

Amara's Law

Book 1 of the Law Series

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## Chapter 1: Evil in the Hearts of Men

### Amara's Law:

**“We tend to overestimate the effect of technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run.”**

#### Ten Years After **The Incident**:

Consciousness returned to her slowly. This was a blessing since she was eased into the pain which, for a while, would demand a considerable part of her attention. She blinked, even that hurt. She instinctively moved her hands to her face. That REALLY hurt. Lying still in the blackness seemed to be the only option that would allow her to remain pain-free for a time. She tested her appendages at various intervals and after a short while she thought she would try sitting up. She sat up and banged her head on something, hard. Rubbing her head, she carefully reached out and touched what felt like the sides of a tube, just small enough for her to bang her head on when she sat fully upright. She also realized that her legs were dangling, toes brushing a hard, cold surface. She sat still and slightly hunched for a minute seeing if the pain would return. When it didn't, she decided to try standing. She stretched out her leg and felt the hard surface below her, it felt like concrete. She probed the surface to make sure it was wide enough for her to stand on, she brushed something in the dark with her leg and heard a rattling as something that was next to her hit the floor. Gently placing her feet down, she stood, hair clinging to the damp skin of her neck and waited for the dizziness to subside. When it had mostly gone, she found she could walk with only a little difficulty, so she swept the floor in front of her with her foot searching for what had fallen. She kicked something hard and plastic, heard it skitter away in the darkness and splash into water somewhere.

“I hope that wasn't important,” she said, her voice echoing hollowly. “Weird. Where the hell am I?”

It was difficult to discern anything about her surroundings in the absolute darkness other than that she was in some sort of cavernous room. It smelled of dank water and waste, and the surface she was standing on felt slightly damp. Using her feet and ears she carefully explored around herself. A few minutes later, she had a better handle on her surroundings. She had woken up in a tube in one wall of a large room and was now standing on a platform. There was also a narrow pathway off the platform that hugged the wall, though how far it extended, she had no idea. The area all around her was dark, but, after a few moments, she thought she could see a lighter part of her surroundings, the merest hint of a doorway in an unseen wall not very far away. She made her way gingerly along the narrow path, keeping her hands on the wall for support. She crossed over two more platforms like the one she left and reached the light space. It was a round doorway, the opening barred by a gated metal grate. She tested the gate and found it unlocked. She went through and came to a new place.

There was very little light here as well, but she found she *could* see. It looked like the inside of a cave, but the walls were wrong. They curved too regularly and were too smooth to have been carved by thousands of years of rushing water. She must be in some sort of tunnel. The tunnel had no illumination

of its own, but there was, very far in the distance, a small circle of light. And there was water, a small trickle of it slid by her feet, moving slightly faster than a walking pace, leading the way.

Walking carefully to avoid falling, she had plenty of time to think as the light she was heading for grew slowly, almost imperceptibly, larger. What could she remember? Quite a few things actually, she could remember birthdays, how to tell time, math... funny, she could remember having birthdays, but not where she had them. She knew she had parents but couldn't remember their names or what they looked like. Questions for which she had no answers plagued her. How had she ended up in the tunnel? Where had she come from? Why couldn't she remember anything? She pondered these and many more as she continued, still feeling a little dizzy. A moment later, she stopped dead as she realized she couldn't remember her own name. Refusing to panic, she decided to save that for when she got out of the tunnel since there was nothing to be done about it here anyway. Starting to walk again, she swung her arms and twisted her body; none of the pain that she had felt before seemed to linger, she could move however she wanted now with complete freedom.

The self-exploration had apparently not only taken more time than she thought but had so preoccupied her that she suddenly found herself at the entrance to the tunnel. It was a water runoff tunnel. The sound of the water emptying from the tunnel and falling the foot or two into the stream had a wonderful calming effect. Drainage tunnels such as this were built into the sides of hills or floodways and made accessible for maintenance. This particular one let her out into the dim daylight at the base of a somewhat steep, grassy hill and it was the work of a few seconds to clamber to the top.

She breathed a sigh of relief as her short ordeal had led her to the edge of the parking lot at a shopping center. She was sure she would be able to find help here. She strode quickly across the mostly empty parking lot and toward the main entrance. A slight breeze below the waist caused her to look down at herself and was a little surprised when she did. Her hands and feet were dirty from the tunnel and her short climb, but that was to be expected. What she didn't expect was a dirty hospital smock which barely covered enough for the sake of public decency. Her modesty was even more compromised because the damp smock was clinging to her body, leaving precious little to the imagination. This was going to be an awkward trip to the mall. She looked down again at her arms, unsure that what she had first seen was real. They were her arms alright, but not how she remembered them. She had expected to see the smooth rounded curves she remembered, the arms and legs of a fully developed young woman. What she saw were sturdily built arms and legs with well-defined muscles, the cords and tendons clearly visible under her skin as she flexed each muscle group in turn. They were not overdeveloped, but most definitely present. She quickly stole a glance under her smock and sighed in relief to find that her chest, at least, was pretty much the same as she remembered it. She let the smock drop back and noticed a small pocket on the front. Reaching inside it, she found a small square of damp paper. Delaying her foray into the shopping center a few more seconds, she opened the paper and found no message, no letters, just a strange symbol and a number:



She had no idea what that meant, but she put the paper back in her pocket anyway and continued on toward the mall. Despite having no shoes for her feet, she moved rapidly across the parking lot. The asphalt was starting to get warm and she didn't want to be on it when it got hot enough to scorch her feet. Since asphalt was still relatively cool, and the sun still low in the sky, she guessed it must still be morning, and pretty early at that. Lucky for her, it was early enough that not many people were there yet, in fact, it looked as if the center had not officially opened for the day. This saved her the embarrassment of public semi-nudity. A swift thought brushed across her mind that she could just go in and take what she wanted, however, she felt strongly that as badly off as she was, she wouldn't resort to stealing just yet.

As she made her way across the lot, the center loomed up ahead of her, a vast sprawling complex of interconnected shops and restaurants. The size didn't overwhelm her, the scale of this shopping center was not anything out of the ordinary, what did draw her attention was the design of the complex. Sprouting from the marble-clad foundation buildings were tubes, arches, and rails, empty and still now, but soon they would be flooded with shoppers. Another level of shops, restaurants, games, and rides rested on the arches and spread over the first level like a prism. Transparent surfaces reflected and refracted the light that shone on it, turning it into a stunning jewel of rainbow brilliance. She had no idea how this feat was accomplished, but whoever the architect was had surely earned his or her rightful place in history.

She pulled her eyes from the sparkling mall and scanned the ground for some other source of help. She spied a service kiosk and made her way to the vid-phone bay with a vague idea to call for a cab. Then she remembered she had no money. As luck would have it, a man wearing jeans, a white button-down shirt, a tan jacket, and a tweed flat cap was coming out of one of the breakfast diners and getting into the driver's seat of a cab. Sending a silent prayer of thanks to God, she moved swiftly over to the cab and got in the back.

The interior of the cab smelled like vanilla and leather, with another sharper scent of cologne underneath it all. The back was separated from the front with a panel of clear spinel glass. These thick windows were extremely hard and strong enough to be used in tanks. With the advent of rail gun technology, cab drivers had insisted on, and received, this extra layer of protection.

The driver turned around quickly in his seat at this unexpected intrusion. "I'm not accepting fares now..." he started, his voice coming from a speaker set in the cab roof. He got no further than this phrase, however. His voice froze at the sight in his back seat. Barely clad young women were not a staple fare in this neighborhood. This was not to say they never graced the cab, he picked up many scantily clad fares in the seedier portions of town – usually late at night. But they most certainly never wore hospital smocks, looking as though they had spent the night crawling around in the dirt.

"Do you need some help miss?" asked the cab driver, the speakers making his voice tinny and sterile. She took a couple of seconds before answering him. He had a kind face, a rich brown, and judging from the crow's feet around his eyes, he laughed a lot. Today though, his brown eyes were sad. His iron-gray hair was tidy beneath the cap he wore though his face was still relatively free of lines.

"Yes," she replied, "Take me to...well, I'm not sure what I need. Maybe somewhere I can get clothes to start?" and she shifted uneasily in the seat, all too aware that there was only a single bit of translucent material between her and total nudity.

"We are at a shopping center, miss. If you could wait a few minutes, it would open and you could buy yourself whatever you want," the cab driver said.

"Yes, I'm aware of that," she replied, embarrassed at her current situation and sure her next statement would get her expelled from the vehicle, "but I seem to have left my money in my other hospital smock," she said with a sarcastic smile, gesturing at what she was wearing. "Besides, I just wouldn't feel right stealing what I want." She looked at him defiantly, daring him to expel her from his vehicle.

He stared at her for a few long seconds, giving her the impression that he was doing some very hard thinking. Finally, he said, "Look I can see you're a little uncomfortable, and I can understand why. Tell you what, I'll keep my eyes front, and you can borrow my spare sweatshirt if you like. I keep a clean one in the cab, in case I get soaked delivering a fare. Here!" And he pushed the sweatshirt into the transaction drawer and back to her.

Turning his eyes front, he paused a moment to let her don the clothing before he continued, leaving the drawer open so they could converse directly. She put on the sweatshirt which was, indeed, clean, and still smelled faintly of fabric softener and vanilla. "I know some people that might be persuaded to help you with spare clothes, food, and even medical help. They're a sort of charity. I'll take you to see them if you like."

"That would be wonderful," she said with genuine relief, "but I don't have any money to pay you."

He looked back at her in the rear-view mirror before replying. "Ah well, it's only money. Besides, what sort of creep would I be if I turned a half-naked girl asking for help out of my cab just 'cause she was short on cash?" he said, eyes crinkling as he smiled. "Listen, it's a bit of a cab ride and since we're going to be keeping each other company for a while, maybe you could tell me your name? Mine's Carmine. Carmine the cabby." Carmine maneuvered the car through the parking lot and out onto the main road, the quiet whine of the electric motor barely noticeable underneath the sounds of the road.

"Mine's..." she started but stopped when she remembered she didn't know it. "I don't know what my name is," she said to her lap.

"How about I just call you Thirteen then?" said Carmine.

"Why would you want to call me that?"

"I thought it might have some significance since it was tattooed on your neck."

Startled, her hand flew to her neck, trying to feel for the tattoo. "Do you have a mirror?"

"Here," said Carmine, tilting the rear view back so she could look.

She tilted her head to the side, exposing the nape of her neck and there, where it joined with her shoulder she saw a tiny black tattoo. Carmine was right! She had a tattoo on her neck: XIII, the Roman numerals totaling 13. She thought for a second or two and then decided. Why not? Some people had weird names and Thirteen seemed as good a name as any until she found out what her real name was.

"Sure, Thirteen will be fine," she said.

On the drive, Carmine asked her quite a few questions and Thirteen found herself repeating what she could remember about waking up in the tunnel, walking to the exit, the questions she had and the quick scamper over the parking lot to his cab. He seemed to like to talk and his voice had a calming, comfortable quality to it that put her at ease. Perhaps it was because of the conversation, perhaps because of the lulling motion of the car, but the drive seemed to be over more quickly than Thirteen expected.

"Here we are," said Carmine, as he pulled the cab over to stop in front of a small multi-story building. The building seemed somewhat out of place when compared to its neighbors. At first glance, it looked moderately well-kept and to be, at least partially, an apartment building. It was a good ten stories shorter than it's nearest neighbor, giving Thirteen the impression it was hiding from something. Its neighbors were office buildings and quite a bit shabbier, showing signs of, if not neglect, then militant unconcern. She looked at the apartment building in front of her again and noticed that it only looked better kept in comparison to its neighbors. The roof was twelve stories up according to the number of windows. The barely visible brick front had long ago been allowed to be host to creeping. The chipped paint shutters on the windows were all closed and locked from the outside. The cracked cement front walk led up to a set of crumbling concrete stairs with scrollwork railings that were rusting slowly into brown piles of dust. Thirteen was left with an impression of shabby seediness. Underscoring her impression was the steady trickle of furtive people entering and exiting the building despite the early hour.

“Carmine, I’m not so sure about this.”

He looked back at her and smiled, “Don’t worry Thirteen. I know it’s a little run down, but trust me, I’m sure my friends will be more than willing to help you out. Besides, you know how things are, rents are tough and you take what’s available, especially if you’re doing charity work. Not a lot of money in that. C’mon, let’s go in, I’ll talk to Dean and he’ll set you up.”

They walked up the front steps and were admitted to the building by a very large man whose clothes seemed just barely able to contain his muscles. The inside hallway was sparsely lit and ran from the front to the back of the building with a stairwell off to their right. The atmosphere inside the building was unsettling, shrieks of both pleasure and pain echoed through the hall. There was the sharp acrid smell of cigarettes and another sickly sweet, almost cloying smell. Thirteen also thought she heard crying underneath the background noise.

She clutched Carmine's arm and they were led to an office by another very large, intimidating man. Thirteen was asked to sit and wait while Carmine went to talk to Dean. The room looked like an office of sorts, with a beat-up desk opposite the door, a grungy, stained couch off to the left and a couple of rickety chairs in front of the desk, presumably for customers. The only light came from the bare bulb dangling from the ceiling. A second door on the right wall was slightly ajar, revealing a small, empty storage closet. Rather than sit uncomfortably on the sketchy couch or rickety chairs in clothing that barely covered her, Thirteen stood. The large man closed the door and Thirteen found herself alone again. Almost immediately, there was a very soft knock on the door of the room. Thirteen turned around as a young woman entered the room on soft feet. The woman was both about her size and age. She had blonde, curly tresses that fell past her shoulders and green eyes that were both captivating and filled with pain. The newcomer turned, still grasping the door handle, and swiftly and silently closed the door almost shut. Without preamble, she reached out and grasped Thirteen's face with both hands.

“Don't speak,” she whispered, “Just listen. I'm Lia. I'm going to try to get you out of here. This is not a place where you want to be.”

“But,” Thirteen said, but she was cut off by Lia.

“Shhh! We don't have much time! Dean is currently *educating*” she spoke the word with extreme distaste and sarcasm, “one of the girls on why we don't displease a client. I need to get you out of here. Go to any Tweaker, when you find one, ask for Mist. Mention I sent you and give her this,” and she took a small memory chip out of her waistband. “I've tried to escape, but I can't, he's got us all hooked on the nastiest things you can imagine, going cold turkey *will* kill us, and he's the only supplier in the area. You're not hooked yet, so you can run. Take this.” and she forced the chip into Thirteen's hand. “The windows in this room aren't locked so we'll open that one and lower you down, I'll distract Dean and the rest of them for as long as I can.”

When Lia stopped talking, they heard voices from outside the cracked door. Lia crept to the door and peered through the small crack she had left between door and jamb.

“Damn!” she hissed, easing the door completely closed. “Change of plan, Dean and the rest are coming now. If he finds me in here with you, he'll kill me!” She came back to Thirteen and snatched the chip back. “Better let me hold this,” said Lia, backing into the storage closet and easing the door almost shut. “Don't panic, the most that'll happen is he'll threaten you not to leave, lock you in, and guard the door. We'll wait for that, then we'll make good on your escape.” The closet door closed with the softest of clicks just as the hallway door opened to admit Carmine and another man whom she could only assume was Dean.

“This her?”

“Yes Dean, you see what I was saying?”

Dean looked her up and down, so brazenly that she fidgeted from discomfort. He spoke to Carmine again.

“A little more full-figured than the usual waifs. The hair is a nice accent though. She's acceptable.”

“My usual fee?” inquired Carmine

“Pay him,” Dean said to a man Thirteen had not seen enter behind Dean.

All three men turned to leave when Thirteen spoke up, “Wait! Carmine, are you leaving? What’s going on here, who are these people?”

Carmine turned slightly and said, “Sorry Thirteen, you sound like a nice girl, but I’m part of this arrangement, see? I deliver the girls, they pay me, and don’t kill my family,” and he left the office. Dean turned back to her, anger plain on his face now. Panic began to rise in her. The cryptic conversation with Lia, Carmine leaving her in a strange place with a man she had never met and what was this arrangement? Why did this man need girls? A horrible suspicion dawned on Thirteen.

Dean strode past her to the desk, slapping her in the face as he went by. She straightened, hand on her face where he had struck her. Just before he turned to sit, she saw he had a strange lump in the small of his back. He reached behind himself, brought out and placed on the desk an old rail gun. Dean sat, his eyes narrowed and a faint smile on his lips.

“You will not speak without permission! Listen close Peach, ‘cause I only ever say things once. If I do have to repeat myself,” he said, unlocking the top drawer of the desk, “there are repercussions,” he placed a rubber baton on the desk. “You will do what and who you’re told. You will go where I send you,” Dean said. “I do not tolerate back talk and expect you to service at least two or three clients a night. You are, from this moment on, mine.”

“I am sure there has been some sort of mistake,” said Thirteen refusing to believe that this was actually happening to her. “I’ll just go to the hospital.”

Dean threw back his head and laughed raucously. Lowering his head back down, he sneered at her. “You’ll do no such thing, Peach. You’re going to stay here and make me money. I know you have nobody, Carmine told me all about you. Your mysterious appearance, your memory loss, all of it. There’s no one looking for you, no one for you to call. No one will miss you, and after we’re done here, you’ll never leave again.”

As he talked, Thirteen's stomach sank. She thought Carmine was being nice; asking those questions, taking an interest in her, but really, he was just pumping her for information! She jumped as she was suddenly grabbed from behind by two men, one on either side of her. So fixated on what Dean had been saying, she hadn’t heard the two men approach. Each man had grabbed both her upper and lower arms in their huge hands. They tightened their grip, twisted her arms behind her back, and pushed her shoulders forward, forcing her to her knees. While she was being manhandled, Dean reached into another drawer of the desk and pulled out a jet injector filled with a pearl-colored, opalescent liquid. Dean approached her readying the device in his hand.

“This is my security. I forget the chemical name for it, most people don’t care enough to bother with it. But you’ll probably recognize it by its street name, Rainbow Pearls.”

Thirteen looked at the injector in abject terror. Her memory might not be quite whole, but she did remember all the news stories about Rainbow Pearls, or RP for short. It was created accidentally in a lab during an experiment involving ultra-high purity narcotics and neural functions. The researcher, clearing up after the experiment, carelessly mixed the remaining samples into one beaker for disposal. There was an immediate change in the liquids appearance. Calculating how much mixture he had left he recorded the mixture and tested it on some animals. They exhibited extreme dependence on the drug. He stole the remaining mixture, his notes, and went to the street with the most destructive narcotic ever manufactured.

In a mere ten years since its discovery RP replaced every other illegal narcotic and increased narcotics usage by a factor of 10. The addictive nature of the drug was such that the first exposure was more than enough to cause instant addiction of both mind and body. This made RP especially difficult to deal with. There was the standard addiction where the brain craved the narcotic effects, but it also affected the nervous system, flooding its pleasure receptors. When the addict can’t get the drug a

debilitating condition ensues, making it impossible to move, or even to breathe without experiencing excruciating pain. Curing the addiction is a long and slow process of gently weaning the victim over years. Fortunately, because it replaced every other narcotic, the resources formerly used to combat a plethora of chemicals were now focused on just one, barely keeping it in check. All this was now approaching her in a glistening and oddly seductive swirl of glass-encased color. Thirteen struggled futilely with the men restraining her as Dean sauntered around the desk, a lecherous grin on his face.

“Don’t bother, Peach,” Dean smirked, squatting down so his face was level with hers. “We’ve done this dozens of times and we’re quite good at it. Oh, you should also know, I make sure that I get a sample of all the goods that come through here first.” Thirteen tried to recoil in revulsion but was held immobile by the two men as Dean reached under both her sweatshirt and smock and squeezed her breast, hard.

“NO!” she shrieked, yanking her arms in vain, her mouth twisted with disgust. Then, outside her feelings of revulsion, and pain, she felt another unpleasant sensation. A buzzing, as though someone had connected her skin to an electrical outlet, washed over her. Dean jerked his hand off her, with a cry of pain, shaking his hand in disbelief.

“What the hell was that?!” he turned to look at the two men. “You let her alone in here without searching her for weapons? Strip her naked and get that taser off her!”

The men, each taking a side, pulled the sweatshirt over her head, taking the smock with it, and threw them against the storage closet door. They looked her over but found nothing. They forced her once more into a kneeling position, naked this time, and held her head to one side.

“She ain’t got one, Boss. She’s got nowhere to hide it.” said the man on her right.

“I can see that, asshole!” Dean shouted. He turned to Thirteen.

“What the hell was that?”

Thirteen trembled and whimpered. Dean looked at her, considering for a second, and then said, “Fuck it,” and approached her again, this time with the syringe held before him like a gun. The injector approached her as Dean leaned forward when a second strange thing happened. She was so filled with fear, so desperate to get out of her situation, that her heart gave a huge beat in her chest and time seemed to slow. Then Thirteen saw it was not just a feeling. She could think normally, but Dean had slowed to a crawl. Thirteen jerked her head to one side and loosed it from the grip of her captors. Time returned to normal and Dean took several steps back, looking at her in some surprise.

“What the *fuck* was that?!” he shouted.

“Sorry Dean,” replied the large man on her left in a surprisingly high-pitched voice. “I don’t know what happened. One second I was holding her head, then it got all slippery, and then I wasn’t holding her head.”

Dean looked at him and shouted “Not that, you ass! She blurred!” He ran one hand through his hair, looking intently at Thirteen. “This is fucking ridiculous! Hold her still! If I miss I could kill her. And if she dies, I’ll be more than a little put out with you.” He emphasized his words by jabbing the injector in their direction.

The men holding Thirteen exhibited some of her fear now as Dean came towards her for the third time. Thirteen felt her panic mounting again; felt her heart beat hard in her chest and once again Dean slowed down. In a desperate attempt to get free, she pulled her arms as hard as she could and was very surprised when they moved quite easily. Thrown off balance by the ease of her movements, she pitched forward and her arms hit the floor, splintering a couple of the floorboards. One of the larger pieces speared up into her forearm and lodged deep inside. Her forward momentum rolled her past Dean to crash into the desk, crushing the modesty panel and causing the desk to jump back several feet. Things returned to normal and she pushed herself to her feet, feeling surprisingly little pain considering the wood shard in her arm. She looked up at the three men blocking the door. Dean and his guards looked at

her in astonishment. The first to recover was Dean; he swiftly approached the guard who had been holding her head, yanked his rail gun from its holster, cleared the safety, and pointed it at Thirteen.

“That’s enough!” he shouted, “What the hell is going on here? What are you?”

Not knowing what was going on and just as baffled as the others, Thirteen stammered in terror, “I... I don’t...”

Dean leaped over to her, grabbed her shoulder, and pressed the railgun to her temple, “Answer me, bitch, or I swear I’ll turn your head into so much rotting melon!”

Her chest throbbed again, this time was different, instead of slowing, everyone stopped. Terrified of having a gun to her head, she shoved Dean’s away as hard as she could. But instead of shoving Dean, her hands sank into him as though he were made of pudding. Before she could stop herself, both her hands were wrist deep in his ribcage. Reacting as though burned, she yanked her hands out, causing more damage as bits of bone, flesh and squishy chunks of organs came away with her hands. Thirteen stared in horror, her hands covered in blood and gore. Surely this could not be real. She could not have just pushed her hands into another human with the same ease as squishing an overripe tomato. She tried to shake the blood off her hands, but only a few drops came off, vaporizing before they hit the floor. She stared, her panic rising, before bolting toward the door. Thirteen stumbled as she trod on the splintered floorboards, driving more shards of wood from the already tortured floor into her foot, causing her to lose her balance. The guards that had immobilized her before had not moved from their positions blocking the door. Time sped up a bit just before she crashed headlong into them. Bones broke, joints separated, and flesh tore, though amazingly not hers. The jarring impact the tangled group made when they hit the floor returned time to its normal speed. Thirteen lay amid a scene from a horror movie.

The bodyguards were both unconscious, perhaps dead, lying in a large dent in the floor with their chests collapsed and blood oozing from their mouths, noses, and ears. One was missing an arm and the other had several appendages lying at awkward angles. A loud thud drew her attention away from the two bodyguards and behind her to Dean. She turned to find him clearly dead with two ragged, gaping holes in his chest, lying in a rapidly expanding pool of blood. The look of anger on his face had not faded in death. The effect it had on the corpse was horrific. An odd detachment came over her: she looked down at her hands and found they only had a few streaks of blood left on them. A small trickle of blood meandered down her arm from the wood shard. Without thinking, she wrenched it out of her arm. This time there was some pain, but it didn’t shake her out of her daze. She watched in clinical detachment as the hole in her arm repaired itself in seconds. Somewhere in her numbed brain, she knew that this was both incredible and unbelievable. However, the sensory overload and extreme emotional upheaval of the situation had shut down Thirteen’s higher brain functions. She would surely pay for it later, but for now, survival instinct was in the driver’s seat. Balancing on one foot, she lifted the other and pulled the shards of floorboard from that as well, noticing that the wounds healed just as fast as the ones on her arm. She dropped the shards to the floor with dull wooden clicks.

*Then* she felt pain, pain she had not realized was possible, and collapsed to the floor in agony, her vision swimming. Instantly her brain re-engaged as it battled this new threat. All movement ceased as she tried with every ounce of self-control to keep from fainting, or vomiting, or both. This was the same pain she felt when she woke up that morning, though much more intense. Holding completely still worked to alleviate the pain this time as well. In a few moments, the pain had lessened to the degree where she could force herself to stand.

Lia emerged slowly from the closet, gingerly stepping around the door, eyes wide and mouth hanging open. The sharp metallic stench of blood and other bodily fluids assaulted her nostrils. The sight of mangled human flesh and bone was seared into her eyes. She ran to the corner, braced her arms against the walls and threw up. When she regained her composure, she straightened and turned, wiping her mouth on her sleeve. Thirteen was still standing, naked and dazed, in the midst of the carnage, covered in remarkably little blood considering the devastation around her.



“Thirteen?” said Lia. “That’s your name, right?” Thirteen nodded, her eyes dead and empty, a lost soul in hell with no hope of redemption “Honey? I know this is truly terrible and I can’t imagine how you are feeling, but you mustn’t lose your mind over them. This is horrible, but so were they. What they just tried to do to you, they have already done to over 40 women and girls,” she said, gesturing to the corpses on the floor. She grabbed the clean smock and sweatshirt from in front of the closet and picked her way over to the almost catatonic Thirteen.

Lia reached Thirteen and clasped her hand. When she didn’t respond, Lia shook her hand and called her name again. Finally, in desperation, she pinched her arm. This, at last, seemed to bring Thirteen into some semblance of consciousness.

“Good,” said Lia, “because we don’t have time for catatonics right now. We have to get everyone out of here!” Lia handed Thirteen the sweatshirt, dropped her hand, and cracked open the door to the hall, hiding the contents of the room with her own body. “APRIL! JASMINE!! I need help over here!” Lia shouted up the hall. In a few seconds two more girls, younger than either Thirteen or Lia, had appeared. “We don’t have a lot of time, you two. Go tell the Firsts of each floor to get everyone out, tell them Dean is dead. Just grab some clothes and whatever RP stashes people have and get the hell out of here. We DO NOT want to be here when the cops arrive. Go!” and the two darted away, one to each stairwell at the front and back of the building.

Lia turned back to Thirteen, who had not moved from her spot, and took her hand once again. “We’ll waste a few minutes to get you cleaned up. You’re coming with us away from here, then maybe you’ll be able to help *us* get clean.” She pulled Thirteen from the room, closing the door on the gruesome scene. Several girls had started to make their way fearfully down the stairs, looking to Lia for direction. Lia’s response to all of them was a nod of affirmation and curt instructions to meet at “her place.” Lia did stop two girls, the same two she had sent off before and had them help with Thirteen who was still somewhat dazed. They quickly ushered her up a flight of stairs to a room with “CANDY” painted on the door, and into a shower so she could wash. Lia left Thirteen with April and Jasmine while she went to check on the mass exodus from the house. April stood outside the shower in case Thirteen needed anything, while Jasmine left to get some clean clothes for her.

The water was cold at first but warmed rapidly. Under the shower, Thirteen rubbed the last blood and gore from her hands and arms. She bent to scrub more blood from her legs. A line of it had caked on her where an errant spray had struck and she sat to scratch it off with her fingernails before cleaning those as well. As she sat, whatever had been keeping her going to this point left her and all that had just happened crashed back in. It hit her like a wave and she buried her face in her hands and wept. There was a little sorrow for the men she had just killed, but not much. If Lia was right, and her brief exposure to the men seemed to confirm this, then they got better than they deserved. The balance of her weeping was for herself, because though they may have deserved to die, *she* had killed them. She had not meant to, but that didn’t really matter. The fact was that she had just killed three men; three large, strong, fully-armed and angry men. And she had done it with nothing more than her bare hands. There were also the wounds in her arm and foot, which had miraculously healed. How? Was she a monster? Was she even human?

The water on her cooled and she heard April asking if she was OK. This shook her out of her dismal reverie of despair enough to reply.

“Yeah, just hungry.”

She collected herself enough to reach up and turn off the water. Then she grabbed hold of the shower bar, used it to help herself stand, and stepped out of the shower.

She was shaking, but whether it was from the cold water, the emotional drain, or from the hunger she was starting to feel, she didn’t know or care. Her mind was so full of questions about herself, who she was, WHAT she was, that she had no mental capacity to spare for mundane issues like physical ailments. She took the clean towel offered by April, dried herself, and used the wet towel to wrap her

hair. Jasmine had returned with clothes and unbelievably a new package of underwear and asked if she would need any help. Thirteen shook her head and asked if she could be alone for a minute to get dressed. The two girls left the bathroom, and Thirteen started the mundane task of dressing made more difficult due to the nature of the clothing. They were a little more revealing and skin-tight than she liked but were a damn sight better than the crumpled hospital smock on the floor. Thirteen turned to the bathroom mirror to finish putting herself together. The steam from the shower had not quite evaporated off the mirror yet, so she reached up to wipe the last of the condensation off, but halted. She didn't know if she could look herself in the eyes just yet. Steeling herself, she wiped the mirror with her towel.

Thirteen ran a comb through her hair and tied it back in a ponytail, the muscles in her arms protesting. She glanced at the image in the mirror, barely enough to register the green eyes and red hair shot through with wide streaks of black. Almost as an afterthought, she bent down and retrieved the note from the pocket of the discarded smock, placing it in her back pocket. She trudged wearily out of the bathroom, legs and back now starting to ache; hunger gnawing at her insides.

She found Jasmine and April waiting for her. Thirteen took a step toward them, but when her foot touched the floor her leg crumpled beneath her, and she collapsed. She tried to get back up but found her arms and legs would not respond. She saw April and Jasmine run towards her, her vision swimming as they approached. April reached out to help her up as Thirteen's vision faded to black. The last sounds that accompanied her into unconsciousness were April's shrieks as she touched Thirteen's bare skin.

## Chapter 2: A Narrow Escape

The field was beautiful, full of wildflowers, sunshine and a gentle breeze. The sweet smell of lilac blossoms wafted to her on the breeze and she spent several minutes deeply inhaling the perfume. The smell tugged at her memory but when she tried to call it forth, nothing was there, just a hole. This was not enough to disrupt her feeling of well being and safety though. Everything was peaceful here and she lingered, stooping to brush the delicate flower petals. There were trees off to one side which offered shade, but none was needed. The sunlight, while bright, did not have any heat, it too existed only to contribute to the serenity of the field. In fact, there did not seem to be any heat, cold or other discomforts. A wonderful sense of contentment filled her and with it, a relaxation that she had never experienced before. Yet there was something wrong, nothing visible, just a feeling of unreality. She stood suddenly, eyes widening. She was dreaming! With this understanding came a sense of control. She looked up and the sky changed to an interesting shade of purple. Smiling gently, Thirteen started walking, not with a purpose, just to do something, to see what was around the metaphorical corner.

After a few minutes of walking, she came to the edge of the forest. With no hesitation, she continued on into the unknown, after all, what could hurt her here? She rounded a bend in the trail and encountered a large rock formation with a door in it. She momentarily hesitated, brows furrowed. Still, this was a dream so strange and impossible things could happen while her brain sorted through the day's events. The door opened as she approached, but instead of opening into a dark cave, a room lit with sterile fluorescent lights was revealed. She did halt at this, her stomach clenched and her hands trembled. What was this sudden fear? As she crossed the threshold she realized that it was the room itself which was the cause of her anxiety.

She inspected the room to try to find the reason for her fear, she could find nothing except a buzzing speaker. Innocuous at first but becoming more insistent with each passing second, it sounded like the humming of a vast beehive. She frowned and stared at the speaker, the noise tickling her memory. Was it a sound she heard before? Or was she hearing it now? The room swirled around her and she was falling, falling into blackness and...

....she woke up to hear the same buzzing sound all around her but fading rapidly. Thirteen lay on the floor where she had collapsed. April and Jasmine were gone now, but they had left a small pile of food and a note, written in lipstick, on the carpet.

COULDN'T TOUCH YOU. ELECTRIC SHOCKS. HAD TO LEAVE. SORRY.

"Electric shocks? What the hell?" said Thirteen, and her memories crashed back into place. Dean, his two guards, the tunnel, Carmine, her collapse. She shook the remnants of sleep from her head, wondering if anything was going to start making sense anytime soon and then the hunger hit her. She scabbled to the small pile of food, tore open a granola bar and wolfed it down in two bites. She ripped open another food packet and saw strange lights flickering outside the window. She downed the second parcel of food on her way over to the window. She pulled apart the flimsy curtains, raised the window and but the shutters on this room were locked. There was a crack in them, however, which afforded her a minute view of the outside.

Through the crack, she saw what appeared to be a small army camped outside the building she had inadvertently liberated. Personnel carriers with searchlights and flashing light bars and men behind barricades filled the street below her. She leaned forward and put her eye right up to the crack, giving herself a better view of the outside. Something flashed by the window making the same buzzing noise that woke her up. She jerked her head quickly back inside as she recognized the vehicle. It was a flier. A transformational inner-city transport, it had no fixed shape but changed its dimensions and overall geometry depending on the use to which it was put. She also saw tactical assault vehicles, mobile

command units, and portable neural disruptors. This was top-notch inner-city enforcement equipment, only used by well-funded security firms.

There was only one conclusion, they must be there for her. Why a private security firm should be interested in her, she didn't know. Thirteen *did* know that she really didn't want to find out why from the gentlemen below; therefore, escape was priority one. Glancing back over the room she had spent the last few hours in she saw there was no way to cover that fact that someone had been here. Cleaning up the towels, and dirty clothes would take precious time that she didn't have. So, rather than waste time cleaning up, Thirteen checked to make sure that she had her note and food then quickly left the room, devouring a large candy bar on the go. Maybe there was still a way to get out through the bottom floor. There were only two ways that she had seen to get access to the upper floors, a stairwell on either end of the building. The stairwell at the front of the building was too risky, so Thirteen went for the back stairwell, knowing that there were sure to be guards there as well. Hopefully, there would be fewer men guarding the back door than the front and maybe she could sneak out. It wasn't much of a plan, but it was better than waiting here to be captured.

Thirteen opened the last of her food, a small box of crackers, and crept her way to the back stairwell. She tiptoed down the switchback stairwell, trying to step near where the stair treads attached to the wall to minimize creaking. As she rounded the half flight from the third to the second floor her weak plan failed. Below on the second floor, four teams of armed security personnel were coming out of four different rooms, obviously doing a room by room search. Even her slight movement caught many of their eyes and being trained professionals they did not hesitate in their response.

"Don't move!" sounded from several voices below as a score of rather serious looking weapons were brought up to acquire her as a target. She reacted out of reflex, dropping her empty cracker box and cringing back slightly, ducking her head a little to the side and crossing her arms in front of her head. Her movements were so sudden, however, that one of the men closest to her jerked his finger on the trigger and discharged his weapon. Out of the corner of her eye, Thirteen saw the end of his weapon light up in a blue spark of electrical discharge. She heard someone shout from below and her arms tingled inexplicably. They suddenly felt incredibly strong, then just as suddenly, very light and weak. As the projectile passed near her head it made no sound as it moved through the air. It struck the wall behind her and off to the right creating a geyser of plaster, wood, and dust. The sound of its passage followed a moment later, the effect was oddly unsettling. Thirteen let her arms drop limply to her side, and glanced over her shoulder. The projectile had made a remarkably compact hole in the interior wall, it varied neither in direction nor width as it blasted through the various obstructions inside the wall. Thirteen recovered, her arms returning to normal, and prepared to bolt back up the stairs when a voice rang out. It tugged at her memory and she stopped.

"Cease Fire!" yelled one of the team leaders.

"Damn Chief!" said the man nearest to her, "What the hell was that?"

"Quiet, Johnson," said Chief, "You are on report. We were ordered not to harm her and your carelessness almost killed her."

"Yes Chief," replied Johnson abashedly, "But sir, I was aiming right at her, there is no way I could have missed."

"Then you better add weapons re-certification to your up-coming eval. My apologies, Miss," he said, turning to Thirteen. "We were sent to escort you back."

"Escort me back? Back where? I don't even remember anything before yesterday, and now people are shooting at me! Not to mention the army that's parked out front, or is that part of my escort as well?" said Thirteen more than a little sarcastically.

"I understand that you are a little disoriented ma'am," said Chief calmly, "and I apologize that you were fired on, I can assure you that was a mistake. As for your memory loss, we can help with that. Come with me and ....."

“You can help with my memory?” interrupted Thirteen, more than a little interested to know that her memory loss could indeed be cured. The man called Chief nodded in silent assent to her question.

“Let me ask you this before we go,” she went on, “You say you're here to escort me somewhere. A place where I can get my memory back. This sounds like a pretty simple job to me.” The Chief nodded slowly, not sure where this was heading. “Good, then what reason could you possibly give me that would convince me it's safe when you've brought 200 trigger happy jarheads with state of the art equipment and top of the line fliers to just escort one fairly small woman?”

“Well....” started Chief, wrong-footed by the unexpected question, “you see...ah....”

“That's what I thought,” said Thirteen, turning to run.

“NO! Wait! I can explain!” shouted Chief, but in vain. Thirteen disappeared around the corner and up the stairs. “Dammit! After her!”

The twenty men behind him followed Chief after Thirteen up the stairs, running full tilt, pounding the old wooden treads. A little less than a flight above them, Thirteen heard the pounding, felt a surge inside her, and the noise changed. In fact, it had ceased.

“Great timing,” muttered Thirteen turning again to go up the next half flight of stairs. The instant her foot touched the step the age hardened wood started to crush.

“Damn!” and she gently lifted her foot off the step. Thirteen stopped to consider the situation. The previous three times strange things had happened the episodes seemed to come and go as they wished. It would appear that this time she was going to have to try to control what was happening. Now the question was how to do it?

“OK, think,” Thirteen said to herself, trying to recall everything that surrounded the events where she noticed time slowing. Before each event, something had frightened her, twice when Dean had approached her with the Hypo, and again when he had held a gun to her head. Maybe the connection was fear? The results had differed each time, but there was no denying that strange things happened when she felt that stab of fear. Was it, perhaps, simpler than that? Thinking harder about the problem she almost failed to notice that the sounds in the stairwell had again changed. Each footfall now came to her ears wavelike, slowly increasing in volume to a crescendo then fading away, sometimes interrupted by another footfall. Gingerly, she tried the step again and found that it remained solid.

Thirteen ascended the steps as quickly as she dared while trying to keep tight control on her fear; a difficult task while fleeing armed men. On each floor she glanced down the hallway toward the front of the building, hoping for another way out. She was disappointed every time. Dean had made sure his “investments” wouldn't be able to escape. On the twelfth landing, she encountered only a door labeled ROOF ACCESS which, after pulling hard on the handle, she found was locked tight. Panicking now, her emotional control slipped as she pulled the door handle a second time. The handle parted company with the door and came away, a mess of metal and shattered wood in her hands. Thirteen took a deep breath and regained control of her fear again. She dropped the handle and gently pulled the door open.

Now that she was on the roof, she faced a new problem, how to get off a twelve-story building surrounded by a small army with no adjacent roof, no fire ladder, and no equipment. Her body had shown it could heal very fast, however, she doubted a fall from about 100 feet would do her any good. Normal time returned in a rush and with it, a sudden intense feeling of hunger and a short-lived flash of pain in all her muscles. She staggered under the feeling. Thirteen recovered quickly and looked across the roof to the adjacent buildings. The one on the right was a cement construction, behind was the crumbling brick and mortar of a high-rise tenement, but to the left was an old office building complete with windowed walls. This last building was, unfortunately, the farthest away from her. A gap of some 30 feet separated the two buildings. Thirteen looked around and found a chunk of brick that had fallen from the building behind. She hefted it in her hand, drew back her arm and threw it hard at an office building window. The brick sailed across the gap and collided with a large window one floor down. It didn't smash the window like she had hoped, but the window did crack. A circular spider web of

fractures propagated quickly out from where the heavy brick had struck and stopped when they reached the edge of the pane. Hoping this would be enough, Thirteen took a few hurried steps back towards the center of the roof then turned and ran toward the office building and the cracked window. She was almost all the way across the roof when the access door burst open.

“Stop!” shouted Chief at her, “Stun her!” he snapped at the man nearest him. This last order caused a leaping feeling in her chest. Thirteen's last step propelled her onto the roof lip, she felt the brick ledge crush slightly beneath her foot as she hurled herself out over the gap. A sharp pain and burning heat streaked across the back of her neck as she flew through the air. Then multiple streaks of fire laced across her skin as she collided with the cracked window of the office building. The window burst inward, shards of glass following her path, a thousand crystalline bees stinging her, shredding the curtains inside the office. Thirteen crashed awkwardly onto the top of an old desk, rolled ungracefully off the top and landed heavily on the floor surrounded by a carpet of sparkling razor sharp diamonds. She raised a trembling hand to brush the glass out of her hair, muscles protesting. Her legs were quivering as well. Her stomach gave a huge grumble and she clutched her middle with weak fingers. “Get up! Move!” she shouted to herself. Thirteen forced herself to her knees and then shakily to her feet. She stumbled to the open office door leaned for a moment on the frame, blood oozing from a multitude of slices in her skin. She looked both ways for her next move, the hallway tilted unexpectedly and she grabbed the frame to steady herself. Just across the hall, a machine caught her eye and she rushed forward. She collapsed on the floor next to the old vending machine and looked up eyes wide and mouth drooling. The ones had always used manufactured the requested food automatically by atomically combining constituent elements into compounds and synthesizing the final product. The device was infinitely more variable and maintainable. But they needed power to work. No power, no food. But the old machines still kept hermetically sealed food products in their insides. In seconds, Thirteen smashed the front of the machine and grabbed whatever food she could. She also grabbed a couple of energy drinks to wash the food down. They were shaped to fit in a pocket for easy carrying but were still made from aluminum. She stuffed most of the booty into whatever pockets would hold it and pushed one can into a tight back pocket. She ripped the top off a packet of ordinary peanuts, tossed half the bag back into her mouth and stumbled down the hall to the stairs. From the first swallow, her trembling lessened and her legs became more steady. By the time she reached the stairs at the end of the hall, her stomach noises had eased.

She opened the door to the stairwell and stopped, listening carefully for sounds of pursuit. The hard walls of the stairwell reflected no sound back to her. She ran on silent feet for the railing, glanced up and down the stairs for any movement then headed down. Maybe she could find a way to sneak out of the building by one of the service entrances or some other out-of-the-way exit. Absently reaching to her back pocket to push the can back down, she grabbed another food parcel from her pocket, tore off the wrapper, crammed the food into her mouth, and continued quietly down the eleven flights of stairs to the maintenance level in the basement. She adjusted the drink several times on the way down. Her skin-tight pants caused the can to work its way out of the back pocket with nearly every movement she made. There was a tense moment when she had to stop her downward progress and seek the minimal concealment of the corner behind a door when a security person gave the stairs a cursory check for life, only to have her stomach grumble when he looked in the window. The sound did not carry however and the man moved on. Twice now, when she had exhibited strange powers she was almost crippled by hunger in the aftermath. Perhaps there was a connection between the two phenomena?

In the quiet of the stairwell, her descending footfalls echoed softly but sounded like the footfalls of giants to her ears. Each level she descended without incident brought more tension, surely she would be discovered soon. She passed the first floor and when the basement door came into view without incident she sighed and her shoulders slumped. Thirteen tilted her head side to side, her vertebrae popping before reaching for the handle to the basement door. She looked through the small inset window for any signs

of movement before trying the handle. A gentle pull on the door swung it open, silently, into the stairs. Thirteen edged around the door, held onto the handle and gently allowed it to close behind her.

The basement was full of machinery responsible for the normal operation of a building this size. Air handling units, water filtration, electrical generators, pumps and massive amounts of piping and cabling made the basement a veritable maze. All the equipment here was silent, shut down long ago when the building died, making the floor eerily quiet. Then Thirteen saw the flaw in her plan, there were no receiving docks and maintenance basements like this one did not typically have exits, existing only to house the vital equipment of the building.

“Damn,” she whispered to herself and reached for the handle to open the door. This mistake drastically reduced her chances of escape. Her hand had just touched the handle when she stopped, she could see through the glass in the door a strange shadow on the stairs. The shadow moved, someone was guarding the stairs! She tiptoed down the three steps to the basement floor and darted between the pipes. She glanced over her head for any place to hide, but the air ducts were too cramped to give her room. She moved fast to the back of the basement scanning the jumbled mess for any place of concealment. A rat darted out in front of her and she almost screamed, but covered her mouth, breathing hard.

“Damn sewer rats,” she whispered. The sewer! She could get out that way! She craned her neck quickly and saw what she hoped were drain pipes. A few meters down, the pipe label appeared:

WASTE 2F. She followed the yellowed arrows on the pipe back to a junction, and then followed the larger pipe. She was, at last, led to a cistern where all the waste pipes came together. The large cistern was built up against the outer wall of the building, she could see no drain pipe. A brief glance around the holding tank revealed it was both a holding and treatment tank. It was built against the exterior wall so it could directly drain through the structure and into the sewer once all the solids had been removed for secondary treatment. Thirteen closed her eyes and breathed a heavy sigh, so much for her shower. She stopped at the access ladder on the cistern, squared her shoulders and began to climb the ladder of the blocky structure. She reached the top where there was an access hatch for routine maintenance. Bracing herself she turned the locking wheel and pulled on the access door. Luckily it was not a secured door, unluckily it had never been oiled. Years of neglect and proximity to a moist environment made it creak like the door to an old crypt. The unexpected sound increased her urgency, the guard was sure to have heard the noise. She glanced at the inside and was surprised to find that while it still smelled, it wasn't that bad. Even better, since the building had been vacated for so long, the cistern was empty and dry. Thirteen lowered herself down as quietly as possible, noted the location of the drain pipe and reached back to close the access hatch. It squealed again, rotating on its rusty hinges, and banged closed with a hollow boom, plunging her into darkness. The noise faded quickly replaced by voices coming from the other side of the basement. She took a step toward the drain pipe but her shoes echoed loudly on the uneven floor so she stopped, hoping no one would think to check inside the tank when they searched the basement.

She waited in the cramped, smelly darkness. The sounds of her pursuers got closer as they methodically checked the basement for her. Finally, she could make out voices.

“See anything yet?”

“Nope, nothing.”

“Well keep checking, we have to clear this floor and report back up top.”

“Yeah, I know. But there aren't any ways out down here, I really think we're chasing a rat.”

“Bet your paycheck on it?”

“Not a chance.”

The voices were almost right outside the cistern, in a few seconds they would see it if they hadn't already. She started trembling, nervous sweat forming on her brow, by the purest bad luck, her tremors shook loose the aluminum can from the vending machine. It squirted out of her over tight pants and

thudded to the floor of the cistern. The silence that followed was thunderous. Thirteen closed her eyes, and clenched her fists, waiting for the inevitable.

“Go check it out.”

“No way, Fisk. I am *not* going into a poop pool.”

“Owens! Quit your bitching and go,” said Fisk, “We heard a sound come from in there. We have orders to check out anything suspicious.”

“It’s an old, dried out waste cistern, it was probably a leftover piece of ... you know. It finally got dried out enough to drop off the side or something. The thing’s old enough that the walls are probably peeling as well. I’m telling you it’s nothing.”

“I don’t know,” said Fisk, hesitation clearly evident in his voice. “We really should see...” It was clear that despite his apparent vehemence for checking everywhere, the option of not having to go bodily into a human waste storage tank was very appealing.

“C’mon Fisk,” said Owens in a cajoling tone, pressing his advantage, “it hasn’t made another sound, not even a rodent could make one sound and then nothing else. It would have moved. And a person would have tried to run for it.”

There was a long pause, in which Thirteen was sure Fisk was doing some very fast and very serious thinking.

“Right,” said Fisk with authority, “Thanks for checking that cistern out Owens. I know it was a nasty job and we’re all glad that you VOLUNTEERED to do it. Just so we’re all clear, you saw nothing in there?”

“Nothing,” said Owens, “just a piece of the wall or hatch that fell off onto the floor, making the noise that we heard.” There was a loud squeal outside the cistern following his statement. “And this is what caused squealing sound Simmons heard, just a rusty old sign that gave way to its weight.”

“Excellent work,” said Fisk, “I think we should all buy Owens a round tonight after we catch the fugitive.”

There was a general murmur of assent and the group left. The sounds of their footfalls marked their progress away from the cistern. Thirteen breathed a slow sigh and relaxed her fists. She thanked whoever was watching out for her for the general laziness of humans everywhere and their aversion to their own waste. She breathed slow and deep of the increasingly stuffy and smelly air.

She opened her eyes back up and found the cistern was not completely dark, she could make out shadows and hints of shapes. The interior of the cistern was outlined in a greenish light without any obvious source. It was possible the light came from some form of bio-luminescent algae or bacteria still able to survive on the limited nourishment on the walls of the cistern. Thirteen found the main drain for the cistern, sighed again and shook her head. The pipe was down low to the floor and only about 18 inches across, her choices thus far had not led her down the easiest path. Well, it was a good thing she wasn’t a big girl, it would be a tight squeeze as it was. She got down on her hands and knees to check out the pipe and found that she could clearly see the other end. It was a straight shot from here to the main sewer system, perhaps 25 meters. It would only take a couple of minutes work to crawl through. As long as she was quiet though there was little danger of being found. Quickly she consumed the last of the food that she had stolen, discarded the wrapper on the cistern floor and knelt to crawl through the drain pipe. The only sound was of her still rumbling stomach.

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