'm not wrong Michael, you understand don't you? What we just shared over the last hour, and what I told you must make you see why I did what I did? Benedict will never be one of us and he was threatening the change I need to make happen."

For a brief moment Michael was caught between the side of him who felt what she did was wrong, and the side that had enjoyed it. He thought for a second, and with all the negativity inside he embraced the darker thoughts.

“So how did it feel?” he asked, a corner of his mouth rising slowly.

Helen looked at him curiously and with realisation the unnerving smile returned.

“I wish I hadn’t had to do it, but it felt really good. There’s so much power in what we have. I’m not sure but I think I was able to inflict even more negatively on him because of what we were doing before he arrived. I’m pretty sure I drew on some of the pain from when you Transferred onto me. I didn’t hold back and I don’t know what it’s done to him.”

“He’s still breathing so let’s be grateful for that,” Michael said. “Do you think he’ll wake?”

“I don’t know?” Helen replied. “I don’t know what to do with him. Maybe you should give him another shake.”

Turning her head she looked at Benedict while Michael went back to him and shook his shoulder.

“Any response?” she asked.

“Nothing. Do you think he might wake up tomorrow, he might just be in a sleep state?”

“I don’t know? What happens if he does wake up? We can’t let him go back to the Council, and I don’t think he’s going to forgive me or understand why I attacked him. I think the only option we have is to keep him in my basement.”

Michael thought for a second, but no doubts tempered him.

“If that’s what you think is best,” he said, and scooped Benedict up easily.

Helen stood, walked around Michael’s chair, taking the route that circled around Michael and Benedict, but she couldn’t bring herself to look at Benedict anymore. They stepped into the hall way, Helen in front leading the way. Turning left towards the door that lead to the basement Benedict suddenly snapped into consciousness. The movement took Michael by surprise. He looked down and saw Benedict’s eyes snap open, but they didn’t focus on anything. The hollow-vacant look startled Michael even more and as Benedict moved again he dropped him to the floor. Benedict sprawled and crouched like a timid animal. Helen gasped, calling out his name. He tilted his head to look at her, trying to speak, but only an incoherent babble, mixed with spittle, came out. Stopping he suddenly screamed, his head twisting and jerking at the same time. Trying to block out the noise Michael went to grab him, but somehow he sensed Michael’s intentions and stopped screaming. With his head still twitching side to side Benedict scampered for the front door, finally rising to two feet as he did. Opening the door he ran down the path, his hands covering his eyes as he started screaming again. He suddenly tripped over his feet, but got straight back up and ran out of the garden and into the road. Helen and Michael rushed to the door to try and stop him, but it was too late. They watched him as he continued to scream, foaming at the mouth as he ran down the road in the early hours of the morning. Some of the houses on the street began to light up as people were woken by the awful sounds. Looking at the houses Helen pushed Michael, as best she could, back into the house.

“Turn off all the lights,” she ordered, and Michael turned off a switch that was to his left.

The hall was immersed in darkness and Helen ran upstairs to make sure those lights were out. Michael moved to the living room and turned off the lights; the only light left coming in through the window. With this light he tried to find a seat but stood on something that rustled. Remembering the lists Benedict had printed out he collected the papers together. Having gathered most of them Helen burst into the room and whispered urgently,

“Come with me,” but seeing what he was doing helped gather the rest and gave them to him.

“Keep those with you,” she said and beckoned him to follow her.

She turned left out the living room and opened the door to the basement. He hesitated slightly.

“Come on, we must keep you hidden,” she said, noticing his slight reluctance. “This is the best place for you while we wait to see what happens. I don’t think anyone knew he came from here. He was well down the road before anyone would have seen him. However, you must be out of sight until things settle down.”

He nodded in agreement and she lead him down the stairs, telling him it would be okay for him to get some sleep now if he wanted. Helen gave him a quick tour of the basement and he sat down on a stall that looked far too small for him.

“I’ll be back, but stay here until I do,” she said.

“I’ll be here,” he replied, not sure what else to say.

He placed the lists on the island table and Helen walked towards the stairs. Turning to take a last look she apologetically said,

“I’m going to have to turn the light out.”

He sighed and nodded acceptingly, guessing he might as well try and get some sleep, if he could. Walking to a far corner he nodded again. Helen returned it with a weak smile and turned the light off. Leaving him in the darkness she went back up the stairs and closed the door, locking it to put an extra barrier between Michael and anyone that might come snooping. She didn’t really expect the Positives to come, but it was best to be cautious until the consequences of the night were clear.

Chapter Fifteen

Helen returned to the living room and switched the light back on. Turning her chair to face the window she sat watching her neighbours as they gathered in the street. She laughed to herself as she saw their scared faces, but then the image of Benedict appeared in her mind. Lowering her head she began to think about what had happened.

Why did you push me Benedict? Why couldn't you just accept my way? I had no other choice. You became an obstacle and I had to remove you. It was necessary. I hope there's no permanent damage. If you do regain your speech I hope you learn to keep quiet. Michael and I will be even more powerful soon. I hope you've learned your lesson.

She continued to muse and forty minutes went by. A sudden knock at the door startled her and she put her thoughts aside. It was still dark outside, but the sun would be coming up soon, and as she opened the door she saw a tired, but still smiling, Council Worker.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said politely, "but did you hear the noise that has woken up the street?"

"Yes, I heard it. What was it?" She said, putting on a scared voice.

"That's why I'm here. Did you see anything?"

"No. I was woken by the terrible sound and stayed in my house. It was so frightening."

"Okay. Don't worry," he said gently. "Everything will be okay. We're just trying to find out what happened. We've found a man who made the sounds, but we don't know what happened to him. He can't speak and is very unhappy."

That's an understatement, Helen thought.

"Sorry to have disturbed you," the worker continued. "Do you want a Positive Transfer to help you?" he asked.

"No," she said a bit too sharply.

A bit taken aback the man looked at her curiously, but Helen corrected her mistake.

"Thank you," she said forcing a smile, "but that won't be necessary. I hope you find out what happened."

The man's curiosity vanished.

"Well if you need a Transfer make sure you ask your neighbours. They've all been Transferring and are feeling a lot better for it."

"I'll do that," she lied. "Have a good night," she added.

"You too. Sorry again. Goodnight."

Helen closed the door quickly and put her back to it, sighing. So Benedict had been found, but still couldn't communicate. With her back to door she realised how tired she was and decided it was time to get some rest. As she walked to the stairs she realised it would be safe to unlock the door to the basement; the Council wouldn't be disturbing her any further tonight. Plus Michael might wake up before her and need food, or to relieve himself. She silently unlocked the door and walked up the stairs to her room. Lying down on her bed she fell into dark dreams.

*

Saturday may have normally been a day off but today the Council Building was occupied by the Higher Council.

"What exactly happened last night?" The Principle Speaker asked as they sat round the table in the main hall.

Blank looks passed between most of the members and seeing no one speak up George took the lead.

“Somehow the Higher Negative escaped. If my guess is correct he has hurt Benedict, who is a Tester that reported to me. He was the one found in the early hours of the morning in Sector Twenty Three.”

“I’ve had reports, but can you explain to us all, as nicely as you can, what Benedict was like?” requested the Principle Speaker.

“Of course,” George said. “Benedict was found unable to speak and could only make unintelligible sounds. He was found this morning when we went to investigate reports of a man screaming on the streets. We found him and managed to subdue him with a Transfer and brought him back here. He is currently under the watch of a few people who Transfer when he starts to get agitated again.”

“What happened to him?” a balding man asked.

The Principle Speaker took over.

“As George said, the Higher Negative Michael has escaped and we think he has done this to Benedict through a Negative Transfer. We don’t know why but it’s the only explanation we have.”

“Do we know where Michael is?” A young woman with glasses asked.

“We don’t. However, this situation is nothing to worry about. We’ll find Michael and stop him from doing what he has done again. It’s something we must keep to ourselves for now. We don’t want people to panic. As much as I dislike lying, the truth will make the people unhappy and we must stick to the Prime Objective at all costs. Our story has been that Benedict was bitten by an animal and must have gone venturing beyond the safety of the Community. We’ll tell this to the people through the news channels, making sure they reiterate that the people should stay away from the outskirts of the Community. This will be enough to keep everyone as calm as we can, without them worrying that Michael is on the loose.”

“Can’t Benedict tell us anything of what happened?” The same woman with glasses asked.

George took over this time, having been with Benedict the most.

“No. He is quiet when Transferred on and only has a blank look on his face. If he hasn’t had one he screams and shouts and it’s terrifying and horrible. There was one word that made us more confident that it was Michael, and that was the word, ‘Negi.’ He must have been trying to say Negative, but couldn’t do it.”

A few people repeated the expression, ‘Negi,’ and shook their heads. The Principle Speaker addressed them.

“We need to Transfer as much as we can so we don’t let this difficult situation take away our happiness. Can everyone Transfer please?”

It was a rhetorical question and they obeyed the command happily. By the end of the Transfers they were all smiles and the Principle Speaker told them the Audit would continue and they would continue their work on the first day as always. He repeated the instruction to keep everything a secret and said he and a few others would try to locate Michael. Everyone left feeling as though nothing bad had happened and they went home to enjoy their time off.

George and the Principle Speaker stayed and took time to discuss the search for Michael. It would take place the next day and early on the first day, starting the search at his work and house. They said a farewell and George went to organise who would take the next shift to watch Benedict.

Helen woke and could hear footsteps downstairs. For a moment she wondered what it could be, but quickly remembered what had happened the night before: it was just Michael. With some effort she got out of bed and stretched her aching and tired muscles. Looking at the time she was mildly surprised to see it was early afternoon. Shrugging with indifference she went down stairs to get some food and to begin reading through the lists.

“You feel as tired and stiff as I do?” she said as she walked in the living room, turning her neck to loosen the aches. To her surprise she saw Michael, and Chris, eating some food; having forgotten that Chris would be showing up.

“Yeah a bit tired still,” Chris said, thinking it was directed at him. “Where’s Benedict? Michael says it’s best if you tell me?”

Helen was grateful, and Michael nodded to her with understanding.

“I’ll get you some food,” Michael said, and left the room, crossing the hall to the kitchen.

Helen got to the point and explained, as best she could, everything that happened and decided Chris could be trusted. He was a Negative after all and had kept her secret from the start. Once she finished telling the story Chris took a nearly a minute digesting everything she had told him.

“So do we know what happened to Benedict?” was his first question.

“The Council has him now,” she said. “They’ll take care of him.”

“So that’s it? Just us Negatives left now?” Chris asked.

“Yep. Do you understand that our goal is still the same? Very little has actually changed.”

There was a pause and Helen tensed, hoping Chris would make the right choice.

“Yes,” he said firmly.

Helen relaxed and a faint smile flickered across her face.

“Good,” she said. “Now we can move forward, gathering support and making sure the Council don’t find us. Once we’ve become stronger we can take the Council Building and use our Transfers if we need to. I’ll go see how Michael’s doing with the food and then we can get organised and take a look at the lists.”

As she walked into the kitchen Michael gave her a glance then spoke causally.

“How’d it go?”

“Fine,” Helen said. “He understands everything clearly enough and he’ll be an important part in recruiting others.”

“That’s good. Do you think we’ll find any more like us?”

“I don’t know,” she said honestly. “I hope so, because after last night, and what we did, we will need more people to make the Transfers even more effective. With lots of people doing it we can keep improving each other’s Transfer.”

Michael gave her a concerned and apprehensive look.

“What?” she said bluntly. “Don’t you want to improve your power? What we did last night was incredible. I can’t wait to do it again.”

Michael relaxed his face.

“I cannot deny that I want to do it again,” he said, “but where will it end?”

“Who knows?” Helen said excitedly. “That’s the incredible thing. Think how much power we might have if we keep doing it?”

The doubt left Michael and he smiled.

“Do you want to do it again tonight?” he asked.

“Definitely. But once Chris has gone,” Helen added.

“Excellent. Well your food’s ready now anyway,” Michael said, handing her a plate with a sandwich on it.

“Thanks,” she said taking it. “Let’s go to the living room and once I’ve eaten we can start looking at the lists.”

Settling in the living room Helen ate as they discussed some plans, but it wasn’t long before they realised there was a problem.

“What will we do if the Council start talking to Negatives? They must suspect something is going on?” Chris said.

There was a brief pause of contemplation and Helen spoke first.

“We need a base, somewhere where everyone can come to. I think it’s only natural that it’s my house?”

“Do you mean stay permanently?” Chris asked.

“Why not?” Helen replied. “Well, at least until the Audit finishes, and we have the Council Building.”

“I think that’s a very good idea,” Michael agreed. “The basement is big enough for people to stay in and you have two spare rooms upstairs. We must make sure we only find the people that are completely committed though. If there are any doubts they mustn’t be allowed to know what’s going on. It may reduce our numbers but we’ll be stronger with people who are willing to accept the costs and effort that will be needed.”

He looked at Helen to see if she understood.

“Yes, I think that’s very wise,” she said nodding. “Chris do you agree?”

“Yes.” He said firmly, knowing they were looking for a confident response. “Shall I move in then?” he asked.

“That sounds good to me,” Helen said. “My home is now yours. The more united we are the better chance we have of making a difference. Michael words about quality over quantity are important. When we’re out speaking to Negatives we must make sure they understand fully what we’re doing before we invite them back here to be part of our family.”

Looking at Michael she asked,

“Do you have the lists with all the other Negatives on it Michael?”

“They’re still down in the basement. I’ll go get them,” he replied.

A few moments passed and Michael was back with the pile of papers in his hands.

“Let’s start noting down potentials who we could visit,” Helen paused for a second and looked sympathetically at Michael. “I’m sorry Michael, but you can’t come with us. If anyone spotted you they might discover us. You can hold the fort here and make sure we’re working hard to find the most committed Negatives.”

“I don’t know if I’m going to like being stuck here,” he said, clenching one fist, “but the sooner we do this the sooner we’ll have what we want. Then I’ll be able to do whatever I want, when I want, and it’ll be worth the wait.”

“Good,” Helen said, glad he didn’t put up more resistance. “Now that’s settled I think we should start making a list of people we want to see. Using my house as the centre we can map out those who are closest and branch out from here to other Sectors.”

After searching her house Helen finally found an old Tram route map that had been gathering dust in one of the spare rooms. They took it to the basement and laid it out on the table, making the basement the central place for keeping all the information they gathered. A few hours passed and as evening approached Chris went to get a few things from his house. While Chris was away Helen and Michael decided to practice their endurance by Transferring on each other again. It was similar to the previous night, and they suffered a lot, but this only gave them more satisfaction. However as they came to a close Helen felt something was missing, and as she sat in her chair, breathing heavily

and rubbing her temples, she realised she wanted a victim. Being able to release her power on Benedict had given her a twisted taste for seeing its effects. Michael could withstand it so the effects were small, but doing it on someone who couldn't endure it was exhilarating. The feeling of control and complete domination was intoxicating, but there was no way of feeding her desire. Or was there?

I need a Positive, she realised, but how can I get one? Will Michael agree?

She decided to test him.

"That was a good session. It was almost as good as yesterday, but it feels like something's missing?"

Michael looked at her, his face pale and eyes dark.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know," she lied. "Like last night made me feel stronger and more powerful, but tonight didn't quite feel the same."

"The only thing that was different was what you did to Benedict," Michael said. "Do you think that's what you're missing?"

"I guess," she lied again. "Maybe being able to inflict what we have endured onto people is part of the process. Maybe we need someone who isn't used to such pain? That way we get to see the full effects of our power?"

"It would be good to experiment with someone who hasn't felt such things," Michael said darkly. "Can you imagine the reaction? Their little minds would be overwhelmed by such an experience. They would be enlightened and shown what it means to feel pain."

Michael didn't hold back. His words and body language reminded Helen of Chris' dark paintings and she guessed they all felt similar things. Yet, with the Transfers, and their growing trust, all restraint had vanished. It was exactly what Helen wanted.

"What can we do about it though?" He asked, thinking out loud as an idea came to him. "Maybe those we recruit will be like us and want to endure pain to understand it through suffering? We can Transfer on them. It can be the way we test them to see their commitment?"

Helen hadn't thought of that and was delighted with the idea.

The Negatives will be inexperienced enough for it to work, she thought. We won't need a Positive after all.

"I did something similar with Chris when I first met him," she said. "We should do this to everyone that joins us. If they endure well they'll be worthy to be with us."

"Would you let me test them?" Michael asked hesitantly. "I won't have much to do being stuck here all the time."

Helen thought about it.

"You can be the initial Tester," she said. "But I think if we hold an endurance ceremony each morning and evening, making it a part of everyday routine, then we'll all improve in strength and commitment."

"That sounds perfect," Michael said with a dark pleasure in his voice.

The conversation ended and they continued to recover, thinking about this new understanding they had. Helen was especially pleased that her questioning had brought this out of Michael. Chris returned soon after and they told him about what they were going to do and he was happy to follow, asking them for another test so he could prove himself. Helen let Michael perform the ceremonial Transfer.

Gripping Chris' wrist tightly Michael started with a low Transfer, but increased the memory of suffering and it wasn't long before Chris cried out and withdrew his arm. He didn't endure as

much as Michael and Helen had, but Michael gave him some leniency as he wasn't a Higher Negative.

"That was satisfactory," Michael concluded.

"Good," Helen replied. "Your ability to endure should increase with more Transfers. We'll do this twice a day."

Chris nodded while he breathed heavily, trying to recover.

The rest of the weekend was spent planning, picking potentials and enduring Transfers. And by the first day of the week Helen and Chris were ready to visit Negatives they had chosen.

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At the same time, and after the new lists were given out, the Council of Higher Positive met to discuss what they should do next.

"Good morning," The Principle Speaker smiled. "I hope we're all pleasant and happy this morning?"

There was a resounding, "yes," and they mirrored his smile.

"Is there any news from the search for Michael?" He continued.

"Nothing yet," George said. "We searched his house, and the forests where he worked, but we found nothing that could tell us where he is."

"It appears he has managed to escape us, but that's okay," the Principle Speaker continued. "He knows we'll not accept what he did to the guard and to Benedict. Therefore we can only hope he has left the Community for good. There's nothing we can do so let's stay positive and keep working on the Prime Objective. Once we know who all the Negatives are we can encourage people to Transfer on them and stop this from happening again. I was thinking about this over the weekend and I think we should aim to finish the Audit in three weeks. We'll have to work harder, but it's imperative we start implementing our goals to achieve the Prime Objective."

Everyone clapped at the prospect of having the Audit done that soon.

"We'll increase the amount of Testers we have," the Principle Speaker continued as the claps faded, "work out schedules, and this will improve the efficiency of the work. There's one more thing I'd like to discuss and then we can start working on having the Audit finished in three weeks. That thing is Benedict. How is he George?"

"I'm sorry to say there has been no change. He's still being calmed by Positive Transfers. He seems to have suffered such trauma that his mind has failed him."

"That is heart breaking and despicable," the Principle Speaker said shaking his head. "Have you been getting enough Transfers to cope?"

"I have, thank you," George replied.

"That's good. Let's all have a Transfer to make sure we aren't affected by this horrible news," the Principle Speaker concluded.

They exchanged Transfers and with vacant smiles began to organise the new schedules and plan how they would finish the Audit in three weeks.

Chapter Sixteen

Helen and Chris prepared what they would say and went to speak to those on the day's list, some of whom they had already visited. However, to their frustration, all but Claire rejected them, saying the plans were too extreme or required too much effort and they just wanted a quiet life.

"Claire wants to see you tomorrow," Chris said late that afternoon as he sat with Helen and Michael in the basement. It had become their new living room and some furniture had been put there already.

"That's good," she said, glad for some success but frustration and anger dominating her feelings because of her own failures that day. "You should see her first thing tomorrow. If she still proves committed you can tell her she can join us and come live with us. Tell her to come round in the evening and we can do the ceremonial Transfer as a last test of her allegiance."

With that decided they had dinner and after an hour of chatting they had a Transfer session of their own. Helen's mood made it very intense, but finally they retired for the night, hoping they would have more success the following day.

Chris' visit confirmed that Claire wanted to join them and she agreed to see them that evening for the Transfer test.

"Still no luck?" Chris asked Helen as he entered the basement, returning from a day of seeing Negatives.

The question was rhetorical as her body language gave away answer. Slumped in a chair, with her arms folded, she shook her head and sniffed.

"Me neither," he replied with similar frustration. "All they want to do is stay out of the way and hide in their bubbles of avoidance. It reminds me of the Positives."

"I know," Helen said, unfolding her arms and turning to him. "They'll not be allowed to enjoy what we have, when the change happens. They'll see what we've done when it occurs and will want to join us then. They will be our followers. Once their eyes are fully opened they'll realise we were right and support us."

"It's just a struggle to be motivated," Chris sighed.

"Have you learned nothing Chris?" Helen said forcefully. "All we stand for is a struggle. That's why we must change what has happened to the people. They've lost sight of the fact struggling is how we grow and learn. Once we're in charge we'll teach them how to grow through pain."

Her words made Chris stop and reflect, and it sunk in fully that the original goal had changed. They were no longer there to help the Positives be happier through the original experiment and Transfers. In the chaos, and with Helen's help, that mission had changed. The new plan was to uproot the current system and turn it on its head; not to balance it. This realisation was alluring, but pricked Chris conscious a little, it didn't last though. They were committed and he embraced the thoughts of power and control. Helen let him reflect for a moment, but then brought the conversation back to his original point.

"The struggle will be worth it, the struggle is always worth it. It's who we are. No more will we be told we should change. We can liberate others like us and this will be our motivation."

Chris nodded with understanding and acceptance.

The evening continued and they went over lists and ate dinner. Eventually, the knock at the door came. It was time to test Claire and embrace her as one of their own. Helen opened the door and went to welcome her, but paused for a second, taken aback by Claire's appearance. She looked far too pleasant. Her clothing was fashionable, but it was her face that was most striking. Bright blue

eyes beamed through glasses, rosy cheeks gave her a look of health, and her straight long sun-blond hair almost glowed.

“Claire?” Helen inquired.

“Yes,” Claire nodded, and a devious smile crept on her face.

It gave Helen a sense of Claire’s nature and she relaxed a little.

“I’m glad to be here,” Claire continued as the smile faded a little.

After the momentary hesitation Helen introduced herself.

“As I’m sure you’ve guessed I’m Helen,” and she stood back from the door.

Claire entered and Helen closed the door. Walking beside her Helen gestured to the door at the end of the hall.

“We meet in the basement as it gives us more privacy.”

Claire nodded and followed Helen through the corridor and down into the basement, observant eyes taking in the new surroundings. As they emerged Helen stepped aside to let Claire see the room. Chris stood from his seat and Michael looked at them from a stall he sat on by the island table. Seeing Chris first Claire gave a small smile and nod of greeting, which he returned, and Helen introduced her to Michael.

“It’s good to meet you Claire,” Michael said. “I hope you’re ready for the Transfer.”

Claire repeated the devious smile that was laced with confidence.

“Yes. I’m ready,” she replied simply.

She isn’t much of a talker, Helen thought, but she does appear to have a confidence about her that shows she’s committed.

“Good,” Michael replied, and he gave Helen a questioning look. Helen nodded and he continued, looking at Claire again. “Chris has said you want to join us. Do you understand that we are going to change the current system by whatever means necessary, so the Positives don’t change us.”

He stopped and gave Claire an intense look. She nodded, smiling a little with excitement.

“Do you fully commit yourself and understand that once you agree to this there’s no going back? You will be one of us and expected to Transfer negatively and receive Negative Transfers. It is only through the use of our Negative Transfers that we understand suffering makes us strong. Are you prepared to join us and be a paramount part of the new world we will create?”

The mood was tense as Michael finished and it had the effect it was meant to: Claire was in awe and felt important.

“I accept my part in this,” she replied, “and want to help build the new world you have been inspired to start creating.”

Helen spoke, wanting her say.

“We accept you Claire, but there’s one thing left you must do. You must have a test of endurance from a Higher Negative,” she put her hand on Claire’s back and motioned to Michael.

As Claire stood in front of Michael he took her arm almost aggressively. She looked up at him submissively and a strange ecstasy laced her face. The look of ecstasy quickly changed once the Transfer started, twisting into creases as she resisted the pain, but her eyes still held glimpses of pleasure. She endured and stared into Michael’s eyes, the corners of her mouth twitching into a faint smile. Looking down Michael returned the smile and increased the pain, watching excitedly as she cast her eyes to the floor; the pain taking its toll. He increased the negativity once more and she closed her eyes, tucking her head into her chest, and trying to resist withdrawing her arm from his grip. Finally, she let out a small cry of pain and yanked her arm out of Michael’s hand. She bent

double with her arms over her chest, breathing short sharp breaths. When she recovered and stood straight she looked at Michael and then to Helen expectantly.

Michael's smile had grown.

"You've suffered a lot for your first time. You'll be an asset to the cause Claire," he said.

The devious smile crept back on Claire's face and the tension in the room seemed to evaporate with the announcement of her impressive endurance. Chris moved towards Claire and gave his approval, while Helen walked beside Michael and spoke.

"Now that you've proven yourself we'll begin our first night of endurance with four members."

An hour of Negative Transfers ensued and when they took time to recover they chatted to Claire and got to know her better. Helen and Michael performed the majority of the Transfers, but Chris and Claire did Transfer on one another when Michael and Helen were Transferring to each other. Once Helen declared it was time to stop they sat in silence on chairs, or on the floor, taking time to recover fully. Helen eventually broke the silence,

"This is your home now Claire. We have to leave behind the world we once knew and be united and draw strength from each other. The best way to do this is to live here and this is what's expected of you."

Chris had already told Claire, and she was happy to belong to something. She had never felt close to anyone and hadn't spoken to her family for a long time.

"I'm honoured to be a part of what you're doing," she replied. "I accept your generous offer to let me live in your house."

"You may get any belongings you need tomorrow, but that's the last time you'll go there until we've accomplished our mission."

Claire nodded her understanding, and Helen continued.

"Good, we should rest now. Tomorrow we'll continue trying to find more like Claire and if we do we'll be strengthened greatly."

The next day Claire left early to get her belongings, leaving her old house behind her. When this was done Helen took her out to do some recruiting and Chris went out to see those he had on his list. It wasn't until the fourth day of the week they found someone who was interested enough to be invited to the house, and after the ceremonial initiation another Negative was inducted into the conspiracy. However, by the fifth day no others showed an interest and Helen took that afternoon to think about how they could improve their success. She realised the only way another Higher Negative was going to be found was to sneak into the Council Building again. The list they had only gave them Negatives, and this hadn't been as successful as she had hoped. Her anger and frustration was noted at the Transfer that evening and afterwards Michael had a chat with her.

"Your desire to endure and inflict is impressive, but I think sometimes you push too much."

Helen snapped her head to look at him, her frustration and anger still very much inflamed.

"This is important. If we hold back we won't improve the way we can. If I go gently then they won't improve. I push because that's how we become strong. Our lack of numbers means we have to push ourselves to compensate."

"So that's why you're especially angry," he said. "I understand your anger."

"We all understand it Michael. That's the point. We understand each other. However, the only way I can rest is if I go back to the Council Building. I need to get the latest list that would have been added to the computers at the beginning of the week. If we are ever going to find those like you and I then I must do this. The Council will discover them first and do what they did to you. I must make sure that does not happen. I'm going there tonight and will be able to print out the latest list,

and we can add this to our pile. After that I can check the lab again and see if they've found another Higher Negatives."

"I can go with you," Michael said.

"No Michael," she said sharply. "It's best if I go alone. Trust me."

It was difficult for Michael to accept, he was sick of being stuck inside not able to act, but he could see her resolve to do this alone. There was no point in arguing, no matter how much he wanted to.

"Fine," he said, "but get back as quickly as you can."

She nodded and put a hand on the table to balance herself, still flushed from the Transfers, but hoping the walk and fresh air would do her some good. Once she explained to Chris and Claire what she had to do she left the house under the cover of night. Walking down the garden she looked around at the wilting, unkempt flowers and felt guilty for neglecting them. She made a mental note to restore the garden to its former beauty so people wouldn't notice the contrast, deciding to make it even brighter and more beautiful than before.

It will be good cover to make sure people don't suspect the truth of what's going on in the house, she thought.

After the hour walk she came to the Council Building and saw some lights on and it puzzled her. It was too late for people to be working and she entered the building cautiously, creeping to the Computer Room and copying what Benedict had done to make them work. She printed off the lists from the previous week, but coming across new data about the schedules being intensified she growled and banged the table hard.

The Council are increasing the pace of the Audit and want it finished in another two weeks, she thought angrily. *We can't keep up with that pace! It's impossible to talk to all the Negatives in this time.*

A few moments of deep breathing passed as she tried to accept she had no control over this. Thinking about the end goal, and how she would have complete control soon, helped her focus. With fists and jaw still clenched she moved with purpose to Print Room and collected the lists. Turning out the lights in the Computer Room she made her way through the dark corridors to the lab, hoping to find another Higher Negative. As she came to the Main Entrance she heard voices and realised the lights must have been on because they had found another Higher Negative. Slowly she walked back up the corridor until she was out of sight, and tried to listen. She couldn't make out what was being said and the voices faded. Realising whoever was there had left she crept as silently as she could towards the laboratory. Nearly there she crept along the same corridor that would turn left and lead to the entrance of the lab. Once at the last bit of wall she peered round slowly and once again there was a guard, but this time he was awake and obviously more cautious than the previous one had been.

Somehow I have to sneak up on him and use my Transfer, but he'll see me coming. I have to create a diversion of some kind to get him close enough to Transfer.

Thinking of an idea she put down the papers and took off her shoe, throwing it passed the corridor to her left. The noise echoed loudly in the stillness. Quietly she took off the other shoe and stood flat against the back of the wall, watching with her head sideways. She waited, listening as the guard called out and walked towards the T-junction. As the steps came closer she became more nervous and raised her hands, ready to pounce with her Negative Transfer no matter what happened. The guard was a few steps away now and stopped, calling out once more. A few moments passed in silence and Helen held her breath. The guard's figure suddenly appeared and he looked down the corridor away from her. She let out her breath slowly and silently, and watched. Taking a last short

breath she dashed at him and put her hands around his neck. The Transfer was unrestrained and all the pain and suffering she had built up swept over his body and mind. There was no cry of pain and he crumbled to the floor in a fit of spasms. Her hands hovered in the air where he had been. Once the surprise of his instant collapse faded she smiled and let out a little laugh. This was what it meant to have control and power, and she couldn't believe she had spent all her long years without knowing she had this power. Giving the guard a smirking glance she casually walked around him as he writhed, picked up her shoe, and went back for the other and put them on. She walked down the corridor and tried the lab door. Once again it was locked and she sniffed with annoyance at letting her confidence get the better of her. Walking back to the guard she found the keys and pulled them out of his pocket. She returned to lab door and as she opened it she saw a woman in her mid twenties.

"Who are you?" The woman exclaimed with surprise.

"My name is Helen. We should hurry. I'm here to free you."

"Good," the woman exclaimed, seeming to understand the need to leave and not ask questions.

"Just follow me and I'll explain everything when I can," Helen said.

The woman nodded. Helen led the way and this time left the guard where he was. The woman paused as she saw the guard, but didn't ask Helen any questions. They crept through the building and eventually reached the Main Entrance. The lights had been turned off and Helen realised whoever had left must have come back and switched them off, going home for the night.

Making sure it was clear Helen led the way out the building. She took a path which wasn't a direct route, but took them away from the open view amongst streets and houses, and she would cut back when they were close to her house. After a few minutes of brisk walking Helen calmed a little and decided to talk. The Higher Negative, Hannah, had stayed quiet, but Helen knew she would want answers. It was a similar conversation to the one she had with Michael, and once Helen had finished telling the story Hannah seemed only placidly interested. Helen struggled to tell if the interest was genuine or not. Her tone and body language was so indifferent it made her hard to read, but she did say she was interested and Helen had to accept it. She was more like what Helen had come to expect from Negatives, but the contrast with Claire was striking. Her features, hair, eyes and clothing were plain, and her personality seemed to match.

I hope she proves more committed or stronger than Claire, Helen thought. We can't have a Negative out doing a Higher Negative. I'll have to wait and see, and keep a close eye on this one.

Helen continued to talk, not getting much response back, and told her more about the others who had joined and about the Transfers; explaining that she had used it to neutralise the guard. After the long walk they arrived home and went straight to the basement.

Chapter Seventeen

Claire woke as Helen and the new comer entered the basement.

“Is that you Helen?”

“Yes, and another Higher Negative,” she said smugly as they appeared from the stairs.

“What happened?” Claire asked once she had been introduced to the Hannah.

“I noticed there were people in the building,” Helen answered, “but I still went to get the list and tried not to get caught. I guessed people were there because they found another Higher Negative. I was right, and freed Hannah.”

Helen tilted her head in Hannah’s direction: who stood quietly beside her.

“Will she be tested tonight?” Claire asked.

“Best waiting until tomorrow. Michael can do it and we’ll have one more bonded to our family. You should both get some sleep,” Helen said looking from Claire to Hannah. “Tomorrow we’ll introduce you to the others and have our morning endurance and strengthening session.” Helen pointed to some blankets and a mattress that had been put in the basement, “You can sleep there, Hannah. I’ll see you both in the morning,” and she left.

Nothing more was said and Claire walked to the mattress, picked up a blanket and got comfortable in a chair. Hannah followed her to the mattress and lying down covered herself with the other blanket.

*

The Council Building was almost entirely empty as the sun started to rise on the first day of the weekend.

“So what happened, Frederick?” George asked the guard.

“I don’t know?” he said sobbing as he sat on a chair in George’s office.

“It’s okay,” George said smiling sympathetically. “Let me give you a Transfer.

“Th... thanks,” Frederick said sniffing.

George gave him a Transfer and immediately the man looked and felt more composed.

“Tell me what you remember?” George asked kindly.

“Well, you had only been gone about thirty minutes when I heard a noise and went to investigate. There was nothing there, and as I was about turn to go back to my seat I felt a pain like nothing I’ve ever felt before. The next thing I remember is waking up in the morning, not long before the next shift was due. My body ached all over and I had a throbbing pain in my head. I’m going to need a lot of Transfers before I recover. Thank you for your Transfer.”

“I’m glad to help,” George said smiling from the seat behind his desk.

“When I went to check on the Higher Negative she was gone and the keys were left in the door. I contacted, Fiona, my boss, and she came here to see me. Once I was calm enough I explained what happened and she contacted the rest of the Council. After that you came to see me, which I’m grateful for.”

“I’m glad to help,” George said again. “I have an interest in this because one of my Testers was the first to suffer at Michael’s hands, but we’re still unsure how he escaped. Fortunately you’re okay. Benedict’s in a much worse state. He responds very little to anything and when he does he’s incomprehensible. I wish we could help him.”

“I’m grateful that I’m not that way. The poor man. Do you know what will happen now?”

"I'm not sure, but I have a meeting with the Council to discuss it. I would ask you keep this a secret so as not to spread unnecessary fear amongst the people. Make sure you get lots of Transfers and you'll feel much better."

"I'll say nothing. And thank you again, can have another Transfer before I go?"

"Of course," George smiled and leaning across the desk took the man's arm and Transferred.

The Council were waiting in the Meeting Hall and the morning light gave the room a hazed look. As George entered he gave his apologies.

"Is Frederick okay?" One of the Higher Positives asked as George sat at the table.

"He'll be okay. Very shaken up but I gave him a couple of Transfers which helped."

"Thanks George," The Principle Speaker said. "This has taken us all by surprise and we have a lot of questions that are difficult to answer. These questions need answering and I propose that the next Higher Negative be guarded at all times by five people."

There was a wave of nods but one of them asked,

"Is it enough? This is the second time someone has suffered and we need to stop it from happening again?"

There were hushed whispers, as it was so unusual to have someone speak out without asking politely first, but they realised he was right.

"There's no need to worry," the Principle Speaker said smiling as much as he could. "We will put this right when we have the chance. Having five guards will allow us to know what's happening and then we can solve the problem when we know. Until then we should Transfer to make sure our fears and doubts are put aside. This is a very unfortunate experience we are going through, but it's important that we move passed it and continue bettering our happiness and the Prime Objective."

Everyone smiled with the reassuring words, except the man who had spoken out.

"At least let us have a precautionary measure?" He said, speaking out again. "They're hurting people and we have to be able to stop them. I don't like the idea of using force, but we really have to think about what they've done and we need to be able to stop them. The Prime Objective is so important and we don't even know what's happening, or where these Higher Negatives are going? We need to make sure the Prime Objective and the people are safe."

"Okay, William," the Principle Speaker said. "What do you propose?"

"We need something to immobilise Michael and the other Higher Negative he has broken free. We don't want to permanently hurt them but they must be stopped. The Inventing Sector is bound to know what can do this. If I have the Council's backing I would like to go to them, and at least ask. We can use the same cover story that it's to stop the animal that bit Benedict."

A lot of the Council gave him disagreeing looks; the thought of hurting others repelling them. No one spoke out though. Looking around and seeing this George took the lead.

"May I say something, Principle Speaker?"

The Principle Speaker nodded and waved his hand invitingly.

"It's my belief that this is the right path. It'll allow us to protect the Prime Objective from these Higher Negatives. We've all seen Benedict and we cannot let that happen to anyone else. We hoped it would go away but it hasn't yet. This'll give us some protection. The idea may not be liked but it's the right one and has my backing."

It was enough to dispel the thoughts of those who had disagreed. The Prime Objective was far more important and the Principle Speaker saw that they were ready to vote.

"All in favour of seeking a way to stop the Higher Negatives with force please show by the usual sign."

They all rose from their seats.

“Thank you,” the Principle Speaker said as he looked around the table. “You may take your seats.” Once they were all seated he continued. “The voting is unanimous. The Council gives William permission to seek the advice of the workers of the Inventing Sector. Let’s make sure it does as little damage to the Negatives as possible. We cannot become like them. It’s unfortunate that we might have to cause them pain, but it’s the only way. Please report back to us on the first day of the week,” he said looking at William, and William nodded in return.

Looking around the other members the Principle Speaker continued.

“Once again we must continue life as we always have. The Audit is only two weeks away from being finished, and I’m sure we’ll be able to find another Higher Negative and put to rest our concerns and worries. Then we can focus once more on reaching out to the Negi’s...” The change of word went unnoticed and had already been used a few times since Benedict had said it. “...and telling people it will be their purpose to Transfer positively to Negi’s. The Audit is our greatest achievement to advance the Prime Objective and let’s focus on that. Once the results are in we can tell the people and begin the next phase of improving happiness in our Community.

Before we leave let’s Transfer and move passed these melancholy feelings. We will continue our work on Monday and at the end of the day we’ll meet to hear what the inventors have come up with.”

He turned to the person next to him and offered his hand, giving the woman a Transfer. A chain reaction of Transfers took place and with smiles and fond farewells they dispersed.

*

It was a docile afternoon for Michael as he sat in the basement attempting to read a book. He was finding it hard, he wasn’t a good reader, and with the overly Positive drivel he was loathing it more and more. The morning had been interesting as Hannah had endured much more of the Transfer than he had expected and he spent some time talking to her. Eventually, the conversation had slowed and with her quietness it faded off so he found something to read. He longed for Helen and the Negatives to return so they could chat. They were out trying to find more people and as it was the weekend they could go to people’s houses during the day, instead of their work.

Giving up Michael casually discarded the book, half throwing it to the floor. Hannah glanced over to him and then went back to looking at the map, and continued adding the locations of Negatives from the latest list. Michael watched her for a few moments, wanting to ask for a Transfer of endurance because the rush was becoming addictive, but he refrained and would wait until the evening. He closed his eyes and began to think about the Transfers and began to have similar thoughts to Helen.

They’re not the same as they were. It used to be so much more satisfying. Transferring onto the negatives is fine but they’re starting to endure it. I need someone completely fresh. I want to see the terror as the completely new feelings take them: I need a Positive. It’s the only way to truly see how powerful I am. I want to study every part of them as they experience something that overwhelming and new. Should I ask Helen if I can find a Positive and enjoy my power?

He debated this for a while and realised Helen would understand and hoped she would accept this idea. He decided to propose it to her that evening. If he was going to convince her he needed good reasoning, and justification, so created some.

It’s what we deserve. It will do more to teach the Council that taking Higher Negatives isn’t acceptable. Having a Positive to practice on will help us have more experience in Transferring to Positives.

Michael felt it was good justification and it wasn't long before Chris returned, followed soon after by the others.

"Next week. We will do this next week," Helen said once Michael had told them his thoughts and ideas.

There had been no debate. The more Michael had talked the more Helen had known this was what she had wanted him to do, and her patience had paid off. The others were a bit taken aback by it, but with Helen's encouragement they were sucked into the new idea. Thoughts of revenge and power enthralled them all and it was enough to disregard any doubts.

"Where and how will we take one?" Chris asked excitedly as they sat in the basement.

"We can plan it over the next few days," Helen said. "We should all think about it and I'll pick the idea that's the best at getting a Positive, but also the best at keeping us hidden. The Council will hear about it and let's hope their blindness makes them think it was an animal that took the Positive."

They all laughed at her reference to what they had seen on the news about Benedict, and the lie the Council had used to explain his behaviour. When the laughs calmed Helen began running through the days work.

"I had no success today and with the Council increasing the test quantity we may not have the numbers we hoped for. Whatever happens we have to make do. Claire I think on the first day of the week you should go recruiting by yourself. This'll increase the chance of finding those who'll be committed to the change."

Claire smiled and nodded her gratitude for the trust.

"Continue thinking on what we've discussed," Helen continued, "and thank you Michael for your boldness and willingness to think of new ways to achieve what we want. Let's get some food and then we'll conduct the endurance Transfers, gaining strength from each other."

The rest of the night was filled with a new energy that pulsed within them. Thoughts of having a fresh victim to Transfer on excited them and ideas of how to capture a Positive circled their minds. They couldn't help but envision the Positive as they Transferred onto them, and thought about how they would feel as they had complete power over them and carried out this act of dominance. It gave them power to push their own pain levels and endure more Transfers that night.

Afterwards, as they collapsed into chairs and wiped sweat from their faces, they discussed how much they had improved in such a short period of time. Helen especially relished in this improvement and knew that her family were doing very well and she was proud of them. She knew the next week was going to be interesting, and once they had recovered she discussed some of her thoughts about the abduction.

"The basement is the best place for us to keep our guest," she smirked. "The walk-in freezer at the back would be ideal to keep them out of our way. It hasn't been used in a while and if we make restraints and attach them to the walls, this will keep the Positive from escaping, not that they could, but it'll make it easier."

They all smiled and imaged their 'guest' being tied up and helpless.

"Michael, could you work on these restraints and I'll get any materials you need," Helen said.

"Sounds good to me. It'll give me something to do," he replied.

"Excellent. We can discuss our plans tomorrow and I think we'll have a day to rest. I'm going to sort my garden as it looks a mess. Then on the first day of the week we can continue our search for Negatives with more vigour as we'll be rested."

With that they settled down to rest for the night and continued to think dark thoughts of pain and controlling the Positives.

*

The sun rose and shone brightly in the clear blue sky of Monday morning. The Council Building glowed as the sunlight reflected off the glass and inside the Higher Positives gave out the assignments to the Testers. Everyone was so happy that they were being more productive and contributing so much to the Prime Objective. The Testers went about their work and the Higher Council went to their offices to file reports and continue making sure their original areas of responsibility, such as monitoring the various sectors, were still productive. An hour before the end of the working day the Council met as planned and received an update.

“We all know why we’re here so welcome and thank you for your incredible efforts. Let’s begin the meeting,” and the Principle Speaker gestured to William.

He stood and addressed them.

“I’m thankful for the opportunity I have to speak and for the happiness being a Positive brings. I’ve spoken to the inventors and they’ve drawn up plans for a device that can be held in the hand. It fires two wires and they pierce the skin, but not too deeply, and an electrical current is passed through the wires from the device. This stuns the person so they’re momentarily incapacitated. I’ve been assured there’ll be no lasting pain.”

The Council had squirmed and given looks of disapproval at the thought of such a device.

“I know how you feel,” William continued. “However, this is the best option we have to stop Michael from freeing any Higher Negatives before we can subdue them and stop them from realising what they can do. The Higher Negatives are too much of a threat. Bringing them here for a lot of Transfers is the best way to make sure they don’t get any ideas like Michael has. These Stunners are our best chance to stop any more Higher Negatives escaping.”

He sat down and the Principle Speaker rose.

“This is uncomfortable for us all and goes against our desire to stay away from such bad things, but it’s only for a short time. Once we’ve completed the Audit and stopped Michael we can destroy these Stunners. So despite our reluctance I propose they be built for our safety and to protect the Prime Objective. All those in favour?”

They all stood.

“Voting is unanimous and the production of the Stunners will commence. If you could organise that tomorrow we would be very grateful,” he said looking at William.

“I shall do it at the first opportunity,” William replied.

“Fantastic,” the Principle Speaker exclaimed enthusiastically. “What a productive meeting we have had! Let’s all Transfer to celebrate!”

*

The success of the day had put Helen in a slightly better mood than usual. She had convinced a Negative to join them and so had Chris. Claire’s first day by herself hadn’t brought any success but with two found no one minded. Helen sat back in her chair feeling very smug and watched as Michael repeated the initiation speech. It was satisfying to know that her work was paying off and she watched closely as Michael performed the test. The second Negative lasted longer and it seemed he was trying to endure more so he could beat the first. This pleased Helen and made her excited for

the endurance session. After it she would continue their discussion on what they would do about taking a Positive to really see the effects of their Transfers. The Transfer hour passed with the new Negatives taking a lot of breaks to recover, which was normal as they hadn't built up a will to endure it yet. It was a skill that they had to learn and Helen knew it well, but always let them learn it for themselves. Helen often repeated it to herself before a session started so she was in the right frame of mind.

Resisting only makes the pain worse. If I try to resist my body tenses too much and my mind shuts down. Pain needs to be absorbed and become a part of me. My first focus must be to breathe. It's the biggest battle. If I try to fight, I forget to breathe. All I think and feel is that pain is an enemy and my brain and body reject it. However, if I can maintain my breathing I can focus and not let this happen. Despite being in agony I must allow my body to cope with what is happening. Breathing allows the muscles to relax and not constrict, which further keeps my body functioning and not shut down. With this done I can explore the pain and treat it as something that can be controlled, endured and even enjoyed. Eventually, the pain becomes like a constant pin prick in the mind that I can keep in a box and it becomes part of me. Once this was mastered more pain could be endured.

This was the secret and each Negative learned it sooner or later as they practiced. Helen enjoyed watching them, knowing when the enlightenment came. Once it did their ability to endure increased at a faster pace, but only Michael was close to Helen's ability to cope, but this was starting to stagnate. Recently she noticed that her and Michael's ability to endure was taken smaller and smaller advancements, almost like they had reached a maximum, and the level of pain they could draw on wasn't increasing either. It appeared to be a limiting cycle: one could not improve without the other. It wasn't concerning her too much, but she wondered if at some point they wouldn't be able to improve anymore.

The endurance session finally ended and they all sat in various places in the basement recovering. Towels were used to wipe away sweat and lots of water was drunk to replace what was lost. Once everyone settled Helen took her opportunity to speak.

"The Transfers we've experienced are what makes us strong." The statement was for the new comers and the others paid less attention, knowing what she was going to say. "We'll only be able to count ourselves fully prepared when we've proven ourselves through enduring even more pain. We will be ready soon, but our path is still laid before us and we must work hard. Our latest goal to take a Positive will take place this week."

They all smiled slyly at the repeated thoughts of Transferring to such an untainted specimen.

"Has anyone thought of a way we can take this person with the least amount of hassle and risk to our identities being discovered?"

Claire spoke up first.

"We can pick a random Positives house in a far away Sector. We can print out the Positives list to find one who lives alone, and if we use one of the Council Vans at night time we'll be hidden well."

"That isn't going to work," Helen said bluntly. "The Council Building is somewhere the Higher Positives know we've been, and unless we have to, going there is too risky. Anyone else?"

Chris spoke up with a devious smile spreading across his face.

"Do you remember the receptionist from my work, Helen?"

"I do," she replied, listening curiously.

"Well, she's a good candidate. I never much liked her and she's even more misguided than most of the Positives. That bright pink bow in her hair, and her love for 'cuddly' animals was weird.

She lives alone and I could easily persuade her to come here with a simple lie, such as to show her your 'pretty' garden. You could invite us in for drinks and then she would be ours."

Helen smiled a crooked smile and loved the plan.

"Excellent Chris. This will be the plan. No doubt she'll ask questions like why you quit your job, but just make up lies. As long as you get her here we'll be able to have our new guest stay with us for our enjoyment and her education."

And just like that the plan was settled and they decided the third day of the week would be the best time to take the Receptionist. This was so Helen had time to tidy and dress the garden up in a mask of pomp and over exaggerated beauty. Once everything had been finalised they began to feel the lateness of the hour and each person found a place to sit or lay in solitude. Helen said she would see them all in the morning and left with Michael, speaking to him about restraints and he said he would have them ready by the third day.

Chapter Eighteen

The following day Helen worked on the garden and Claire returned with a Negative who wanted to join them. On their return they realised the basement was nearly full so Helen decided to change the sleeping arrangements. Claire and Hannah were given one of the upstairs rooms and Michael and Chris the other. The basement would have more space at night time and during the day the Higher Negatives would still live in it, waiting for the time they didn't have to hide. In the morning's and evening's it would be very crowded but they had to make do, knowing that it would all change soon.

That night they tried to sleep, but everyone was eager to test their Transfers on the Positive. Helen struggled long into the early hours with the anticipation, reminiscing about the power she had felt with Benedict and the guards. Eventually the house was still and when they woke the following day they knew it was going to be a day of pleasure. Helen continued to work on the garden and left the recruiting to Chris and Claire. They had taken the other Negatives to train them, preparing them to go out by themselves. Chris finished early and sent the two Negatives that were with him to the last few people on the day's list. Leaving them he made his way across the Sectors to see the Receptionist.

'Ding-dong, ding-dong,' went the door bell of her house and Chris waited with a twisted child-like anticipation. The door opened, swinging inward, and Chris forced a smile that he hoped looked genuine.

"Chris?" She exclaimed. "How are you? I wasn't expecting to see you again. After you quit I guessed you moved on to another job that you were happier with."

"You might say I have," he smirked. "How are you, Claire?"

"I'm very happy, thanks for asking. Work was wonderful today and you know how I like to see what everyone has painted when the day is over. The scenery for a new play is looking exquisite. You should have seen it Chris, so many colours in a sunset backdrop, I wish I could paint such beautiful things."

"We all do what we can to achieve happiness," Chris said, "and some get it by watching and some get it by acting." It was hard keeping up the charade, but would be worth it he hoped. "And that's why I'm here," he continued. "I hadn't forgotten your love for beautiful things. Just the other day I saw the most splendid garden you could ever imagine. I've come to see you because I thought you might like to see it?"

"Was it really the prettiest you have ever seen?" she said bouncing up and down on the front of her feet with excitement.

"Without question," he replied confidently.

"Well, how could I resist that?" she exclaimed clapping once in glee. "Let me just get my shoes."

Chris waited smugly and braced himself for the inevitable pointless chit chat that would occur while they were on the Tram to Sector Twenty Three.

It hadn't been as bad as he had expected, blocking out most of what she said with thoughts of what was to come. As the Tram slowed he got up from his seat and she followed.

"Oh how splendid!" She exclaimed once they made the brief walk to Helen's garden. She half ran to it with excitement, wanting to see the colours and beautiful flowers as quickly as she could. Chris continued to walk at the same pace and by the time he stood at the garden she had walked back and forward along the fence admiring it.

"It's better than you described," she said smiling joyfully at Chris.

"I thought you might like it," he said with a tone of wicked satisfaction that she didn't notice.

The door to the house opened and Helen played her part.

“Hello there,” she said walking up the garden path. “Do you like my garden?”

“Oh yes indeed,” Claire said. “It’s magnificent.”

“That’s kind of you to say so young lady,” Helen said once she got to the fence, and close to Chris and their prey.

“This must have taken a lot of careful and loving work?”

“It certainly did, but to have such praise, and people enjoy it the way you have, makes it all worthwhile,” Helen replied, and took the opportunity to set the trap. “I’ve even prettier ones in the house if you would like to see them? Why don’t you come in for a drink and I can show them to you?”

Claire looked at Chris eagerly and he nodded that he would be happy to do it. She smiled with delight, and so did Helen and Chris. Helen began talking about her favourite plants and Chris walked behind them as they made their way down the path and in to the house.

“They’re right this way,” Helen said pointing down her hallway to the door at the end of the corridor.

“I can’t wait to see them. What kind of flowers are they?”

“The prettiest you’ll ever see. I can’t wait to show you?” Helen said sinisterly and Chris gave a little smirk as he continued to follow behind.

Helen opened the door. There was enough space for two people to walk side by side and Helen took a step forward, putting her hand gently on Claire’s back to encourage her down. Chris still followed behind. She hesitated slightly, noticing the stale air and how glum and dark it felt. She started to feel something she had never felt before, some sense of foreboding, but the feeling was new and she didn’t understand it, so smiled at Helen and continued to walk step by step down the stairs. About half way down the stairs Chris took the opportunity to pounce. Raising his right hand he moved close behind Claire and put his arm over her, grabbing her neck like he was trying to choke her. She went to scream from the surprise, but as his fingers touched her neck his Transfer made her scream even louder. As she felt the surge of pain she closed her eyes and all her muscles locked as she tried to understand the excruciating pain. It was too much and her mind shut down. Chris knew she belonged to them now and took delight in it, and for good measure pushed her down the stairs.

Helen saw it coming and stepped to the side so she was flat against the wall, and watched as Claire fell forward going from rigid to limp as Chris removed his hand. They both watched as she fell down the stairs rolling helplessly. Once she hit the level floor she stopped and Chris let out a little laugh. Walking down the stairs with Helen by his side they reached the still figure, noticing the others were standing and watching too. After a few seconds she began to stir and Michael did his part: coming across the basement in a few strides, picking her up in his arms, and taking her to the unused walk-in freezer. He chained her so she was slumped against the wall and the others came to watch while she regained some sense of herself. They saw the bruises and smirked at what Chris had done.

Finally, she slowly opened her eyes and tears began to fall as she looked up at Michael. Wincing with pain she slowly moved her gaze and saw Helen standing close by with the others behind her, peering in from the doorway. She went to speak but no words came, only a small whimper of disbelief and fear left her lips. Not knowing what to do, or where to look, she bowed her head and tears dropped to the floor. Seeing this submission Helen spoke.

“Welcome,” she began. “This is your new home. We have selected you for a great honour. You are going to be part of something that will change the Community for the better. You get to be the first person to truly experience the awakening.”

Claire looked up again, having had no idea what Helen was talking about, and looked at Chris with tears stained cheeks and questioning eyes. Chris just smiled back deviously and Helen continued, answering the questioning look.

“All you need to know is the life you had is gone. You’ve been living a lie and we’re here to show you the truth. Awakening you to a sense of suffering that will free you from the blindness the system has given you. I hope you’re ready because you’re about to understand what I’m saying a whole lot better. Chris I think you should go first.”

Chris’ eyes lit up and he thanked Helen for the opportunity as he stepped forward. He towered over the slumped figure and stretched his hand down towards her. Crouching, he came level with her and his hand moved slowly towards her arm. She kept eye contact, looking at him with the same fearful and questioning look. Suddenly he grabbed her arm and she recoiled, rattling the chains and banging herself against the wall. Chris held on tight and Transferred. As before she screamed in agony and closed her eyes, but it was less of a shock and she stayed conscious, struggling against the chains. Finally, Chris let go and she tried to withdraw like a beaten animal. Having nowhere to go she sobbed and cradled her head in her hands. Chris didn’t say anything. He only smiled as he stepped back and nodded to Helen and the others, showing them he was deeply satisfied.

Helen debated what to do next and everyone waited with silent anticipation.

I could go next? I am so powerful that I could put this woman into a fit like the guard. Or could I do more? We’ve improved since then. The others will want a turn though, but I want to show my power and feel the pleasure...

It was too tempting and in a flash she grabbed the woman’s arm, Transferring more negativity onto her than she had the guard. Claire began to spasm in the same way. She fell forward, but the chains were too short to let her fall to the floor so she was stuck shaking violently as she knelt. After a few more moments Helen let go, satisfied with what she had seen. She felt she could have Transferred for longer, but it was sufficient for now, and this way Claire would wake and the others could play with her how they wished.

“She’ll be out for awhile,” Helen said confidently as she stood to face the others, making sure they realised the extent of her power and authority. “Once she wakes she’s all yours. Michael you will be next to enjoy the unique pleasure that comes from playing with this lamb. Chris you did well,” she said giving him a glance of recognition.

Clearing her throat she held her head high, expression flat and walked out of the old freezer. The Negatives parted for her. She went to the table and sat, looking at some lists with her back to the others a wide smile spread across her face.

*

“Another one?” the Principle Speaker asked at a Council meeting earlier that same day.

“Yes, we’ve found another,” Claudia replied. “The Tester came to me yesterday saying they suspected one of the people on their list was a Higher Negative. We went to investigate and they were right. He’s in the laboratory but this time we have five guards watching him as we decided. He’s being kept pacified by constant Transfers but he’s very resilient to them. It took a lot to turn his anger into more pleasant behaviour.”

“Make sure there are five guards at all times,” the Principle Speaker said. “If Michael comes we want to be able to pacify him again, and find out what he’s doing?”

“We will make sure we’re ready if he comes.”

“Are they using the Stunners?” The Principle Speaker asked, turning to William.

“I’m sorry to say they’re not. They’re still being made.”

“I must confess the more I think about these Stunners the more I don’t like them,” the Principle Speaker said, “but then I think of what Michael has done, and how we must protect the Prime Objective and I know it’s necessary.”

“It is important and necessary,” William said. “We must be prepared to protect our happiness.”

“I know,” the Principle Speaker agreed. “We will stay the course. Soon the Audit will be finished and we’ll free ourselves from these Negi’s that jeopardise all the goodness in our lives. Report to me if you hear anything from the guards,” he said looking at the members, and lastly at William and Claudia.

“I will let you know the moment I hear anything,” William said. “Thank you for all you do as the Principle Speaker,” he added.

“Thank you, William. And thank you for all your help and efforts to help,” The Principle speaker returned.

The two then shared a brief Transfer and the others did the same.

*

Day four of the week began and the basement buzzed with excitement. Memories of all they had done to the Positive were fresh in their minds, and anticipation of doing the same today enthralled them. The previous night she had woken about an hour after Helen’s Transfer and the others Transferred for a short time before she passed out again. They left her alone this time and spent the hours laughing and talking about her reactions. Finally, they all went to sleep, waiting to continue their fun. However, their sleep was broken in the early hours by the receptionists pleas to be let free, begging to know why they were doing this to her. Michael had been called down by one of the Negatives and he Transferred a lot of pain to shut her up, and gagged her in case she woke again. With this done they all went back to sleep.

When they woke on the fourth morning of the week, they partook of endurance session with a new eagerness. When it was over their excitement was fed and they went to play with their new toy. It fulfilled its purpose, feeling like a reward after having suffered in the Transfers. They removed the gag so they could hear her call out for help, but they all laughed as she whimpered when they came close.

“We’re going to need a system,” Helen said looking from her to the eager eyes of her family. “We will start with the newest Negative and go one by one, finishing with the Higher Negatives. This way she won’t pass out until the end when we use our powerful Transfers.”

Everyone understood the logic and agreed, and though the Higher Negatives wanted their turn first, the waiting made it even more tantalising.

*

“So he’s still safe in the laboratory?” The Principle Speaker asked in the morning meeting.

“He’s still under our charge,” William confirmed. “We had no trouble last night. However, on questioning him he says he doesn’t know who Michael is. We think we’ve managed to keep this one from knowing about his Higher Negative Transfer ability too. The usual thing occurred when he was tested but the Tester did well to hide the amount pain and fluctuations over the days. He appears to have no idea what he is.”

“This is excellent!” the Principle Speaker said clapping his hands together. “The less they know the less trouble they’ll be. I guess our worries were for nothing. Keep up the good work everyone,” he said cheerily. “Now let’s have a productive day of testing and work.”

He finished and as usual the Transfers of optimism and joy took place.

*

That night Helen stood over Claire the receptionist giving her a disgusted look. The sight and smell was offensive to the senses and in the two full days of being held hostage she hadn’t been cleaned once, only being allowed off the restraints to go to the toilet. The rest of the time she had either been subjected to pain, or been left alone to recover. Looking at her Helen debated what to do, finally deciding that this would be part of the awakening. *The more humiliation, the better the education*, she thought. Turning she looked at her family and her eyes lingered on one of the three newest recruits. He was very young, only being in his late teens, and had expressed doubts at first, but once he had felt the satisfaction of enduring the Transfer he embraced his true Negative self.

Her family was growing well but she knew it was time to leave them again. It was time to print off the latest lists from the Council Building. The weekend was the best time as it meant she could scope the Council Building while it was empty. Caution would be needed again as there could be people like last time, but this was the best time to go.

“I must go alone,” she insisted when questioned. “I know you long for experience and chances to use your power, but it’s not the right time. The more of you that come, the greater the chances of being caught. I must go alone.”

It was decided and no one spoke out as she walked passed them and up the stairs of the basement.

*

The entrance to the Council Building was lit, despite the late hour, and Helen guessed her previous visit had made them do this. The route was almost second nature to her now and she crept through the building keeping her ears and eyes alert for any Positives. The computers whirred and buzzed as they booted up and she printed off the latest list. She wished she could just get the list for this week, but they wouldn’t be entered until the first and second day of next week.

Waiting by the printer she finally had all the lists in her hand and turned off the computer and went to the lab to check if there was a Higher Negative. As she snuck along the corridor she could hear many voices and cursed. Reaching the T-junction she slowly peered round the corner, counting five guards. She cursed again and withdrew back down the corridor as quickly and quietly as she could. There were too many of them. It did let her know there was another Higher Negative and as she made her way out of the building she formed a plan to free them. By the time she was home she was excited, having decided to meet the problem head on knowing it would be a great test for the other Higher Negatives.

Two and a half hours later Helen was back at the building with Michael and Hannah. She had no worries that together they could Transfer to each one of these Positives without getting Transferred themselves. They knew they might be seen, but wanted to avoid it if possible, so wore dark clothing and hoods that shadowed their faces.

“You know the plan,” Helen said to Michael. “You and Hannah go the same way we went when we freed you and stop at the T-junction corridor. I’ll go the other way and you’ll see me in the same corridor on the other side of the T. Depending on where they stand we’ll either rush them, or creep up on them. I’ll give the signal: one finger for rush, two for creep.”

“Got it,” Michael said, and Hannah nodded.

They split up at the main entrance: Michael and Hannah going left and Helen going right. Reaching their destination they heard sounds of two inaudible voices echoing up the hall and Helen nodded to Michael and Hannah across the gap. Peering slowly round the corner she saw two guards sitting on the floor reading, two engaged in conversation, and one sitting by the lab door. She leaned back to get cover and raised her arm holding one finger up. Michael and Hannah watched as she put her hood up and did the same. Helen mouthed, “Now.”

The three hooded figures were half way down the hall when the guard sitting by the lab saw them. Standing he called out to the others. The four guards turned to look at him and then in the direction he pointed. It was too late and the Higher Negatives were upon them. The two guards who had been reading were set upon by Michael and Hannah, sending the quickest but most intense Negativity they could. The Positives collapsed into spasms and Michael and Hannah laughed at how easy it was. Helen continued passed them and the two guards who had been talking put out their hands to grab her, but she was too quick. She grabbed each of their arms, one in each hand, and they crumbled in unstoppable submission. Michael and Hannah caught up with her in those brief moments and the three of them approach the last guard, the shadow of their hoods hiding their faces.

“Please! Please don’t hurt me,” he begged as he began to quiver in fear.

The three figures said nothing and casually walked up to him. Once Helen was close enough she simply raised her hand to his head, pressing her palm over his nose and mouth, fingers spreading over his cheeks and forehead. He screamed as she held back her power and gave him enough to stay conscious. Hannah and Michael smiled as they watched. After a few moments Helen got bored and unleashed all her power. The man went pale and dropped to the floor, landing in an awkward position and appeared to have stopped breathing. Helen paid no attention to this and rummaged for the keys. Finding them she unlocked the lab door and entered. As before they found the Higher Negative sitting on the make-shift bed, but this time there was no confusion on his face, just a blank look of contentment.

“We’re here to free you,” Helen called out. “Come on. We need to go now.”

The man spoke in a placid tone.

“I’m okay, thank you. I’ll stay here?”

“What’s wrong with him?” Michael asked.

“I don’t know,” Helen replied, walking closer to the man. “We need to go. Do you understand?”

“You can go, but I’m happy here,” he replied again.

“They’ve Transferred so much he thinks he’s happy here,” Hannah exclaimed, seeing the familiar bubble like behaviour.

Helen growled with anger and thought for a second.

“Well, I guess we’ll have to try and counter it,” she said, forcing her hand on his arm.

Giving the man the least Transfer she could Helen watched as his face went from a docile smile into a flat stern look, and finally into one of pain and discomfort. With this final change she let go and anxiously waited. A minute passed and the man looked around confused. A light suddenly seemed to turn on in his mind and he became more aware of his surroundings.

“Who are you?” He said looking at Helen.

“We can explain once we’re out of here,” Helen said quickly. “You must come with us.”

“Beats being here,” he replied and slid off the bed.

The three liberators sighed with relief and the four of them left the lab. They stepped over the guards, who had stopped shaking, and the one Helen had touched lay completely still, stuck in the same awkward position. They didn’t bother to check him and Helen quickly introduced herself to the new Higher Negative, Lucas. Michael and Hannah followed, guarding the rear as they meditated on the rush they felt.

Staying quiet and listening for any noises they made their way through and out of the Council Building. Once they were amongst houses, and hidden from the Building, Helen spoke to Lucas and answered any questions he had. Michael and Hannah listened from behind, and chatted to each other from time to time. Helen told Lucas the story from the beginning and all the reasons they had freed him. As always her speeches were enticing and as with the others who had joined Helen, Lucas finally felt like this was something that gave him purpose and belonging. Once he had learned everything he requested a Transfer from Helen to make sure he wasn’t tainted by the Positive Transfers. She did as he requested and by the time they got home he was eager to be initiated and to test his own Transfer skill.

Chapter Nineteen

“I know you’ve suffered, and I’m sorry, but please tell us what happened last night?”

The Council met first thing Saturday morning and it was becoming an all too familiar pattern. The four guards sat in front of the Council and one of them answered the Principle Speaker.

“We were guarding the laboratory and heard footsteps coming towards us. Looking up we saw hooded figures and by the time we realised what was happening they attacked James and Greg and when myself and Glen tried to stop them we were attacked. All I remember is so much pain,” he began to tense as he recalled the feelings, but managed to continue. “Next thing I remember is being woken by the others and the four of us found David still unconscious and barely breathing. The Higher Negi was gone and we called you straight away.”

There was a long pause, but finally the Principle Speaker broke the silence.

“This is a tragedy we tried to avoid and I’m sorry. David is conscious now but with the deepest regret he has become like Benedict. How many hooded figures were there?”

“Three,” the guard replied.

“That must have been Michael, and Hannah the other Higher Negi, but who is this third?” the Principle Speaker said to himself, but discarded the thought as there was no way of knowing and he believed Michael to be the priority.

“Thank you for all you do,” he said to the guards. “Please come here for Transfers and if you ever find yourself worrying or needing a Transfer don’t hesitate to get one. It’s also important no one else knows about this. The story is that David was attacked by the same animal that attacked Benedict while we were trying to capture it. I know it’s hard to lie, but this is for the greater good and only necessary until we’ve solved this little problem.”

The guards nodded that they understood, rose from their chairs and felt all warm and calm after a mildly intense Transfer from the Higher Positives. It didn’t even cross their minds to give an intense Transfer, as the effects weren’t constant. Yet the guards had previously experienced a Negative Transfer. If they had only received an intense Positive Transfer they would have seen Helen had been right all along. The guards would have experienced a higher level of joy, and it would have lasted longer, but it wasn’t to be. The guards left and the Council turned to each other to discuss what they had heard. The Principle Speaker was about to address them, but William spoke first.

“I think it’s time to make sure the guards of the Higher Negatives have these Stunners. I’ve been told they’ll be ready by the first day.”

The Principle Speaker sighed in acceptance.

“It’s a sad day when we have to do this, but you’re right,” he said. “If you can see the inventors on Monday and get them to deliver them here that would be best. They can show us how to use them and we should all have one, and so should any guards that are assigned to keep a Higher Negi in check. However we only have one week of the Audit left so let’s work hard and hopefully we can find another Higher Negi to lure Michael and his accomplices back. We don’t want to hurt them but they’ve forced us to stop them. This is the only way we’ll all be safe.”

There were nods of agreement and understanding from the Council and it appeared the meeting was done. All that was left was to Transfer, but one of the members raised his hand and once he caught the attention of everyone he stood up and spoke.

“I was going to bring this information up on the first day of the week, but as we’re here it’s best I break some bad news to you now,” he paused, trying to understand the information he was

going to give. It was something that had worried him and caused him to have more Transfers than usual. "Someone from my Sector has...gone...missing," he said nervously.

"Missing?" The Principle Speaker asked confused.

"Yes. She was at work as normal the first three days of last week, but she didn't turn up for work the next day and hasn't been seen since."

"How does someone go missing? She must be somewhere," the Principle Speaker said.

"I know," the man replied, "but no one knows where she's gone."

"This is peculiar and I really don't like it. Do you think she could have left the Community?" The Principle Speaker asked.

No one answered. Blank looks stared back at him and he didn't know what to say. It was the only reason to why she could have gone missing so he continued.

"This will be our cover until we can locate her. Is there anything else before we Transfer?"

No one had anything else to say so they indulged in their Positive feelings.

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Monday morning arrived and once the last of the lists were given out the Council met for their morning meeting.

"I'm happy to hear that the Stunners are ready. Make sure everyone that needs one has one and is shown how to use it safely. We'll continue to work hard at locating the missing woman, as there's still no sign of her. I'm sure there's a perfectly good explanation for her disappearance so let's keep working hard until we have answers."

Their optimism dulled the ability to link the disappearance of the Positive to what was happening with the Higher Negatives.

"We only have a week of testing left," the Principle Speaker continued. "So let's find Michael one way or another. This is important so we can achieve the Prime Objective."

The Council all smiled at the thought of the whole Community unified in Transfers and continued to discuss their agenda before going work.

*

Another day passed and it had been an uneventful few days for the Negatives. They went to find others on the first day, managing to find one that wanted to join them. The day had begun with the usual ceremony and endurance and they took some time to continue inflicting pain on their captive. This time Helen decided to go first.

"Is she still alive?" She asked Michael as she walked into the freezer, watching the woman slumped diagonally against the wall, the restraints stopping her from lying on the floor.

"She was last night before she passed out."

"There doesn't seem to be much satisfaction from torturing her like this. It isn't the same if she's out cold. I think we need a new guest Michael?"

He smiled at the idea.

"I'll finish her off," Helen declared and walked over to her.

An intense Transfer took place and Michael watched, still smiling, as Helen held onto the Receptionists wrist, Transferring a lot more negativity than she had with Benedict. Clair's body tensed and her muscles contracted, but there were no screams and Helen let go.

“That should be enough,” Helen said. “The news said they found a man unable to make sense and that Transfer should do the same to her. If she wakes make sure she’s quiet in her ramblings and mutterings. If you need to sedate her I know a plant whose seeds can be crushed and will force her to sleep. I’ll go find us a fresh Positive who can enjoy our hospitality and become familiar with what we know, just like this one has,” she laughed and nodded her head at the seemingly lifeless figure of the Receptionist.

Turning away Helen walked out the freezer.

“Do you want some help?” Michael asked hopefully.

“No. I’ll do this one myself. I have plan similar to Chris’. My garden will once again provide the bait, but I shall do this later when the timing is right.”

With this she took some paper and sat in her chair, writing her plans and other thoughts on the paper. She decided to take a day off from going to find Negatives and prepare herself for the excitement that would come from getting a new toy.

The hours passed and she left basement mid-afternoon, going to the top floor to dress like the Positives. Once changed Helen left the house and got the Tram to the shopping complex.

“It’s really worth seeing? You’re just about to finish aren’t you?” Helen asked the worker.

“Well yes,” the short man, who was about her age, replied, “but I should get home once I finish my work.”

“It won’t take long, you can even help me plant this,” she said gesturing to the plant she had purchased from the Garden Shop.

It was too tempting. He knew she had been working on the garden a long time because of all the times she had been in the shop, and he decided it would be nice to see the finished result.

“Oh okay then,” he smiled. “Give me time to tidy up and I’ll be with you soon.”

“There’s no rush,” she said, forcing politeness.

However, in her mind there were sinister thoughts playing over and over and she felt the thrill of tricking him back to her house.

It was too easy though and once back at her house there was an anti-climatic frustration as she put her hands round his neck and he fell to the floor in her kitchen. She left him lying on the floor writhing and opened the basement, calling to Michael. He came bounding up eagerly and smiled following the arm Helen had extended pointing to the kitchen.

The family had a fresh energy about them that night as they participated in the evening’s endurance, waiting eagerly for the opportunity to Transfer on the new Positive Helen had brought them. He had been restrained on the wall next to Claire, who was still out cold, but breathing deeper. Helen knew it was unlikely she would recover mentally; at least she hoped she wouldn’t. Once the endurance was over Helen gave them permission to see the new Positive close up. They then feasted upon the man’s shock and suffering as one by one they shared their negativity with him, gratifying their dark desires.

*

Earlier that day, while Helen was persuading the man to see her garden, and become their second hostage, the Higher Council had assembled for yet another meeting.

“This is promising news,” the Principle Speaker said smiling from ear to ear. “Two Higher Negi’s and both in the laboratory getting constant Transfers?”

“Yes, Principle Speaker that is correct,” George replied.

“And you have the Stunners William?” The Principle Speaker asked.

“Yes. They’ve been delivered and handed to the guards. I’ve a box here that contains ours. It will protect us if we’re here when Michael comes for the Higher Negi’s.”

He stood and handed one to each of the Council members. Once they all had one he gave a detailed explanation of how they worked and showed how they attached to their belts for comfort and easy access.

“This is all incredible news,” the Principle Speaker said, “and we must feel joy and happiness at having Higher Negi’s again. Soon we’ll be able to stop Michael. The Audit’s nearly done and it will be a wonderful conclusion if we can wipe away this stain that has tainted our beautiful Community and Prime Objective. I guarantee that in the next few days we’ll hear that Michael and his accomplices have been captured trying to free the Higher Negi’s. We’ll keep them pacified through Transfer and soon we’ll have all the results of the Audit. Then we’ll make sure people Transfer to all the Negi’s. We will no longer have Negi’s who bring the people down, but we will make them happy like us.”

He beamed with these words, and the prospect of totally eradicating negative thoughts and feelings. The other’s too felt the same pleasure from what he said and clapped with joy. Believing they had done more for the Prime Objective in a couple of months than had been done in centuries.

*

The familiar routine took place for Helen and her family and by the fifth day of the week they had found one more Negative to add to their numbers. It would soon be time to take over the Council Building, but there was still time left to get the latest list and look for a Higher Negative. After the last adventure Helen knew she would have to take the other Higher Negatives with her so told them about her plans. That evening, after the Endurance Transfer and some torture of the man from the Garden Shop, the Higher Negatives left the basement, using the shadow of night as there cover once more.

*

Only a few hours earlier the Higher Council had called a celebratory meeting with the workers who had been testing the Community.

“Words cannot express our thanks and pride in the hard work you have done for the people. Some of you have had to endure being Transferred on by Negi’s and some have endured more. We are sorry for this but hold on to the fact the Audit will eliminate such things. Once all the data is processed we will begin a campaign of encouragement. We need to help the Negi’s know they should receive as many Transfers as they can. As Positives it’s our responsibility to offer a helping hand and to Transfer so they don’t have to suffer the negativity they feel every day.

“This is a great day for us and the data should be realised in two weeks from the first day of next week. You’ll be able to tell people in years to come that you were the ones who tested the Community and were the very life blood in helping us become a Community of love, peace and happiness, free from feelings of sadness, fear or pain. It’s all because of you so make sure you never forget this and always draw happiness from it. Tonight when you go home make sure your families know how happy they should be because you worked hard as the Testers for the Audit.

“To celebrate we should have Transfers and our happiness will grow for generations to come because of what has taken place in these couple of months.”

At his conclusion there was an eruption of cheers and claps and some were nearly crying with joy. It filled them with such gladness to know that because of them negativity would be taken from the people completely, and that was a thought of ecstasy to them. The Transfers took place and this escalated the intensity of what they felt. The room was filled with laughs of joy and smiles of pride and this continued for the next half an hour. Eventually the ecstasy calmed slightly and they returned to their homes for the weekend.

*

The Council Building was still and quiet, showing no signs of the congregation that had shared in the ecstasy of emotions. The lights were still on however, and Helen wondered if this was the sign that another Higher Negative was being held. After all, if there wasn't any one there they wouldn't leave the lights on would they? It didn't matter though, she would have to check either way.

The four hooded figures waited in the Printing Room patiently, hoping there would be guards to Transfer on. Confidence and arrogance radiated from each of them and they had no doubt they could over power any Positives that tried to stop them. With the lists finally printed they stalked down the corridors eagerly, expecting to have a lot of fun with any guards they found. They approached the T-junction and smiled to one another, hearing the voices of guards. As one body they kept walking and turned the corner, rushing the guards without worry or concern.

The guards saw the movements in their periphery. It was time to face what they had been expecting every night for the past three nights. They reached for their Stunners and pointed them with quivering hands as the hooded figures came upon them.

Helen saw them, wondering what they were doing, but moved forward taking no heed to their actions. There were only four this time and she smiled. This was going to be even easier than before. She reached the first guard as he held the Stunner at her. He was too slow. She grabbed his face and he fell to the floor in a fit of convulsions. Her accomplices moved beyond her, taking one guard each and Michael strode to the one who was furthest away. The guard pulled the trigger and two wires flew from the Stunner. Michael saw them and threw himself sideways knocking into the wall as the wires flew passed him. They reached their range and fell to the floor. Michael gained his composure and pushed off the wall, almost flying at the guard. The force knocked the guard down and Michael thrust his hand on the man's face as they fell, Transferring to immobilise him. Staggering to his feet Michael panted hard. He looked around at all the guards laying sprawled and shaking on the floor and pulled back his hood.

Helen had seen the Stunner miss Michael. She walked over to it and picked it up, turning it in her hand with curious eyes.

"What is it?" Hannah asked.

"I'm not sure?" Helen replied. "They were using them to try and stop us. I didn't think they would have the guts to try such a thing. At least none of us were caught by it. Their pathetic attempt failed," she laughed and the others joined her. "Now let's go get the Higher Negative," she said dropping the Stunner and moving to the lab door.

Opening it she walked inside and the four of them saw something they hadn't expected, smiling at the sight of not one Higher Negative, but two.

"Well, this is fortunate," Helen said loudly.

The two Higher Negatives looked at her with blank smiles.

"You know what to do," Helen said to the others.

Lucas and Hannah went up to the Higher Negatives, Transferring a little bit of negativity onto them. They waited until the expressions changed and as they did the new Higher Negatives started to ask questions.

“We’ll tell you everything soon,” Helen said, standing in front of them. “But we must leave. If you want to be free from what the Positives have done to you then come with us.”

The two Higher Negatives looked at each other and nodded once. Getting off the makeshift beds they left the laboratory, Michael bringing up the rear. Helen reached the end of the T-junction and glanced back, smiling at the sight of two more Higher Negatives. Michael entered the corridor as she did and suddenly he dropped to the floor, shaking violently. Panic and shock froze Helen to the spot and she saw two thin wires leaving Michael’s body. Regaining focus she traced them. They lead into the lab. The others heard Michael hit the floor and saw Helen’s shock. Turning they saw Michael writhing and jolting. The new Higher Negatives looked back at Helen for some explanation. She didn’t know what to do. Seeing the blank look on Helen’s face Hannah started to move towards Michael. Suddenly Helen realised she had to take control.

“Leave him!” she shouted. “We have to get out of here!”

Who fired the device? What was it doing to Michael?

There was too much chaos and uncertainty.

“Leave him!” she repeated.

Hannah looked at Michael, but took several slow steps away from him. Finally accepting Helen’s words, she turned and broke into a run. They all ran, frantically looking back as they passed through the corridors. Helen led them to the Main Entrance, the bright lights making them feel exposed, but it didn’t last. They quickly pushed through the glass doors, left the building and ran down the concrete steps, making for the cover of dimly lit streets.

Chapter Twenty

Michael continued to shake as the electricity ran through his body. The tension on the wires loosened as the firer walked cautiously towards him. The fifth guard had stayed in the lab to Transfer on the Higher Negatives and when he had heard the shouts he was scared and hid. Concealed, he had watched as the hooded figures took the Higher Negatives, but saw one of them was larger than the others. It had to be Michael, so he plucked up his courage and used the Stunner.

Having stunned Michael he peered round the lab door and saw the horrific sight of his colleagues recoiling and tensing on the floor. He had an overwhelming wish for a Positive Transfer and he knew he had to get the Council. He went to the nearest phone and called the Higher Positive who was to be contacted in an emergency. The guard cried on the phone as he explained the terrible events. Eventually the Higher Positive got the story out of him and the whole Council was contacted, and despite the late hour they all made their way to the building.

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Panting heavily Helen and the others ran through the streets in the direction of the house and the safety of the basement. Helen's panic had turned to anger and she decided to slow down to a walk and the others matched her pace.

"What's going on?" One of the new comers asked.

"We're freeing you from the Positives who would change you into something you're not. We're not letting that happen. This is why we came to free you. We haven't encountered any real difficulties in the past but this new weapon they have was something we couldn't have predicted. And now they have Michael," she said angrily, clenching her fist tightly.

"We must go back for him," Hannah said, listening to the conversation as they walked.

Helen thought for a few seconds.

"We can't," she spat. "They'll have contacted others and the building will be crawling with those Positive rats and they'll capture us all. Michael is gone, for now. We'll get our revenge," she said bitterly, already forming a plan in her mind.

Hannah exhaled in frustration wanting to argue, but knew Helen was right. The rescued Higher Negatives didn't know how to react, but one of them spoke up.

"So how did this all happen? When did you start this group of Negatives?"

Helen wasn't in the mood for chit-chat and was still fuming at the loss of Michael.

"I'll explain when we're home," she said. "We have a place of safety and we'll talk then." She gave the new Higher Negatives a look that said, 'and don't bother me until then,' and neither of them did.

They continued to walk briskly back to the house and no one spoke. The moment they were in the door Helen went straight to the basement. The others followed but Helen was already in the freezer by the time they started walking down the stairs. She crouched down and grabbed the man's arms with both hands, waking him. She looked him straight in the eye, blinking once, and let the fall amount of her negativity pass into him. His eyes opened wide and he shook with the pain, but as quickly as it had started it stopped. He went limp and his eyes closed.

It made her feel better and Helen let go. Standing she took a step back, but kept her eyes fixed on him. She let out a small laugh and wondered why she doubted her power and superiority to these Positives. So they made a weapon that could shock and incapacitate them. She had so much

power that she could do that with a touch, they were nothing compared to her and soon they would all know it.

“What happened?” Chris asked, having been woken by their return and arriving in the basement as they all gathered, watching Helen walk out of the freezer.

Helen explained what happened and reassured them that everything would be fine, but first the new Higher Negatives needed to be taught and inducted, and she didn't go easy on them. With this done she addressed her family and they listened intently.

“This is something we hadn't anticipated. The Council have really pushed the limits of their own standards and their hypocrisy will lead to further suffering for them. Michael has been taken from us, but in time we'll get our revenge. However, we must continue to wait. We must have all the strength we can. Not long ago we would have been able to walk in there and secure our freedom, but things have changed. If we were to do so now they might stop use and taint us with Positive Transfers. This cannot be allowed to happen. Our revenge will be swift once we have control, but until then we must be cunning and smarter than they are, which will not be hard,” she laughed.

Once her laughter settled a few of those listening raised objections and that they should strike and get revenge now.

“Haven't you heard what I just said?!” Helen shouted. “We can't risk capture. All would be lost and the Positives would win. We're the only hope for a future where we are free and not suppressed through their Transfers. Do you understand,” she said sternly.

Those who had argued looked at the floor, having been chastised.

“We mustn't be discouraged,” Helen encouraged. “I'll get another Positive so we can let our frustration out. We must continue recruiting others and continue strengthening ourselves. I have the next lists and when the time is right we'll be able to endure anything, and inflict even more pain than we can now.”

With the speech over they separated into groups and soon after they went to their beds to sleep.

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“Michael is secure and has people guarding and Transferring to him. We have doubled the guards. We cannot afford to lose him again. Have the other guards recovered?”

All the Higher Positives arrived once they had received the phone call and they sorted out the scene of terror that lay before them. They Transferred to the guards and dealt with the situation as best they could. It was late once they managed to restore the guards and decided it would be best to stay at the building and get some sleep. Such rest was only possible because they Transferred all the fear away. The following day they went to work and held a meeting.

“Yes, Principle Speaker,” Claudia replied. “They've woken and received Transfers, but it'll take a few days to restore them fully.”

“I'm glad they'll recover and aren't like Benedict. That's a small mercy. This has given us a chance to track down the others. We'll question Michael to find out where they are. I'm sure he will comply once we've Transferred and taken the negativity out of him.”

George raised his hand and the Principle Speaker nodded his head.

“I'm sure it won't be long before all these horrible problems are forgotten and we've achieved our goals,” George said. “The Stunners proved beneficial and we're happy that these were made. Without them we wouldn't have the advantage we do. Let's be happy for that.”

The Council smiled in unison at these words.

“You’re right George,” the Principle Speaker replied. “I had my doubts but they’ve proved helpful. All of you make sure you carry them with you when in the Council Building. If everything has been sorted it’s best that we go back to our families. We’ll meet the first day of the week and the last of the Audit data will be put into the computers. Then this Audit can come to a close and the efforts to use it for the benefit of all can take place.”

*

“He’s still not conscious?” Helen asked on the second day of the weekend.

“Nope. The only sign of life is his breathing,” Chris said with excited surprise. “What did you do to him?”

“Transferred all my anger and power on to him,” she said smiling that twisted smile at him.

“I’m guessing he’s in a coma? Your power put him in a coma!” Chris laughed evilly.

“It does appear that way,” Helen replied.

She was surprised at first, but embraced the new knowledge, feeling even more superior from it. She could make people lose their mind, or put them in a coma, and couldn’t wait to do this to the Higher Positives. Such power would eradicate them from the equation and never again would they jeopardise the Negatives.

“I have an idea,” she said smirking to herself. “How about tonight we send a message to the Positives?”

“What do you mean?” Chris asked.

“Well, let’s take the broken Positives we have to the Council Building. Tomorrow they’ll find them and know what we’ve been doing and fear us the way they should.”

“That sounds perfect,” Chris said chuckling sinisterly.

“I have a wheelbarrow in back garden,” Helen continued. “If you want to help we could put them in there, cover them up, and take them to the building?”

“Sounds good to me, but will it be worth the effort? Will we have a new Positive soon?”

“I’ll make sure we have one by tomorrow night,” she smiled, and he smiled back.

After a day of the usual routine, but without Michael, they carried the sedated receptionist, who could only babble nonsense like Benedict, and the comatosed Shop Keeper up the stairs and put them into the wheel barrow, tucking their arms and legs in without any consideration. Several bags of flower bedding were placed on top of black bin bags to cover them, and Chris and Helen shared the burden of pushing the heavy load at night through the shadowed streets.

They were tired and sweating by the time they got to the Council Building and they quickly crept to the entrance, dumping the contents ungracefully, but put the bags of flower bedding and bin bags back in the barrow. Taking a last look at the sprawled bodies of their victims they smirked and looked at each other with cruel smiles. No words were needed and they turned, walking away briskly and gloating as they imagined the reactions of the Council when the almost lifeless bodies were found.

*

The change of Michael’s guards took place first thing Monday and as they arrived they saw two figures lying at the bottom of the steps. They were horrified by what they discovered and phoned a Higher Council member, who informed the others.

“This must be used as a reason to work harder,” The Principle Speaker said as they met. “We must finish and release the data to eradicate the horrific practices that could only have been done by the Negi’s. The Negi’s have abducted these two innocent Posi’s and this cannot be allowed to continue. Be vigilant at all times. If the Higher Negi’s return we will stop them with our Stunners and increased number of guards. We must finish what we’ve started. Let’s quicken the pace and get the data analysed by the end of the week. We can release it next week and begin helping the Negi’s to change. If we can do this we’ll be beating those who are doing this.”

It was a desperate attempt to tackle the problems they were facing. The truth was they hadn’t a clue what was happening, or why.

“We’ll do our best Principle Speaker,” one of the guards said smiling weakly, having been shaken by what they had seen that morning.

The rest nodded and engaged in a Transfer, dulling the images of the barely breathing limp bodies they had discovered. An hour had passed and the workers began to arrive, most of them ready to go back to their previous jobs of monitoring various aspects to the Community like leisure, industry, housing, inventions, and education. However, due to Higher Council’s desire to have the statistics and trends of the Audit released a week earlier most were told to join those who were inputting and analysing data.

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“It’s too easy isn’t it?” Chris laughed that evening.

“It really is,” Helen laughed. “It doesn’t take much to convince them to see the garden and then they’re ours, just like this pathetic woman.”

The latest victim was a similar age to the receptionist and to their delight they had someone to torture again, and didn’t delay in doing so. Helen stood back and watched as one by one the Negatives Transferred onto the woman who recoiled and would have screamed if it weren’t for the gag. Helen laughed again at Chris’ statement, it really was too easy to abduct them. The week passed by and they found two more family members who were eager to prove themselves now they had found a purpose to their lives.

*

The Higher Council meanwhile was a hive of activity. Information was constantly being printed and each person’s name and status was put into the category of Positive or Negative. The Computers were not advanced enough to do this in a simple equation to calculate the results they wanted. So each person had a file and all the areas would be analysed and totalled up. Each Sector would have the statistic for: Positive/Negative, how old they were, whether they were male or female, the type of jobs they worked, whether the parents were Positive or Negative, whether they were single or married, and whether they had children or not. Once that was done the sectors had to be added up to gain a Community wide demographic and it took a lot of work. However despite the hard work and constant papers being passed backward and forward it was all finished by the last day of the week.

The Higher Council met last thing that day and discussed the statistics, but mainly the overall result that showed there was eighty-five percent Positives and fifteen percent Negatives in the Community. Discussions took place and the goal was to release this information on the first day of the new week: using media, schools and work places to make sure people knew they should be encouraging each Negi to receive as many Transfers as they could.

*

Helen didn't go to the Council Building that weekend as the image of Michael being captured still haunted her. She didn't want to risk being captured until they were as strong as they could be. There were still a few more people on the lists they wanted to try and recruit and she wanted the Higher Negatives to do what she could, and put people in a coma, before they went to rescue Michael and take the Council Building. Having five people who, with a single touch, could permanently incapacitate a Positive would give them an unstoppable advantage.

The weekend passed and they tried to achieve this goal through lots of intense Transfer sessions. Following the gatherings it was always a gift to go and use their own Transfer on the Positive and be reminded of how fun it was to watch every expression of horror and shock.

The first day of the week began and though most of them hated the television programmes one of the Negatives got a sick pleasure from laughing at the Positives and how ridiculous they were to him. It had helped them learn the justification the Council gave for Benedict's condition and the condition of the others who they had tortured. Because of this they let the television stay on, as long as it wasn't loud, and that morning they were brought to it by the exclamations of the Negative as he watched it.

"What is it?" Helen asked as they all gathered.

"The data has been realised today. There has been a nonstop barrage of adverts and news bulletins telling people of the results. It says that people can find lists of those who are, Negi's, as they now seem to be calling us, at their schools and work places. This way they can help us Negi's," he spat half laughing in disgust.

Helen stood there aghast.

The results out already? The computers said it shouldn't be until the following week.

The shock turned to anger and she growled and the others looked at her.

"So they want to pick up the pace and think they can ignore what we've done?" she said bitterly. "We will have another endurance session everyday at midday. Having it three times a day will quicken our strength. This Audit will not be allowed to change the Negatives the way the Higher Council want. We will stop them. I want no more Negatives to Transfer to our guest. Your job is to Transfer to the Higher Negatives. The Higher Negatives must be able to put a Positive in a coma. Then we'll pay the Council Building one last visit, and it'll be ours. When we're in charge we can stop this propaganda and make sure no Negative is ever subjected to a Positive Transfer again."

The Negatives wanted to argue about not being allowed to torture, and very nearly did, but they knew Helen would shout down anyone who tried so they buried their annoyance.

"Higher Negatives come with me," Helen barked and led them to the freezer. "Hannah I want you to use all your Transfer on her."

Hannah didn't need telling twice and walked over to the woman and grabbed her arm, sending out all her hate and bitterness, which made the woman spasm and pass out.

"Good," Helen said. "You're nearly there. Once she wakes I want you others to do the same. Do not hold back," she said forcefully.

"It would be quicker if we had more Positives," one of the two newer Higher Negatives stated.

"I know that," Helen replied flatly. "That's why over the next few evening I'll get some more."

The Higher Negative looked at the floor apologetically and Helen spoke again.

“It may be a while before she comes round, let’s do the morning endurance and she should be ready when we finish.”

It was a trying time for Helen. The Council were winning. They had the results out and were changing Negatives, but Helen stuck to her plan of strength and patience. Over the next week they Transferred to each other in their ceremonious way, tortured those they had abducted, and one by one the Higher Negative’s could put the Positives into a coma. As each one did it required a new Positive and the Negatives were employed to dump those in a coma on the edge of the Community. Every time they did there would be a new report the following day, explaining how those who were missing had been found and had been bitten by the same animal as Benedict and the others. The reports reassured everyone that the animal would be found and stopped soon. Helen and the others always got a good laugh from this and would make animal noises to each other and mock the reports.

On the first day of the second week since the results had been published Helen decided it was time to get another three Positives. The Higher Negatives were nearly ready and soon they would take Council Building. Having three would be good as a last gift before they went. Helen decided they could all practice now, as it would give the Negatives encouragement before the takeover.

*

“It has gone too far?” The Principle Speaker said in a meeting the following day. “Three more people have vanished and we’re no closer to finding where they’re being taken. Michael has given us nothing to help find his accomplices, despite all the Transfers he has received. He has only told us things that have ended up being lies. He acts compliant and pleasant because of the Transfers but when we want information he has mocked us by pointing us in the wrong direction. As much as I dislike it we have to try something else. Does anyone have any ideas?”

There was a pause as they all struggled to think outside the usual bubble of doing things, but finally William came up with an idea like he had before.

“I think we have to bring the Negi’s in for questioning. Some of them might know what the Higher Negi’s are doing. This is the source of the problem. It’s the Higher Negi’s trying to stop the Prime Objective and unleash their hate onto us, even though we’ve only ever done good things. The Negi’s might be in lead with them. If we Transfer to them some might know where the other Higher Negi’s are?”

“Excellent idea!” The Principle Speaker said with relief and joy, clapping a couple of times and put it to a vote.

“The voting is unanimous in favour of questioning Negi’s. We can start bringing them in today.”

*

After the midday endurance Helen left the basement to make some food and decided to take a look at the garden first. Going outside was an inconvenience as she had to change and put on something more appropriate to disguise herself in the outside world of Positives, but she wanted to see her garden. She decided changing fully would be pointless and put on a cardigan, an old lab coat, and took some clippers for her roses.

As she went to open the door she heard voices and went to the window of the untidy and neglected lounge, it had been used as a place to sleep by the extra Negatives. Through the window she could see a boy and girl and realised they should have been at school. She wondered why they

were here, but her thoughts changed and darkly she saw them as easy targets to abduct. They hadn't had anyone this young and the prospect excited her even more.

Walking to the front door she forced a smile, hunched her back and opened it slowly, trying to look as weak and timid as possible. Leaving the house she shuffled towards some roses and feigned surprise at seeing the two youths. She changed the direction she walked and went to tempt them into the basement for some unexpected fun for her and her family.

Chapter Twenty One

Blair stepped through the door way and into the hall. As Helen closed the door behind him he turned and blurted out his epiphany.

“You’re a Negative aren’t you?!”

Helen looked at him curiously.

“What makes you say that,” she said, looking him directly in the eyes, the smile now completely gone.

“Because I’m one. I can see your behaviour’s a charade and your garden a mask.”

“How perceptive of you,” she said, looking at him with more fascination and curiosity. “If you’re a Negative then you’ve come to the right place,” she smirked with a smile that wasn’t forced, but no less sinister.

“And what about you?” Helen said looking over Blair’s shoulder to a frightened Jessica.

“I’m... I’m a Positive,” Jessica stammered.

“And you’re friends?” Helen asked in a tone of disgust, as if the words tasted bitter to her.

“We are,” Blair said boldly, but backing away to stand directly in front of Jessica.

“Interesting,” Helen whispered. “So why are you really here? The newspaper story didn’t seem like the truth?”

Blair mastered himself and being much bigger than Helen replied with confidence.

“I wanted answers. The Council have started a search for all the Negatives and I don’t want to be caught by them. I don’t trust them and this Audit.”

Helen was even more surprised by this statement.

“You show much wisdom Blair,” she said, relaxing a little. She became a bit more welcoming too. “You certainly have come to the right place.”

“So what’s going on?” Blair asked ignoring her. “We know that there are Higher Negatives and they’ve been abducting people, was it you?”

“How do you know about that?” Helen asked sharply.

“Jessica overheard George on the phone last night and she heard the whole story. Knowing I was a Negative she came and told me. So was it you?”

Helen thought for a second.

“I will tell you if you follow me.”

“Blair please can we leave?” Jessica whispered in his ear.

His original fear and caution was replaced by the overwhelming desire to get answers and this was his chance, he couldn’t miss it.

“It will be okay Jessica. I won’t let anything happen to you,” he whispered back.

Helen gave a little snort, but covered it up by wiping her nose with her sleeve and clearing her throat.

“If you want answers follow me,” and she stepped around them and walked down the hall, opening the basement door and pointing down the stairs.

Blair wasn’t afraid and he walked forward. Jessica clung by his side, keeping a close eye on Helen. Reaching the door they passed Helen and looked into the mouth of the basement. It was dark and Blair could see dim lights at the bottom of the stairs. He heard faint whispers and took each step carefully and slowly, aware of Jessica next to him and how afraid she was. The door behind them closed and it became a lot darker. He heard Helen walking behind him but he didn’t look back, trying to keep up the confident persona. At the bottom he saw people on chairs in dark clothes, whose faces were pale and worn. They all stared at him like they didn’t know what to do. He nudged

Jessica gently with his shoulder and they took a few steps right. Helen passed them and raised her hand to the people in the basement, signalling that everything was okay. A few moments of silence passed and Helen laughed. She made a gesture of the right hand that motioned in one fluid movement from left to right and addressing Blair and Jessica said, "Welcome to the family."

She paused to let the words have impact and then continued.

"We're all Negatives, but myself and four others have the privilege of being Higher Negatives. We're the ones who have been abducting people and soon we won't need to. We're going to stop this Audit and expose the lie that it is. I know you understand what I mean Blair."

Blair tried to understand why they had needed to abduct people. He knew they, like him, did not think the Audit was right. They were trying to stop it, and in a way he was glad they were, but he didn't like the way they were going about it."

"Why have you abducted people?"

Helen began a long speech, telling them about her discovery of being a Higher Negative and how she had recruited others. She told him the power being a Higher Negative meant they no longer had to live in a world controlled by Positives. She was not ashamed of who she was and not willing to change. Then she explained how she found another Higher Negative, Michael, and they could Transfer to each other and increase in power. She told him about the Council abducting the Higher Negatives and forcing them to change. That she had abducted Positives to send a message and they were able to see the true effects of their power when Transferring onto the Positive. She told him how incredible it was to see the submission in a Positives face when they were tortured.

Blair listened and he felt Jessica squirm with the talk of pain and suffering. This kept him level headed, because although at times he felt like Jessica did, he was intrigued by what Helen said. To have such power brought buried feelings within him to the surface. Jessica's influence however kept him from asking more and he realised what Helen was doing was too extreme. It was time to leave, for Jessica's sake. He had got his answers and although part of him wanted to learn more and even test his Transfer he stopped those thoughts because of Jessica.

"I think you're like me," Blair began, "because you don't want the Posi's to change you, but what you're doing is something I cannot agree with. There must be another way. We'll leave now and whatever you're doing has to stop."

This was not the response Helen wanted. She flew towards him in a rage of anger, but it wasn't at him, it was at Jessica. All the other's in the room stood, ready to act if they were needed. By the time Blair could respond Jessica was on her knees facing him and Helen was standing behind her with her hand around Jessica's neck. Jessica screamed and quickly stopped, panting sharply. She looked up at Blair with tears in her eye, unable to speak, but her face conveyed a thousand words of terror and fear.

"You're a Negative Blair!" Helen shouted. "This is what you are. You must join us, or suffer under our hands. Do not think you could resist us. We've been practicing for a long time and enduring more than you could even begin to comprehend. You would bow before me with one touch of my hand. You will join us, or I will make you both suffer."

Blair didn't know what to do. Could he reach her and hit her. It was stupid, there were too many of them and she had Jessica. The pause frustrated Helen and she unleashed a little of her negativity again. It was enough to make Jessica scream out in agony.

"Stop, stop," Blair begged. "Please don't hurt her anymore. I'll do what you want."

"Good," Helen said unfeelingly. "That's more like it."

She released Jessica, who fell forwards, but caught herself by putting her arms out as they hit the floor. Blair went to help her, but Helen put out her hand to halt him and he froze.

“Blair you have to realise this is not what I want. Once you realise who you are, and that you should embrace your Negative side, then you’ll see why I’m doing this.”

Blair had all kinds of profanity and hate growing inside him but he stayed himself for Jessica’s sake.

“Now come here,” Helen said and Blair slowly edged around Jessica, looking at her longingly and with deep regret for what he had caused to happen to her. Once around her he looked at Helen. They were only half a pace apart now and she spoke again.

“Take my hand and Transfer on to me.”

Blair looked at her hesitantly.

“Do it!” Helen yelled.

As he put his hand on Helen’s arm Blair returned his gaze to the innocent girl he loved and Transferred half heartedly, dazed and confused by the situation he had suddenly found himself in. However, the sight of Jessica suddenly changed the confusion, and anger, hate and rage exploded inside him. He loosened his grip, not realising he had broken skin contact, and suddenly gripped her arm tighter. A terrifying berserker storm dominated all his feelings. He began to shake with the anger, but realised he had to control it for Jessica’s sake. The same image that created the storm helped him keep it at bay, and it kept him from lashing out with his fists. It was like a window he could look through amongst all the blinding anger, and that window was Jessica.

Helen had been watching him closely.

“Let go Blair.”

He was slowly losing control and didn’t respond. The desire to keep Jessica safe, and do as he was told conflicted with his desire to beat Helen to the floor. She shouted the command.

“Let go now!”

Blair obeyed this time and snapped his hand off her arm, looking away from Jessica, but really away from his mind’s eye and the darkness that pulsed in his veins.

“You said you were a Negative? Why didn’t you say you were a Higher Negative?” Helen said, taking a step back from him.

The surprise took away some of Blair’s fury and Jessica looked up too.

“I’m not,” Blair said sharply.

“You are,” Helen said matter of factly and laughed to herself.

Blair couldn’t understand.

Helen held out her arm again, this time more considerately and with less menace towards him.

“Take my arm Blair. Think of something that doesn’t make you angry or feel the pain of being trapped in a system that has allowed your current circumstance to take place.”

Blair did as he was told, wondering if she was right, but how could she be? He had gone through all the tests and been pronounced a Negative. There had been no variation or trouble like Helen had said there had been with Michael and the others. He rested his hand on her arm, not gripping it tightly, and looked at Jessica again, but drawing on happy memories of her this time and Transferred to Helen.

“Interesting,” Helen whispered, speaking her thoughts to the air. “Barely any Negativity at all. Complete contrast to moments ago.” Focusing she looked directly at Blair. “Now show me all your hate, show me how much you hate me for hurting your friend, show me who you really are and what I understand all too well.”

Blair tightened his grip and she laughed with joy and shouted at him,

“More! You can do better! Let go and try again. If you don’t I’ll give Jessica so much pain she will never be the same again, she will be a lifeless shell.”

With these words he did as she commanded and Transferred the pain, suffering, regret, and desire to hurt Helen and the Negative’s in the room.

“Wonderful!” Helen said, laughing with sick pleasure.

A few moments passed as the Transfer continued and she stopped laughing, but still smiled the sickening smile. Suddenly the expression shifted, and in a calm voice she told him to let go. Yet once again he was caught up in the storm. She repeated herself as before and yanked her arm from his grip. This brought him back to the room and away from the maelstrom that had been about to break.

“You’re definitely a Higher Negative Blair,” Helen said conclusively, “and a very interesting one at that. Your power is impressive. The darkness that lives in you is far greater than any of the others when they joined us. How is it that you were missed?” It was a rhetorical question. “It’s of no concern now, but I think it had something to do with her,” she glanced at Jessica who had recovered and had been watching the whole scene in horror from the floor.

“I think it’s time we tried something else with you now that we know the truth. Hannah come here?”

Hannah walked over and as she did Blair spoke.

“Let Jessica go. She won’t tell anyone of what has happened here, she’ll say I went missing and she couldn’t find me. She can do this and they’ll believe her. You can do whatever you want to me, but let her go.”

Helen deliberated.

“I will let her go, when I’m ready,” she replied. “But for now keep doing as you’re told and she’ll not suffer.”

It was the best he was going to get and Blair nodded in acknowledgement of what she had said. Hannah was next to them now and they formed a triangle around Jessica who was still on the floor. Helen looked down and spoke directly at Jessica.

“Get up.”

Jessica rose without any hesitation or rebellion, knowing the pain she might feel if she didn’t comply.

“Go over there and sit quietly for me,” Helen pointed to the chair Hannah had left. “My family will keep an eye on you, and you should be honoured that you get to behold what we are about to do. Hannah you know what to do.”

Hannah nodded.

“But go easy on him at first,” Helen added.

Hannah smiled a knowing smile, but Blair looked at them both perplexed.

“Hold out your arm Blair,” Helen said.

He was getting used to obeying her and not letting his desire to lash out or rebel take over, so he raised his arm. There was a slight hesitation as he began to suspect what might be coming, but Hannah snatched his arm and extended it fully. At that moment Blair was brought into a world where pain was all he knew. He tried to fight it and he felt all his muscles tense. His breathing became irregular and the stress caused sweat to break on his face. The pain suddenly increased and he shut his eyes, tensing even more, feeling like every part of his body was crying out for the pain to stop, but he couldn’t stop it.

As if it came from a faraway place he heard Helen voice.

“Do not fight it Blair. This pain is part of you. Embrace it and absorb it into your being. This pain is real, it cannot be stopped. It cannot just disappear. Fighting fuels it and your body and mind will tire and the pain will win. You must find a place in your mind and store the pain there, put it in a box and let it remain, but channel your mind and body to keep going. All the systems in you must keep functioning. They must be the focus, and the pain the secondary sense. Focus on what will keep you alive.”

The voice stopped and the pain increased even more. Blair yelled out but managed to think for a split second.

Breathe, he thought. *I must breathe.*

He tried his hardest to minimise his focus on the pain and regulate the systems of his body. He began to inhale and exhale slowly, in a rhythmic pattern, and this was his focus and it worked. The pain became slightly less of a burden and he could start to feel his body again and felt the sweat on his face and how tensed he was. He continued to relax and kept breathing as the primary focus, but the whole time there was this almost overwhelming agony drilling into his thoughts and it was too much. He lost focus and the pain dominated his mind again. Suddenly it stopped.

After a few deep breaths Blair straightened himself from the bent over position he found himself in and opened his eyes, feeling exhausted and dizzy.

“Not bad, not bad at all,” he heard Helen say, and he saw Hannah glaring at him.

“I’m so glad we found you Blair. You’ve proven yourself to be most interesting. Prepare yourself. Again...” and Hannah Transferred.

This went on for an hour and Hannah made him suffer more each time. Every time he began to get closer to regulating the pain, and make his body to focus on the external world, the intensity increased. Finally, he heard the words, “That’s enough.” They had a finality about them and he guessed it was over. When Hannah let go he found himself on his knees and continued to focus on breathing and recovering from the trauma he had been put through. As he knelt Helen spoke.

“Once again you show strength few here possessed even after weeks of suffering endurance. Now it’s time to show you one more purpose behind what we do. This is where you get your reward and can feel the power of your own Transfer.”

She scanned the room and made her orders.

“Chris, get one of the Posi’s and bring them here. Everyone should see this.”

Chris did what he was told and Benedict recovered enough and pulled himself to his feet, not able to focus fully on what was going on. A few moments passed and he focused a bit more, realising there was a man kneeling in front of him.

The man was one of the new Posi’s so didn’t look too worn and battered. Yet, he had already suffered a few and he knew what was coming. Terror made his face twitch and it held his tongue as he tried, but failed to beg for compassion.

“Transfer onto him,” Helen ordered.

Blair looked at her and then to the man who knelt before him. He was repelled by the thought, it was too much, and Helen saw the hesitation.

“Bring Jessica here,” she barked, and one of the Negatives rose, grabbed Jessica’s arm, lifting her out the chair, and dragged her to them.

“No!” Blair cried out, his arms flying up from his side, holding them out with his palms vertical in a beckoning protest. “I’ll do it,” he said in submission.

As the Negative pushed Jessica back down into the chair Blair slowly raised his hand and placed it on the side of the man’s head, almost like a caress, his hand cupped around the cheek as the man knelt there shaking as he looked up at him. Blair closed his own eyes and Transferred as little

negativity as he could. The man still recoiled and it broke the connection. Before Helen could say anything, because Blair knew she would, he placed his hand around the man's neck and held tightly, but not so it would strangle him.

"Open your eyes Blair," Helen said threateningly. "And give him a bit more than that," she smirked.

Blair obeyed.

"Now look at his eyes. Look how he pleads to you. This is what it means to have control. No longer do you have to ask them for help. This man is a Posi. The same as those who would change you into something you're not. They've told us we're wrong because we're different, but I say we are the ones with the power. Look at the effect your Transfer has on him. We've been suppressed because we didn't know what we could do. How could we? Now look how he cowers before you. No longer will you feel scorned because of what you are. Share who you are with him Blair. They tell us what we are is wrong, but what you feel is right. I know what you feel Blair. I know deep down you're fighting yourself and your true nature. Don't fight it. Embrace who you are and begin again as a better, and more powerful man than you would have ever been. This is the new way I believe in. A way where people like you and I have the power Blair, you know the power I speak of as you control this man. You could command him to do anything. He would obey because of your power."

"Don't listen to her!" Came a cry from across the room. "Look at him Blair! He's in such pain. Why would you want to inflict that on someone?" Jessica stammered.

Helen was furious for the interruption and was going to punish her, but she stopped: that would come in time. She knew she could use the question to her advantage. Blair continued to Transfer and listen, unable to do anything else as Helen replied.

"Why?" she laughed. "Because it is true understanding and empathy. Because this man now understands us a little bit more. Because true strength comes from what you can endure, not what you can run away from. I know you understand Blair. I have never seen so much potential as I see in you, someone who hasn't even subjected themselves to negativity voluntarily.

"We've grown over the weeks as we found those similar to ourselves, and our power is growing as we push and strengthen ourselves. The time is almost right for us to show ourselves and we'll do great things, and people will do what we want. But now you have come to us. You, who has so much power after such a short time. You too could be a part of this, and you could be great, people would listen to you and do what you wanted. That pain you feel becomes easier if you push it to its limit. I know this is what you want because it is what I wanted. If you don't believe me I will show you again. Remember all that I have said Blair. I have shown you our ways and have given you a gift by telling you what you should have learned for yourself. Now prepare yourself."

Blair hesitated, stopped the Transfer and the man doubled over falling at Blair's knees. Jessica knew what was coming and stood up shouting, "No! Please don't..." but she was pushed back by the Negative who stood in front of her blocking her from getting up, but letting her see Helen and Blair. And then Helen did it, she grabbed Blair's arm violently and he screamed with terror and pain. It was far more than Hannah had given him and he fell to the floor, curling into a ball of oblivion.

Only moments passed, but to him it felt like a life time of suffering. Finally, his thoughts swam through the overwhelming horror and some conscious thought broke the surface so he could battle this, but battling was wrong, he had to swim with it.

Focus.... the small conscious thought said, Breathe. Feel the pain. This pain is just a higher level of what is already inside of me. I endured the others. I can do the same again.

It was difficult to even think these thoughts, and he could hardly sense his body. It was so much more pain than he could ever have imagined. However as he repeated the words, *focus, breath... focus, breath...* It became the pattern of his inhale and exhale, and he knew he was starting to swim with the pain. Through the pain he suddenly began to feel and sense his lungs and air ways. Breathing became easier and somewhere in the back of his mind he felt a feeling of accomplishment and even satisfaction at what he was doing. He was enduring this. He was increasing in his ability to survive suffering. Shaking his internal mind he realised that through the pain he could speak, and managed to hiss,

“Let. Go.”

Helen didn't let go, but did stop the Transfer. Blair lay on the floor, pulling on all his inner strength to turn his head and look glaringly at Helen.

“Good,” Helen said, ignoring the look he gave her. “Even better than I had expected. You see now that it becomes easier to deal with your own darkness once you've suffered this way?”

Blair understood what she had said and he closed his eyes. He no longer felt the same weight of his own darkness bear down on him the way it always had. He had always had to fight it but now he felt like it was easier to deal with, like it wasn't something to fight anymore. It was still there, and part of him continued to challenge it, but it was not the internal struggle he had felt all his life. He realised that this was what he wanted and Helen had been right.

Jessica saw the change taking place in Blair's facial expressions and she realised he was beginning to be drawn in by what had been said and what he had experienced.

“Blair you can't seriously be contemplating joining them? They've inflicted pain on people until they go mad. They need to be stopped!” She shouted.

“That cannot happen little girl,” Helen said bitterly. “People need to accept us for who we are, but they won't, so we need to shift the balance of power in our favour. You're beginning to understand Blair, and soon there'll be no doubt in your mind that this is what you are. Now show us again by educating this man in the ways of suffering. Let your mind relax and feel what it means to have power. Fighting it will only bring suffering to you and those you care for.”

Blair was in a state of confusion. Part of him wanted to do this, he wanted to make the man suffer so he could feel superior, but another part fought it, he didn't want Jessica to think him a monster. And then there was the threat of her suffering that contradicted his desire to stop this. He had no choice, he had to do it to save her from suffering, and the darker part was glad for the justification.

Helen began to be impatient and gave him one last chance through sly words and subtle temptation.

“Remember that your power has already increased so quickly. Can't you see that you have complete control over him? If you grew stronger you would have so much power. You have the power over him. He is at your mercy. He would do anything for you not to feel that pain. All you need to do is touch his skin and prove to him you'll make him suffer and he'll never want to change you or make you feel insignificant again.”

It was too much and the darkness in him wanted it so bad. The justification was the excuse and he spoke in an authoritative tone, “If I stay here with you, you must let Jessica go.”

Helen smirked in her mind. *The boy thinks he has a choice... how cute...*

“I promise to let her go,” she said, “but she knows too much.”

Walking over Helen came closer and closer to Jessica. Fear took Jessica and she tried to push herself through the back of the chair, but there was no escape. Helen bent over and placed a hand on Jessica's arm. Jessica screamed in agony, her mind unable to comprehend such negativity and pain.

It was all the pain, misery, loneliness, betrayal, agony, rejection and struggles all together in one burst of Transfer. Helen knew what it would do to Jessica, but Blair had to learn that although she would let Jessica go eventually, she wasn't just going to let her leave and tell everyone what was happening here.

Blair reacted without even thinking. He saw what Helen was doing and the storm that had been raging to save Jessica peaked and his window of resistance smashed in the hurricane. He ran forward at a lightening pace. Jessica went limp and silent, and Helen had just let go of her arm, but Blair didn't notice. He was on Helen the moment she let go and he put his hands on her face, drawing on the storm. It was enough to catch her off guard and she buckled slightly under the surprising intensity. Blair felt a brief moment of hope from her staggering, but it vanished. Helen grabbed his wrist, about to put him in a coma, but at the last second she stopped, Transferring enough to tame the storm, but not destroy it. He was too unique and important to her. Blair felt a brief flash of agony and then everything went black.

Chapter Twenty Two

“Wake up, Jessica.”

It was Blair’s voice. *What happened?* She thought as she stirred, feeling disorientated and aching all over.

“B...Blair?” She stammered.

“Yes, Jessica, it’s me.”

She opened her eyes and blinking hard she saw him kneeling in front of her. He looked up at her intently and she regained a sense of her surroundings, feeling the cushions of the chair. Suddenly she remembered the horrific scenes that had taken place and scanned the room in fear, then looked to Blair in confusion. The basement was empty and apart from a few chairs that were knocked over it looked undisturbed.

“What happened?” She asked.

“Everything’s okay Jessica. We’re safe. Your Dad has gone upstairs to talk to some of the Council Workers. They came and stunned all the Negatives before they could hurt us anymore.”

“How?” Jessica said still dazed and confused.

“The man across the street saw us go into the house, but didn’t see us leave. He phoned the Council and they had Helen down on their list of Negatives to take in for questioning, so they came here with Stunners. They knew we were missing and might be being held hostage like those who had been abducted. They’ve taken Helen and the others and they’ll make sure they never hurt anyone again.”

Jessica struggled to believe it, but there he was in front of her and she shook her head, ignoring her disbelief. With it gone she threw herself around him, hugging him tightly. Blair just caught his balance and rose with her still in his arms. She pulled herself away and kissed him. Blair was caught by surprise, but once he realised what was happening he kissed back.

“Blair I’m afraid we’re going to have to take you to the Council Building,” came a voice to their left.

It was George. They hadn’t notice him come down the stairs. Jessica looked at him objecting, “No, don’t take him Dad. Please,” she begged. “He’s done nothing wrong. He did everything he could to save me from these people. He isn’t like them.”

She doubted what she said a little, remembering how he had looked towards the end, but she knew him. It was only because Helen had forced him to behave that way. It wasn’t his fault. It wasn’t the Blair she had always known.

George looked at her and then at Blair, and back to Jessica, sighing.

“Okay. For you Jessica, but we’ll be keeping a close eye on you Blair.”

Blair and Jessica relaxed at his words and they followed him up the stairs and out of the dark basement. They stepped out of the house and into the darkness outside. It was a comforting darkness with a breeze, and not the stifling stale darkness of the basement. They were free, and they held each other’s hand, knowing the ordeal was over, and in a strange way they were happier than when they had entered that basement. Something positive had come from the trauma they had suffered. They had been forced to express how much they cared and loved each other and the future looked brighter than it ever had. Blair walked Jessica home and struggled to say goodbye, but they said they would see each other after a good sleep. It was a difficult night for them both and memories of the pain they had experienced caused them to shake in terror at times, but thoughts of each other helped dispel the fear and finally they slept.

Life went back to normal almost straight away. The Council decided it was time to tell the people what happened. Forcing the point they had captured all the Negatives and there would be no more suffering and only the Prime Objective would flourish now. A few more weeks went by and Jessica and Blair shared a stronger bond, spending as much time together as they could.

At the end of those few weeks Jessica felt that something wasn't right, but she ignored it, thinking it was just doubts and would get a Transfer to push them away. The beginning of the following week she was walking home from school with Blair, happy as she could be. But as she walked she felt something on her face, like someone was touching it, but there was no one there. Suddenly an overwhelming pain surged through her body and she fell to the floor. She could hear Blair calling to her as he stood over her, trying to help. The pain was the same as when Helen had Transferred to her and she couldn't move or call out. And then as quickly as the pain had come, it vanished, and changed; it became love. It was like nothing she had ever felt before. It was so intense and comforting. She held onto it with all her might and focused on it as she lay there on the ground. She didn't want to move or open her eyes. If she could lay there with this feeling forever she would have.

She lost track of time and had no idea how long she had been lying there for. She realised Blair was gone. In fact, so was the hard ground she had been lying on. She let some of the love go and thought about what she could sense through touch and realised she was on something softer, like a mattress. She kept her eyes shut tightly, not knowing what was going on. Listening she heard nothing, only her own breathing. This gave her the courage to finally open her eyes and she couldn't believe what she saw.

Chapter Twenty Three

Two days earlier...

It was late morning the day after Blair and Jessica had arrived at Helen's house, but Blair had lost his grip on time. The basement had no natural light or clocks and the first thing he felt was the pain in his arms as he lay slumped against something hard. He opened his eyes and moved a little. The movement made the restraints chink and he looked to his arms. He pulled them in a futile attempt free himself, and stopped when he heard a quiet grunt. Looking around he saw the Positives Helen had abducted and tortured. The next sounds he heard were footsteps and he looked to the entrance of his prison. It was Helen. She looked at him like a displeased school teacher.

"There was no need to do what you did. I know you care for the girl but she was your weakness and holding you back."

"Where is she!" Blair shouted, pulling once more on the chains in frustration.

"She... She is safe," Helen replied mischievously. "She is in a coma, and she won't wake from it."

The words were cold and unsympathetic and she continued the same way.

"I didn't really want to have to do it, but you must realise this is the best thing for us both. I cannot allow her to go and tell people where we are. They might try to stop us, not that they could, but it would make things a lot harder. This way she'll never tell anyone. This frees you from your concern for her and now you can focus on reaching your potential without wasting your time trying to save her."

The shock and despair took all the fight out of him and Blair slumped back into the kneeling position. He couldn't think clearly, all his emotions and desires contradicting each other. He felt like his head was going to explode. Jessica was the one thing stopping him embracing the darkness and she was gone. All hope was gone. With this thought he hung his head; the fight was over. He had to embrace his true nature now. It was the only way to cope with the loss.

The more suffering I can endure, the easier it will be won't it? But his thoughts and feelings suddenly cleared and only one desire remained. *I will rip this world apart. If my Transfer can make me powerful and control others then I want it. I can make all of them suffer as I do now.*

The anger and fury grew and as he embraced it something inside him died. At that moment his face changed from a strained and hurt expression into a blank canvas. He looked up and spoke with a tone of sinister purpose and acceptance.

"Let me go. I cannot fight this anymore. This is who I am. All that remains is my negativity and hate. I will bring to pass the change I knew I wanted from the first time I heard about the Audit. I am free now. I am free to be the Higher Negative you've shown me I can be. I want pain and I want to inflict even greater pain."

With the last words his face turned from the blank expression, into a sly smile, and any hope was crushed under the darkness, buried in a universe of negative emotion. Helen had watched him and enjoyed the transformation that took place and spoke when he finished.

"Finally, you understand. There's nothing better for me than to see one of my own embrace their true nature. You're truly free now, and with a little more training you will be ready."

She took out a key and took off the restraints. Blair stood up, stretching to his full height. Helen stood back to admire him. The change was noticeable. There was a determination in him that hadn't been there before and the twisted smile on his face, combined with his athletic physic, made him an intimidating figure to behold. They left the freezer and Blair looked at the Positives and

smiled, thinking he would be back for them soon. He turned and looked around the basement. There on a mattress was Jessica. He looked at her, but felt nothing and glanced away as if she had been an inanimate object that gave him no concern.

Helen called the other Negatives, telling them Blair was now a part of the family and in two days they would be leaving to take the Council Building.

“We will go to the building at night and wait in the offices of the Higher Posi’s. In the morning we’ll put them in a coma, or inflict them with enough pain that they pass out.”

The Negatives had developed the ability to do this thanks to the endurance sessions.

“Once the Higher Posi’s are out of the way it will be easy to subdue the others,” Helen continued. “They’ll see how powerful we are and any who try to stop us will suffer. My one concern is for the Stunners. We must stay clear of them at all costs otherwise we’ll be shocked like Michael. We’ll free him when we can and soon we’ll be reunited with our brother. The Community will then be ours and we can do anything we want. It will be our time to have control and have revenge for what the Posi’s have done.”

With the plan explained, and after Blair was questioned by some of the suspicious Negatives, they continued endurance and torture and spent all their time making themselves strong and ready for the final assault. However, they were interrupted in the middle of the afternoon by a loud knocking coming from the front door above. Helen hushed them all. She was confused. Apart from Blair and Jessica, no one had come to visit her in a long time.

“It’s probably the Council coming for you,” Blair said realising the truth. “They wanted to take in all the Negatives. They must have reached you on their list. They would make for good guests,” he said slyly.

Helen liked the new Blair, but she knew his eagerness would be too much of a risk, the Council would know the workers were here.

“No. It’s too risky,” she said. “I’ll go up and see if I can hear who it is and find out what they want.”

Helen crept silently up the stairs to the front door and through it she caught the last part of a conversation between two voices.

“...must not be in?”

“I guess not. We can try again tomorrow. We have a few others we can go see and bring in for questioning.”

Helen heard the footsteps walk away and she sighed. She realised Blair had been right and walked softly back to the basement.

“Well?” Blair asked.

“Council Workers come for me,” Helen replied.

“Thought so,” he nodded.

“They said they would be back tomorrow,” she exclaimed. “I really wish we could have them to torture as you said, but we must be careful. We’re too close. We must train you to be ready. Then this will be over once and for all.”

“Whatever you think is best,” Blair said. “They’ll be back tomorrow though, what will you do?”

“We’ll ignore them. They’ll leave again and by the time they think to actually check properly it will be too late.”

“I hope you’re right,” Blair said.

Helen gave him a sharp look.

Don’t question me boy, she thought. We don’t want you ending up like Benedict.

She didn't say anything though, he was important and his rapidly growing power was needed.

"You need to ignore them and focus on your training Blair," she said instead. "You, Hannah and the others continue Transferring and enduring. The new Posi's I brought in last night, while you were out cold, need to be broken in," she said laughing.

Blair smirked and they continued to participate in the cycle.

By midday the next day Blair was overflowing with thoughts of power and he stepped into the freezer as normal to Transfer all his negativity onto one of the Positives. Helen stood by and watched like a mother wolf teacher her cub to hunt. The first few times he had played with them, teasing them with mocking words, but that had become dull quickly. Now he just crouched down and grabbed them violently, expelling memories of his sufferings and hate.

"Good," Helen muttered as she watched the woman spasm and suddenly go limp. Blair let go, looking to Helen for approval.

"Very good," she exclaimed. "Just one day of our training and I think you might have put her in a coma. Let's do some more endurance and we'll see if she wakes."

Blair stood up feeling very proud. He couldn't wait to get out of here and do this to anyone that tried to stop them from taking over the Council.

The knock came as expected and Helen crept once more to stand behind the door, listening to the workers. She had been right and yet again they left saying they would try for a third time tomorrow. Helen laughed at how even after all she had done they still hadn't learned to be cautious or suspicious of this. It just confirmed to her that Positive Transfers made them ignorant. The rest of the day was spent in the same way as always and before they rested for the night they checked the woman and she was still out cold like Jessica.

"Well done Blair," Helen said. "I cannot believe your power has grown so quickly. Tomorrow we will be ready to leave this place and implement our change. I cannot wait to see you in action."

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That time was so close at hand and Helen recapped the plan on the fourth day of the week, two full days since Blair had ventured into the basement.

"Today is the last day of endurance and most of you will have one last chance to Transfer onto our guest before we leave. Negatives you will go first and we Highers will finish them off. After that, when it's late into the night, we'll go to the Council building and sit in wait for the Higher Posi's."

A pattern of endurance and watching the Negatives torture their victims went on until mid-afternoon. For a third time they were interrupted by a knock at the door above, but Helen ignored it. The knock was repeated, and still she ignored it. It didn't come again and to their relief all was quiet from above. Another hour passed and it was time for the Higher Negatives to have their turn. They had completed Helen's goal on previous victims and put them in a coma. However, Helen said this time only she, Hannah and Blair were to use all their strength and finish them off. The other three were allowed to make them suffer until they passed out, but that was all. These three Higher Negatives took their turns and once the hostages had passed out they had dinner. They returned and Hanna, Helen and Blair prepared themselves eagerly to put the Positives into a coma. Hannah went first, letting her victim suffer slowly. She increased the pain bit by bit until she gave one last burst of

all her inner torment and watched as the man went limp. Cheers and claps erupted at the spectacle and Helen decided she wanted her turn now. She held the man's arm, but didn't Transfer.

"Now?" she mocked, pretending she was going to Transfer, but didn't. "Now?" she mocked again laughing. "Who knows when it's going to come?"

The man's face screwed up tightly in anticipation and the wait was torture enough; tears ran down his cheeks. Helen smirked pointing to the tears with her other hand. She looked at the others and they all laughed again.

"Now!" she shouted above the laughs.

The man's body locked in the split second of agony then went limp. Helen tossed his arm aside and stood up laughing at the game.

"Blair it's your turn," she said once she stopped laughing.

Blair stepped forward. He had endured two full days of Transfers and barley remembered anything from before that time. The only things he remembered were pain, suffering and loneliness. Now he had a family of people like him and he drew on his past pain and the suffering he had felt over the forty-eight hours. There was no game for him, no precession of words and jeers. He simply crouched down, put his five fingers against the last woman's face, and placed his face directly in front of hers. She was balanced on her knees, looking at him with eyes that begged him to stop, but he only stared back with a cold unfeeling commitment. Everyone else had gone silent, watching the intimate scene. Blair took a breath, drawing on the negativity that circled his body like blood, and Transferred the universe of oblivion. There was no scream, no spasms, no closed eyes: the face just froze in its expression. The on lookers stared in fascination. Blood began to trickle down from her eyes like tears, and they gasped as more blood broke the skin of her forehead and started to run down her face. It all happened in a few seconds and she fell forward. Blair caught her in a twisted embrace of hunter and prey. Blood covered his shoulder as she rested there, then he pushed her away and stood up. Helen had walked forward as he did and took the woman's head in her hands and checked for a pulse.

"She's dead," Helen exclaimed. Looking at Blair she repeated her statement, laughing this time. "She's dead. Your power killed her."

Blair said nothing, but let a thin smile creep on his face.

Suddenly Helen became very jealous.

Why does he have this power? I want it! I've trained more than he has. I should have this not him. This jeopardises my position as leader. If he's stronger than I am the others might listen to him and not me. I will have to keep a close eye on you Blair and if you try to contradict me I will stop you as I did Benedict.

Everyone was in shock as she was thinking and Blair said nothing. Helen looked at him to see if he would say anything, but he didn't. He turned from her, walking out the freezer in deep reflection of his own. The others parted out of respect and fear. He found a seat and sat, his shirt covered in blood, and processed the fact he could kill people by Transferring. He could take a life with a simple touch and he needed some time to come to terms with the power he had.

Helen continued to watch him while the others went to find corners to talk about what had happened. She looked at them all. This had changed things and her jealousy took her again.

Something has to be done quickly to make sure he doesn't get thoughts of taking the forefront of my revolution. My plan to capture him, and raise him to be one of my own could backfire. How could I have guessed he would have such power? He will not have power over me. I will make sure of that.

“Blair,” she called, walking out of the freezer and bringing him away from his reflection. “This is power indeed, but you must prove yourself before we go to the Council Building.”

She walked over to the mattress where Jessica lay barely breathing, and she pointed a finger at her.

“You must use your power to end her life. Only then will you be truly free, and one of us. This will prove your loyalty to our Prime Objective.”

Blair watched her, half turned in his seat, and as she finished he stood up and spoke.

“What does it prove? She is nothing to me now. Why would I waste my efforts?”

“Why?” Helen spat. “Why wouldn’t you? Another chance to use such power should be welcomed. I’m sure everyone would like to see it again?”

The others had stopped talking and were watching as this unfolded, and with these last words they nodded. One negative stood to get a better look at Jessica, and the others followed. Their eyes turned to Blair expectantly. Blair sighed.

“Fine,” he pronounced casually. “If this is what I have to do to prove myself then I’ll do it. It will be good to take another life, such power is a gift I accept with gratitude.”

He walked over to Jessica, but there was something slow in his movement, as if his legs were trying to resist. Reaching her he knelt next to the mattress. The others gathered closer to witness his unique power again. Helen watched Blair and she was both willing him to do it and not to do it. If he killed Jessica her dominance was clear and she had control of him. If he didn’t she would have to prove her own strength against him and force him to submit. Either way he wasn’t going to elevate himself above her.

Blair’s hand moved slowly towards Jessica’s face, but stopped, hovering above it. There was something inside him stopping him. Suddenly he felt an emotion he thought had died. It was a pin hole of light piercing through a black sheet and it was enough to hold him back and think.

What is this feeling? What is it? It’s so familiar and yet so distant?

As each micro second passed the light ripped a bigger hole, and clinging to it he knew what it was. It was love. He remembered that he loved Jessica. He couldn’t hurt her.

With this remembrance he rose and turned to face Helen. Everyone looked at him confused and quickly the confusion turned to anger and disappointment. Helen was the angriest, and as with Benedict she snapped.

Snarling she threw her hands at Blair’s face. He barely managed to keep his balance and locked his legs just in time. However, it was the emotional impact that hit him hardest and Helen’s Transfer flooded over him like a tidal wave. For a second it drowned him but his reflex action kicked in and he began embracing it. The onlookers had taken a step back in shock and watched as Helen snarled and growled, looking up into Blair’s face with her hands pushing hard against his skin. Blair’s eyes snapped open as he gained composure. His arms rose and gripped Helen’s wrists. She winced, but endured it like he had and the battle of Transfer commenced.

They had immense strength to endure, but also immense power to inflict and after a few seconds sweat began to break on their brows. Both eyes were locked on the other in a battle of wills. So much pain and agony crossed between them, and then back as they each drew upon it. Finally, Blair’s superior strength gave him the advantage and he pushed with his Transfer and physical strength. Helen’s legs buckled and she fell to her knees. Her hands dropped from his face and he was free from her grasp. She scrambled, trying to grab his wrist like he had hers, but it was too late. The moment her Transfer was broken, it was over.

Blair looked down and saw the veins pulsing in her temples and the sweat dripping from her face. This was it. This was the way it had to be. Helen had tried to make him kill Jessica. No matter

what happened after this he would not let her be killed. Helen had to be stopped for good. With a burst of all his Negative power he willed it into her. Helen's eyes closed and she called out. Not a cry of begging submission or plea for mercy, but a cry of anger, frustration, defiance and an inability to accept this.

"Noooo!" she yelled, but it was cut short, and she went limp and silent.

Blair let her go. Her lifeless body fell to the floor and the onlookers took another step back as she fell. Only Chris rushed forward and managed to soften her fall. There was a moment of silence, but Blair broke it.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

Chris looked up from Helen, looking at Blair with anger and vengeance, but he knew there was nothing he could do. He checked Helen's pulse and felt nothing.

"Yes. She is dead," he spat angrily and held her close.

"She brought this on herself," Blair said, trying to justify what he had done.

No one said anything, the shock of what had happened and fear of Blair binding their tongues. Blair wasn't sure what else to say and he took a step back. He felt his foot knock against the mattress. He looked down and saw Jessica. He felt the light again and knelt down beside her. The others watched still not knowing what to do.

"I'm sorry Jessica," he began. "I'm sorry this has happened to you. I loved you..." he stammered. "But I don't understand what that is anymore. All I feel is pain and darkness inside me. I remember love, but losing you has fuelled the darkness inside me. All I want to do is inflict this on others and have control over my circumstances. That darkness can kill people now, but I couldn't kill you. I guess that love is still there somewhere, but it is pointless. It was pointless in life, as you never loved me, and it is pointless in death. Maybe if you had loved me I could understand, maybe I would have been able to fight my nature, but this is who I am now. Whatever I feel for you it serves no purpose. If only you had loved me, maybe I would have felt like I belonged and never came here."

The light was fading and the darkness multiplied, smothering it, but one last reflex action took over. The dimming light inside him stretched out his hand and he brushed the matted hairs from her face. As his fingers grazed her skin she seethed and convulsed violently. Blair pulled his hand back sharply as if it had been burned. Suddenly Jessica stopped and went still as stone. Blair stared at her in complete disbelief and horror.

What have I done? I didn't Transfer anything? How...? Please... no...

"Please," he cried out, looking from her to his hands in repulsion, as if they were covered in her blood.

He had killed her. The last shade of light vanished and the guilt, suffering and remorse for killing her was tearing his mind apart. The others were staring at him just as shocked and confused as he was. Blair rose and stumbled towards them, looking up and down from them to his hands.

"What have I done? My hands? My hands? What have I done?"

He came to Chris first, who had let Helen lie on the floor.

"What have I done?" Blair repeated, holding out his hands and putting them on Chris. Chris fell to the floor without another movement or breath. Blair watched as his mind continued to fragment.

I'm not Transferring. What's happening to me?

The others were backing away quickly towards the stairs. Blair couldn't let them go. He ran at them, his hands outstretched, and one by one they crumbled to the floor. Standing there next to the

stairs he looked at the lifeless bodies and his mind shattered like glass. It was all too much and he reverted to the only plan he knew.

Stop the Council and make the Posi's suffer.

With one last look at Jessica he left, walking up the stairs, down the corridor and out into the street. He walked slowly, as if to the gallows, but it wasn't his execution. It was the execution of the Council and anyone who got in his way.

Chapter Twenty Four

Jessica's chest suddenly started to rise and fall and she breathed consciously, waking from her coma. A few minutes passed and she opened her eyes. In the shock and disbelief she touched her face and then the mattress, hoping it would prove they were real. The world she had woken up from had felt real, but she remembered how at times it hadn't, and realised it had been some sort of dream.

Shaking her head and looking around she gasped. Bodies littered the floor of the basement and at times they overlapped one another. It was impossible to understand and on top of the confusion she felt so tired and lethargic. She stood up slowly, feeling dizzy, and saw Helen in front of her. All the memories returned in a flash, but when she looked around there was no sign of Blair. Thinking of him reminded her of the love she had felt and somehow she knew that it had come from him. This thought gave her strength and she called out his name.

"Blair!" She shouted, hoping he would come, but he didn't.

Staggering over the bodies she went to leave this scene of horror and place of suffering. Drawing close to the bottom of the stairs she glanced down and there, in the place where she had first been tortured, was the blue Tulip. It was all kicked, dried and trampled on now and she felt like she was the tulip. The initial numbing shock began to pass and tears fell from her eyes.

What happened here? Where's Blair? I'm so tired.

A minute passed and she composed herself. Breathing heavily she looked away from the Tulip, focusing on the love she had felt. Step by step she made her way out of the basement. Once at the top of the stairs she closed the door, hoping that such an act would hide the terrible things that had happened. It helped and she blocked the memories out, holding on to the desire to find Blair and see him. She still felt dizzy and staggered left to the kitchen, drinking some water and eating a couple of slices of bread. Feeling a little better she left and opened the front door, turning her face to the side as the sunlight hurt her eyes. It took a few moments to adjust and finally she walked up the path, drawing on all her energy and determination. She looked left down the street they had come up, and then looked right. As she did she saw a group of people gathered around a man lying motionless on the floor, about fifty metres away from her, on the other side of the street. Now that she had stretched herself and gained some composure she walked a bit faster. She came to the group and a few of them noticed her. They looked at her with shock, her hair was tangled and dirty, her face pale and tear stained, and her clothes were dirty and smelt stale. Many of the people were crying and she couldn't understand why. She looked to the man lying on the floor and covered her mouth so she didn't scream. He was lifeless and dried blood tears marked his cheek and forehead. Jessica tried to speak, but the shock stopped her. She looked at the crowd and saw the same shock and terror in their faces. Finally, she found some words.

"What happened?"

One of the people in the crowd spoke as best they could between sobs.

"A boy...a boy about your age touched him...and...killed him..."

"Blair?" Jessica said under her breath. "Which way did he go?" she asked.

"Th...that way," the woman pointed up the street.

Jessica guessed he must be going to the Council Building. She started walking as fast as she could in that direction and all she heard was someone say,

"Where's she going?"

And someone else reply, "I don't know, but let's Transfer. The Council should be here..."

Then they were out of her hearing range and she started to jog lightly, feeling so tired, but searching for every bit of energy to keep up the pace. She thought about getting a Tram but people

would ask questions. They might hinder her so she jogged hoping she would get to Blair and find out what was going on? And why the people said he had killed someone?

After feeling like she was going to pass out several times, Jessica reached her destination. The scene made her stop still: she couldn't believe her eyes. Body after body lay on the floor in a chaotic line leading into the Council Building. Each one of them white faced with blood running from their forehead and eyes. The sight and physical exertion was too much for her and she lost the food and water she had taken. Wiping her mouth she started to walk around the bodies, staring at them in bewilderment.

I have to find Blair, she thought.

It was the only thing pushing her on through this traumatic experience and finally she entered the building and continued to follow the line of death. People crouched beside lifeless victims, sobbing and crying in confusion; unable to comprehend the violence. They barely noticed Jessica, some looking up at her, but unable to speak coherently through the sobs.

The path continued along the corridors until she came to the Main Hall. She paused for a moment then slowly opened one of the doors and stepped through it. Letting out a silent gasp she saw what she had been looking for. Blair sat in the Principle Speaker's chair with his head in his hand, eyes closed and forehead creased, like he was trying to solve the hardest mathematical equation. All around him were more bodies and Jessica recognised them as Higher Positives, like her father. She saw the Stunners, some of them having been fired, but ignored them and sobbed because it was all too much.

"Dad?" she called out, scanning the faces, but not seeing him.

Blair hadn't noticed her and at the sound his head snapped to look at her. His deep contemplation turned to confusion and disbelief. A few moments passed in silence as they looked at each other over the thirty metre gap. Blair spoke first rising from the seat.

"Jessica...? Is it really you...? How...?"

"It's me Blair. It's me."

He stretched an arm out as if he could touch her from that distance, but quickly snapped it to his side.

"How are you here?" He asked in complete disbelief.

Jessica started to walk forward as she spoke.

"I woke up in the basement. It was horrible Blair, all the Negatives on the floor. What has happened to you...? Did you kill these people...? Why...? How...? What happened...?"

Blair tried to understand how she could still be alive and be here talking to him. Suddenly he began to feel guilt breaking through the madness.

"You... you were dead?" He managed to say.

"I'm not Blair. I'm here. What happened?" She asked again, stopping five metres away from the table that separated them.

"I thought you were dead... I couldn't think anymore and..." his guilt turned into anger and frustration.

"This is who I am!" He shouted, spreading his arms open wide to present the bodies to her. "I'm a Higher Negative and I'm in control now. No one can stop me and no one will change me."

"This isn't you Blair. What did Helen do to you?"

"That doesn't matter!" he spat. "How are you alive, Jessica? You were dead!" he choked.

"I... I don't know," she stammered. "All I know is I was having some sort of a dream and then I felt so much pain, but the pain turned to love. It was a love I had never felt before. Then I woke in the basement. It was you wasn't it Blair? You love me..."

He shook his head trying to bury it. If he loved her then he still felt goodness. He didn't want to feel that, not with what he had just done.

"It doesn't matter!" he shouted. "You never loved me so why does it matter!?"

"It matters Blair, you brought me back."

"But it doesn't change anything. I am who I am. You cannot change what I've done. I will rule the Community now and you need to leave and let me do what I have to do."

"I won't leave," she cried.

"Why!?" he shouted in frustration.

"Because I love you too," she whispered.

He only just heard the words, but didn't believe them.

"Don't lie to try and stop me! I know you don't love me. Years of Transfer and not once did I feel love from you. So don't lie to me now."

"I'm not lying," she said, taking the last few steps to meet the table's edge. "I can prove it. Hold out your arm."

"No!" he screamed, taking a step back. "I will not touch you! My touch is death. Look around you! All these people dead from my touch. You're the one thing I will not kill Jessica. You need to listen to me and leave. People will be here soon and I'll be giving my orders for a new age of Negative control."

"You need to trust me Blair. There's a secret I need to tell you."

He looked at her confused, but curious.

"What secret?" he said.

"I'm a Higher Positive," she said looking him in the eyes as a tear ran down her face. Wiping it, she lowered her gaze to the table. "I've known it all my life, but I didn't tell anyone. I didn't want you to know so I could keep my true feelings from you. I didn't know if you would like me in return, but now I know you do. I'm not afraid of my feelings anymore Blair."

Blair struggled to digest this revelation. The truth felt like it was lodged in his throat, blocking his ability to breathe.

"Trust me Blair," she repeated, holding out her hand and looking at him again.

He wanted to know, but his touch would kill her. Yet, it hadn't. It had woken her from the coma. He didn't want to risk it.

"It's okay," she whispered softly, seeing his fear and hesitation. "Trust in love Blair. Trust in the love you have for me. Let me prove that I love you."

He shook his head slowly with fear, but her words were too reassuring and he slowly stretched out his arm, longing to know the truth. Both hands moved towards each other slowly and Jessica placed her fingers gently around his wrist. Blair closed his eyes, fearing what was going to happen. Jessica focused on the love she had always kept hidden and placed it as the only feeling in the Transfer. The love Transferred the moment her fingers touched his skin, but at the same time she felt overwhelming pain. She focused on her love, trying to fight the inner anger and rage coming from Blair.

Blair could feel her love mixed in with all his darkness and it brought up emotions he believed were dead. Then suddenly there was an overwhelming guilt for all the lives he had taken and his darkness began to implode in on itself. He embraced it, but not the way Helen had taught him, instead he let the guilt and negativity consume him. With one last effort he willed his resurrected love to Jessica and everything went black.

Jessica had been battling the negativity and was losing. The physical signs of stress were showing: sweat was beading on her forehead, her face was pale, and her eyes were closed. She kept

trying to Transfer her love to stop the pain, but it wasn't working and she was losing hope. Suddenly the rage and hate vanished and all she felt was his love. The change made her smile, but a second later her vision went white and then there was nothing.

Chapter Twenty Five

Jessica stirred, feeling the floor against her side and she rubbed her head. Opening her eyes she saw the pale faces of Blair's victims and gagged. She quickly turned over, back towards the table, and put her hands against the floor, ready to get to her feet. She stopped as she saw Blair lying motionless on the floor across from her. His face was stained with dry blood tears and drops on his forehead. Jessica dropped the half inch she had raised herself and sobbed, trying to breathe. Blair was dead.

As she lay there, with her eyes shut and hands covering her face, she tried to guess what had happened. She couldn't and the stress of everything overwhelmed her. All she could do was cry hysterically and she tried to breathe despite the pain. Then she heard footsteps and a familiar voice.

"Jessica?"

It was her father, George. He crouched down beside her, speaking with relief and terror in his voice.

"What has happened?" He said, looking around at the carnage.

Jessica couldn't respond.

"It will be okay," George said, trying to convince himself as much as he was her. "Your mother will be glad you're okay. We were so worried. When I got the phone call that people were being murdered I nearly lost all hope that we would ever find you. But here you are? How did you get here?"

She still couldn't answer.

"This should help my darling daughter," George said.

He placed his hand on her arm, trying to stop her shaking and sobbing. He willed the feelings from the day she was born, which were some of his happiest he had, hoping the intensity could give her what she needed to get through the trauma. He would give her a medium one for consistency after it. However, she didn't calm and he willed it stronger, but still she continued to cry hysterically in a curled up ball.

"Jessica do you feel better?" he asked confused.

Amongst the hurt she knew what he was doing. She wanted to welcome the feelings, but there was nothing. His question, and her own confusion, gave her something to focus on her.

Why hadn't the Transfer helped me? She wondered.

Her sobbing slowed and she focused on her breathing to try and calm herself. Finally, she had enough composure to answer.

"I can't feel it Dad."

He tried again. "Anything?"

"No?" she said confused, and sat up wiping her tears.

"I don't understand?" George said. "What happened?"

"B... Blair," she said pointing to his dead body, and she began to cry again, but not hysterically.

"He did this? How?" George asked.

"Not now Dad," Jessica said heavily, and stood up looking at Blair. "It's over now," and more tears fell down her face.

She sat on one of the chairs and stared at the floor.

Why can't I get a Transfer? Will I ever be able to have one again?

George looked at her debating what to do. He needed to go and check something, but couldn't leave her alone. Luckily some Positives came into the hall, tears on their faces from the

scenes of horror they saw. They walked around the bodies to George and asked him what they should do.

“Find as many Positives as you can and begin moving the bodies to the front of the building.”

They didn't move. The idea of moving the bodies was too much for them. George realised what they were feeling.

“Take a Transfer from me to get you through this. Do the same to others that help you.”

Once this took place the Positives left feeling confident about what they had to do, and began moving the bodies. George looked back to Jessica, who had her head on her arms, crying silently against the table. How could he help if he couldn't Transfer on her. There was nothing he could do and he spoke to one of the Positives.

“Can you make sure she's okay? I'll be back as soon as I can.”

*

“Michael must not be left alone at any point,” George said as he met the guards at the laboratory. “Keep your Stunners ready at all times.”

“We understand,” one of the guards replied.

“Good. Make sure you keep up the Transfer too. I don't know exactly what has happened and I don't want him escaping again.”

He turned and left the corridor, realising he needed to get his daughter home. It took some gentle persuasion and reassurance, but finally he guided Jessica out the building and took one of the vans to their home. It had been hard to get her to leave, she wanted to know what would happen to Blair's body.

George had reassured her while in the hall, “He'll be taken to the front like everyone else and workers will be taking the bodies to various morgues across the Community. They'll be buried at gravesites over the next few days.”

“I want to be at his,” she demanded and George promised he would make sure she was.

He tried to quiz her again about what had happened and all Jessica could say was, “The basement... Helen's basement...” and she lost her composure, sobbing again.

“Where?” He asked.

Through sobs she told him and once she was safe with her mother he went to investigate. He found the scene of Negatives lying lifeless on the basement floor and phoned for workers to come and get them. In his Higher Positive way he was glad that so many were gone and Michael was the only Higher Negative that remained, whatever had happened had helped the Prime Objective a lot. However, he hadn't had a Transfer in a while. Some conflicting emotions began to surface as he sat on a step in the basement waiting. He had lost so many colleagues, there was so much death, but thankfully Jessica had been found and was safe. He had never had such a mixture of Negative and Positive emotions and he began sobbing, desperately wanting a Transfer. Finally, workers arrived and he got one and promised himself he would never feel that way again.

*

“Jessica it's time,” George said.

It was the following day, and funerals had been taking place the whole day. It was now time for Blair's. As the coffin was lowered Jessica cried, feeling an emptiness a kin to the torture she had suffered at Helen's hands. She didn't know how she would go on. All she could do was let her

parents tell her what to do. It was the easiest way to live. She missed him so much. She missed the person she knew as Blair, not the killer that everyone believed him to be. Yet, it was over and he was gone. In time she hoped the pain would fade.

As they walked away to go back to the house Jessica asked George what had happened to Helen.

“She was buried earlier this morning, along with the Negi’s that had helped her,” he replied. “It’s sad to think it was her all along, and that she had done such horrible things. However, it’s over now. We can move on at last.”

He gave her a warm Positive smile, but having experienced what she had it didn’t comfort her at all.

*

The burials were completed by the next day and it was the beginning of a new week. The remaining three Higher Positives who had escaped Blair’s massacre met in the Hall to discuss the future. The Hall had been cleaned and no sign remained of what happened there. Being there didn’t bother them at all and they Transferred as they met and with big smiles they began discussing what they should do now.

“So all the remaining Negi’s have been brought in and are receiving Transfers with Michael, Benedict and the others in the lab?” George asked.

“Yes new Principle Speaker. They’ll no longer be a thorn on the rose of our beautiful Community.”

“This is wonderful!” George exclaimed. “The Prime Objective has been benefited more than we could ever have hoped for. Only us Posi’s remain and we can Transfer everyday and be the happiest we can.”

He clapped his hands for joy and smiled like a child getting a treat.

“Our people will continue forever in happiness and joy and it’s because of the Audit,” George continued. “We are the Higher Council of Three and we’ll keep doing as we have always done and nothing needs to change; everything will remain the same.”

Two years later

Every day it had hurt. Every day she had wanted a Transfer, but couldn’t have one. She couldn’t give one either, and no one could understand why. Jessica had returned to school, but felt completely alone. Each day she struggled to deal with the complex emotions she felt and how different she was. She felt stuck and trapped by her emotions. However, time passed and without really knowing it she finished her last year at high school, passing with average grades. She found a job that gave her some comfort, as it kept her focused and busy.

Then one day at work she met Paul. He was a nuisance at first, talking to her more than most people did, and she tried to ignore him. But he was persistent, making her laugh with his causal dismissal of her rejections. It wasn’t too long before she realised she liked him and decided to give him a chance. They started to talk more and he continued to make her laughed. It was something she hadn’t done in a long time and it helped her heal. Letting him into her heart was difficult, but once she did she knew it was good for her. It wasn’t complicated, it wasn’t hard work; it was simple, and

she needed simple. It wasn't long before they were in love and had their first child. At the hospital the nurse brought the new born baby to Jessica.

"It appears a Transfer won't settle her?" she said confused.

Paul stepped across giving it a try, but his daughter continued to cry.

"She must be like me," Jessica said, taking the crying baby from Paul and smiling down at the innocent child. "She can't receive Transfers. She must not be a Positive."

Or a Negative, she thought, not wanting to say it out loud.

It was a part of their history no one talked about anymore. Jessica had wondered if more Negatives would be bom, but that didn't matter right now. She could see something new was happening. No longer was she alone in her uniqueness, she had a daughter that was different too. What this meant for her, for the child, or for the whole Community she couldn't tell, but she was happy it had happened. After everything she had been through, and with everything she had learned, it was clear that their uniqueness was important.

The End