

*Some people just want to watch the world burn*

The door creaked as it opened into the well-lit study. A very average-looking man walked into the room and approached the two high-back chairs facing the fireplace opposite of the door.

“Is everything taken care of?” came the voice of a man sitting in one of the chairs.

“Yes. Philip is heading toward Portland now, James will be leaving for Des Moines in the morning, and Wilson is already in Jackson.” As he reached the other chair and took a seat he continued, “There’s no going back now.”

“Excellent. Has there been any indication that [government organization] has figured out what we’re up to yet?”

“We received a dispatch that one of their junior agents will be traveling to Seattle tomorrow morning on an unrelated assignment, apparently a local terrorist group has threatened to blow up a ferry or something and the mayor pulled some strings, but otherwise nothing.”

“Hmm.. interesting.” The men paused their conversation as the door creaked open again and a servant entered with two champagne glasses. The servant quickly placed them on a table between the men and retreated. Once the servant was gone he continued, “I expected nothing less. I doubt the agent in Seattle will make a difference, but then that’s why we didn’t put all our eggs in one basket.”

“True, and they might not suspect anything yet, but they’re going to have their hands full very soon.”

The two men smiled at one another with knowing looks and raised their glasses for a toast.

*Some people just want to be left alone*

Cody stared up at the terminal monitors looking for his next flight home. He quickly jumped through the lists until he found Seattle, Flight D1525, Gate C15. *Great, that means I have to go half way through the airport now.* He straightened his backpack, sighed, and headed toward the

trams.

It wasn't that he wasn't in a hurry but he hated crowds. The hustle and bustle of airports wore on his nerves and overloaded his senses. It was hard to stay grounded when hundreds of people were in such close proximity and more rushing past. Even shielded he could taste the emotions of many of the people around him.

After a few minutes he reached the trams and walked onto one just before the doors closed. The pressure on his senses quickly lessened as the tram whisked him away from the crowded terminal and he sighed again. *I love seeing my friends, but if they knew how much trouble it was maybe I could get them to come see me once in awhile instead. On the other hand, if anyone found out what I can do I'd never be able to keep anyone away.* The tram signaled approach of the next terminal and he braced himself for the approaching crowds of people.

The tram doors opened at the B terminal. People shuffled on and off before the doors closed and the tram continued along. Once they were away from the terminal he noticed the emotions of one of the new passengers was very different from everyone else. Nervous, alert, and focused on everyone else. Trying not to draw attention to himself he slowly looked around the cabin until he saw the source. A young woman in a over-starched suit on the other side of the tram was eyeing everyone like she expected one of them to jump at her any second. It was so obvious that the people closest to her were inching away, which just made her more nervous.

The tram signaled approach of the C terminal and his attention returned from the woman. He grabbed the straps of his backpack as the doors opened and shuffled toward the door. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the young woman was also getting off at this stop. She brushed past him and merged straight through the crowds waiting to get onto the tram, brushing several people aside as she went. *Well, that was pleasant. I hope she's not going to the same gate.*

The pressure from being close to so many people again returned, pushing any thought of her out of his mind. On the way to the gate he stopped by a stand for a bottle of water, thanking the

attendant after paying. He walked right past his gate until he found a quiet corner, as far away from people as one can get in a crowded airport, to wait for boarding time. He pulled off his backpack, sat down on the floor next to the wall, and closed his eyes.

*If I have a few minutes then I might as well practice my abilities. It might make crowds easier to handle in the future and this place is easier to hide if I'm discovered.* First he grounded, centering and focusing inward, *this is me*, then he reached out looking for the people closest to him. A few rows down a couple were happily conversing about their recent trip to see grandkids and broadcasting images of happy children and grandkids. He skipped over them and moved out further, back toward the gate he would be taking later. A gaggle of school girls, a couple of friends, foreigners touring, and, *Oh dear*, the young woman from the tram. He continued outward past a businessman returning from a work trip, projecting images of a mistress being left behind, on to a guy who...

Cody nearly lost his grounding as intense dark images of the death of thousands assaulted him from the man sitting a couple of rows away from the young woman. Her stares at him and everyone else were making him nervous, but his emotions were not focused at her. He didn't care about anyone or anything and savored the moment when he would be able to act on his desires.

*Wait, he's going to act? Now? ... No, he's waiting for something. Does he have abilities like me?* He took a closer look to see what sort of powers he could detect. *Very basic abilities at best, but then how is he planning on doing such massive damage? Using something on him?* He began sensing for power in the man's luggage, backpack, and clothes. *Bingo! Left jacket pocket. But what is it? I've never seen anything like it before. Hmm...* Cody spent a few minutes pondering and analysing the energy signature of the device when someone began to detect his probe. He quickly withdrew and hoped they wouldn't be able to trace it back to him. He listened and waiting, passively sensing for disturbances. Nothing happened. *Maybe he thinks it was the*

*young woman.*

Opening his eyes, blinking and focusing on the here and now, he slowly got up and stretched his legs. He pulled out the bottle of water and took a few sips. In a few minutes the loudspeaker announces the boarding of his flight.

*Some people don't get a second chance to learn from their mistakes*

Cole waved back as the girl from his high school walked by. He always had a special way with the ladies, especially being the football captain and all, but ever since the fire at the Aldofo's place barely a week ago almost everyone had been waving or coming up and congratulating him. It made him feel like a real hero, not just reading about them in the comic books his sister got for him.

He wasn't sure how he had known but he felt the surge of energy as their furnace had blown up. In an instant he was outside and running toward the feeling until he got to the Aldofo's house as it became engulfed in flames. Everyone was already standing outside of their house, except their pet beagle.

"Is everyone okay? Is anyone still in there?" Cole had asked urgently.

"We're fine, but Ralphie is still in there." the father had replied. Without thinking Cole ran straight into the house. "No!" the father tried to stop him but he was already gone. Everyone stood around dumbfounded as the seconds ticked away when suddenly Cole burst out of the house with Ralphie in his arms. His clothes were singed but he had nary a scratch.

Since then Cole began to realize he wasn't like everyone else. He could sense energy and started to realize he had abilities that made him better than others. He might even be able to become a real modern day superhero!

After football practice Cole was heading toward the locker room when he started to feel an energy build-up toward the the parking lot. Once again like a moth to the flame he headed toward

the feeling. In the middle of the parking lot a man stood intently focusing on a small stone-like device in his hand. Cole could still feel the energy building and started to get the impression this wasn't a good thing.

"Hey! What are you doing?" he yelled out.

The man looked up and the energy stopped building. "Nothing. Just examining this stone I found on the ground."

Cole saw the stone clearly now and the intricate patterns embellishing it did not look natural. He wasn't sure what to do now so he thought of situations like this in comics and TV shows. He thought his first course of action should be to get the man away from the object. "Why don't you put that down and tell me who you are."

"Okay." the man replied calmly, as if being told what to do was a perfectly natural thing. He slowly squatted toward the ground and put the stone down, maintaining eye contact with Cole the entire time. He stood back up and started to back away.

Cole looked down at the stone and felt the energy draining away even faster now. It was only a split second that he had taken his eyes off the man but that's all it took. The man threw out his arm with fingers outstretched and a bolt of lightning struck Cole in the face. He didn't have enough time to think or react before half his face had melted away and he was thrown backward onto the ground. Perhaps if he had lived longer he would have learned how to shield, but in that last moment he knew he had failed.

The man known as Philip picked up the device again. After nearly half an hour of staring and focusing on the stone again a blast of white light shot out in all directions for miles. It quickly enveloped everything and in moments what had been known as the Portland Maine and its thousands of residents ceased to exist on the face of the Earth.