Part X: Return of the Native

Back at Freedom Five HQ in the situation room, Legacy immediately steps into crisis mode. “We’ll arrange transport and try to get in touch with everyone we know. Prime Wardens, everyone.” Brian paces, and Legacy puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. “We’re gonna go get her back, Brian.” Brian doesn’t look reassured.

Wraith shakes her head. “We might want to consider a small strike team. We can send a few people in and break her out the same way they broke Energy out.”

Brian pauses mid-pace. “There are *hundreds* of them. I counted 397 distinct individuals, and there were more that I hadn’t gotten to.”

Vance enters the room and clears his throat. “SecNav just called. SOSUS just triggered off the southeast coast of Greenland. There are three subs on the way here. The Citizens are coming to invade North America.” Yeah, SOSUS is a relic from the Cold War, but it’s a useful relic.

There’s a moment of silence while everyone comes to grips with the implications.

Legacy leans on the conference table. “We are going to fight them. We are going to stop them. I want everyone we know ready to go. We need to coordinate with the Joint Chiefs for evacuation and defense. I want Brian and Wraith to look at what intelligence we have and come up with likely targets. And Tachyon?” As he says her name, she skids to a halt at his shoulder. “Tachyon, figure out what the outside range of Colleen’s power is. I wanna be able to tell ‘em the minimum safe distance.” The veteran members immediately spring into their respective tasks.

Brian’s world is collapsing around him. The days where he’d just hear the incident sirens go off and step into autopilot are long gone. No more can he just make sure that civilians get below ground and then wait for the real heroes to do their job. He’s it. He’s the real hero. Worry for Colleen is subsumed by sheer dread. Brian feels like he might need to put his head between his knees.

He feels a hand on his upper arm. Legacy gently leads him into the hallway and leans him against a wall.

“Brian, need you to breathe, okay?” Legacy’s tone is encouraging, not angry.

Brian nods, swallowing hard and trying to hold the fear down. He’s a cop. What the hell is wrong with him right now?

Legacy is watching him with serious eyes. “Brian, listen to me. Yes, this is going to be... big. But we can do it. We can handle this.”

“I’m... I’m not sure I signed up for war.” There, he said it. And even as he says it, he realizes how dumb it sounds. Of *course* he signed up for war. He signed up for war the day he joined the Academy. Only back then it was a war that he wasn’t prepared for, one he didn’t know he was fighting and one that he couldn’t possibly hope to make any headway in. *Now* he’s forewarned and forearmed. He’s standing shoulder to shoulder with the most powerful people in the country AND he knows what’s coming. If he was willing to march into a fight with*out* the advantages, how could he possibly panic now?

Legacy smiles as if he knows what Brian is thinking. “You’ll be okay, Brian. You’ll be just fine. Now, go tell me where they’re gonna attack.”

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Maybe an hour later⎯Colleen isn’t sure⎯Energy slacks off his assault on her magnetic field enough for her to regain her bearings. They’re out over the Atlantic Ocean, judging by their position relative to the magnetic north pole. A few hundred yards out, three submarines break the surface of the water.

Energy swoops in low, and they land on the hull of the center sub. The hatch opens, and several Citizens wearing uniforms emerge. Colleen and Energy are escorted inside.

They’re brought to a small cabin. Citizens Dawn, Truth, and Battery are waiting. Dawn smiles and holds her hands out.

“Welcome back, Energy and *dear* Matter. We have acquired a significant quantity of radioactive material. Are you ready to show the world what you are capable of?”

Colleen sneers at Dawn defiantly. “No, as a matter of fact, I’m not.”

Dawn had already turned around, confident that Matter would return to her normal, compliant self once she’d been reunited with Energy. She had never fully understood what Bold did and had always thought that Matter was just naturally submissive. Dawn dismissed the tales of her working with the heroes as the result of the heroes being manipulative. But then something in Matter’s tone, a certain steeliness she’d never heard, makes Dawn pause.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” she asks without turning back to Matter.

“I am not going to help you.”

Energy’s voice crackles over a shortwave radio attached to Battery’s uniform. “Citizens, if she will not, I am able to force her, particularly if she is weakened. She will be unable to resist.”

Familiar fear hits Colleen in the gut⎯there’s more than one way to condition a person to be obedient, and pain is a particularly effective one. “It could *kill* me like it would kill you if *you* went too long!”

Dawn faces her now, smiling a predatory smile. “And that is why you are the one who will be doing this, not I. Battery, I believe Energy suggested that you soften up Citizen Matter. Break bones. Oh, and Energy, we will want your talents to broadcast the news to our new servants soon.”

Dawn walks out of the cabin with Truth on her heels as Battery snaps Colleen’s arm. Her screams echo through the narrow submarine.

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Ex-Patriette missed the train back to Rook City so spent the night in a no-tell motel (after bringing her trademarked brand of justice to Megalopolis⎯though this city is almost too easy to clean up). She heads to the train station to take the earliest train back and is sitting in the waiting room, trying to ignore the ubiquitous televisions, when the feed from CNN cuts out.

The Citizens’ symbol appears, and the televisions get her undivided attention. The Allegro of Dvorak’s Symphony #9 in E Minor echoes through the cavernous waiting area. Her mother’s voice overlays the music and sends shivers down her spine.

“Attention humans. This morning, a new day dawns on this great nation. The Citizens of the Sun, your superiors in every way, arrive to take the reins from your beleaguered leaders. Your country faces crisis after crisis. Crime ravages your streets. War takes your young people. Illness takes your elderly. All this because you foolishly place your trust in mere humans.

“But no more! We are coming to take our rightful place as your leaders. Like loving parents and devoted older siblings, we will guide you, protect you, and preserve your best interests. All you must do is submit.

“Those who submit will find themselves the loved and cared for younger children of our glorious family. Those who choose to behave obstinately will not. The transition will be difficult, humans, as transitions often are. But, I, Citizen Dawn, first of the Citizens of the Sun, promise you: a new, brighter world awaits.”

The anchors’ feed cuts back in and Ex-Patriette ignores the panicked conjecturing. She stares down at the polished marble floor⎯marveling that the floors could be *so* gleaming and gorgeous and wondering where all the homeless people are and thinking that Megalopolis is a creepy place. Her scarred face stares back at her.

God. Damn. It.

She doesn’t normally take the subway, but she doesn’t feel sufficiently familiar with this city to rely on alternative routes. The Freedom Five don’t seem to care too much about secrecy, because when she gets to the proper stop, there are helpful signs pointing out the way to the HQ and everything. This place is so damn cheerful it makes her teeth hurt.

There are armed guards at the entrance and the place has an air of tension about it. Ex-Patriette grimly notes the large hole in the wall⎯they thought they could hold Energy, didn’t they? Idiots. The guards stop her and she’s about to just shoot them because she doesn’t have time for this shit, when a commanding voice cuts through.

“Well, I didn’t expect to see you here, Ex-Patriette.” Legacy had been talking security measures and the potential for using the HQ as a shelter when things go south with some Feds when Ex-Patriette showed up. Turns out, the minimum safe distance is the Mississippi River, but no need to tell the civilians that, hm?

“I like being unexpected,” she taunts.

He places a hand on a guard’s shoulder and steps past them. Wire barricades separate the two of them. “What can I do for you?” he asks.

“Question is, what can *I* do for you.”

Legacy smiles slightly. He’s heard Wraith’s suspicions about Ex-Patriette’s origins, and he’s inclined to believe her analysis. He shakes his head sadly. “Thing is, Ex-Patriette, we have a sort of open information policy around here. You don’t have to tell me your whole life story or anything, but I like to know more about the people I’ve got backing me up in a fight, if you know what I mean.”

Ex-Patriette outwardly scowls, but inwardly, she’s been preparing herself for this. No way anything else happens unless she goes through with it. How badly does she want to stop the Citizens? Short answer: pretty damn bad.

She raises her chin defiantly. “My name is Amanda Cohen, formerly known as Citizen Morning. Let’s go kill my mother.”

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Naval Station Norfolk knows the Citizens are coming. They were warned, like every other base on the Eastern Seaboard, and they knew that their proximity to Washington (200 miles over land, or just down the Potomac) would make them a prime target. They are ready. But sometimes, there isn’t a damn thing you can do to prevent something. Like in this case. They scramble fighter jets and planes equipped with anti-submarine measures, and Citizens burn them out of the sky. They can’t sortie the larger ships fast enough.

Then Citizen Dawn comes. The “fight” such as it is doesn’t last long. In their defense, the US Navy does everything they can. But then she releases an aurora and the destruction is swift and absolute. Ships are sunk at the dock. Buildings are razed. It’s Pearl Harbor all over again, except that the whole thing takes less than ten seconds.

Once the entire base is rubble, the only thing they can do is just try to evacuate as many survivors as possible and spread the word. One particularly brave radio officer has the building burn to the ground around him while he tries to send word to the Pentagon. Others hop in whatever land-based transportation they can muster and race toward the civilian centers of Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

Three submarines pull into the harbor, taking spots at docks that until very recently had held American ships. The hatches open and Citizens pour out. Some marines and MPs set up hastily-arranged defensive measures. They drag out mealy bags and barbed wire and office furniture and whatever other rubble they can find into barricades and try to shoot as many coming off the subs as they can. Their efforts are entirely in vain, however, because Citizens blast their defenses with fire and lightning and things that their body armor cannot withstand. The Citizens laugh with joy at their simple victory and spread out to wipe up any stragglers.

Aboard the sub, Colleen lost count of the number of bones that Battery has broken. If she stops to think, it might be 15 or 16. But it doesn’t matter. What they want her to do is impossible. Not now. It’s strange. All this time, she’s been so afraid and she never was sure why. She was scared of dying, that much she can be certain of. But she’d always assumed that she’d never see her dad again and her life was one step above hell, so she didn’t really have anything to cling to.

Now, as Battery turns his attention to her right hand and fingers, she has everything in the world to cling to. Felicia, Unity, Meredith, Mr. Parsons, Wraith, Tyler, Amanda, Brian⎯she knows she’ll *never* see them again. She *knows* that she lost her chance to see her dad, to make it up to him. And she ought to be so very very sad about that. She can hear Unity laughing, see Felicia gleefully zoom around Megalopolis, feel Brian’s lips... A tear rolls down her cheek. Yeah, she actually has something to live for.

And she *knows* in the depth of her soul that they’re all gonna die. They’re all gonna die or she is. And that’s what’s so strange. Once she came to that conclusion, once she realized that it’ll be her or them and it sure as hell isn’t going to be them, the fear vanished.

Sure, she hasn’t quite figured out how she’s gonna accomplish this. But, for now, she knows that she has to endure the pain and not kill them voluntarily. They might force her to anyway, but she sure as hell isn’t going without a fight. Maybe she’ll get lucky. Maybe she’ll win.

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The call comes in from the Pentagon confirming the attack on Norfolk and the Freedom Five HQ jumps into action. Legacy especially seems in his element. Brian had a sergeant like him once: oozing authority and confidence. He *is* Legacy after all, and he wears the mantle of leadership well.

Legacy alternates between communicating with Vance and his military contacts, calling up every hero he knows on his cell phone (when Legacy asks for your number, *you give it to him*), arranging for transportation and supplies, and coordinating with emergency personnel on the ground. As far as they can tell, the Citizens are currently finishing off the survivors of the Naval Station, which is a good thing because every second they spend hunting down soldiers is a second they aren’t spending murdering civilians.

That being said, urgency weighs heavily on everyone.

Every hero Brian has ever heard of, plus a few he’s never seen before, troop in: a robot, an alien, ...is that an angel?, a guy dressed like an Egyptian, a dude with all these instruments around him, a cowboy, guy in a dirty bathrobe that everyone seems strangely excited to see.... Man, cops made jokes about costumes and how silly the whole thing seems at times. Cops have *no* idea how silly it could actually be.

The relatively notorious vigilante, Ex-Patriette is there too, armed to the teeth and seething in internal rage. Brian helps Unity pack up some of her equipment, and they pass Ex-Patriette in the hallway.

“Who is *that*?” whispers Unity.

“Uh, Ex-Patriette. She hunts bad guys in Rook City. She’s a former Citizen, like Colleen. I think they were friends.”

“Oooh, one of Colleen’s friends? Any friend of Colleen is a friend of mine. Hm, you know, she looks like she needs a hug!”

“....I don’t think I’d give her one if I were you. And why can’t you make a Champion Bot and let HIM carry this stuff?” Brian asks from behind a very heavy metal pylon.

“ALRIGHT PEOPLE, LET’S MOVE!” Legacy shouts, gesturing for the stragglers to get on the transport plane. Brian drags Unity’s pylons on board and drops them on the floor, panting. The door to the transport shuts after Brian.

Felicia floats next to her dad. “So, we’re gonna fly outside and keep any aerial attacks away from everyone else, right?”

“What’s this ‘we,’ kemo sabe? You’re going home where it’s safe.”

Felicia gives her dad a teenager stare. “Seriously? You need everyone you can get and that includes me. Basically, when you tell me to go home, I usually do. Not today, Dad. Not today.”

Legacy recognizes a very familiar jut to his daughter’s jaw and sighs in resignation. “Fine. Yes, we’re going to keep the aerial attacks away from the transport.”

Felicia grins, and everyone takes off.

Unity straps into her jump seat on the transport and glances curiously at the woman sitting next to her. Brian puts his face in his hands behind them, groaning inwardly. “So,” starts Unity cheerfully. “I heard you were a Citizen?”

Ex-Patriette stares straight ahead. “If you can call it that,” she growls.

Unity ignores her tone. “What was your name?” she asks cheerfully.

“Morning.” Ex-Patriette is counting to ten in her mind. The other girl seems to be completely oblivious to how much Ex-Patriette does *not* want to talk about this.

“So you and Colleen were besties, right? Neat.” Unity glances down. “Ooh, cool. You have doves on your guns.”

Ex-Patriette wonders if anyone would stop her if she just shot this person in the head. “Yes,” she replies flatly. “Mourning doves.”

“Like your name!”

“Different kind of mourning,” she grunts.

Haka, sitting across from them and watching this exchange, stands up and gets Unity to move. Unity does so.

“So. Your first time seeing them after being forced out.” Haka’s deep voice rumbles but he speaks softly enough that their conversation doesn’t leave their seats.

“Am I wearing a sign that says ‘talk to me about my life’?”

“Being forced out isn’t easy, even if you can convince yourself that you are better off, no? Never can fully forget what you’ve lost, even if you want to. Can’t fully hate them, even though you know you could. Blood’s weird that way.”

Ex-Patriette pointedly doesn’t reply, which Haka chooses to interpret as “You’re closer to the truth than I care to admit.” He looks at her kindly. “It is acceptable to feel conflicted,” he offers gently.

“I’m not conflicted. I’m the least conflicted person you’ll ever meet.” Ex-Patriette can’t help herself. This giant man is just drawing it out of her. He’s a strangely fatherly figure, and if she were the type to confide, he’d be the ear she’d go for. But she isn’t, she reminds herself. She does not confide and she does not feel the least amount of internal conflict over going to face her Mother.

“Very brave of you to face your demons for the missing girl.”

Ex-Patriette looks at him sharply. “Who the hell said that I was doing this for Colleen?”

“When I was forced out of my tribe, abandoned by my family and everyone I knew, I struggled for years to re-create an identity. My name was a curse and a terrible burden, scar tissue from my past. I cannot say that they were *wrong* to cast me out as they did. I cannot say that my journey since then has been one of defiance, exactly. Instead, I chose to see my being cast out as the chance for something even greater to occur. It pains me, and I still grieve for what I have lost, and I still regret how it happened. But, I cannot regret that it *did* happen, because without that pain, I would never have become who I am today.”

“Yeah. Me neither,” Ex-Patriette cuts in sarcastically. “And lemme tell ya, the world would be a must worse place without me in it.”

“The world would be a much more flattened place without you in it. I understand that your expression of support for Colleen was the deciding factor, and had they not helped her, she surely would have returned to the Citizens willingly by now.”

“Yep. I’m a big damn hero, lemme tell you. Don’t I look all brave and valiant? Regular knight in shining armor, that’s me.”

“Well, I for one much prefer the knights in dented armor, as they’re the ones who have actual battle experience. As I see it, you have two choices. You can give her power over the rest of your life by allowing this to define you forever, or you can defeat her once and for all and move beyond your traumatic past to a better future.”

“If you’re trying to turn me into one of these costumes, you’ve got your work cut out for you.”

“No, that is not your path. What I am trying to get you to see is that you need not live the rest of your life under the shadow of the Citizens. Not out of guilt for having been one, not out of shame for having failed to live up to their standards, not out of fear of their wrath. You were cast out, and while it still feels like a severance of your identity, it also represents freedom. Their choices, their doctrines, their reality *no longer applies to you*. Your slate is clean. If you are coming to stop them from invading this country, you do so as Ex-Patriette, not Citizen Morning.”

Ex-Patriette isn’t really one for mushy stuff, so she doesn’t even get the least bit teary eyed. Instead, she sets her jaw and gazes downward. “And Ex-Patriette is going to kick their asses,” she promises.

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Naval Station Norfolk is essentially rubble by the time the heroes land on the blessedly still-clear runway. By now, several pockets of Citizens have spread out to terrorize Norfolk civilian centers and Virginia Beach. But when the heroes arrive, Dawn sends out a message calling everyone back in. She obviously knows the same thing the heroes realized: either they stop the Citizens or no one will. They start streaming in while the heroes deplane.

The heroes huddle around Legacy, waiting for some big, inspiring speech. The devastation has several of them feeling less-than brave. Legacy looks around at them.

“Heroes, we’re out-numbered and quite possibly out-gunned. But you know what we aren’t? Piles of irradiated ash.”

Tachyon coughs and mutters into her fist. “Is that the direction you wanna take this speech?”

Legacy pretends not to hear her. “Colleen Mosley could create a nuclear explosion large enough to wipe out the eastern United States. And I’m talking all the way to the Mississippi River. We’re still here. That means that she hasn’t yet. That means that she’s resisting.” Legacy lets that sink in. “As long as she’s resisting, we’re going to resist too.”

Absolute Zero looks around at the gathered heroes. “We’re what, 30 people?” He points over Legacy’s shoulder. The Citizens have formed tight battle lines, led by flowing banners embroidered with their triangular sigil, and the force advances toward the heroes. A few opening salvos of flame stream down on top of them. “We’re outnumbered 14 to 1!” Absolute Zero finishes as the fireballs make contact.

Tachyon zips through the battle lines, knocking every third Citizen onto the ground by elbowing them. She stops next to Legacy. “Eh, more like 15 to 1.”

“Great. This is gonna end well,” mutters Absolute Zero.

Vance in the Bunker suit clunks to the front of the hero lines and activates his turrets.[[1]](#footnote-1) The entire front line of Citizens drops to the ground. “Well, I got *my* fifteen,” he announces over his radio.

Legacy steps in front of them and places his fists on his hips, facing the Citizens. “Right. Let’s save the world!” he shouts. Brian’s muscles tense, and adrenaline pumps through his veins.

The man dressed like an Egyptian, Ra apparently, steps to the front and creates a pulsing gold-orange aura around himself. Ra’s skin glows gold, and Brian feels himself warming up, leaving him feeling feverish. “Argent Adept, sing me a song!” Ra calls out grandly.

“DAMN IT, RA! EVERY GOD DAMN TIME!” Absolute Zero is the only hero who isn’t thrilled about this development.

At this moment, Citizen Summer steps forward. Her hair is blown by the wind, and she’s wearing a manic smile. “Red Rover, Red Rover, sent the Traitor right over,” she taunts in a sing-song voice. Then she releases a column of fire. Brian winces, ready to get burned and not entirely sure what that would feel like. But the fire hits him like a warm wind passes right over.

Tachyon grins at him and comments casually. “Fire immunity is quite the power when you’re facing the Citizens, huh?”

Argent Adept calmly ignores Citizen Summer and prepares his alacritous subdominant, mentally running through the songs he could play. It isn’t so much *what* he sings but *how*. Anyone else could sing the same songs, even use his instruments (God forbid), and they’d get nothing. Only a Virtuoso can strike the right chord (oh, God. So, so sorry.) And as far as he knows, the other Virtuosos would play different songs and get the same result. So he gets to play whatever he feels like, as long as he *intends* for it to have the proper effect. He starts playing “Leaves.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The music surrounds Ra, and he laughs triumphantly. The heroes’ eyes burn, and Brian’s hands are balls of flame. Brian gasps and stares at them, not sure what to do.

Tachyon touches his shoulder. “It’s okay, Brian. Take advantage of it while you can, hm?” Then she darts off, knocking into Citizens like a blazing pinball. She’s hitting harder than she normally would and sending them reeling.

“Press the advantage!” calls out Legacy.

Brian engages in hand to hand with the nearest Citizen. It’s almost unfair. The poor Citizen looks drunk from Tachyon’s hit, and every punch from Brian has a fireball kicker. It only takes two hits, one to the stomach and one to the jaw (with Brian dodging an off-balance and weak right hook) to drop the Citizen to the ground. Brian then looks around to see where else he’s needed. The woman with shocking white hair⎯Nightmist, he reminds himself⎯steps forward.

Nightmist raises her hands, and a black disc⎯three feet in diameter and a fraction of an inch thick⎯appears a few feet above the ground in front of her. White mist pours out. Brian stares. She calls out something Brian can’t understand, and a book, a round necklace, and a gold pentagram on a green ribbon fly out of the disc. The disc snaps shut, and she puts the necklace and the pentagram on.

She holds her hand out, and the book⎯floating an inch above her hand⎯opens. The pages fly like wind is blowing them. She finds whatever she was looking for, because the pages stop and then the book glows. “OBLIVION!” she calls out.

Tendrils of flame spew from the book. First, they slam into the heroes, and just like Summer’s attack, the tendrils make no headway there. Then, they head to the Citizens. Even more tendrils pour out of the book and for a few seconds, the battle looks like a forest fire.

The flames end, and Brian relaxes. The Citizens are staggering from that blast. Did they.. did they just win?

Dawn looks around, smiles, and calls out, “CITIZENS! RISE!” Then she lets a gold light filter across their side of the battle lines.

Many of the unconscious Citizens stand up, and the simply-injured ones get bathed in light. Either way, it’s like that forest fire never happened. Brian groans inwardly.

“It’s her,” Wraith announces glumly over the communicators. “We take her out, and the rest won’t be able to resist.”

For their part, the Citizens are pissed about this fire-based offense that the “heroes” are putting on. They’re the Citizens of the Sun for the love of Pete; that is THEIR schtick. Dawn glances over her shoulder at the reserve lines. “Sweat, Tears, deal with the one who claims to be a god.”

The two of them stroll through the battlefield and right up to Ra. Sweat punches him in the stomach, and the fire goes out. Then Tears puts a hand up and hits him with an invisible force. He slams into this invisible wall, his head tilted back and up, his arms spread, his eyes open wide and pupils pinprick. He quivers slightly, unable to breathe, unable to move.

“None of that now,” Sweat admonishes him.

Tears releases him, and he sinks to his knees. They disappear into the crowd. Ra pants, his entire body shaking slightly. He isn’t physically injured, but he can’t center himself enough to call on his powers.

The fireproofing is gone, and Hammer gleefully takes his chance. It rains fire down on the heroes. This time, they feel it. Brian staggers and tries not to cry out in pain⎯that would be rather embarrassing.

An older man wearing a baseball cap lands in the center of a knot of Citizens, striking a fighting pose. He produces a long pole and spins it around his head expertly. The pole slams into the Citizens around him. They all bend over and groan.

Unity’s bots zip around, blasting things and biting at Citizens’ ankles. The robot, Omnitron-X (...wasn’t that the thing that rampaged through the city a few years ago? No? Yes? What?), sends lasers bouncing around the battlefield, occasionally stops to heal a few people, and punches things with a rocket-powered fist. Chrono-Ranger⎯the cowboy⎯is firing off potshots at anything that moves.

CON’s voice comes over the communicators. “Jim, we just got some bounties in. Looks like the people you’re up against have caused some temporal chaos before. Or will. Either way. I am sending the information to your arm,” CON concludes cheerfully.

Chrono-Ranger sets his jaw and raises his arm. A large vortex of time energy opens next to him. He pulls out a massive energy weapon of probably future origin. He winds up and blasts Dawn right in the chest. Dawn winces and doubles over.

Brian tries not to stare at the others’ fighting style, as fascinating as it is. Instead, he gazes around the battlefield. Points of attack light up in his mind like beacons. He races to the first one and catches a blow from a Citizen⎯and sends it right back at her⎯before the Citizen can hurt Unity. Then he moves on to the next one. It’s like he always knows exactly where to be to prevent the next cheap shot.

Then he realizes that his zipping around has cornered him too far from the rest of the battlefield. He’s separated and alone, and several Citizens realize it. As the Citizens advance toward him, targeted throwing knives and razor-bladed ordnance whizz past his head and into four approaching Citizens. Wraith does a somersault and lands next to him. “Detective, keep an eye out for me while I stitch this up, please.”

Brian glances down. Her arm is gushing blood. He blanches and nods. A few angry-looking Citizens approach them. Brian steps in front of Wraith, who is calmly stitching herself together⎯Brian supposes that you have to be calm if you’re trying to suture yourself (oh no, a pun?). He glances around frantically. He’s not really able to take on three at once. This is gonna be painful, right? His eyes focus on a half-burned out wall. You know, that looks *awful* unstable...

Brian picks up half a brick and chunks it at the wall, striking it exactly at the weak spot. The crumbling masonry gives way and the wall crashes down on the Citizens. “Oh, nicely done, Detective,” comments Wraith. “Hold on.” She buckles something to his belt and fires her grappling hook into a building that survived better. The two of them are pulled upward, and she swings them back to the main fight.

Vance’s voice echoes over the communicators. “Everybody duck now.” Wraith pushes Brian to the ground just as an enormous laser cannon roars to life. The blue light burns into Brian’s retinas, even with his eyes closed and facing the ground.

The Omni-Cannon strikes Dawn directly in the chest. She gasps and bends over, groaning. A soft, gold light filters across the Citizens. Citizen Spring elegantly crosses the battlefield, healing all of them.

“Well, that’s annoying,” mutters Brian.

The winged woman, everyone calls her Fanatic, shouts, “Go therefore, Tempest, and do better!” A bright beam of light hits Tempest, and he looks suddenly determined.

Clouds roll in. Brian looks up, confused. Then he sees Tempest raise his hands to the sky. Guess he’s controlling it? Duh, Brain. Think about the name. Lightning crashes into the Citizens, striking them all. Then it starts raining. The rain makes Brian feel stronger, and a few cuts on his arms heal over in front of him. Then hail. Lots of hail.

By the time the storm is over, the heroes are feeling better and the Citizens are looking worse for the wear. Absolute Zero looks around, shrugs, and releases a blast of cold and ice that hits all the Citizens again. Several Citizens do not stand up again.

Dawn looks around, displeased. These heroes cannot be allowed to gain the upper hand. Time to level the playing field.

Dawn releases her aurora. The sky darkens and meteors of colored lights streak down onto the heroes. The lights strike them and send them into spasms. Brian feels like his insides are being squeezed. Then he blacks out for a second.

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When it passes, the heroes are still standing, and, even though the aurora made them stagger, they’ve at least put a dent in the Citizen-ranks⎯maybe down by a quarter? Still, Dawn is at the back lines and can’t be reached, and the heroes look haggard. All they can say at this point is that they’ve still got a big fight ahead of them.

Brian catches his breath for second and rolls out of the way of a Citizen’s giant boulder. Still on the ground, he tosses a bolas at the Citizen’s legs. The rope hits her ankles and the two balls spin around, tripping her. Brian stands up painfully and retrieves a ziptie from his pocket. He binds her wrists and pats her on the cheek. “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you do say can and will be used against you in the court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one, one will be appointed for you. Do you understand these rights?” She spits on the ground and mutters something about sheepdogs.

“Uh... you’re arresting her?’ Tachyon is suddenly at his elbow.

“Oh, well yeah. We keep knocking them out and Dawn keeps waking them up. This way, she can’t do anything. Like chunk another rock at my head.”

“....Can I have some of those?”

Brian hands Tachyon some of his zipties. “Knock yourself out.”

Tachyon winks and sucker punches a Citizen⎯who was trying to sneak up on the two of them⎯to the ground and restrains him. “I *like* these.”

The air shifts. Brian looks around, feeling the abrupt change in the atmosphere. The Citizens look like they’re wearing armor made out of gold light. Out of the corner of his eyes, he sees Bunker fire his Gatling gun at a group of Citizens. The bullets have absolutely no effect.

“Truth is out,” whispers Tachyon.

Brian turns to her, about to ask what she means. Then Legacy’s voice crackles over their communicators. “FIND HIM AND TAKE HIM OUT!”

The Citizens press their advantage as the heroes try to locate one in hundreds. Brian sees Unity lose several bots right in front of them, but the bots absorb her damage and she stays on her feet. Citizen Blood slams a heavily bleeding Visionary hard, but she stays on her feet.

Brian races through the horde of Citizens, relying solely on his instincts to dodge their attacks. He makes an abrupt cut right and the Citizen who just tried to hit him falls to the ground. This time, though, he doesn’t stop to restrain them. Instead, he tries to concentrate on Truth. The Citizen blinks in his mind like a beacon. Brian sets his face and makes a beeline to him.

Then things go bad.

The air crackles with purple energy. Everything on the ground stops, and everyone looks up. Colleen, surrounded by Energy’s purple forcefield, floats out of one of the submarines and into the sky over Norfolk. Her hands are holding on to a large, glowing rock⎯presumably some sort of radioactive material.

Brian squints. It’s hard to tell, but it looks like Colleen is hurt. He concentrates on her condition. She’s got broken legs, cracked ribs, a concussion, and internal bleeding. She’s semi-unconscious, and blood is running out of her nose and mouth. She’s barely alive.

Legacy flies right up to them, intent on stopping him. Energy hits him with a jolt of electricity, followed quickly by extreme heat and then slams him into the ground with kinetic energy.

Citizen Dawn’s voice echoes. “I am become Death, Destroyer of Worlds. Goodbye, humans and their protectors.”

The purple energy turns inward. Colleen’s body twitches and she screams. Everyone’s wrist communicators pick up her screams and transmit them in a weird, tinny distortion. No one else makes a sound.

The substance in Colleen’s hands starts glowing green. Her eyes match it. Inside Energy’s field, the reaction gets bigger and bigger until the glowing gets so bright that Brian can’t see her at all. Everyone has to avert their eyes. Soon, she is burning brighter than the sun.

The heroes stare up at⎯and slightly to the side of⎯Colleen. “Wraith, what is she packing?” Legacy asks over the communicators.

Wraith turns on her eyepiece and gets the readings. She filters for the interference from Energy and swears into the communicator. “Equivalent of.... five times the global nuclear arsenal. Twenty-five gigatons of TNT. Or 1.046 x 1020 joules.”

None of the heroes look at each other. What are you supposed to say to that? Brian feels someone touch his hand. He turns. Felicia is holding his hand and staring up at Colleen. Her eyes are clear and her expression is serene. “Come on, Colleen. Don’t let us down,” she whispers.

The Citizens laugh and cheer at the heroes’ fearful reactions. They start chanting, “RISE! RISE! RISE!” and pumping their fists in the air.

“RELEASE HER AND LET THE SKY BURN!” shouts Dawn.

The energy shield around Colleen starts to retract. Radiation gushes out of the top like a soda that’s been shaken up. Colleen screams shrilly, and the heroes wince in anticipation for the incredible heat at make its way down to them. The sky fills with light so bright it drowns out all other vision.

Then a small black spot forms just above her head, and the bright light is pulled back toward her. The black spot grows.

*Black holes exist where gravity is so dense that not even light can escape.* Colleen’s tinny voice echoes over the communicators.

The black spot expands and expands, pulling in Energy’s purple field, pulling in the light, pulling in the radiation. The spot grows larger still, roiling and rolling, expanding from the middle and sparking with purple light around the edges.

Energy is consumed entirely first, his purple form swirling around the outer edges for a second before being sucked in like water down a drain. Then there’s a second where the black hole seems to pause.

*I’m sorry. Tell my daddy that I’m sorry*, whispers Colleen’s voice.

Then the black hole bursts open again, engulfing her.

It snaps shut, leaving no trace of Colleen or of Energy or of the nuclear disaster waiting to happen.

Ra breaks the silence and hits Truth with a one-two punch of flames. For a second, everyone just stares at the ashy unconscious body of Citizen Truth. Then Haka shouts his Haka of Battle and swings his taiaha. He sends two Citizens sprawling, and the fight is back on.

Colleen’s dead. Brian feels his knees buckle beneath him, and he’s instantly glad that Felicia is next to him. She tightens her grip on his hand and punches out a Citizen who tries to capitalize on his momentary distraction.

“Hold on, Brian. This isn’t over yet,” she whispers to him.

Brian struggles to his feet, but his body aches⎯physically and psychosomatically. He can’t think clearly. There’s nothing he can do. He’s useless. He looks around the battlefield. Everyone seems to be stunned, sluggish.

Unity is sobbing a few feet away. “COLLEEN!!!” she wails. She pulls out two pylons and breaks them into bots, her face twisted in grief and rage. Her bots run around the battlefield, causing chaos. Swift Bots help her to manufacture more. Champion Bots stand heroically, urging their fellow bots to do better. Platform Bots laser things. Raptor Bots nip at Dawn’s heels. Turret Bots blast a Citizen who gets too close to Unity. Cryo Bots and Stealth Bots guard her. She probably has fifteen out.

And she attracts the attention of Sweat and Tears.

They descend on the girl and give her the same treatment they gave Ra earlier. Sweat pushes her to her knees, and Tears touches her finger to Unity’s forehead. Unity’s body jerks when Tears makes contact, and her irises contract. Her connection to her bots is severed instant and the Citizens gleefully smash the leftover pieces. She slumps over, broken and dejected, silent tears running down her cheeks.

Then Sweat and Tears are knocked unconscious by a pair of crowbars and a furious auto mechanic. Mr. Fixer crouches next to her, taking her chin in his hand. “Hey there, missy.” He helps her to her feet, supporting her slightly as her body is wracked by sobs.

“They took my bots!” she wails. “And I’m out of stuff!”

Mr. Fixer presses her head against his chest and strokes her hair. “Chin up.” He hands her his toolbox. “Think you’ll find what you need in there?”

She leans away and looks down at his box. Her eyes light up through the despondent tears. “*Really*?” He nods. She pulls tools out of his box and sends another Platform Bot out to blast Citizens.

Then, heroes start falling. Tempest goes first. After the aurora knocked out his resilience, he couldn’t withstand the onslaught, and Blood finishes the job. Omnitron-X and Bunker go next, for similar reasons. Their armories got obliterated, and there are just too many Citizens to keep up with. Then Wraith gets cornered and hit with a one-two punch of Battery and Blood. Tachyon is scorched by Summer and drops too.

Fanatic sees her fellow-warriors fall, and righteous anger fills her. She prays for guidance and realizes that Visionary, Unity, and Mr. Fixer will be hit next and will not survive the encounter. She makes sure that her aegis is strapped on tightly, then lashes out at the three evil-doers who would kill her companions. That strike gets their attention and they instead hit her.

She is barely conscious, blood leaks from her mouth and most of her ribs are broken. She lurches toward Dawn. “MAY THE DAY OF JUDGMENT FALL UPON YOU!” she screams as an enormous, retina-scarring burst of radiant light strikes Dawn.

Fanatic feels something strike her. Blood leans around, grinning at her. She shakes her head and her aegis crumbles. A light surrounds her and she heals herself slightly. Blood blinks in confusion, and Fanatic encases him in a cage of glowing sigils. “Be still,” she orders.

Dawn looks around. That was... That was a very powerful hit. She heals herself and her Citizens. Time to stop playing around. She hits the heroes with a blast of light that injures them⎯killing a few, and leaving the rest reeling.

Fire rains down and lightning crackles. Fanatic sinks to the ground, followed by Mr. Fixer. Argent Adept *would* have gone down, but Legacy takes the hit for him.

Ra and Absolute Zero are standing in front of Unity, who is barely conscious. Several Citizens advance on them. Ra looks at Absolute Zero. “This is gonna hurt,” he comments.

“Hit me.”

Ra blasts Absolute Zero with a column of fire. Absolute Zero staggers, then hits the oncoming Citizens with a blast of coolant. The Citizens drop. Dawn glances at them, sneers, and raises Blood. Blood takes out all three of them without a moment’s hesitation.

The battlefield is crawling with Citizens, and the remaining heroes can’t hold on much longer. The Scholar heals people as much as he can, but he knows that something is going to have to give if this fight is going to be survivable. Argent Adept plays “Hold Your Head Up,” healing people too, as often as *he* can, but no amount of healing can outpace the hundred plus Citizens they’re facing.[[3]](#footnote-3) They need to clear the field.

The Scholar calls over Nightmist, Argent Adept, and Haka. “Listen, I think I got a plan. You guys ready?” They nod.

The Scholar centers himself, preparing to expect the worst. Argent Adept plays two songs in a fugue-like pattern: “Leaves” hits the Scholar and “My Songs Know What You Did in the Dark”[[4]](#footnote-4) hits Haka and Nightmist. The Scholar floods the field with a red mystical energy, pulling all the damage to himself. Haka and Nightmist feel their strength increase.

“Alright everyone, hold on to your hats!” calls out the Scholar.

Haka rampages across the battlefield, attacking anything and everything he comes across. He doesn’t distinguish between friend or foe when he lets loose like this, but the Scholar’s alchemical redirection draws off the violence. Of course, he actually *does* distinguish between friend and foe because he hits his foes harder. The Citizens are heavily injured.

But still standing. And that’s where Nightmist comes in. She raises her hands and screams, “OBLIVION!” White mist tendrils swarm the battlefield. Brian can only stare as the tendrils impale Citizens.

By the time it’s over, there isn’t a single Citizen standing.

Dawn screams in rage. Fire builds within her and she doesn’t want to hold it back any more. Light bursts forth from her and she floats several stories above the fight. Then, she starts channeling her power, creating a blinding corona around her that pulls Citizens into the fight left and right.

The heroes watch helplessly as their once-clear battlefield teems with Citizens, all at full strength and itching for a fight.

Then she releases another aurora, and before they can recover from THAT, they’re hit with another burst of flames. Several more heroes go down.

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Dawn floats over them, burning with power and rendering herself untouchable. On the ground, the Citizens continue to pound the remaining heroes.

And there aren’t many remaining heroes. Legacy and Felicia are trying to keep Hammer and Summer from obliterating everyone. The Scholar shouts out pithy sayings every once in a while that keep the heroes’ spirits up. Haka is slamming into anyone and anything he can reach. Both Nightmist and Visionary are technically still in the fight, though both have slipped into stasis forms.

Unbelievably, Brian and Ex-Patriette are also still standing. Brian has simply avoided getting hit as much as everyone else. When you see them coming, you can get out of the way. But things aren’t looking great for Ex-Patriette.

Brian sees her trying to shoot Battery, but apparently she’s out of ammo. Battery sneers at her and hits her in the chest, knocking her to her feet. Brian starts running toward her, shoving Citizens out of the way indiscriminately.

“Well, Traitor. I’m glad it’s going to be me that finishes you off,” Battery taunts her. Ex-Patriette pants heavily, and her eyes are slightly unfocused.

“First time you’ve ever finished a woman first, I’d bet,” she spits out.

Battery pauses and then snarls when he understands the insult. “I’m gonna give you a scar across the chest to match the one on your ugly face.” He raises his sword and brings it down hard on her chest.

“NO!” shouts Brian but he’s too late.

The sword hits her and makes a TWOOF sound. Ex-Patriette drops backwards and lands in the dirt. Brian tenses, gearing up to fend off Battery.

BAM BAM. Battery falls backward like a felled tree. Ex-Patriette lowers her pistol and grimaces. “Flak jackets are *not* meant to take sword blows,” she complains.

The Scholar strolls up and helps her to her feet, healing a few of her wounds. “Hey, deep breath, you got this,” he tells her.

Strands of flame peel off Dawn and blast the heroes.

Legacy flies over to the three of them. “We gotta do something.” His uniform is torn, and he has blood on his arm that is probably his.

Felicia calls out, “I’ll buy us some time.”

Before Legacy or anyone else can stop her, she flies right into the center of the Citizens and draws their fire. Brian’s stomach drops as the girl gets pounded over and over again, but the Scholar grabs his shoulder before he can run off to help her.

The man heals Brian and says in his ear, “Focus, Detective. What are they about to do?”

Brian tries to think, but there’s too much going on. Colleen’s dead, they’re all dead, the country’s dead. So many of them, too many of them. Brian isn’t meant for this. He barely knows how to work his powers. What the hell is he doing here? His mind is spinning, and he really just wants to get off this ride. Why did he ever leave his desk job?

Brian shakes his head sadly. “I can’t. I can’t see anything.”

Someone grabs him by the shirt. He looks up. Legacy is holding him up and staring him straight in the eye. “Brian, right now, millions of people are glued to their television sets and emergency radios, huddled in basements and bathrooms. The world as they know it is about to end. We are the only people standing between them and that fate, and you know what? I’m *glad* to be here. And you should be too. Wouldn’t you rather be here, controlling your fate, than helplessly waiting back home? *You* get the chance to save yourself.”

Ex-Patriette nods, her face twisted in a sneer, and racks her shotgun. Felicia limps back over and gets a hand from the Scholar. Haka hefts his taiaha. All five of them stare at Brian expectantly. He swallows. All those times he could do nothing but hide in a basement and wait for it to end. All those long nights sitting up for his Dad to come home from patrol, wondering if he ever would. Every time he turned a corner, never knowing what was waiting for him. Yeah, he knows what it’s like to be scared. And now he knows what it’s like to be in control. He prefers control. He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

Everything fades away. Dawn is the only thing he focuses on: Dawn and what she’s going to do. Dawn. Dawn.

“She’s... about to bring back more of the unconscious Citizens.”

*Thank you, Brian*. Brian looks around. Who said that? The others are already turning back to the Citizens, who have just now recovered from their mini-brawl with Felicia⎯girl can give ‘em a run for their money when she wants to.

Visionary’s cocoon wiggles and pops open. She stands up, swaying and clearly on her last legs herself. She places her fingers on her temples and concentrates. The psychic ether opens up in front of her. She smiles and whispers *Citizen Matter* into the ether.

Then Citizen Blood stabs her from behind and she sinks to the ground. Ex-Patriette unloads her guns into Blood, and he goes down. The few times Brian’s dealt with Ex-Patriette haven’t given him much confidence in her sanity, but right now she’s screaming in incoherent rage and clearly on the last shreds of whatever sanity she might have had before.

Up in the sky, Dawn smiles down on her Citizens. The battle is going well. So bravely fought. And now the battle is almost over. A shame that Matter did not perform her function. Ah well, once the last of the heroes are gone, there will be no one to stop their advance. And now, to finish things.

She calls out to her daughter. “My dear Amanda, what *have* you done to your hair?”

Ex-Patriette stands feet shoulder-width apart, head thrown back, and screams up at her, “WHAT DID *YOU* DO TO MY FACE?” She punctuates her question with several blasts from her handguns, Pride and Prejudice.

The bullets, naturally, do nothing. Dawn laughs. “Amanda, are you still trying to resist me? You barely escaped with your life last time you defied me, and now you do not have Matter to rescue you. You will not fare better this time.”

“Gotta die someday,” Ex-Patriette retorts. Legacy and Brian make eye contact behind her. Colleen did what now?

“And it shall be today.” Dawn smiles a victorious smile and holds her hands out. “Citizens! RISE!”

*Citizen Matter.... Citizen Matter... Citizen Matter.*

Psychic energy swirls in a knot right above the ground under the place where Colleen and Energy disappeared. The knot grows and throbs until a human figure forms.

*Citizen Matter.... Citizen Matter... Citizen Matter.*

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Colleen’s eyes open. She... she’s alive? Lying on the ground, surrounded by rubble and unconscious Citizens. She wiggles her fingers. Yeah, alive. And hey, her legs aren’t broken. Wait... didn’t she...

She sits up. She’s still on the battlefield, but time has passed. Only a few heroes are still standing; the rest are lying unconscious or worse. Everything is quieter than it ought to be, slower than it ought to be. She gets to her feet.

Someone yells something, but the words are muffled. Citizens run toward her, but Colleen’s eyes glow white and all of them jerk upward and get caught in zero gravity. She walks carefully, deliberately through the rubble. Citizens who run toward her are simply added to the collection floating in mid-air.

Dawn looks down from her position and screams in fury. “NO!” Her scream echoes across Norfolk. This was *not* what she intended. One of the heroes screwed with her. Well, if they’re gonna screw with her, she’s gonna screw with them.

Dawn holds hand out and a column of fire strikes Brian, dropping him instantly. Colleen’s eyes snap to where Brian fell. Then her features harden.

Colleen makes two fists and howls in wordless rage. Fire burns within her, and she couldn’t stop herself from fusion hydrogen even if she wanted to.

She looks up at Dawn. Dawn has allowed her powers to go unchecked and is essentially invincible. Her whole life, Colleen has lived in fear of Dawn in this form. But now, Colleen knows a thing or two about science.

She allows herself to float to Dawn’s level and stares the other woman down. She can feel the heat of Dawn’s sun-form and she welcomes it. It just fuels her fire, her rage all the more. Colleen forms a magnetic field around herself to stabilize things and then reaches out for Dawn.

Dawn turns to her. “You cannot touch me, Matter. I possess power as great as the Sun.”

“Oh, you wanna be the sun? You got it.” Colleen shoves her hands into Dawn’s corona. She grabs onto Dawn’s arm and starts fusing.

Dawn cannot fuse like this because she can’t stabilize⎯she lacks the control over electromagnetic and gravitational forces necessary. But Dawn knows what fusion feels like, and she realizes what Matter is doing. She’s getting heavier and heavier as Matter forces her hydrogens together into larger atoms. Her fuel is being consumed faster than she has ever experienced before. She’ll run out! She’ll collapse! How, how is this possible...?

The light and the heat and the energy are unspeakably intense, but Colleen grits her teeth and holds on. Her magnet field protects most of her, but she has to allow her finger to touch Dawn’s skin for the controlled fusion to work. And that finger⎯and by extension, the rest of her⎯is suffering greatly.

But Dawn is suffering more. Even as Colleen starts getting tunnel vision, she can see Dawn sag. Colleen has no idea how long she could or should hold on, but she refuses to let go until Dawn turns off her power. Right now, if she *did* let Dawn go, *Dawn* could turn into the equivalent of a nuclear warhead. Colleen will *not* let her win.

The energy threatens to rip Colleen apart, but she doesn’t let go. Her vision darkens.

BAM. BAM.

*Lights out, Mother*.

Amanda’s voice echoes in Colleen’s head. Cool blackness surrounds her, and she surrenders to it.

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The therapist and her patient sit in uncomfortable plastic chairs in a generic waiting room. She watches her patient over her reading glasses. “And how did it feel, seeing her die in front of you?”

“I... I couldn’t believe it. She’d been such a force in my life that I couldn’t believe she was gone. And then I was relieved. It felt so good.”

The therapist makes a few notes on her pad before asking “And what about your role in that?”

“My role? Well, I guess I’m proud of myself. She didn’t die, you know. Not really. Her molecular structure is so unstable that eventually the damage will undo itself and she’ll be back.”

“I had had that explained, yes. Does that make you nervous?”

“Me? Nervous of Citizen Dawn?” Colleen grins confidently. “Not any more, huh? She comes back, I’ll be there to stop her. For the first time in my life, I actually feel in control. Like I’m the one calling the shots and not anyone else.”

“Yes, it’s not often that someone can simultaneously save the world and exorcise demons from her past.” The therapist smiled in amusement. “We call that a breakthrough.”

Colleen looks thoughtful. “I did exorcise her, didn’t I? I mean, I really did. I’m not afraid of them. There were so few of us, and we still beat them. I guess people talk about a weight being lifted, but really it’s like I’ve made it past some milestone. And now I can start the next phase of my life.” Colleen glances at the therapist sheepishly. “I’ve started to sound like you.”

“I’ll just take that to mean that you’re internalizing what we’re doing here and leave it at that. So, if it’s time to start the next phase of your life, are you ready to do this?”

Colleen stands up. “Yes.”

“Good. I’ll be right here, waiting.”

Colleen turns to head down a hallway. Pleasant Gardens Rest Home is none of these things, she thinks. But she’s already got safety bars in the bathroom and she’s triple-checked the width of the doors in her apartment and there’s a ramp up off the street.

Her pace quickens to a run and the years melt away. All the pain, all the lies, all the horrors fade into distant memories and she’s a nine-year old girl with curly hair and an infectious smile when she opens the door at the end of the hall.

“Daddy! I’m here.”

Patrick Mosley turns his chair around slowly. Despite his paralysis⎯or perhaps due to it⎯his face is very expressive. And right now, pure joy and relief shine through his eyes and smile. “Colleen.”

Epilogue:

For Brian, the fight ended before it *ended.* He spent several days in the hospital before finally being released. He swore up and down that he felt fine, but there seemed to be a vast conspiracy to keep him in bed.

The day he DID leave, he finally understood why they’d kept him in so long. A swarm of camera crews waits for him, and a dozen microphones are shoved into his face the instant he steps into the mass.

His uncle and brother came to escort him out of the hospital, and they’re well-versed at keeping the media away. They firmly ask the cameras to step back, and Matt steers him to a car.

Safely inside the car, Brian realizes that Legacy is sitting in the backseat with him.

“Uh, hi.”

“Hello, Detective.” Legacy is grinning at him. “How was *that* for a trial by fire?”

“No offense, sir, but if we could not go through that again, that’d be great.”

“None taken. It isn’t every day we have to face down an army of 450 angry metahumans.”

“...What happened, by the way?”

Legacy smiles. “I believe Colleen taught Dawn the meaning of the phrase ‘Be careful what you wish for.’” Legacy chuckles. “She pushed Dawn so hard that she consumed her hydrogen supply and had to release her sun power. In the instant that she did so, Ex-Patriette finished her. The Citizens surrendered when Dawn fell. Now there is a very, very large group of newcomers at the Block. And everyone else made it to hospital and are all back on their feet, same as you.”

“And... how is Colleen? She didn’t come visit me...”

“She sends her apologies, but we told her you would understand. She’s been helping her father transition into her apartment.”

Brian smiles. All’s well that ends well, huh? But then... something nags at him.

“What is it, Detective? You’ve got that ‘my gut is telling me something’ look on your face.”

Brian concentrates, trying to put his finger on it. He snaps his fingers. “There were no kidnappings in Rook City. Shoot, they steered clear of Rook City entirely.”

“No metahumans?”

Brian shakes his head. “No... there should be. They’re evenly distributed and Rook City is plenty large enough. No, it’s like something scared them off.”

“Rook City belongs to someone else, perhaps? Someone who doesn’t like poachers.”

“Exactly.”

Legacy grins at him. “Sounds like a job for the Detective.”

Brian leans back into the car seat. Yeah, yeah it does.

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2. By Cheers Elephant [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. By Argent. Yes, he knows. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By Fall Out Boy [↑](#footnote-ref-4)