

IN THE SHADOWS

By JH

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Excerpt from In the Shadows:

## Chapter One

She had been locked in a small room, the walls made of at least one foot of cement. No light entered the containment unit, no fresh air could be felt. It was the middle of summer and she had a feeling she was located in the desert as the temperatures soared and dropped to extremes. Her skin had been bruised since her last interrogation, cuts slowly healing from her previous questioning. Huddled in the corner, Frankie licked the blood off her shoulder. Perhaps they wouldn't have hit her so hard had she not fought back the first time they came for her.

They were calling her Feral, a codename given for what she became. When the headaches had started, she hadn't thought anything of it. It was her mistake when she'd gone to the Med Center and asked for help. The tests were simple then but intensified her aches, but they were bearable. Soon, though it became apparent that something was wrong. They were searching for something in her. During one test, her migraine got too powerful and she'd blacked out...but during that time when she wasn't conscious, something had happened. When she'd come through, there was blood everywhere, bodies lifeless on the ground, and she'd been strapped down. Since then, her tattoo burned, her eyes hurt in the light, and everything had been more sensitive. Confused and distraught, she'd fought the minute she woke up. Thinking back, she calculated she'd injured at least four of the soldiers guarding her and two of the doctors--she'd been careful not to kill them, although now she wondered if that was a mistake.

"Do you know others like you?" The one in white asked. He leaned back in his chair, his hands idly drumming on the table.

The sound reverberated in her ears, each tap a loud drum pounding inside her head. She looked at him, her once brown eyes now a complete black that swallowed the white. "My name is Francesca Liu. I am a civilian researcher based on this compound. If you're asking if I know other employees, other members of the research facility I can help you, otherwise I don't know what you're talking about."

"A civilian researcher who managed to disarm and neutralize six military officers. On your own. Why don't I believe that?" His eyes looked behind her and she sensed the movement before it happened. Moving with newfound instinct, Frankie pushed her chair to the left as the butt of a rifle grazed her ear. The speed was astonishing and she was suddenly flanked on all four sides.

"You've had training."

Her silence had confirmed his suspicion. "Where do you come from Miss Liu?"

"California."

"And how do you know how to fight like you do?" His round glasses reflected the bright overhead light.

"I've always been fascinated with how the body moves, Sir. It's been a hobby of mine to see what it can do...I've trained since I was ten."

"We'd like to run some tests on you, Miss Liu."

She knew he wasn't asking her permission. Run tests. Though the compound was militarily run, the private research facility was managed and owned by the Conservatory Co. Civilian workers were plentiful and there had been recent sabotaged projects that were under investigation. The few humans who'd been developing unusual abilities were now under surveillance of the company and a "no-hands" research policy had been implemented to observe the subjects. Unfortunately something was happening and people were getting nervous and a string of violent outbreaks had been occurring world wide.

Monsters.

The media was in a frenzy. Abominations. Magazines, newspapers, television networks showcased the "growing epidemic". Some people had developed a madness, they said, a surge of something intangible that made completely "normal" folks go crazy and ripped others' throats out. In her case, it seemed to be true.

It was the last time she was told anything about what would happen to her. She understood their fear, she had it herself. What was she becoming? Everyday little changes in her abilities worried her. It was only under complete stress when she found her headaches coming back, when she would lose consciousness and wake up sore, her body convulsing from the electric shocks running through her system. Every time, the room she'd been in had been smoked, debris and the occasional body strewn and gorged on. She never knew what happened. In the end, she was grateful to her ignorance--did she really want to know what she could do? Did she really want to be released into a world where she could do so much damage? Part of her realized they were training her, too. They were maneuvering her to do the things they wanted, her powers and skill an asset they yearned to have.

As she was placed in her cell again, her body bruised from another session, her sensitive hearing picked up on the conversation down the hall.

"They're moving fast, Captain. They've slaughtered the small development on the outskirts of the compound. I think we should integrate her with the team." It was Doctor Nishimura, her mentor--the man she had trusted so completely before she became an experiment.

Unlike the doctor, Captain Morrison lowered his voice and Frankie strained to hear. "She's be a wild card, Nishimura. Her lack of control--I'm not sure the team would accept it."

Footsteps came near and the conversation stopped. The two men had walked away and Frankie felt torn. Who exactly were the bad guys here? The people who held her captive or the ones who were killing innocent lives? It was one of those situations where she felt she had to choose the lesser of two evils and it wasn't a position she liked being in.

