

## **Escape**

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In a world where villains and criminals crawl in every shadow and where superheroes work tirelessly day and night, M-114 is locked up deep in a laboratory. All she can remember is a life of torture and pain.

Now finally comes her chance to escape.

## Chapter 1

Pain. All I feel is pain. Shackles. The struggle to breathe.

Days blend into years and I don't know how long I've been here. How much longer I'll be here. I have no more will to rebel, no more strength to fight.

"Dr. Walters."

I don't open my eyes. Can't. Too much pain. I take this quiet moment to gasp for breath, preparing for what's to come.

"Turn it up."

The sound of machines whirring. Electricity crackling, the typing of keyboards, pressing of buttons.

I scream.

Power surges into me from where I am bound to the machine. It lights my cells on fire, burns through my veins. Tears fill my eyes and I choke, no longer able to breathe. It's too much. It surges through me like a thousand needles, cutting me apart molecule by molecule, forcing me apart and then putting me back together again.

Over and over again. A never ending cycle of torture.

It stops and I go limp, abandoned breaths rattling in my ribcage. My face is wet, with tears or sweat I don't know. I can't differentiate them anymore. It's salty and gross.

"Again." The familiar voice commands. I crack open an eye to see his manic grin, excited by the numbers dancing on the screen in front of him. Those wide, crazed eyes that haunt me. Always watching. "Turn it up higher, to the max."

"But sir," his assistant at the controls looks nervous. There are many others in lab coats and safety glasses standing around the room, jotting down test results and making sure the technology is working properly. "If we turn it up any higher, she might—"

"I said turn it up." Dr. Walters snaps, his grey eyes never leaving my form. "Do it." The assistant swallows, then does as he's told.

I barely have time to suck in air before I'm wailing, my voice piercing through the metal and glass surrounding the room. After the initial shock, I try my best to grit my teeth, not giving the madman any more sick satisfaction of hearing me scream. I am exhausted, but I can't give up.

Not yet. Not now.

I can't give up.

The pain is unbearable. I'm sure my skin has been burned off already from the scorching heat that flows through the shackles. My senses are dulled and confused. My body is about to burst, light pours out from every seam. My eyes are wide open now, all I can see is white. I'm sure they're glowing, and when I open my mouth for a silent cry, I'm sure light is coming out there too. I can't hold it in anymore. I hear something cracking, the sound of metal screeching. The blaring of alarms and people yelling.

"Don't stop!" Dr. Walter's voice booms over the chaos, sounding ecstatic. "These numbers are off the charts! This is amazing! With this I can finally—"

His voice drowns out and I growl, no longer feeling the pain, just the unbearable need to get out *now now now*. Power fills me, desperation fuels me. With one good tug, I pull my hands free, then my legs. The iron shackles that held me down only seconds ago feel nothing more than paper now. I lift up my arms, feeling my powers reach out and grab hold of my goal, and with a yell, I bring the ceiling down.

For the first time, I am free.

I run, my vision still impaired. Everything is covered in wisps of white, looking warped and fuzzy. My ears ring. I shake my head, trying to clear the haze. I force my ruined body to keep going. There are footsteps, screams. They are not far behind.

I run through the maze-like hallways of the lab, not knowing where I'm going or where I came from. Every time I see a group of guards blocking my way I turn sharply into another hallway, hoping for the best. It's only a matter of time before I am caught again. I can't be caught again. I won't let them. Conjuring all my strength, I pull against the metal walls with my powers, forcing them to bend inwards, blocking off paths. I do this as often as my body allows, my muscles burning from the exertion.

I do not stop. Can't stop.

I find an air vent and force it open. It should be big enough for me to squeeze in. I take my chances and bring in my shoulders to make myself smaller. I crawl through the vent, trying to steady my breaths, to keep myself quiet in hopes they won't trace me here.

It is dark and suddenly so silent.

Panic builds as I try to find my way, feeling myself get more and more lost. I cannot go back, but I do not know the way forward. There are many paths in the vents and I don't know which is correct. I am scared, but I force it down. I can't be weak now, not until I manage to get out. *If I can get out.*

I take a turn and feel my heart soar with hope from seeing the light on the other end. I quicken my crawl, the claustrophobia lightening upon the promise of freedom. I push the lid open with all my remaining strength, the muscles in my arms scream for me to stop. I find myself in another testing chamber like the one I was in before.

Someone grabs my arm and pulls me out.

I shriek, kicking and flailing wildly to get out of the stranger's grasp. He is strong, his legs around mine to limit my movement, and in a few quick strokes, has me on my knees. My arms are twisted around painfully behind my back, my body completely immobilized.

I stare at a black and red mask, the Chinese character 開 on both his forehead and chest. Only the bottom half of this person's face can be seen, where a smirk greets me. The man's suit is black with red stripes that stretch across his toned abdomen, and from his shoulders down to his wrists. He wears black gloves and boots. A silver belt where I assume his weapons are is tight around his waist. I don't know him, but he doesn't look like anyone good.

"Hello, sweetheart." The man's voice is smooth like velvet, sending a shiver down my spine. I scowl and try to struggle again, but the way my arm is twisted makes me wince in pain. My whole body is hurting so badly I can't fight even if I could move.

"Easy there." He chuckles, and to my surprise, lets me go. He raises his hands up in surrender, the smile still present, like he's mocking me. "I'm not here to hurt you. In fact, I was paid to get you out."

I rub my wrists, seeing the ugly red marks in the skin. I can only imagine how the rest of my body looks. I don't want to think about that. I glare up at him, pushing myself up. "Who paid you?"

He shrugs. "Dunno, don't care. I get the money and you get out. Seems like a win win. So whatcha say?"

My heart leaps up my throat when I hear voices outside. There are cameras everywhere, they must know I'm in here. They'll be here any minute. I don't think, just grab his hand and say desperately, "Get me out."

"Alrighty then." He grabs my waist, pulling me too close for comfort. His smile is wider this time. "Hold on tight, sweetheart." Then he presses a button on his belt, and the air around me

dissolves just as the doors burst open.

The ground disappears, reappearing seconds later but not where I was standing just now. I am suddenly standing on a beam that stretches across the ceiling. Teleportation.

Men pour into the room. They hold guns, firing at us. The masked stranger ducks to avoid getting shot, and plants a roundhouse kick to one of the windows, shattering it. He motions for me to follow as bullets continue to fire, just barely scraping by me. If I was little closer to the edge, I'd be a goner.

I feel the wind against my face as I step out into the night. Freedom is so close I can taste it. We stand above what seems to be a harbor, warehouses lined up neatly, the sound of water crashing nearby. The air is salty and wet, a hint of iron wafting by. It's so dark I can hardly see anything. I can still hear voices from behind us, and storming footsteps.

The masked man grabs my hand, and presses the button on his belt again. He does this a few more times until we're far enough from the lab, nearing the city. All the teleporting makes me feel queasy, but I breathe out a sigh of relief when I see the city lights come into view, sounds of cars and street markets.

Almost there.

The masked man maneuvers around the city easily, and I'm certain he has all the streets memorized. He stops on the roof of a building, then lowers himself down, slinking into an alleyway. It seems to be the back entrance to an apartment. He types in a code, the door clicking open and he gestures for me to enter first.

The room is dark. He closes the door, locks it, then flips the light switch. It takes my eyes a while to adjust to the light. It is a studio room, rather large for one, with more than enough space for two people to move around freely. It's clean and tidy, almost seemingly unused.

"Well, home sweet home. Help yourself." The man says, plopping down on the sofa and removing his belt. Surely without his belt he won't have many weapons to use. I eye his suit, searching for other places he could've hidden a weapon. His gloves perhaps, could hold a small knife. He took off his boots when he entered the apartment already, so at least it won't hurt as bad if he kicks me.

He turns his head towards me and scoffs. "What? Scared? I told you; there's nothing in it if I harm you. You're gonna stay here until I get my money, and then you can leave if you want." I wrap my arms around myself, glancing around the room, still skeptical. "You aren't going to tie me up? Torture me?"

“No.” He sounds disgusted. “That’d be a waste of time and energy. ‘Sides,” he stands up, then all of a sudden he’s millimeters away from me, so close I can feel his heat. I squeak, instinctively stepping back until I hit the kitchen island. The smile is back. “You’re cute, how would you like to go on a date with me, hm? Maybe a kiss? Or even—”

I growl and he backs away, the heat in my eyes telling me they’re glowing unnaturally. “Alright, alright. Easy, tiger. I won’t touch you.” He tilts his head cheekily. “Yet.”

He sits back down on the couch, propping his feet up on the coffee table, flipping through channels on the TV. He doesn’t seem to be making moves to take off his mask or suit. I shrug, then sigh. Looking around the room once more, there’s really nothing I can do in this limited space. He seems serious about not attacking me, so I’ll trust him for now.

I tentatively take a seat on the sofa, as far away from him as I can. He stops at a channel playing a soap opera, snickering at the cliché and cheesy lines. “So, you got a name?”

“M-114.”

“Uh, that’s not a name.”

“That’s what I’ve been called all my life.” I rub my wrists. Now that I’m semi-relaxed, the fatigue and abuse is getting more prominent.

He sees this, and takes my hand. I wince when he brushes across a tender spot, but otherwise I let him observe.

“That’s sad, sweetheart. Let’s see.” He grabs a med kit and starts putting ointment on my wounds, then wrapping them up with gauze. His hands are quick and steady, which means he’s done this a lot. “How about Eve?”

I blink, surprised. He gestures for other wounds and I show him. “Oh...sure, I guess.”

“Great, then your name will be Eve, sweetheart.”

“Then perhaps you should stop calling me ‘sweetheart.’”

He pauses to consider, then grins. “Nah.”

There’s silence as he continues to tend to the wounds on my legs. When he’s done, he asks, “Anywhere else?”

I hesitate, still uneasy about this situation. My back stings, but that would require me to take off my shirt. I choose to shake my head, “No.”

Through his mask I can feel him staring at me, as if he doesn’t believe me. Then he shrugs, putting his tools away.

“What about you?” I ask as he puts the kit away. “What should I call you?”

“Kai.” He says. “Don’t forget it.”

## Chapter 2

It was rather peaceful that night. Kai had ordered pizza (his fridge was empty, save for a few bottles of water for some reason), insisting I eat something before bed. It was delicious, to say the least, since I've never really eaten "normal food"—according to Kai—in my time at the lab. I was always given pills in place of food. It was something that Dr. Walters had invented, pills that tasted like nothing but would give me the nutrients I needed to survive, keeping me alive well enough. So pizza was indeed the most delicious thing I've eaten so far. I wonder what other delicacies I'm missing out on.

After that, he ushered me to the bathroom, threw me a towel and some clothes.

"Get clean." He ordered, shooing me away. "You look awful."

Looking at myself in the mirror, I agree. My hair is matted, my skin covered in grime. The testing clothes I wear, a tight back jumpsuit, is torn in several places, probably also covered in blood. I look so much older than I remember being, bags under my eyes and skin deathly pale. It's hard to believe I made it so far in such a condition. I can hardly recognize myself—the last time I saw myself in a mirror was so long ago.

Stepping into the shower, letting hot water hit my skin, I hiss. The wounds on my back sting, and I try my best to wash off the filth so they don't get infected, hopefully. I couldn't help getting my new bandages wet. I sigh in relief once I begin lathering soap into my hair, glad to feel clean after so long. I feel human at last.

After my relaxing shower, I step out and wrap myself in the towel, feeling warm and safe and relaxed. Now that I am, I suddenly feel so sleepy. Doing my best to pat myself dry despite my many wounds, I put on the clothes Kai handed me. A big baggy white t-shirt and equally baggy sweats. I tie the string around my waist as tightly as possible so it doesn't fall down. I blow dry my hair, feeling how soft it became after a good wash compared to the monstrosity it was before.

Staring at myself in the mirror, I let myself smile. I still look awful, but better. Way better.

Heading out, I find Kai typing on his laptop, looking very focused. I fidget, wondering what I should do. “Um...”

“You can take the bed.” Kai says without looking up. “You must be tired.”

“Oh, no it’s okay.” I hurriedly say. “I can sleep on the sofa.”

He taps a key, looking up at me. His lips are pulled into an amused smile. “I can’t let a pretty girl sleep on the couch. Don’t worry and just go to sleep. I’ll do my best to keep my hands to myself.” If I could see his eyes he might’ve winked at me.

“I can’t tell if you’re a good person or not.” I mumble under my breath as Kai gets up, setting his laptop onto the coffee table.

“I’m not a good person. Just in it for the money, sweetheart.” He pokes my cheek as he walks by, heading into the bathroom. “By the way, my clothes look good on you.”

The bathroom door slams shut before I could hit him. His laughter is muffled on the other side. I hear water running, and now that I’m alone in the room, I wonder what I should do. Well, he did give me permission to sleep, so I suppose that’s what I’ll do. I head over to the bed, climbing in tentatively. It’s soft and smooth, and I wrap the blankets around my body like a safe cocoon. I sigh into the pillows, fatigue instantly catching up to me. I have never felt so comfortable in my life, and part of my brain kicks into high alert. I won’t allow myself to fall deeply asleep, only enough to get the rest I need to fight another day. Years of being in the lab trained me this way. I never know when I’ll be in danger and need to protect myself. I can’t trust Kai, after all.

I hear the shower stop. Muffled sounds of him moving around, quiet humming. The door clicks open, and I am immensely curious about what he looks like. I manage a peek while feigning sleep. He has a towel around his bare shoulders, water dripping down his dark hair. He wears a pair of black sweatpants but, to my disappointment, I can’t see his face from here. He stands with his back facing me, dries his hair more thoroughly with the towel and then puts his mask back on. It seems he isn’t taking any chances either.

I see him begin to turn towards me, so I close my eyes and even out my breathing. I feel him checking me, making sure I’m asleep before he moves away. There’s a quiet click, and then a soft female voice can be heard, sounding muffled.

“Hey Kat.” Kai greets, most likely talking into a phone. There’s a pause as Kat speaks. “Yeah, she’s at the apartment.” Another pause. “No need, I’ll handle it. Yeah, okay, bye.” He hangs up, letting out a sigh. There’s some shuffling and I assume he’s getting comfortable on the couch. Light dances across the wall, which I think is from the TV, though there’s no sound.



“Go to sleep.” His voice rings in the quiet room, making me stiffen. He knew? I choose to stay quiet, lying very still and trying not to react. He sighs again, shifting. “Seriously, sleep. You need it, and so do I. You’re safe here.”

Safe.

I swallow, the word getting stuck in my throat. I am safe. It’s such a difficult idea to wrap my head around because I’ve never been safe before. My life has been threatened every waking moment of my life and I’m just so...*exhausted*.

To hear him say that...was comforting. It brought tears to my eyes which I quickly blinked away, taking a quiet breath to calm myself. In all honesty, I don’t know if I’m safe. I don’t know if I can trust Kai. I don’t know who paid him to save me. But for now, I believe I am safe.

I close my eyes, and I let myself sleep.

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Voices. Light.

I breathe in, blinking awake. The ceiling is unfamiliar. I lie on something soft, not the hard concrete floor I am used to. There are no bars or lasers keeping me confined. The room smells of aftershave and baked goods, rather than sweat and vomit. No men in lab coats. No cameras. No Dr. Walters.

I choke out a gasp, and someone is beside me in an instant. “Oh thank goodness!”

It’s a voice I don’t recognize. I turn my head, looking at a girl about my age. Her eyes are bright green, hazel hair falling to her shoulders. She wears fingerless black gloves, a simple t-shirt and jeans.

“Hello, sweetheart.”

Now that’s a voice I recognize. I glance over as Kai joins the girl, his full suit on and his arms crossed over his chest. He grins down on me. “Got us worried. You were out for two days.” I blink, then shoot up. Two days!? There’s no way I would let myself stay out for so long. “What?”

“You must’ve been exhausted.” The girl says, tapping something on her tablet. “That mad scientist sure did a number on you.”

I wince at the mention of him.

“Anyways,” Kai clears his throat, then gestures at the girl. “This is Katrina, Kat for short. She’s my partner in crime.”

“The behind the scenes girl.” Kat says, grinning and looking quite proud. “I make sure he doesn’t kill himself.”

Kai scoffs and Kat elbows him. They seem close, quite the team if I’m honest.

“So, how do you feel?” Kai asks, probably scrutinizing me from under his mask.

“Better.” I flex my hands, rolling my shoulder. Nothing really hurts anymore. I notice my bandages have been changed. “A lot better, thanks. By the way, why doesn’t Kat wear a mask?”

“I don’t have to.” She answers. “No one knows about me...well, except you now.”

I frown. “And you’re not worried I’ll tell someone?”

“You can’t.” She says, rather sternly. Her eyes change, darkening on me. “You’re an illegal experiment by Dr. Walters. If the authority finds out about you, you’ll be confined for more testing to see what he did to you. Worst case scenario, you’ll be put down. From what I believe, that’s the last thing you want.”

The shock must be evident on my face because her expression softens and she puts a hand on my shoulder. “If you don’t tell on us, we won’t tell on you. Don’t worry.”

I sigh. There’s nothing I can say in this situation. My hands are tied and these criminals are the only ones I can rely on right now.

“Well, since you’re better I think it’s best you go.” Kai says, flexing his gloved hands, nodding at Kat. “We got paid yesterday, so you’re free to do whatever.”

“What?” I gasp as I watch them head towards the door, probably off for another mission. “But I don’t—”

“Not my problem.” He calls back, giving me a two-fingered salute before they disappear into the night. I stare after them with my jaw hanging open, dazed by the suddenness.

He’s not serious, is he? Is he really kicking me out without any prior warning? I wrap my arms around myself, trembling as panic kicks in. Dammit, dammit! I knew I shouldn’t have let myself relax. How could I? Those two are criminals, I’m only here because they were paid to. It’s only right that I go after they get their money. They haven’t done anything wrong.

But the feeling of betrayal still sinks my stomach. I take a deep breath. Alright, first things first. I grab my old clothes, slipping them back on. It’s tight and uncomfortable and reeks with years of abuse. But it’s black so it’ll allow me to blend in better with the night, and it’s easier to move in than baggy clothes.

I’ll have to move fast, find a place to stay. I don’t have money so any inns, motels or hotels are out of the question. I’ll have to find a place hidden from sight and where people don’t go to often.

With that in mind, I leave.

The night air is rather cold, leaving me shivering. The rips in my jumpsuit makes me feel exposed. I ignore it and begin to run. Now that my strength is back, my speed back too. I jump across rooftops, stopping and hiding every once in a while to listen for anyone following me. I can never be too careful.

I head towards the darkened part of the city, the slums. Slinking down to an alleyway, it smells of smoke, piss and vomit. I cough involuntarily, the smell reminiscent of my time in the lab. My living conditions were not much better than here. No one cared about my hygiene or health, doing only enough to keep me alive for their next test. There were special occasions where I would be treated better, given solid food rather than pills and switched to a cleaner cell, all because my next test would be highly draining and I was required to have the strength to withstand it.

I walk past the slumped figures on the street, faces covered in dark shadows, clothes torn and stained. A fight breaks out nearby, and I turn the other way as quickly as I can.

I come across an old abandoned apartment-like structure. It looks like it's about to crumble with a touch, the doors and windows boarded up. They are no match for my strength. I pull the wooden boards apart, accidentally breaking the rotting door as well, wincing when it crashes onto the floor, kicking up dust. I cover my mouth with my hands, squinting into the dark place and cough.

As the dust begins to settle again, I turn and try to pick up the door, putting it back in place as best as I can. Having some form of a door is better than nothing, after all.

Once that's done—kind of—I step into the building carefully. Water drips down from the ceiling, creating a puddle towards the right. It's not big enough to bother me, so I ignore it. There are sounds of rats scurrying around. I check the stairs, tapping it with my foot and deciding not to take my chances. I'll have to stay on the ground floor.

I shiver again, wrapping my arms around myself as I curl up in a corner. It's even colder in here, but at least I have some sort of roof over my head. I can stay here for a while until I figure out what to do next.

I tuck my knees tight against my chest, resting my face against them and sigh. As bad as things are, I'll take this over being in the lab any day.