

Chapter 1

The room was dark, with only a single fluorescent light bulb flickering overhead.

The ropes chaffed at Lynn's wrists and ankles and the chair she was tied to creaked every time she dared to move. She couldn't remember how long she had been here. Hours? Days? She didn't even know where she was. She had arrived bound, gagged, and drugged. She wasn't sure how long it had taken for her to regain consciousness but, at some point, she had come out of the drug-induced haze and started to take in her surroundings. A simple room, probably a basement judging by the cold dampness, no furniture other than the chair she sat in, and the simple door far enough away that there was no hope of reaching it. It didn't matter; the door was probably locked anyway.

She was sure she had been kidnapped but why she was being kept here, she still didn't know.

She had been walking home from school with Lex, her best friend, when a group of men jumped them, pressing drugged cloths to their mouths and dragging them away. Lynn still wasn't sure where Lex was. She hadn't seen him since she'd woken up and no one had come into the room so she could find some information, not that she was in any position to demand answers. She sent a silent prayer to God that Lex was okay.

At first, she had been terrified but now a sense of acceptance enveloped her. She could do nothing except pray for deliverance. Somehow that helplessness was a comfort. It meant she wasn't in charge, God was.

She wondered if anyone would be able to find her and Lex. Surely, they would be missed by now. They should have arrived home hours ago. Their parents would be worried, and probably call the regime's police force. Lynn doubted the enforcers would come. Her father was a miner and her mother a factory worker. They were only kept around for labor, another two people amidst thousands in the city. It didn't matter what happened to them. Lex's parents were both miners too, but they probably wouldn't even bother to call the regime. They had been smart that way, staying below the radar. They would come searching for their son but they wouldn't draw attention to themselves. Perhaps it was because Lex wasn't their only child. Lynn was all her parents had left.

The door in front of Lynn creaked as it swung open. A brief flash of light from the outside hall filled the room. It blinded her for a moment but was gone just as quickly. She heard the door slam shut and when her eyes had readjusted to the darkness, she saw that three men had entered the room. The men were all dressed in black combat fatigues with utility belts around their waists and bulletproof vests strapped to their chests. Lynn felt a lump rise into her throat. This wasn't a mere kidnapping. These looked like the regime enforcers.

Her mind flashed to her parents. Were they alright? Had something happened while they were working that had angered the regime into taking away their only daughter? It wasn't uncommon for things like this to happen. If a miner was caught stashing away a bit of the precious Chikara that they were tasked with mining, they wouldn't always be imprisoned for it. That would damage the labor force. Instead, sometimes their family would pay the price. Lynn wondered if her father had stolen Chikara. It was possible. With how expensive food had

gotten, thanks to the increased price of imports and the slowing rate of exports, perhaps her father had gotten desperate. Maybe now, Lynn was paying the price.

Her family had tried to shield her from the regime but they had all known that she couldn't stay safe forever. No one could. They'd done their best to prepare her, teaching her about God and the hope she could have, even if everything in their world seemed hopeless. There were no churches in the city, the regime claimed that it was too distracting and they refused to allow the workers even a day away from their labor. Yet, Lynn's family had still taken time whenever possible to learn about God and she'd even been able to share her beliefs with Lex. Learning about Jesus and the disciples had encouraged her. They'd faced terrible trials and still remained faithful. Lynn took a deep breath, trying to muster that courage now.

As the men came closer to her, she wondered what they would do. She had a friend several years back who'd been taken away after her mother stole ground Chikara from the factory she worked in. Poor Kira was never seen again after the regime took her away.

One of the men came within a foot of Lynn, stopping close enough that he would be able to reach out and grab her. She could smell his putrid breath. The other two enforcers took up positions in the corners. Lynn noticed that both of them had large guns strapped to their backs. The man in front of her was armed with only a knife. It was nearly as long as her forearm.

She tried to stay calm, not wanting them to see her fear. The man in front of her reached out and yanked the gag roughly from her mouth. Lynn gasped as she was finally able to suck in a deep breath of air. Her mouth stung and ached.

"Are you Lynn Gavi?" the man asked.

Lynn didn't speak. She wasn't sure what would happen if she answered but she had a feeling it would only cause her more trouble. The man waited for a moment then turned towards his companions. After receiving a mere shrug in response, he looked back to Lynn. Before she saw what he was planning, he brought his hand back and slapped her hard across the face. Lynn's head snapped to the side and she sat for a moment panting, trying to recover from her shock. Slowly she turned her head back to face the man, her eyes filled with defiance.

"Is your name Lynn Gavi?" the man repeated.

Lynn spat at the man. If they were going to slap her around and keep her locked away in a basement somewhere, she wouldn't make it easy or pleasant for them. The enforcer snarled.

"That's good enough for me," he said.

"At least she fits the description," one of the other enforcers added.

The man in front of Lynn grunted in agreement, "I don't see what's so special about her anyway, she doesn't look any different from the others we've brought in."

"I don't think you can determine special criteria by their appearance," the third put in.

"It doesn't matter if she has the criteria or not. We finished our part of the job; they'll find out if she's the right one once they conduct the experiment."

The enforcer in front of Lynn turned back to face her.

"You know, the experiment only works half the time, the other half ends in... well, let's just say there's usually a mess to clean up afterward."

Lynn felt her eyes widen. Experiments? She'd never heard of experiments being conducted on the prisoners. She needed to find a way out of here and find Lex too. If they were planning on conducting experiments on her then surely, they would be planning the same for Lex. Lynn

knew she would have to plan her next moves wisely. She would only have one chance to escape and the men before her were armed and dangerous.

“God, give me strength,” she muttered under her breath.

She waited until the man in front of her reached forward to shove the gag back into her mouth. She waited until his hand was close, very close, waited until he had slipped the gag onto her head and was working it towards her mouth. Then she bit into the man’s hand. The enforcer cursed loudly and jerked his hand away from her. The other two rushed forward to check on their companion who was grasping his bleeding fist and yelling in anger. Lynn started to wobble in her chair, pushing it back and forth, back and forth. Maybe if she knocked herself over, the chair would break upon impact. It seemed weak enough. It was leaning precariously to the side when one of the enforcers caught it, stopping her.

“I thought you might be trouble when I saw that gleam in your eye,” he told her.

Lynn screamed as loud as she could, hoping someone might hear her. She tried to move her tied ankles far enough forward to kick the man. She managed to barely graze his shin and he growled at her. Lynn yelled and thrashed, knowing this would be her only chance to get away. She twisted her arms against their restraints, trying to work her hands free, but the ropes were too thick and the coarse texture tore at her wrists. Lynn growled in frustration. The man holding the chair slammed the legs of it down, jolting Lynn forward. He took advantage of her being distracted and punched her hard in the gut. Lynn gasped in surprise and the man managed to reach up and yank the gag the rest of the way over her mouth. But Lynn wasn’t done fighting yet.

She head-butted the man standing in front of her causing him to stumble backward. She lowered her head and rubbed her cheek against her chest until she was able to work the gag out of her mouth.

“Help!” She yelled as loud as she could.

She knew it was a last-ditch effort. She didn’t know where she was and she doubted any friendly ears would hear her cry for aid. But she had to at least try.

“Help, anybody!” she yelled again.

“That’s it!” the man with the injured hand exclaimed. He rose from his spot crouching, clutching his palm, and started to walk towards her. He pulled the long knife from his belt and Lynn screamed louder, desperate for someone to hear her.

“Wait!” one of the other men yelled. “She has to be brought in alive.”

The enforcer with the knife turned to look at his companion. Lynn saw a wicked grin cross his face and she tensed. “I know,” the man said, “but she needs to be silenced. They never said she needed to be able to talk to fulfill her purpose.”

The man came closer, each step seeming to last an eternity. Lynn yelled more, but eventually, her voice started to fade.

No one was coming.

Why would they?

Why would anyone risk angering the regime to rescue two teenagers? Lynn was on her own. Well, almost. “Lord, please, save me!” she cried out.

The knife glinted as the fluorescent light reflected from it. Lynn swallowed hard as the man came ever closer. No one would come, and it would all be over soon.