

Tyranny 6.3

BANG

The gunshot was thunderous and deafening in the confined space of Coil's office, bouncing off the walls with a reverberating echo that only seemed to make it louder. I gasped, ears ringing from the noise, and stumbled back as a few stray splashes of Coil's blood splashed over my face and the front of my costume.

And inside my chest, the noose wrapped around my heart pulled tight, pulled taut, until it felt like it was trying to yank it out through my ribs.

Then, with the finality of a dying man's last breath, it *snapped*.

I wasn't the only one who felt it. Even as I struggled to gulp down a breath, even as the sudden sense of *weight* and *certainty* that I had borne, almost unnoticed, for the past few weeks vanished from inside of me and almost took my knees out from under me, Lisa gasped and stumbled, too.

When I turned to look, she was doubled over, her pistol held in a trembling, white-knuckled grip even as her other hand clutched desperately at her chest — at her heart.

"Fuck," I saw her mouth form. "Fuck."

"You shot him!" Amy exclaimed disbelievingly. The only reason I could even hear her was because she was shouting. "You crazy fucking bitch, you *killed* him!"

I pinned Lisa with my best glare. It probably would've been less daunting if she could have seen my actual face, rather than just my mouth.

"You... What did you just *do*?"

The feeling in my chest, just now...the geis had just been broken — on *her* end.

"What did *I* just do?" she snapped, snarling. "What the fuck were *you* doing?!"

"I was fucking handling it!" I spat. My strength was starting to come back. "I was about to fucking take care of it!"

Lisa tried to straighten up, but she only made it about halfway, and she glared back at me, one hand still clutching at her chest.

"No, you fucking *weren't!*" she yelled, and it didn't make the ringing in my ears any better. "You were giving him a fucking *out!* You were going to fucking *let him go*, give him a fucking chance to come back and *fuck us both over, again!* What the *fuck* were you thinking, Taylor!"

That I didn't want to be a murderer at fifteen. I could pretend it wasn't the same with Sophia, that she had gotten what was coming to her, that because she had come after me in the middle of the

night with the intent to murder me in my sleep, it was self-defense, but actually killing Coil wasn't the same as that. *Executing* a man in cold blood wasn't the same as that.

"I was gonna bind him!" I retorted angrily. "With a *geis*, you idiot, so he'd never bother us ever again! I wasn't just gonna let him *walk away!*"

"You're the fucking idiot, if you thought that would actually work!" she said, hints of red spreading over her cheeks. "He would have come back after us, *even if it meant breaking that geis!* Weeks, months, years — he'd fucking test it, try to find a loophole, and if he couldn't, he'd *break* it, *as long as it meant he could take us down with him!* He's a vindictive, spiteful *sonuvabitch*, Taylor! He's ten times worse than *Bakuda*, and *you* were gonna let him *get away!*"

"No, I was gonna hand him over to the PRT —"

Lisa burst out into mocking laughter. "Like that's any better! Hand him over to the government stooges with the revolving door cells, where he has moles or bribed agents who can bust him out or let him escape by the end of the day! He'd be out and plotting our fucking *murders* before his seat even had a chance to get fucking warm!"

I glared. "I trust Armsmaster —"

"Hookwolf has a *Birdcage sentence!*" she cut across me. "He's escaped from them *three fucking times*, already! If you think Coil wouldn't be out within *hours* and planning his revenge for how badly we've fucked up his base and his plans, you're fucking delusional!"

She was right. Somewhere inside me, I knew she was right. That Coil deserved what she'd done to him several times over. That he was a scumbag and a slippery slimeball who didn't deserve an ounce of my pity. That we were safer with him dead.

And that was why I absolutely couldn't admit it.

Because agreeing with her meant crossing a line. It meant becoming more like *her*, it meant becoming a person I didn't hate, acknowledging a truth I'd been running from. I couldn't... Even if Coil was as bad as she said and more, I couldn't... If I was even party to something like that, if I let it happen in front of me...

"You don't know that —"

"Did you miss the fucking *snipers!*" she demanded. "The hitmen he sent after us! The attempts to put holes the size of *softballs* through our fucking chests! The part where his mercs shot at us with automatic rifles and Tinkertech lasers! How about recruiting me at *gunpoint?* Maybe, like I've been fucking *telling* you guys, the fact that he's an amoral, conscienceless *bastard* who would quite *happily* blow this base up, with both us and his own men still inside?"

"He would never have done any of that ever again!" I countered.

Even as I said it, I knew it was a lie. Geasa, even the more powerful ones like I'd used on Bakuda, like I'd been about to use on Coil, could be broken. *Had* been broken. And Coil... Coil was a monster.

But I couldn't admit that. Not now, not ever. If I let myself believe that Lisa was right, that killing Coil was the only way out, then that meant *that* hero was right, too. And if I did that...

If I did that, then I was already...

"Excuse me if I don't have that much confidence in the frontrunner for Scumbag of the Year," Lisa said sarcastically. "Doesn't matter now, does it? He won't be doing it, anymore, anyway — don't fucking touch him!"

She pointed, suddenly, at Amy, who had moved towards the desk and Coil's...Coil's body. Amy startled, then glared. "He's still alive!"

What?

I whipped around, and sure enough, his chest was heaving for air, although I still couldn't hear it over the ringing in my ears. If he was conscious, if he was even coherent enough to do anything but feel pain, I didn't know, and the mask that hid his face also hid everything that might be gleaned from it.

But the sound of the hammer on Lisa's gun cocking back was still like thunder.

"Then I guess I'll just have to rectify that."

My body moved before I could even think about what I was doing, and then I was staring down the barrel, past the sights, and into her grim face.

"No."

Lisa's scowl deepened. "Get out of the way, Taylor."

"I'm not going to let you kill him, Lisa."

"Fucking — he's already dead! His heart just hasn't figured out enough to stop beating!"

"And that makes it okay for you to shoot him again?" I shouted back. "We didn't come here to kill him, Lisa! *Murder* wasn't part of the plan!"

"Fucking *yes, it was!*" she spat at me. "Yes! It! Was! From the beginning, from the *moment* we swore those oaths back in the bank, this was *always* how it was supposed to go! I thought you fucking understood that, Taylor! I thought you understood that I couldn't be free until he was *dead!* That you, me, your dad, everyone we care about, none of us could be safe and out of his reach while he was still alive!"

I opened my mouth to retort, but she just went on and steamrolled over me.

"I thought you'd understand that, after Bakuda!" she continued. "After Vista lost her fucking *arm* as collateral damage! After he sent a *hit squad* to chase me through the city! Every time I looked at you this weekend, it was 'determined to deal with Coil' or 'resolved to handle Coil!' I thought we were on the same fucking page!"

My lips pulled tight.

“What, page ten of the sociopath’s handbook?” Amy asked sarcastically.

Lisa took a deep, calming breath, let it out, and her mouth quirked. “No, page five of the ‘How to be a Hero’ handbook, actually. I thought you, Taylor, of all people, would understand that sometimes, being a hero means killing the villain. But if you’re not willing to go that far, then I guess I get to be the hero, tonight.”

“No,” I repeated.

“Move, Taylor.”

“I’m not going to let you shoot him again.”

“Damn it, Taylor!” Lisa snapped. “I already broke my fucking geis, I’m not going to sit here and let it be for no reason! Get out of my fucking way!”

“No, I won’t,” I said again.

“If you think he’d fucking *thank you* for this —”

The unholy *screach* of sudden feedback echoed throughout the room, like a nail driven through each of my eardrums, and I could even hear it bouncing back from the hallways outside. I cringed and covered my ears, stumbling away until my back hit one of the walls, and so did Amy and Lisa, both of them grimacing and gritting their teeth. It had to be going through the entire *base*.

“Noelle,” gurgled a familiar voice, and I looked over, surprised, to find that Coil had propped himself up while we were arguing, speaking into a what had to be what passed for this base’s PA system while his other hand pressed against the hole in his chest. “*Th-there’s three girls i-in my office. Capes. They’re here to kill y —*”

BANG echoed another gunshot, and the retort came through on the PA, too. Coil jerked again as more blood spurted out of his body. Even through the hands pressed against my ears, the sound of it was almost deafening.

BANG-BANG-BANG, Lisa fired, again and again. *BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG*, she kept going, squeezing the trigger over and over and sending bullet after bullet into Coil, who jerked more with each shot, until her gun let out an empty *click, click, click*. Coil fell backwards, slumping bonelessly in his chair, motionless as more blood came from the eight new holes Lisa had just put into him.

“Fuck,” Lisa cursed, hand trembling. “Of fucking course. He dodged *left*, so I only hit him in the lung, not the heart.”

“Jesus H Christ, you fucking psycho!” Amy snarled. “You didn’t need to empty the whole fucking *clip* into him!”

“Well,” Lisa replied, “there’s something to be said for overkill —”

BOOM, resounded an echoing rumble. The floor beneath our feet vibrated, and the three of us shared a startled look.

“What —”

BOOM, it came again, followed by an echoing *CRASH* as something big and heavy tumbled over in the distance.

“Fuck.”

Lisa spun around and took off out of the office at a dash, but Amy and I weren't far behind, stepping carelessly over the sleeping mercs as we raced through the hallways and back towards the main hall. The weighty sound of something big moving fast rang from ahead, bouncing off of the concrete walls.

When we made it back to the entrance hall, it was utterly *trashed*. Down on the floor below, where crates and boxes had been stacked and piled up, everything had been scattered about, tossed every which way like they'd been swept aside by a hurricane. Some had busted open, spilling sleek, black rifles or bars of shrink-wrapped military rations all over the floor. Others had been crushed as though under the foot of an elephant, splitting at the seams or crumpled and flattened like a pancake.

The metal walkways weren't much better off — the railings were dangling, half torn off, over the pit that oversaw the lower level, and half of the lights that had been set into the edges had been ripped from their mountings, too. They hung, swinging back and forth like something out of a horror film, connected and held only by their wiring, and those that hadn't been broken outright flickered weakly.

Even the big, vault-like door that had guarded the entrance had been blown wide open, exposing the base to the long tunnel that led outside.

“What the hell?” I whispered.

What could have done *this*?

“Fuck,” Lisa hissed, “she *would* be here, wouldn't she? Of all his fucking bases.”

“Lisa?”

But she ignored me and raced off, again, and after sharing a look of foreboding with Amy, we followed after her, again. The metal walkways echoed beneath us, and then the concrete, and the tunnel that had felt so long on our way in seemed incredibly short as we covered the ground at a full sprint.

We came out into the moonless night, again, and Lisa skidded to a stop. Amy trailed behind me, panting as she slowed to a jog, then doubled over. “Shit,” she breathed, “you guys are fucking *ridiculous*, you know that?”

Lisa grimaced. “Ah, fuck.”

Then, suddenly, she was gone, and I jerked back as one of Coil's mercs — bruised and beaten, one of the men I'd disabled on our way in — fell to the ground in her place, groaning.

“What — Lisa!”

“Over here, girls!”

I spun around and saw —

“What the fuck?”

“Holy shit,” said Amy.

A man in a suit and a top hat with a red mask over his face, holding Lisa and waving at us with a gun in his hand from beside Lisa's head — in my head, I dubbed him Tuxedo Mask. And next to him... Next to him, maybe ten feet away, was an enormous, writhing mass of flesh, ranging from raw red to dark green to muddy brown and maybe a dozen other colors, besides. Monstrous heads and limbs sprouted from all over it, some of them outright nonsensical and some of them bizarre combinations of other animals. Each of them wriggled and moved, seemingly independent of each other, and the mass as a whole vibrated, barely contained.

And atop this amalgam was the figure of a woman, but only from the waist up. It was like someone had taken every kind of beast they could get their hands on and surgically attached them to a woman's torso.

Something tickled at the back of my head, and I flinched, forcing it away. No, now was *not* the time.

“Alright, I'm sure you girls have seen enough movies to know how this works,” said Tuxedo Mask. “Here's how this is going to go. We need a little...help, of the kind only *Panacea*” — here, he gestured in Amy's direction — “can provide. As long as no one tries anything funny and we get what we want, you can have your little friend back and we can all go on our way, happy and healthy. But if you try to get clever...”

He prodded his hostage with the barrel of his pistol to demonstrate.

I...didn't know how to take it. Laugh? I mean, as long as Lisa had her amulet on, she was safe, but if I gave *that* away, he could just take it off of her.

I pursed my lips.

Was I fast enough? On my own...maybe. Probably. With my best Vantage, I might be able to get there and grab her before Tuxedo Mask, there, could even react, and if I pulled out someone like Aife...

I took a slight step forward, tensing, preparing myself — and out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of the tentacles jerk, and a sudden jolt of petrifying foreboding *rocketed* down my spine. Every muscle in my body locked up, frozen, as the breath in my lungs became *suffocating*.

Don't get close. It was like a physical presence, wrapping around my limbs to hold me in place. *Don't get anywhere near her. Don't let her touch you.*

Almost against my will, I took a step backwards.

“Well,” Lisa said wryly, “I knew it would be pretty fast, but not *this* fast. I figured a week or two, not ten or fifteen minutes.”

It was enough to take my attention off of the...the *monster*, and I gulped down a breath as my lungs started working again. A bead of sweat curled down my scalp and disappeared into the edge of my mask.

“What are you talking about?” asked Tuxedo Mask.

“Nothing you need to worry about.” She chuckled briefly. “But let’s get to know each other better, huh? Apocrypha, Panacea, this is Trickster, the ‘leader’ — in a manner of speaking — of the nomadic cape group called the Travelers. The gigantic wall of fleshy bits is his girlfriend, Noelle. Trickster, those two are Apocrypha and Panacea, but you already knew that, right? Coil must’ve told you.”

“Shut up,” said Trickster.

“Oh, no, no, *no*,” she replied, grinning. “We still need a bit of exposition, here, you know? These two have *no* idea who you guys are, and we won’t get anywhere if you just keep making demands, you know? If you’re going to *negotiate*, the other side needs to know what you want. See, girls, Noelle, here, is in a bit of a bind, because her powers did *this*” — she gestured vaguely at the writhing blob of flesh and body parts — “to her. No one knows what’s happening, but Trickster and his friends think that she might be turning into an *Endbringer*. Scary, right?”

What?

My gaze swept back to the...to Noelle, the girl attached to the monster, and I took another step back almost unconsciously, swallowing around the lump in my throat. Suddenly, that jolt of foreboding felt all too justified, because if it was true...

She was becoming an *Endbringer*? Right here, in Brockton Bay?

“I said, *shut up*,” Trickster growled.

“So, they’ve been traveling around, all over the country,” Lisa went on, ignoring him, “trying to find someone who can fix her. In case it wasn’t already obvious, Coil was the latest in a long line of people they thought might have the resources to make that happen — and, as you can imagine, they’re not too happy that he just got killed.”

He pushed the barrel of the pistol harder against her temple. “Do you *want* to get fucking shot, you bitch!”

“That threat would be a whole lot more intimidating if the gun you were holding to my head wasn’t empty,” Lisa remarked.

“Oh yeah?” said Trickster. “How can you be sure I didn’t reload it while you weren’t looking?”

She laughed. “Come on, it’s in the name! Tattletale — it means I *always* know things you think I shouldn’t. Speaking of which, what do your *friends* think about this idea of yours? Have you told them about this *brilliant* plan you’ve concocted, or were you just hoping that everything would be over and done with before they showed up and you could claim it was a miracle, afterwards?”

But this was clearly the last straw.

“You know what?” said Trickster. “Fuck you.”

He grabbed a fistful of the borrowed hoodie in one hand, her shoulder with the other, and with a full body twist and a grunt of exertion, he shoved her towards the gigantic mound of flesh and appendages. Lisa stumbled, a look of stunned surprise on her face, and I took a step forward, preparing to rush in and rescue her — and then a tentacle lashed out, and I flinched as another jolt of foreboding stole the breath from my lungs and the surety from my feet. I could only watch, frozen, as it took hold of her arm and yanked her in, absorbing her into the mass like a blob of gelatin.

“Lisa!” Amy cried, forgetting to use her cape name.

“Krouse!” shouted Noelle, sounding horrified.

“I’m changing the deal, now, girls,” said Trickster. He turned the gun in our direction as though to ward us off or threaten us. “The only way you’re getting your friend back is if you fix Noelle. That’s how this is gonna go. Understand?”

Anger, anger that didn’t feel entirely like it was mine, exploded in my stomach, and the liquid fire in my veins sent my limbs aquiver. I snarled. “You sonuvabitch —”

“I’ll do it!” Amy burst out.

I startled and turned to her. “What? Amy!”

“I’ll do it,” she repeated. “I’ll heal her. As long as you promise Lisa is okay, I’ll heal Noelle.”

Trickster turned to Noelle. “Noelle?”

Slowly, biting her lip, the girl atop the monster nodded.

Trickster let out a noise like a sigh, then started to step back and away, still pointing his gun in our direction. “Okay,” he said, “do it. But no funny business. I’m watching.”

“Okay.” Amy nodded. “Alright.”

She started to step forward, towards the monster, but I snagged her arm before she could.

“What are you doing?” I hissed at her.

“Saving Lisa,” she whispered back.

“Are you crazy? What if the same thing happens to you?”

Don't let her go, every instinct inside me was saying. *Don't let her get close.*

“Then I guess you'll have to find some way to save both of us!” she snapped. “Do you have a better idea, right now?”

“I could try and find a hero who could do it instead —”

“And you think he'd trust you if you did?” she demanded.

I hesitated. Because she was right, wasn't she? If I pulled out a hero right here and now, even if it was one that *could* fix whatever was wrong with Noelle, then why would he — would either of them, really, Trickster *or* Noelle — have any reason to believe I was telling the truth about being able to fix her?

Would he trust me?

“No,” I admitted at length.

“Any day now, girls!” Trickster called over.

I ignored him.

“It has to be me,” Amy said quietly.

I bit my lip, wishing that I could refute the logic or that I had some way of doing this that wouldn't blow this powderkeg sky high, then let go of her arm and stepped back.

Once I had, Amy took another steadying breath, then slowly, haltingly, started to make her way over to the mass of flesh and tentacles. Every part of me was tense, screaming that it would go wrong, that it would fail, even if I had no idea why I was so sure of it. The farther and farther away Amy got from me, the closer and closer she got to Noelle, the more I had to force myself to just *breathe* and hope that I was wrong.

Amy came to a stop a few feet away from Noelle's lower half, lifting her arm hesitantly. I wasn't the only one who seemed to realize how much effort the girl attached to the monster looked to be putting in keeping the various monstrous appendages from simply lashing out, because they all quivered, rigid and vibrating with an energy and restlessness that I could see even from where I was standing. Up close, they must have looked like branches shaking in a violent storm. Noelle herself didn't even seem to be *breathing*.

Then, Amy reached out, slowly, carefully, like she was waiting to be attacked, and pressed her hand against the blotchy flesh. For a second, I thought everything was going to be okay, that it was going to work, and some of the tension inside me loosened.

But Amy screamed — “Fuck!” — and was pulled in before I could even realize what was happening.

My stomach dropped.

“Amy!” I shouted.

“Fuck,” Trickster muttered, almost unheard. “It didn’t work.”

I almost went over to them, almost rushed towards Noelle so I could reach in and try to pull them free — pull Amy and Lisa free. But Noelle trembled, the heads and legs and tentacles jerking sporadically, and I stopped before I could make it more than two steps as every instinct in my head *screamed* at me to stay away.

“You lied to me,” Noelle began lowly. When she raised her head, she pinned me with a furious glare and a snarl that twisted her face into something ugly. “You *lied* to me! And you took away my only hope!”

She moved.

“You fucking *BITCH!*”

She was fast. Faster than fast. So fast that a normal human would’ve been overtaken in an instant. Even *I* didn’t have time to think about how to react, what I should do. My body just moved on its own, and I stepped back and away, putting only enough distance between us that I had enough range to —

Thunder Feat.

— pull back my arm, gather my strength, and unleash it in a single blow.

“GRAH!”

The bulging mass of her lower body *shredded* before the power of my attack, blasting away chunks of flesh and meat and spilling some sort of *bile* all over the place. Heads, tentacles, and legs, severed from the main mass, went flying, spewing something that looked and smelled more like vomit instead of blood, and Noelle herself reared back, screaming, although whether she even felt any pain from the damage, I had no idea.

It wasn’t enough.

If some part of me had held out hope that my almost reflexive blow had been enough to free Amy and Lisa, it was dashed. The front of her, the area that took my Thunder Feat head on, was a mangled mess of pulped meat, a downright nauseating and grisly sight made better *only* because there wasn’t any blood, and even as I watched, my brain frazzled as I tried to comprehend everything that was happening *too much* and *too fast*, more sloughed off and fell to the ground with obscene squelching noises.

But a blow that would have been enough to kill at least a dozen men at once had made only the barest dent in that writhing mass, akin to tearing off the top layer of skin. There was still so much more left, still the majority of that monstrous growth. It would take me a dozen such blows just to carve away half of it, and if I accidentally hit Lisa or Amy in the process...?

My outstretched fist trembled, and I found my eyes locking onto my pristine, untouched knuckles.

Because I *could* have hit them on accident. That I didn't... That I didn't was a miracle.

“GRAGH!” Noelle screamed. “You bitch! You fucking bitch!”

She moved again, and I flinched, starting to back away and put space between us, but she turned away from me and sped off, instead. It took me several crucial seconds to realize that she was running *away*, and by that time, she'd picked up a speed that was frankly ludicrous for something as big as she was.

“Wait!” I called after her, although I didn't know what else I could say. I started to follow. “Stop!”

But I only made it half a dozen steps before I stopped. There was no point trying to chase after her. She was too fast, too agile. Vantage of Swiftness might let me keep up for a while, but she'd undoubtedly lose me somewhere along the line with a sharp turn, and if she didn't, I'd probably tire myself out long before she began to slow down.

And even if I kept up with her the whole way, what would I do when she stopped?

I turned back towards the entrance to Coil's secret base. The gate that had guarded it was nearly torn off, hanging limply by one hinge.

Fight her? Sure, it would probably come down to that. She apparently blamed us — me, Lisa, and Amy — for ruining her best shot at fixing what was wrong with her, for ruining her chance to be a normal human, again. If she felt like she had nowhere left to turn and all her options were gone, I had no doubt that she'd probably lash out.

But she had my friends. They were hostages, held inside of her body, being subjected to who even knew *what*. If I fought her, all it would take was one wrong move, one punch or slash or stab that hit the wrong place, and...

How was I supposed to fight her without hurting...without *killing* my own friends? I didn't want to become a murderer, I didn't want to be that person, but if it was *my only friends* whose blood wound up on my hands... I couldn't...

I was so out of it, I almost tripped on something. When I looked down, I found I'd stepped on a smartphone.

I bent down and picked it up, a slim piece of electronics and silicon, protected by a baby blue plastic shell with sturdy, rubber corners. When I turned it over, the screen was consumed by a flashing red and yellow box, with an exclamation mark and the word “ALERT” written in big, bold, stark black letters.

Amy's. It had to be.

My hands started to tremble and my vision blurred at the edges.

Damn it. Damn it. Damn it.

“Fuck,” I whispered hoarsely.

Why?

What... What was I supposed to do? How was I supposed to fix this? Save my friends from what might be a nascent *Endbringer*, of all things? How was I supposed to make her let them go? Without them or anyone else getting hurt?

There *was* a hero who could do that.

I flinched away from the knowledge. No. There had to be another way. Another option. Something, someone else in my repertoire that could fix this fucking *mess*. *Anyone* else. There couldn't be just *one* hero who could solve this situation, there just couldn't. There had to be *at least* one more, hell, someone who could do it even *better*.

But I couldn't think of anyone, and I was too scared to reach for my power and ask it for options, because if it offered only the one hero and even my *own power* was telling me that I had no other options, then I —

“Where did you get that phone?”

I startled, and when I looked up, I'd been joined by what looked to be an entire team of capes dressed in white, with varying secondary colors and unique symbols emblazoned on their costumes to set them apart. About half of them were actually *flying*. The one who'd spoken, standing in front of the others, had orange accents and was adorned with the symbol of a crossed blade.

This... This was New Wave, wasn't it? Amy's family.

“I won't ask you again. Where did you get that phone?”

I looked down, down at the flashing screen. Some kind of panic button, I guessed. Amy must have pushed it when Noelle showed up.

My fingers curled tighter around it, as though that simple hunk of plastic and silicon could somehow ground me amidst the hurricane of emotion that whirled around me.

“She must have dropped it,” I said quietly. “When she was...kidnapped.”

“Absorbed” was probably a better word, but I didn't care for the semantics of it, right then.

“Kidnapped?” the woman — *Brandish*, that was her name, *Carol Dallon* — asked sharply.

“A cape who was mutated by her powers wanted her help because she thought she could fix her,” I explained woodenly. “She took Amy and a friend of mine and took off.”

To do... I didn't know. Was she hoping to get revenge on all three of us and was just using Lisa and Amy to lure me in? Why not just fight me here, then?

Maybe she wanted to use Amy as a hostage and try to negotiate help from the PRT or the Protectorate? Would the PRT even be willing to negotiate, even if it was for Amy's sake? I didn't know about that, either.

There were a lot of things it seemed I didn't know, just then.

But...

I looked back down at the alarm on Amy's phone. Her panic button. A distress call to let everyone she cared about know that she needed rescued.

...whether I knew or not, the problem remained the same, and me standing there feeling sorry for myself wasn't going to solve it, was it?

Brandish frowned. "I see. Do you know where she was taken?"

No, I didn't know. Not for sure, not with absolute certainty. I'd have to check, just to be sure that I was right.

"Yeah."

But it wasn't that hard to figure it out, even if I didn't. It was obvious, really. After all, there weren't many places in this city where something of her size could hide, weren't that many places in the city that were abandoned enough for her to escape notice.

When you looked at it that way, there was only one real choice.

"The Trainyard."

What would happen when we got there? I... I didn't know.