

Prologue

All I could see was white light; blinding white light, so bright it hurt.

I tried to move my head but it seemed too heavy or was restrained somehow. Either way, it took too much effort to move, so I stopped trying.

I felt a prick in my arm and flinched. All of a sudden an incredibly bright pink flash invaded my brain, but just as quickly it subsided to bright white again. Fear took a brief hold but then, just as suddenly, it subsided and the bright light diminished slightly, replaced by a calm, grey hue. I slowly opened my eyes, feeling a gwey substance fighting the release of my eyelids. I willed them to separate and tried to raise my eyebrows to help.

"Ahhh!" The bright light flashed again and the intense needle-like pain returned. I felt a hand on my shoulder and as if heat radiated from it, the colour eventually changed to the calming grey again, and the pain seemed to vacate my mind.

"Eleanor?"

The voice was quiet, male, and seemed to be connected to the hand on my shoulder since it shook me gently as he spoke.

This time when I tried opening my eyes, the gew released my lids and I began to see something other than grey. After a moment, I could make out a creamy ceiling. Suddenly a head came into my vision, leaning over her and filling my view.

"Eleanor, I'm Doctor Jefferson," the man said, his gaze engaging me. I felt dozy. But I wanted to know what was happening, and this man seemed to be in a good position to answer. His voice was soft and gentle.

"Wh...who are you?" I said, surprised my voice was groggy and seemed to come from deep inside.

The man smiled again, looking over at someone out of my immediate view, but then he quickly peered down again.

"Doctor Jefferson, Eleanor," he said. "You're at Temple University Hospital and you've been asleep for a while." He tapped my shoulder. "Don't try to speak too much. Your body is still recuperating from... well, from surgery, and you haven't been using your voice lately. It will take a few minutes." Creases formed on his face as he squinted a bit and leaned in closer. "Be sure to tell me if you feel any pain. I've given you medication so you won't feel much, which is what's making you feel drowsy, I'm sure." His smile returned though it didn't seem quite as genuine as before. "We'll have to monitor it so we can keep you comfortable."

"Where am I?" I stammered, still not recognizing the voice coming out of me.

"As I said, Eleanor, you're at Temple in Philadelphia, the Crisis Response Centre. You were in an accident and you were severely hurt..."

I tried to shift my body to see who else was in the room but a flash of pink light sent my head crashing back into the pillow.

"Please," the doctor said. "Don't make any quick movements, at least not for a few moments. Your brain is still adjusting to the environment..."

"My brain?" I asked. "What's wrong with my brain? I thought you said I was hurt." I winced. "Did I hurt my head?"

"Eleanor, we'll talk about everything shortly," the doctor said, his smile fading. "But for now, you just need to be patient and wait for your brain and body to catch up with each other."

"Ho...how long have I been here?"

The doctor glanced over at the person Eleanor couldn't see. Then he nodded his head, sighed, and looked back down.

"You were in an airplane crash six days ago Eleanor," he said quietly. "We induced you into a coma to ensure the damage to your head didn't become permanent. Do you remember anything about the accident, Eleanor?"

I pushed my head into the pillow and closed my eyes. Then, realizing I didn't want the lids to stick, quickly opened them again, which resulted in a quick white pulsation in the corner of one eye. "Oooh," I said and looked up at the doctor. He rubbed my shoulder which relaxed me slightly.

"I don't remember being on a plane doctor," I said. Then with sudden realization, I added, "And I don't know why you keep calling me Eleanor."

The doctor frowned and looked over at the other person again. Then he looked back at me quizzically.

"I don't remember much, doctor," I said. I could see he didn't like that answer. I felt tired but wanted to get the thought out. It seemed important. "But I'm pretty sure my name isn't Eleanor."

I closed my eyes and the calming grey subsided as it became darker and darker. Blackness shrouded my vision and as my thoughts drifted into incoherence, I felt a physical, comforting warmth envelope me.