

ALWAYS WATCHING

“Don’t worry ‘bout them!” Sawyer shouts down the barren street. “Just keep running!”

I quickly lower my gun and the burning in my legs starts again, coursing its way through every part of my body as we pass by smashed windows and rotten, kicked in doors. The overcast sky seems like it hasn’t disappeared from the day we left. I remember it like it was yesterday...

... I watch the news reporter’s face become consumed with fear. He announces that they have been watching as well as listening to us as part of their plan to overthrow Washington. As I rest my head in my hands I feel my face become hot and sticky with salty tears.

“We have to leave,” Sawyer says softly and he looks at the plain tiled floor like something in him is missing.

I feel like there’s heat boiling up behind my eyes with the memories of before the world became so corrupt.

“Bridie!” shouts Sawyer, an anxious look upon his face. I snap back into the present and quickly catch up with him as he fires at the remaining brainwashed traitors. They fall to the ground lifeless: well, for the time being at least.

“We should get to the school, those kids can’t make it themselves,” I say puffing, as my lungs become more exhausted with every breath. Sometimes I think they would be better off if they didn’t breathe at all.

We make our way to the local primary school quickly not saying a single word on the way, because if we said anything now I’m sure we would lose it for good.

As we pace our way around the barren playground I think of the bliss that was shared here every day: the children prancing around, playing their joyful games and sharing their laughter around contagiously. I try to think of what happiness feels like. I can’t.

As Sawyer’s face becomes more shaky by the second, I notice that all the classrooms are empty, and something like a rush of relief comes over me in

the thought that they may have escaped technology. But it's hard to tell because I'm not really sure what relief feels like anymore.

As we walk around the eerie school grounds I feel a slight gust of wind that tickles the back of my neck, which is usually drowning in sweat. Even though the sun's always concealed by the clouds there's never any rain to stop the grass becoming crunchy. I've never paid any real attention to it before. Now it seems like millions of beige toothpicks crumbling under every meticulous step I take. But that seems to be the way of the world now: never knowing what I've got until it's gone.

I see what looks like shadows in one of the dark classrooms. We make our way in to search, as the only thing I can hear is the battering of my heart which feels like it has moved to my throat, creating a bitter taste in my mouth. All the students' heads are on their desks: they're either unconscious or under control. Sawyer and I creep slowly around the room; I find the camera on the classroom television- which reads the brand name to which the traitors are loyal to- and shoot it, so they can no longer watch us like they have been for the last year; scanning our everyday life. I saw it coming from the beginning; the fact that there was a lens in every room didn't seem right to me, like there were people on the other side watching my every move. The pressure was unbearable.

Sawyer crouches down next to a small girl who looks no older than nine. *Too young*, I think. But then does that mean Sawyer and I *are* old enough to go through whatever life this is? A life in which technology becomes power? *No*, I tell myself. *Never*.

We try to wake them up but it is useless. I get so frustrated that a strangled scream escapes my throat. Time is running out.

Then the pounding of boots hitting concrete fills my ears as I become almost paralysed with fear. Bullets start hitting the walls behind me as I reach for the gun that is tucked under the waistband of my jeans.

Then it hits me. A dull ache in my chest sends shocks of excruciatingly sharp pain through me; making my limbs feel weak and powerless. I fall to the hard ground. Something that a traitor throws, hits the wall behind me where

Sawyer is using a desk for a shield, making them fall with every bullet released.

“Bridie!” he screams, coming closer toward me in a blur, after he has eradicated them. I lay down on my back because right now the ground has never felt more comfortable. “Bridie don’t leave me!” At this point I think there are tears coming out of his eyes but I can’t tell because the object that hit the wall releases white smoke that makes my vision go black at the edges. As the smoke forces Sawyer to become limp and rest his head next to mine, I close my eyes and hear voices echoing in the room all around. Turns out I was right. The children *are* brainwashed.

“Bridie Vesper and Sawyer Danica,” they speak in unison. “We have observed to your lives’ ends. Information will be sent to a third party that shall remain confidential. We thank you for your participation in our examination. However, because of your reluctance, you are no longer needed.” And with that, everything disappears.

Written by Jas Port