

Chapter 1

Doctors' offices always had such a harsh, florescent light bulbs inside of long narrow panels of plastic on ceilings. And the walls were always white or pale blue or some other color that made the reflection of the bright lights give off headaches; not very accommodating for a woman in her second trimester. But the bright lights weren't enough to make Louise look for another OBGYN, a healthy friendship with a doctor was a rare thing, and it was not something to throw away. She would have to suffer the brightness for another five months until the baby came.

The thirty-year-old woman fixed her side-swept bangs putting her almost coffee colored hair behind her ear as she reached down to place a hand protectively over her stomach. "I can't wait to meet you, darling. Maybe we can start to see a better picture of you today!" She whispered to her unborn baby as she started to worry about her husband. Politics always kept Patrick busy, there were so many meetings and press conferences and dinners; Louise couldn't even remember where he was at this moment, she only knew that he couldn't be away from his work. But that was okay, he was close to retirement and with the pension of serving in the higher up sect of government, they could both be stay-at-home parents by the time their new child was twelve.

A knock at the door interrupted her daydreams about not working her desk job and Dr. Speal entered the room to greet Louise and start the check up. After being weighed and giving a urine and blood sample to make sure that everything with the baby was on track, the ultrasound was the last thing to do. In her

pregnancy with Adam, Louise loved the ultrasounds; it was her chance to see the baby's progression and keep her excited. The Garwoods' OBGYN was a family run business and their latest son to join, Jacob, was a young but brilliant addition to the practice. Standing at 6'3" weighing 250, the standard for collegiate football players these days, kind hearted with smiling dark eyes that matched his raven's black hair, Dr. Garwood asked if she was still feeling normal or if she had any concerns when he noticed a problem with the baby.

Jacob tried to subtly leave the room to walk back to his father's office. Vic immediately saw that something was wrong because Jacob looked grey, as his eyes were when he was first born. Something was wrong. Playing it off like he was checking up on their "favorite returning customer," Doctor Vic looked at the ultrasound and tried to hide his worry. "Mrs. Case," he began "it looks as though your child is going to have a heart condition. One that I can't necessarily treat or even send you to another doctor to have fixed."

"What do you mean one that you can't treat?" Panic caused Louise's voice to rise almost two decibels. "Which condition?"

"Coradle, Louise. I'm sorry."

If she hadn't already been sitting, Louise would've fallen to the floor. Coradle was a condition that created a hole between the two heartstrings. It would not be fatal due to medications already invented for other bodily issues, but getting diagnosed with Coradle ensured that your life would end at best by the age of 40, and here sat Louise at 30 pregnant with only her second child. She

buried her face in her hands, wishing Patrick were here for this moment. “And there’s still nothing you can do? Even after the baby’s born?”

Vic sent Jacob to get Louise a cup of water. He started speaking very quickly while passing her a name and address. “There’s nothing I can do, but there is a scientist looking for volunteers for an experimental procedure. He would place inactivated magnets into the hole, just as a placeholder to keep everything attached. But, Louise, talk to your husband. He could get into a lot of trouble for this; it isn’t approved by the government-“ he broke off mid-warning when Jacob walked back in with a cold glass of water. “Son, why don’t we give Mrs. Case our pamphlet information on heart diseases and schedule her next check up? I think she’s in need of a lie down.”

“Of course, Pop,” Jacob headed back out of the door.

“Vic, how risky is the procedure?”

“There’s no way to tell yet, Louise. He’s only contacted one OBGYN from each faction. He needs to keep it spread out so that he won’t be caught.”

“Thank you. I’ll speak with Patrick and let you know when-“

“No! I don’t want to know. Simply telling you this information is dangerous enough. I want to help you, Louise but you need to think about this from every angle.”

Jacob walked back into the room giving Louise ten pages of information and a business card with a date and time for two weeks from today. “We’ll see you soon, Mrs. Case!” Louise stood up. She left the building and all its florescent

lights, but her head did not stop spinning. Louise and her husband had a choice to make, and it would be a decision her child had to live with forever.

Rather than driving home to lie down for the remainder of the afternoon as Louise normally did, she found herself driving to the East Port Faction's headquarters for the government. She needed her husband. As she pulled into the parking lot, she used the reserved spot for the Secretary to the Representative, as Patrick hadn't driven into work that day. She was greeted by the first level of security who waved her through to the back.

It was dark inside of the office, a complete contrast from her doctor's office. Louise kept walking and started toward the elevator that would take her 200 feet underground. The elevator had the shaking light that was familiar to her from old scary movies she would watch with Patrick when they were kids. Her mind took her back to the first time he put his arm around her, they were 13 and it was Halloween.

They were sitting with eight of their best friends from school watching one of those horrible movies where you knew exactly what was happening but the wait was so long it still scared you. A man in the mask came up the steps on the screen and his butcher knife shone against the blinking lights causing a glare on the television. After the light, the movie showed two new victims and Louise flinched. Expecting the characters' deaths but not prepared to see it yet, she was startled. Then there was Patrick's arm around her shoulder. She felt safe, like she knew he would be there to keep her safe from anything that would jump out of the television or anything that would happen to her in real life.

The elevator stopped and opened up to a second line of security guards and metal detectors that Louise had to walk through before she could go to her husband's office, the standard procedure for entering government buildings. It was still strange to Louise that Patrick was working directly for the newly elected representative of their faction. The last man in charge of their section of the country had barely been in the ground for a week, but there was still not a protocol for selecting new members of the government, so there was no time to mourn the man who gave the second half of his life to the divided country, instead there was only time to select a new one and surround him with people who would help him find the best ways to help their faction.

As the guards patted down her arms and legs and sent Louise through the metal detector she thought of the first time Patrick said he wanted to work for the government. They were 18; heading into college at Amherst and their town threw a party for all of the students starting the next chapter of their lives. All of the elderly people were saying "I remember when you first came home from the hospital, now you're off to study! What are you looking to do anyhow?" And Louise said plainly that she wanted to be a historian, leaving out the time period that interested her the most, before the country was divided into six parts, when it was the United States of America, before the close call to civil war, when things seemed to be so much easier. Patrick surprised everyone, including Louise, by admitting he had been interested in civil service, and saying ambitiously that he wanted to join a government rank. But Louise held in her surprise and stood by his side through all of the questions that emerged after his announcement, and every announcement

after that. Now, ten years later, there she still stood by his side with their four year old son, and one hand constantly on her stomach already protecting her next child from this world.

The guards waved Louise through and she headed toward Patrick's office. Patrick loved being down here, the tunnels were like a maze and the underground structuring provided complete safety from the country above it. There was a shuttle here that took the members of the office to the headquarters, in the middle of the ground in the middle of the country. It was a two-day drive from everywhere else but the shuttle took less than two hours. It all fascinated him. As always, there were people surrounding his desk, asking his opinion on policies, on colors for the next round of posters, but once someone saw Louise they respectfully left, allowing her a private few moments with her husband. He immediately stood and went to greet her, asking about the Garwoods and how the check up went. Louise sat him down next to her, not wanting him to be across the wooden desk during the conversation.

She was hesitant to even discuss the matter in the government building. But she had no choice, every moment counted now. "They're fine, Patrick. I have pictures from this ultrasoud, but there's something that we need to talk about."

"Is she ok? What is it?"

"She's fine, at least for a while she will be, but, love she has Coradle."

"What? What do yo-

"Patrick, listen to me, John said something about a scientist. He worked as a researcher for the magnets. He thinks he has a way to keep her healthy."

"Louise..."

“Just listen! He would put an inactivated magnet in her heart, it’ll keep the heartstrings from separating, she’ll get to live her entire life.”

“I’m working for the new representative, I work for the government, and you’re asking me to take our child into an illegal surgery?”

“Yes I’m asking you to break the law that you’re trying to uphold. For our daughter, Patrick, our child.”

“This can’t be happening.”

“Look, we can call and set up a meeting, just to get more information about what he would be doing, and what he’s going to do to make sure it doesn’t activate.”

There was a knock at the door. “Patrick, I’m sorry to interrupt but the Head is here.”

Patrick stood and buttoned his coat; “I’ll be right out. Louise, I want you to go home and take a nap. I can’t think about this right now, but we’ll talk more about it when Adam’s gone to sleep for the night.”

“Alright, I love you.”

“I love you, I’ll walk you out.”

After Patrick had come home and they put Adam to bed for the night, the parents spent the entire night discussing what they were going to do. It was extremely dangerous for their entire family to have this surgery done, more than Patrick losing his job, they could be placed under arrest, and the scientist could be killed. The government hated anything having to do with the magnets, after they were outlawed from being placed into people’s hearts, the officials wanted nothing

to do with that part of the country's history, it was a dark and desperate time, they were solely trying to keep the country afloat.

As the sun started to rise, Patrick realized that the creation of the magnets was in fact to save the country. And if there were a way for him to save his daughter from a disease that would keep her from living, he would take the risk. So they agreed that Patrick would stay away from everything having to do with the surgery, including the meeting Louise was to set up with the doctor, and they would need to wait until Adam and their daughter both were old enough to explain why they made the choice that they made. Louise called the doctor and set to meet with him the next week, when Patrick would be on a tour with the new representative, and they both got less than a few hours' sleep before the new day woke them with a reminder of everything else that was happening in their world.

Her hands were shaking during the entire drive. She wished Patrick would be there but it was better that he stayed as far away from everything as possible. This way she can argue that he didn't know if the government ever found out. Louise was horrified to admit even to herself that she had concerns about him disagreeing with the surgery, but she knew in the end his concern was for the life of their child. It was dangerous.

Louise pulled off of the highway and turned left down a dirt road. The autumn leaves were flying across her windshield and being crushed by the rolling tires of her car. This was the best time of year, windy, but warm in the sun.

She got out of her car after she reached the driveway and pulled in. She looked up at the house of the doctor, red brick with big open windows and wooden doors. It looked quirky, each piece of the house was a great quality, but they didn't quite go together. It reminded Louise of the idea of the factions; each section did its job for the country, but they don't really mesh together anymore. It was so segregated now that it would be hard to.

As she walked up to the door, the leaves rushing past seemed to whisper. Their pigments were beginning to fade, leaves that once would have been bright red were the color of her favorite wine, a burgundy, and the leaves that turned orange in October were a light brown rolling across the toes of her boots. She watched the crushed leaves get swept up in the wind and carried away to be crushed by another's foot or tire, to whisper secrets to another person.

There were no more distractions; it was time for her to go into the house. The doorbell she pushed didn't chime or ring, like most, it buzzed. She wondered what would compel someone to have a doorbell that was so difficult to hear. A quirky house, a quirky doorbell...what was she getting herself into? Then he answered the door. Not to her surprise, a quirky man. He was shorter than Louise, not much but enough to be noticed, his black hair starting to grey on the edges and his crystal eyes shone behind thick bifocals: he was the epitome of a scientist. He welcomed her in with so much warmth that it startled Louise. As they entered the hallway that led to a sitting room, he took her coat and asked how her drive was and if she found his place all right. His voice squeaked

slightly, as if he was a boy stuck in puberty not the older aged man he clearly was.

“I want to address all concerns you have for the surgery now. You’re putting quite a lot of faith in me and I want to be certain that you’re certain.”

“My husband and I both feel that this is the best chance we can give her, but we are worried about the ramifications. Obviously, the government can never know that you’re performing these surgeries.”

“No, President Grant passed onto this generation his belief that all things related to the magnets are inhumane and immoral.” He paused, “I agree that the initial experiment was but they refuse to see reason that they can be used for good.”

“And what about as she grows, will that change anything? Will she be able to pass through metal detectors and pass physicals without suspicion?”

“Yes, it’s inactivated so she should be fine.”

“What about sports and athletics?”

“I would advise her not to engage in contact sports, but that’s recommended for anyone with Coradle, to keep them healthy for as long as possible, so it won’t be seen as out of the ordinary.”

“Exactly how will the procedure go? I don’t mean to doubt your abilities, but this is my baby girl I’m trusting you with.”

“I would question your parenthood if you didn’t ask these questions, don’t worry that’s why we’re meeting. After I put her under asthenia, I’ll open her chest and take the magnet and insert it into the hole between her two heartstrings. As

her heart grows, the magnet will expand to keep the heartstrings in their proper place. Once a year or so I should come monitor her though just to make sure everything is working correctly. But I need you to understand how dangerous for your entire family it would be if anyone were to find out that she had this done.”

“Yes, we understand that. My husband is-“ *no, don't tell him who your husband is, he might change his mind about working on your daughter,* “my husband is very concerned about someone finding out about this...what about the scar from the surgery? Will she have one? Won't that bring attention to her?”

“No, thankfully so many people are vain these days that there are enough creams and medication to get rid of surgical scars. If you use a certain brand the scar will be gone before she's even old enough to notice it on herself.”

“Okay, well this seems to be the best thing that we can do, I mean, my husband and I are just concerned with doing what's best for her to have a long life. This disease threatens that.”

“And I want the same thing, for everyone I'm working with.”

“How many others are there?”

“I'm sorry, but as I protect you and your family I also have to protect the others.”

“Of course, I'm sorry,” Louise starting wringing her hands nervously.

“There's really nothing to be sorry for, you're nervous I completely understand that.” While his voice made him hard to take seriously, his eyes hidden behind the bifocals were solemn.

“You lost someone, didn't you? That's why you're looking to do this.”

“Yes, I was fortunate enough to find love in this twisted world, but I was also unfortunate enough to lose her when the government retracted all magnets. She didn’t survive the operation.”

“I am so sorry for you.” Her hand involuntarily went over her heart in sympathy.

He was quite flustered by her genuine apology. “Well, thank you my dear, but all in a lifetime. That’s why I’m looking to help others whom I can. Now, how far along are you?”

And so they continued to make plans. Almost an hour later, Louise left the house and drove back down the dirt road knowing that the surgery was the best option, relieved, strangely comforted by the quirky little man, but still absolutely terrified.

Chapter 2

Adam Case entered his classroom with such authority the students thought “Pomp and Circumstance” must have been playing in his mind. Tall and intelligent, his bright blue eyes looked out to his class from behind circular, thick-framed glasses with a mixture of excitement and adventure. As Adam looked across the filled seats, he found a familiar face he shot a curt nod toward.

His naturally projected voice addressed the entire lecture room without a microphone and the students heard the husk in his voice for the first time, “Who can tell me what year it is right now?”

A redhead in the second row replied indignantly “52, professor.”

Adam’s crooked smile appeared for his class, the first of what he was sure would be several times. “No. The year is actually 2136. Now someone else, tell me what set off the Separation of our country?”

Another student hesitantly put his hand in the air, “President Grey’s election in 1?”

His smile flashed again while he shook his head. “No. Not quite. Welcome to History 481, ‘Before 1.’” Adam started passing out the class syllabus to his students, taking in each face and desperately trying to commit them to memory. “This class is going to go beyond all of the history you’ve been taught so far. You may think that you know what caused the Separation. You all may think that you know what happened before Year 1. But this class is going to get into such detail that you will question everything you’ve learned. Tonight, I want you all to go home and write at least three paragraphs, summarizing our history as you’ve

learned it so far. When you're finished, before 11 tonight, send them to me and I will read them and find the most common misconceptions. That's where we'll start tomorrow. Any questions?"

Staggered through the entire lecture room, hands shot up. Students wanted to know how much was going to be covered, where were they starting in the old years, were they allowed to learn about this stuff, what could they expect on exams, what was his policy about student athletes. Adam grinned subtly, everything they were asking was outlined in the syllabus, but they were listening to him instead of reading; that was a good sign. He patiently went through and answered everything they shot at him; the class would start with the campaign for Former President Grant's first term in presidency, technically yes that was the old years, if they weren't allowed to learn about this he wouldn't be allowed to be teaching it, there would be no exams just four papers and the dates were on page 3 of the syllabus although they were subject to change if the lectures were lagging or moving more quickly than anticipated, and his attendance policies were the same as the University's.

Adam ended up dismissing the class 25 minutes early once all the questions had been answered, looking at each face again trying desperately not to become one of those professors who doesn't know his students. Once every seat had been vacated, Adam realized there was a familiar student on his roster that was not present for the introduction to the class. He was sadly unsurprised and his frustration came as quickly as he began to try to dismiss it.

Following the last student's exit from room 127, Adam closed the door and headed to his office down the hall to collect his things before heading home. Opening the dark wooden door labeled "Professor Case," Adam saw a small blonde sitting in the chair facing his desk.

Sighing, he walked around his desk to sit down and looked at her, "You know I have to mark you as absent for today, Bailey."

The blonde looked at him and replied, her sass matching his sense of authority, "You know most profs stop taking attendance by the 300 level."

"Just because you're helping as a tutor and helped design the syllabus for this class doesn't mean you can pick and choose when you make your way there," Adam tried to force out politely but his temper began to boil. "I can't give you preferential treatment, you know."

"Haven't we talked about this already?" Bailey rolled her crystal blue eyes. "It was just the introduction, I bet all you went over was the syllabus I finished editing before I printed it out for you this morning."

"No. I've talked and you clearly haven't listened."

"Fine I'll be there tomorrow. Happy?"

"Get the notes from Garrett. I noticed *he* still came today," the judgment crept out of Adam's mouth before he could stop it.

"*He* wasn't a lab rat as a baby," Bailey retorted while standing and turning for the door.

"Get the notes, Bailey. And call Mom."

Keeping her hand on the mahogany door so it wouldn't slam, Bailey started down the hallway. Her blonde curls subtly swayed back and forth while she shook her head in frustration.

Professor Adam Case, my brilliant older brother. God help me. I shouldn't have to be at lecture. The only reason he asked me to be the tutor was because I learned so much about the way it used to be when I was younger. "Back to Basics" he wanted to call his course. His proposal for this class wouldn't have made it past the board without my help. His lesson plan wouldn't be done without me. If I wanted to miss the intro to the class that I helped design, I can.

Ever since he got this job with the university, Adam's been determined to become a real adult. Looking to settle down, his blonde hair is turning darker almost brown like Dad's did before it started to turn gray. His tone of voice is only stern now. I remember when he knew how to laugh and joke with me, now all he does is boss me around when Mom's at work.

Rolling her eyes, Bailey dialed the number for her mother's work line.

Louise didn't even try to hide her disappointment, or her frustration from a long day when she answered Bailey's phone call. She didn't even say hi, she immediately went to "You already skipped a class?????"

Bailey was already on the defense, prepared for this reaction, "How could you possibly have already talked to him, oh my God. But, come on Mom, seriously? You, Dad, Adam, and Doctor Nolan have taught me and quizzed me about this stuff since I could walk."

Louise responded, "And you'll only be walking when you're 50 because of it. You needed to learn."

Bailey's anger was growing with her mother's annoyance, "And I have learned so why did you make me sign up for this class?"

"Because we can't let anyone find out why you know so much. It could be dangerous!" Bailey heard her mother closing her office door as the conversation got more heated.

"Why wasn't that something you thought about before?"

There was a long pause before her mother responded to the comment Bailey was already regretting make.

"I was too busy thinking of you having a long life, Bailey. We did this for you." Louise's voice was full of hurt.

Silently berating herself, Bailey apologized "I know, you're right. I'm sorry; Mom, but you know how he can get to me when he gets authoritative."

Laughing at the common quality between her children that was the biggest annoyance for them both, Louise reminded her "I know but he's trying to balance now. Give him some time to find it. I love you."

Bailey said, "I love you back. See you when you get home tonight."

There is no doubt my parents did the right thing getting my operation. I would die in a few years without it. There's nothing I do that isn't a direct result of the choice they made. And I know that, but I know everything. The operation was illegal, so no one can know about it. Ever. I'm alone in this. They forget that.

When Bailey arrived home after the fifteen-minute walk, her best friend was already waiting on her porch for her. Garrett was a tall brown haired boy with welcoming green eyes, the boy next door and her best friend from the moment they came home from the hospital as babies, the only person Bailey wished she could tell her secret to, ironically also the only person who could never know.

He stood up and bent his head down to make eye contact with her. He could tell she was already in a fighting mood, so Garrett said, "let's just get started on your brother's assignment, B. I'm guessing he already tore you a new one for not going today?"

Bailey got fired up again, "Oh my God, you too? Really? I'm 22! When do I actually get to grow up again?"

Garrett laughed at how quickly her temper came out. "Oh come on, I'm the only one jokingly giving you crap for skipping intro. But apparently once you get married and are allowed to leave your parents' house you can grow up. Can you believe that people actually used to live together before they got married?" Disbelief entered his voice, "or before they were even engaged? It's insane; no wonder people stopped getting married."

Bailey quietly replied, "yeah, ha, how stupid. You're right let's just get started."

As they had since they were in first grade, Bailey and Garrett worked on their homework next to each other, occasionally bumping into each other's arms since Garrett was left handed. In the beginning and the end of the school year, when it was still nice out, they would do their homework using Bailey's front

porch as their desks, getting occasional gusts of warm wind into their faces and being able to use the sunshine as their lamps. When it got colder, they would go into either of their houses waiting for their parents to get home from their different jobs, but they always took a little extra enjoyment out of the spring and summer months, as they had since they were six and Bailey's mom pulled into the driveway and saw them doing homework together for the first time.

Garrett Kennedy: In 2040, due to the growing rate of divorce there was a lull in marriages, causing a lull in pregnancies. The US population drastically lowered. Presidential candidate Jason Grant vowed to assemble a group of scientists who would create the world's first chemically monitored magnet, which would be placed in a baby's heart after birth. Whenever the parents learned of the pregnancy, they alerted the government and a magnet was created over the nine months for each individual baby. The magnet would be activated after each child's completion of education or apprenticeship, an average of 22 years. On New Year's Eve, all the people eligible for activation gathered in one massive party to be "drawn" to their person.

When the population stabilized in 2084, the project was shut down, when it was declared unethical. The new President, Hamilton Grey, and his Secretary of State, Conrad Williams, entered heated discussions about the organization of families following the end of the experiment. Soon, the entire House of Congress was in a fight about the issues of people living together before marriage, the vastness of the country, and the idea of husbands and wives versus the "parent

partnership” which dictated that two people who married were required to have at least 3 children.

Once the arguments moved toward threats of Civil War, President Grey, Secretary Williams, and four members of Congress wrote the Treaty of Separation, splitting the United States of America to six regions. Our region includes all of the original 13 colonies of America. Here, we refer to the Separation as the Rebirth. We are the East Port Faction.

Bailey Case: Before agreeing to the Separation, President Grey assembled all of the researchers, scientists, and doctors associated with inserting the magnets and made them swear an oath to burn all of their records and never insert another magnet. Of course, they all did; then they disbanded and separated, like the rest of the country. No one operated on babies by inserting individually made magnets again. Until 21 years ago.

I was born with a rare heart disease. Mom’s doctor passed her the name of a Dr. Nolan when the sonogram showed the hole between my two heartstrings. Dr. Nolan was one of the researchers before the Separation. He had since stopped practicing medicine but continued to research how else the magnets could be used in surgeries. Dr. Nolan told mother that although I would survive for a time with the hole, I would have a better chance of a long life if she agreed to participate in his trial experiment. Nolan was placing inactivated magnets into the hole in hearts of babies with this condition; he believed it would act as a placeholder between heartstrings. My parents agreed, as did several

others'. But Garrett's parents didn't. He won't live a long life. And he can never find that I have the same heart disease as him. Garrett couldn't play sports growing up because of his condition, as far as he knows; I never was interested in them. And he can never know about my surgery.

Apparently, no one can. Although Nolan created the magnets to never activate, the government would kill him for performing the surgery and my family owes him my life, so mother says. Everyone is paranoid that I will start acting strangely because of the magnet and that someone will find out about it, turn us all in, and kill us all. So I learned everything about the Separation and life since the Rebirth. I know, for example that it's technically 2136 even though I have to date all papers for the year 52. I know that love can be unexplainable even though when I get married I will need to testify as to why I choose the partner in parenting that I do for it to be approved by the government. I know everything you're going to teach me in this class, big brother, you made sure of that to ensure my safety.