

## Oblivion Girl – Episode 6

### ESSA NARRATION

Skyride Studios presents... Oblivion Girl, episode six. Oh, Brother.

### ESSA NARRATION

After the train ride back into town, I visited a clinic and got the bullet out of my arm.

### NURSE

Are you sure we're out of painkillers?

### DOCTOR

There's no time for that. Help me get her to bite down on this piece of wood.

*(Screaming)*

### ESSA NARRATION

After the Doc dug around like he was searching for buried treasure, out popped the bullet.

I left the clinic with a sore arm and a lollipop. Not bad after two fights.

Kial babysat Alita so we could have a well-deserved break. I didn't trust those two together, but after all that bullshit, all I wanted to do was sleep. My head touched the world's softest pillows.

### ESSA

I've missed you.

### ESSA NARRATION

After a few days of recovering, we went and visited Kial. He managed to finish a secret project he'd been working on. He took all the computers above his office and connected them to a pair of old aviator goggles at his desk.

Thousands of tiny wires ran down the ceiling from some special mainframe he'd custom-built. He explained it to me four times, but I still didn't understand what the hell he was talking about. I had to admit, I was not impressed. It looked like a bunch of color-coded spaghetti wires super-glued to an old pair of sunglasses.

The glasses glowed in eerie blue as he placed them over my eyes. A rush of information flooded inside the screens. The hum of the computers above the ceiling sounded like the muffled jet engine about to take off.

**KIAL**

These goggles are to help you on your missions.

**ESSA**

Um, how? They're tethered to your computer.

**KIAL**

No, not these. I made a second wireless pair for Alita.

**ALITA**

For me?

**KIAL**

Yeah! You'll be constantly fed to rain data from satellites. So whatever jam you're in, you can guide them out.

**ESSA**

Alita, rescue us? In your dreams.

**ESSA NARRATION**

To prove how useful she'd be, Kial sent us out with her on an easy job across town.

**ALITA**

Kial added our own little avatars for the GPS. They're so cute! Atticus, you have to come check this out.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I couldn't take it anymore.

**ESSA**

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

**ALITA**

Why don't you shut up, Essa?!

*(Clicks gun)*

**ESSA**

Go ahead, shoot me. You know me. You know what I'll do to you if you do.

*(Kicks gun)*

**ALITA**

Ouch! That hurt! You could've broken my fingers!

**ESSA**

You're right. Next time, I'll make sure to aim for your fingers. Better yet, why don't you walk behind us for a bit? Like, far behind.

**ALITA**

Yeah, fine, whatever.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Far out in the distance, I saw a mirage appear out of thin air. At first, it looked like an animal, but then morphed into the shape of a human.

**ESSA**

Hey, you seeing what I'm seeing?

**ATTICUS**

Uh... maybe. My eyesight must be getting worse. That far away, it just looks like a blob.

**ESSA**

Can your scope go that far?

**ATTICUS**

Let me check.

It's a guy. He looks like he's taken off some kind of backpack and crouched down, but the heat waves make it too hard to see.

**ESSA**

Hey, Alita.

**ALITA**

What?

**ESSA**

There's a guy about half a mile in front of us. Can you lock onto him with your goggles and see what he's doing?

**ALITA**

Fine, one second.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Suddenly, something reflective blinded my eyes.

*(Sniper shot)*

**ESSA**

Oh, shit!

**ALITA**

Watch out, he's got a sniper rifle!

**ESSA NARRATION**

Atticus peeked around the boulder and aimed his rifle at the mystery man.

**ATTICUS**

Little bitch thinks he cannot snipe me?! Oh fuck!

**MYSTERY MAN**

Is that you, Oblivion Girl?

**ESSA**

What if it is?

**MYSTERY MAN**

Don't you remember me? You stole money from me two years ago.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I peered out of the boulder and tried to get a better look.

**ESSA**

You're probably right, maybe not. Either way, I ain't paying.

*(Sniper shot)*

### **ESSA NARRATION**

Since Alita had straddled far enough behind us, she had the luxury of avoiding this little predicament. She'd snuck behind the guy in an attempt to take him down. However, we hadn't given her bullets for her gun yet, so she was forced to smack a rock against the guy's head.

### **ALITA**

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

### **ESSA NARRATION**

By the time we regrouped, the guy had stopped witching.

### **ATTICUS**

You can give me the rock now, Alita. I don't think he's waking up anytime soon.

### **ESSA NARRATION**

As I rolled him over on his back, I gave his face a good, hard stare.

### **ESSA**

No, don't remember this guy.

### **ESSA NARRATION**

He had an awful flower tattoo on his shoulder, smelled like jasmine, and had a slight smirk on his unconscious face. I wasn't sure, but if I had to guess, it was probably one of Jophie's crew sent out as a scout for us. In his backpack, we found a GPS transponder.

### **ALITA**

You could have just switched it off. There's a toggle switch right there...

### **ESSA**

There will likely be more of them coming, and we don't need this one following us on some kind of revenge quest.

### **ALITA**

What should we do with him?

**ESSA**

Did you bring the shovel?

**ATTICUS**

I never leave home without it.

**ALITA**

Shovel?

**ESSA NARRATION**

We buried him up to his neck in the sand and took his rifle. The last thing we needed was this lunatic out for revenge. I made a mental note to revisit the same spot after our mission and check in on him. That was, unless he passed away.

On our way back after the mission, we returned to our buried friend only to find his body missing. Someone had dug him free and added two additional holes next to his. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the three holes were for us, but it did take a genius to turn around to see the five or six gypsy caravans hiding behind the boulders waiting for us. Each caravan held up to eight men. We were fucked.

One of the patrols spotted us on his way back from taking a piss.

**GYPSY**

Hey, what the...

*(Whistles)*

**ESSA NARRATION**

I put my hand behind my back and held up three fingers to Atticus and Alita. We were in the beginning stages of working on coded hand signals. The only problem was I never learned them. I just held up random numbers and improvised whatever they decided to do.

Our enemies climbed out of their mobile homes to see what all the commotion was about. It only took four smoke canisters to leave them in a cloud of unforeseen confusion. By the time the smoke cleared, we were nowhere in sight.

**GYPSY**

Huh? Where'd they go?

### **ESSA NARRATION**

As he turned around to yell back to his playmates, my right hand popped out of the ground like 'Night of the Living Dead' style. I grabbed a hold of his ankle while Atticus, who was now off in the distance, had a clear and steady target.

### **ESSA**

Whenever you're ready, Atticus!

*(Gunshot)*

### **ESSA NARRATION**

I wasn't expecting him to use the exploding bullets, but whatever got the job done. With my other hand, I popped out an all-black canister with little yellow dots that I call Fireflies.

I pulled the pin and chucked it into the air.

*(Explosion)*

The canister exploded as flaming pieces of ash rained down onto everything in a 100-foot radius.

The caravan's caught fire and freaked out the horses.

*(Horse Whinnies) (Gunshots)*

I ungracefully dug myself out of my dirt tomb and proceeded to even out the numbers.

Flaming on made it easier for Atticus to hook them up in the long range. Each hit was like watching the firework go off. The leader was off in her own wild, freaking out between the explosions in front of her and the data displayed in her goggles.

### **ALITA**

Uh shit, shit FUCK. No, no NO! Ok, how about this one? No?! FUCK! FUCK, SHIT, NO, NO, No!

*(Gunshots)*

She picked up a handgun from one of the dead guys and began firing sideways like a gangster.

*(Gunshots)*

**ALITA**

That's what I'm talking about! FUCKKK YOU ALLLLLL!

*(Gunshots) (Laughter)*

**ESSA NARRATION**

She didn't actually hit anyone, but it's the thought that counts. Or so I'm told.

**ATTICUS**

Hey, Alita. Are you okay?

**ALITA**

I-I killed them, didn't I?

**ESSA**

Um, don't go taking all the glory for yourself. The closest you came to helping was slapping some guy with a rock.

**ALITA**

Atticus, how do you do it? How can you take another person's life as if it were meaningless?

**ESSA NARRATION**

I knew Atticus well enough that he wouldn't answer a stupid question like that.

**ESSA**

Because they *are* meaningless.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Alita was bothered by the answer. But I wasn't about to sugarcoat the subject with hugs and kisses. If she wanted truth, I had no problem giving it to her.

**ESSA**

The only meaning that our lives held was getting in our way. A bunch of sheep willing to die for something they don't even fully comprehend themselves. If I had any remorse left, I still wouldn't pity them.

**ALITA**

You're one to talk. You do nothing but kill! Someone like you could never understand how precious life is. You're the one to pity, not them!

**ESSA**

People don't pity the winners, Alita. Look around. That's us.

**ALITA**

I don't feel much like a winner.

**ESSA**

You're not. I had the most kills.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Jophie and Micah had shown up to crash my party and brought reinforcements along with them. Twenty caravans followed behind, kicking up enough dust to make my allergies go nuts.

Atticus used the time to reload his rifle, and I wiped the blood off my knife with some dead guy's shirt.

**JOPHIE**

Causing trouble again, Essa?

**ESSA**

Not more than usual.

**JOPHIE**

We come in peace. We're not here to fight.

**ESSA**

I would never call what you do fighting, Jophie.

**JOPHIE**

Can we have a conversation like civilized human beings?

**ESSA**

Sure. Come on out and let's get civilized.

## **ESSA NARRATION**

And without waiting, Micah walked outside. As soon as he saw me, he stared me down with that classic Micah face.

## **ESSA**

Atticus, Alita, keep an eye out. If they try anything fishy, kill them all.

## **ATTICUS**

Micah! Good to see you again... I guess.

## **ESSA NARRATION**

I took my last long breath of fresh air and walked into the caravan. Even though I'd seen it from the outside a hundred times, I never actually stepped inside one before.

The interior was ugly. Avocado green and puke yellow lined the walls. Red curtains draped down to an astroturf texture brown carpet. The stench of stale air mingled with garbage and made me wish my gas mask had an oxygen mask setting.

Jophie sat down across from me in an armchair. Sitting beside him was some guy in a black suit. His briefcase probably cost more than my yearly salary. Behind them hung some of Jophie's freshly washed, wet underwear. It'll take years to erase from my memory.

## **ESSA**

You have about thirty seconds to say your piece before the smell in here makes me puke all over.

## **MR. NO NAME**

It'll take longer than that to explain that your brother is still alive.

## **ESSA NARRATION**

There are a few things wrong already. First, I've never told anyone that I had a brother. Second, Jophie looked more on edge than usual. And third, for the life of me, I couldn't understand why no one had cracked open a fucking window.

By the time I walked out of his caravan, Atticus and Alita were sitting around a fire with Micah and a few goons.

## **ESSA**

We need to go.

## ALITA

What did they say?

## ESSA

It's my brother, Eden. He's alive. Until I kill him.

## ATTICUS / ALITA

Brother?

## ESSA NARRATION

The day our city crumbled, Eden was taking a shower. Something he rarely did, at least at our place.

In the middle of a quick, 45-minute rinse, the apartment began to shake. He slipped in the tub and unwillingly drank a mouthful of dirty, clogged shower water. The floor disintegrated beneath him, and like a cowboy, he rode the bathtub, butt-passed naked all the way down. Those ten seconds must have felt like ten hours as he crashed floor through floor, private parts waving in the wind like the flag on the 4th of July. The sight I was glad to have missed.

Tumbling aimlessly in the air, he hit the ground hard. The bathtub landed over him just in time before loads of debris crashed on top.

While buried alive for two days, something in Eden changed for the worst. Maybe it was his mild case of claustrophobia, or the fact that he had no food or water. Whatever the reason, it altered his state of mind like a hippie on a bad acid trip. It didn't take long for military personnel to uncover him in his birthday suit.

## MEDIC

Hey, I've got a live one over here!

## ESSA NARRATION

The person they found under the tub, however, wasn't the brother I knew and loved. It was evil in the flesh.

He was covered in mud and smelled like a cow farm.

## MEDIC

Kid, it must be your lucky day, because you're the only survivor we found in three days.

## ESSA NARRATION

He already knew what he wanted to do with the rest of his miserable life. It took little effort for Eden to be accepted into the military academy, even less to rise to the top of his class.

After graduating, he dedicated his life to serving in the military. After two short years, Eden had already been in 97 battles. His squad had won all of them with zero casualties. They were nicknamed the Reapers. After his 100th battle, Eden returned home with a limp. He'd been wounded in the leg while rescuing a Reaper from five enemy soldiers.

Recruitment ratings were low, and the military needed a poster boy to help inspire new blood. So, for his outstanding bravery and impressive track record, Eden was awarded the highest rank the military had to offer. Not only was he the youngest to achieve the rank, but he was also the only person to never accept it.

On the day of the ceremony, he vanished off the face of the earth, along with nine Reapers he had specially selected. At first, the military thought it was some sort of bizarre kidnapping. However, intel came back featuring photos of Eden in various parts of the world, working with a government contractor. Outraged that one of their best and brightest had gone AWOL, they issued a warrant for his arrest. They wanted to make an example out of the ungrateful bastard.

The only problem was, no one could find his sorry ass.

If it were me, I would have checked under every overturned bathtub I could find.

They soon felt the sting of Eden's venomous bite. During a mission to take him down, the special ops got flanked by Eden and his Reapers. Out of the 15 men, none came back alive.

*(Gunfire)*

After that, the heads of every branch of the military were slowly slaughtered one by one.

*(Screams)*

It didn't matter where they hid. A house, an office, or a bunker hundreds of feet underground. Eden found them.

Soon, bounties for him started popping up. Big ones with enough money to make the average man quit his day job and begin a life as a two-bit, wannabe bounty hunter. And that's exactly what they did. Everyone and their moms started an amateur bounty hunting service. They accomplished nothing except solidifying my reputation for being the best.

Thanks, amateurs.

Then things just got quiet. Rumors spread that a bounty hunter killed Eden.

*(Gunshot)*

Everyone was baffled when the reward money was claimed without a body. People began speculating that Eden had collected the reward for himself.

After the money disappeared, so did the excess bounty hunters. They returned their weapons and went back to their old day jobs. Military officials had new priorities. With no bounty to claim anymore. They had forgotten about Eden. That was until the night with Jophie and the suit. I sat there speechless as these two idiots told me this fairy tale. My long-lost brother was the new living, breathing pain in my ass. I sat there trying to listen as they explained further details. But who was the guy in the fucking suit? Mr. No Name had a briefcase full of stalker pictures.

What? Was I to believe that these blurry images were photos of Eden from a few months ago? What kind of idiot did they take me for?

**ESSA**

So what?

**JOPHIE**

Essa, don't you see? They're hiring you to take down Eden.

**ESSA**

Bullshit. Why don't they ask you to do it instead? You're a better lapdog than me.

**JOPHIE**

Because nobody knows Eden better than his own sister.

**ESSA**

Come on. This is your best plan. I've only known him for a third of his life. He might as well be a stranger.

**MR. NO NAME**

This isn't our best plan. It's our only one left.

**ESSA NARRATION**

They knew I wouldn't give two fucks about this. Unless they planned something they weren't telling me. This whole thing stunk of a double cross. I just didn't know exactly why.

**ESSA**

I want half the cash up front and in our account within the hour. If it's there, you've got yourself a deal. If not, then don't come looking for me. And as for you, I don't ever want to see your face again.

**MR. NO NAME**

Don't worry. That feeling's mutual.

**ESSA**

Also, I have three requirements.

**MR. NO NAME**

Name them.

**ESSA**

Number one. You try following me on my team, I'll quit looking for Eden and hunt you down instead. Two. If you try pulling some underhanded shit, I'll join Eden and destroy you.

**MR. NO NAME**

And third?

**ESSA**

We're tripling our fee. You have 58 minutes and counting.

**MR. NO NAME**

Hmm. Interesting list of demands. We have a requirement for you as well. Bring Eden back alive. He has a lot of questions to answer for.

**ESSA**

Deal. Let your boss know that my team will keep our part of the bargain.

**MR. NO NAME**

Don't you want the intel on your brother?

**ESSA**

No. Anything you have on him is probably wrong anyway. Oh, and Jophie?

**JOPHIE**

Yeah?

**ESSA**

Your place fucking stinks like shit. Next time you have visitors, open a goddamn window.

**MR. NO NAME**

You really think she'll keep her end of the bargain?

**JOPHIE**

Oh, trust me. Once Oblivion Girl sinks her teeth into something, she doesn't let go.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Mr. No Name nodded and put on his hat, opening the door to the caravan. He walked out and waited for his helicopter to land.

The co-pilot handed him a headset as he jumped inside.

**MR. NO NAME**

Operation Checkmate, here's a go.

**AXIEL**

Excellent. We'll inform Eden.

**ESSA NARRATION**

By the time we got back home, Kial was sitting on the curb outside waiting for us with a bag of groceries.

To be honest, it was weird seeing him outside. His pale skin made him look whiter than an albino ghost.

**ESSA**

What are you doing here, Twilight?

**KIAL**

I received a large transfer into our account. Heard it was thanks to you. I thought we could celebrate.

**ESSA**

Heard about it, huh? Alita, do those goggles charge you monthly for phone service?

**ALITA**

Kial! I've missed you so much!

**ESSA**

I wouldn't call it good news exactly. My outstanding reputation is tarnished now. Oblivion Girl almost destroys everyone in cities. Pathetic.

**KIAL**

Funny. I thought you'd be more excited.

**ALITA**

I didn't. Since when does Essa get excited about anything that she can't put in her mouth?

**ESSA**

I'm sorry. Is that some sort of passive-aggressive sex joke, or did you just call me fat?

**ALITA**

Why not both?

**KIAL**

Oh. Hahaha.

Atticus, I'm not sure that's supposed to go in there.

**ATTICUS**

Who's the chef here, Kial?

**KIAL**

You are.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I was held hostage in my room, cleaning guns with Alita. The smell of fresh pasta, bread, and tomato sauce rushed through my nose and into my empty stomach. I could hardly wait.

**ATTICUS**

Dinner time!

**ESSA**

Fucking finally!

**ESSA NARRATION**

The boys sat at the table, looking as though they were up to no good, with a bottle of Chateau Chalon shifting around their glasses.

**KIAL**

If you account for the quantum decoherence within the Second Sun, the leakage isn't just a byproduct. It's a necessary-

**ALITA**

—Do you mind if I sit next to Kial?

**ATTICUS**

Be my guest. Would you like some wine?

**ESSA**

Look at you, giving alcohol to minors.

**ATTICUS**

You're not much older, you know.

**ESSA**

Yeah, but at least I'm a woman.

**ALITA**

And what do you think I am?

**ESSA**

Good question. Never really figured it out. Maybe some sort of ugly boy?

**ALITA**

How can you mistake me for a boy?

## ATTICUS

Hahaha.

*(Ding's glass)*

Well, ladies *and* gentlemen, I'd like to thank you all for being here and enjoying this meal together. Feel free to eat more. There's plenty. Okay, Dig in.

## ALITA

Atticus, Atticus. Is there any more wine?

## ATTICUS

A few more bottles, but don't you think you've had enough?

## ALITA

No way! I've got room for at least another glass... or two.

*(Tips over glass)*

I think I'm done. I'm sleepy. I'm going to bed.

## ESSA

You can sleep off the booze on the couch- Hey! Dummy! Why are you walking to my room? Ugh!

## ESSA NARRATION

Even though I had offered to temporarily share it with her, it didn't give her the right to go in whenever she wanted.

## KIAL

So, I looked into Eden.

## ESSA

Let me guess. Didn't come up with much?

## KIAL

Some people just don't want to be found. Digging up dirt meant making waves, and I'm sorry to say that this is the best I could do before my presence was known.

I found a picture of him standing next to these words carved into stone. Locus amicus. It's a Latin expression that translates to pleasant place. But where or what exactly it pertains to, I have no idea. Part of me feels like it's a dead end. Another part? Not so much.

**ATTICUS**

What makes you think it's not a dead end?

**KIAL**

When I looked more into it, I found that pleasant place sometimes refers to the Garden of Eden. Either that has to be the biggest coincidence, or the lamest trap.

**ESSA**

So, we're looking for a place that has a garden?

**KIAL**

Not just any garden. One that Eden would consider very special.

**ESSA**

Haha. Son of a bitch. I think I know where he is.

**KIAL**

You do?

**ESSA NARRATION**

I looked Atticus in the eye. You already knew the answer.

**ESSA**

Garden Grave.

**KIAL**

Never heard of it.

**ATTICUS**

It's not a place you want to go looking for.

**KIAL**

Why?

## ATTICUS

The military used to take captors there during wartime to slaughter them. The ground is drenched in blood. Centuries later, the dirt still stained red. To help deal with the psychological guilt of the mass murders, the soldiers created a tradition. They'd plant a flower for every adult they killed, and a tree for every child.

## ESSA

Within three months, over 270,000 flowers and 150,000 trees were planted. Afterwards, the military's agenda focused on foreign threats, and Garden Grave was abandoned. The plants and trees were supposed to help cover up the mass graves, but there weren't enough plants in the world to cover what they had done. Once the operation was canned, all documents were burned. No one except for top brass knows what Garden Grave's true agenda was. For now, Eden's the only one left who might have access to that intel.

## KIAL

Wonderful. But if it's a secret, how do you know about it?

## ESSA

Because they hired people from my town to work at Garden Grave before the city fell.

## KIAL

Holy shit.

## ESSA

Eden better have a good reason for making me go through all this bullshit to find him. And if it's a trap, I'll kill him twice if I must. And I won't be leaving any flowers.

*(Chugs wine)*

Well, that's enough. Reminiscing for one night. I'll see you guys in the morning.

## ALITA

Hey, Essa...

## ESSA

Go to sleep.

## ALITA

Are you nervous?

**ESSA**

Nervous about what?

**ALITA**

Seeing your brother again.

**ESSA**

No.

**ALITA**

Why not? I would be.

**ESSA**

My brother died that day, along with everyone else in that city. I don't know who this impostor thinks he is. Walking around, pretending to be Eden. But he's not my brother. Now get some sleep. It's gonna be a long day tomorrow.

**ESSA NARRATION**

The next morning, the outside fog hung low to the ground and gave the streets an eerie feeling. Like an old Sherlock Holmes novel.

**KIAL**

Atticus, Essa, take care of yourselves. And her.

**ATTICUS**

Don't worry. You'll be choking down my next meal before you know it.

**KIAL**

Great. Can't wait.

**ESSA NARRATION**

We left the two love birds alone to say their goodbyes and then headed out. Before long, we already had a few uninvited guests following us. I couldn't see them. They could hear their noisy feet as they stumbled around. The low fog thickened as we quickly made our way down towards the harbor. The wind picked up, and I smelled a lavender perfume as strong as paint thinner.

**ESSA**

Hey guys, what if we...

**ALITA**

They are? Well, where are they? I can't...

**ESSA NARRATION**

Glad to know she was so discreet.

Atticus and I hooked a hard right while Alita went left and slept on her goggles. Last thing I wanted was to make it easy on Jophie. I was positive Jophie had already figured out that we were on to him.

Once we reached the Miss Misery, Atticus and I laid booby traps around the ship. We then waited for Jophie and his men to make their next move. Alita had set up camp a few miles away inside a cave.

**ALITA**

And according to the GPS readings, there's about 30 or so men headed your way. They should reach you within about 10 minutes.

**ESSA**

Perfect. We'll be ready.

**ESSA NARRATION**

By the sound of it, Jophie had brought all his men. I guess he's not holding back this time.

Atticus had squished his body inside a drainage vent under the entrance of the ship. Inches above him stood the group of men who walked inside.

**ATTICUS**

They're here.

**ESSA / ALITA**

Copy that.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I was so excited that I had to bite my bottom lip to keep from letting out this sinister laugh. Oh, what the hell? They only live once.

**ESSA**

Mwahaha!

**GYPSY**

W-what the hell was that?

**JOPHIE**

Worry not, men. There are only mortals hiding here.

**ATTICUS**

They're staying in groups.

**ESSA**

That's fine. Stick to the plan.

**ATTICUS / ALITA**

Copy.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Lights, camera, and action.

Atticus tried desperately to climb out of the dirty drainage vent. Once emerged, he was covered head to toe in a bunch of black, gooey gunk.

**ATTICUS**

Oh, fuck. What is this shit?

**ESSA NARRATION**

Probably caused cancer just by looking at it, let alone touching it. After wrestling a padlock out of his greased pocket, he took off his coat and threw it to the ground.

**ATTICUS**

Ugh. Another coat butchered...

**ESSA NARRATION**

Meanwhile, back on the front lines, I was having a bit of my own fun. Following secretly behind a group, I picked off stragglers and hid their bodies inside the empty rooms.

**ESSA**

Well, look what we have here. Pick a color. Purple or pink?

**GYPSY**

Uh, purple? I guess?

*(Choking)*

**ESSA NARRATION**

Men are so dumb.

I continued to slowly decrease their numbers with the help of Alita. Her goggles made it easy to enjoy a sandwich while keeping me clear of hostile areas. Didn't take long before Jophie noticed his numbers dwindling.

**JOPHIE**

Disband. Everyone, back outside!

**GYPSY**

What the? They locked the doors from the outside!

**ESSA NARRATION**

A few of the men tried to climb out of the glassless windows, only to be hit with heavy sniper fire.

*(Gun fire)*

He watched through his scope as the gypsies tried desperately to climb back into the window, as bullets ricocheted all around them.

With one hand, he continued to fire warning shots, and with the other, he shoved half of Alita's sandwich into his mouth.

Fine. Leave all the hard work for me. Typical.

**GYPSY**

Jophie, only half our men remain. What should we do?

**JOPHIE**

Regroup! Everyone, back in the hall!

### **ESSA NARRATION**

This was where stage three of my plan began.

I ran into what used to be the ship's mess hall, lacking tables and chairs. Now it resembled more of a dance hall. I closed all the doors and immediately filled the rooms with smoke.

I placed the last canister down and heard muffled whispers on the other side of the door.

### **ESSA**

They're here.

### **ESSA NARRATION**

Jophie entered the room first. He crouched low and pushed the smoke around with his hands in a failed attempt to thin it out. His men followed close behind, spread out in a horizontal line, and swept down the room.

### **JOPHIE**

Essa, I know you're in here.

### **ESSA NARRATION**

How could you tell? Was it the giant plume of smoke that gave it away?

### **JOPHIE**

We aren't here to hurt you. We came to help.

### **ESSA**

I already told you I don't need your help, gypsy boy. So suck my balls.

### **JOPHIE**

Come now, Essa. Even after all we've been through? All the times I saved your life.

### **ESSA**

Unwanted help.

### **JOPHIE**

What about for an old friend?

### **ESSA**

Sure.

**JOPHIE**

Great!

**ESSA**

But you're not one.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I knew that the jerk was just buying time. He took a few more steps closer into the middle of the room and spotted me crouched behind a pillar with my back turned toward him.

**JOPHIE**

Hahaha. The game's over.

**ESSA NARRATION**

Spinning around his gypsy friend, dressed in my clothes, his hands, feet, and mouth were tied to the pillar. I had stuffed TNT down his purple bra. I went all out and gave him makeup, which he had mostly cried off once I slapped the TNT to him.

**JOPHIE**

What the f—

**GYPSY**

—Stop staring and help me!

**ESSA NARRATION**

That's when I pushed the detonator.

TNT, which Atticus and I under the parameter of the room exploded and collapsed to the floor. The gypsies fell into the engine room.

Mini-me's TNT were just toilet paper rolls, painted to look like the real thing. Like I'd ever blow myself up.

**ESSA**

Ha ha ha... oh, fuck!

**ESSA NARRATION**

Jophie was still in the room, dangling off a windowsill.

**ESSA**

Well, well, well. Isn't this just one big-ass metaphor? Why are you following us, gypsy jerk?

**JOPHIE**

You... You need my help.

**ESSA**

I need your help. Are you sure you don't have that backwards?

**JOPHIE**

Tell you what. I'll call off my men if you call off yours. We'll do this together, like old times' sake. What do you say?

**ESSA**

Well, when you put it that way, how could I resist?

**JOPHIE**

Think about it, sweet cheeks. With my skills and your brains, we'd be unstoppable.

**ESSA**

That's weird. From up here, it looks like I'm the one with all the skill and brains. HAHAHA!

**JOPHIE**

Hahaha...

**ESSA**

Tell you what. Sounds like a good deal to me. Let's shake on it.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I grabbed his greasy hand and lifted him over the hole.

**ESSA**

Nah, you know what? Changed my mind.

**ESSA NARRATION**

His smile shifted to terror as he fell into the gaping darkness of the crevasse.

**JOPHIE**

AHHH! Ow! Oh.

... my handsome face.

**ESSA NARRATION**

I jumped from the ship's main deck down to the hot sand. Atticus and Alita were already waiting for me.

**ATTICUS**

Here you go. You've earned it.

**ESSA**

Thanks. I'll eat it while we walk.