

The Inheritance

The first thing I inherited was the scar. Not the strength. Not the flight. Not the ability to catch bullets in the hollow of my palm like raindrops. I woke up in the ambulance with a crescent-shaped mark over my heart, silver-white and warm, as if someone had pressed a moon into my skin.

The paramedic leaned over me and said, “Stay with me, sir.”

And I said, “Don’t call me that.”

Then I blinked, because I had never minded before.

Two hours earlier, I had been nobody important. A junior accountant named Daniel Reyes, twenty-six, allergic to shellfish, scared of heights, and currently late paying rent. I had been running from the subway station with my jacket over my head because the sky had split open above downtown and darkness was pouring through.

Then Solara hit the pavement in front of me. Everyone knew Solara. The golden woman. The city’s shield. The one who stood between us and the impossible. She was supposed to be untouchable.

But she was bleeding through her armor. Above us, the sky bent inward. For a moment, Null Saint hung there in the broken light, wrapped in black static and the sound of every radio station playing backward. Everyone knew him too, though nobody liked saying his name. The hollow man. The preacher of endings. The thing Solara had driven out of the city once before, back when the news called it a victory because people needed victories. But it had never looked like a victory. Not really. This time, he had gotten the upper hand. She had not defeated him. She had pushed him back. Forced the door shut. Held it closed with both hands while something on the other side kept breathing. And somehow, even dying, she knew what everyone else would learn too late.

Null Saint would be back.

Solara tried to rise. Her arm shook. The light around her flickered once, then thinned to a faint gold thread. That was when I understood something the rest of the city had not caught up to yet.

Their shield was breaking.

I remember kneeling beside her. I remember saying something stupid like, “Help is coming.”

She laughed. Not bitterly. Kindly.

“Oh, sweetheart,” she whispered. “You are help.”

Then she grabbed my wrist. Light went through me. Not over me. Not around me. Through! It burned every memory I had and then began writing in the margins.

Her name was Mara Vale. She hated tea but drank it anyway because her wife made it every morning and kissed the cup before handing it over. She loved women. She had once loved a man. She had never found a clean word for the shape of her wanting and eventually stopped caring. She was afraid of deep water. She voted differently than I did, and with such conviction that I woke up angry at myself for opinions I still held. She had once looked in a mirror at age fifteen and cried because everyone kept calling her a boy. She had a scar over her heart. Now I had it too.

At first, I thought the powers would be the problem. They were not. The powers were simple. My body knew what to do before I did. A bus tipped toward a crowd, and I caught it. A bridge cable

snapped, and I flew. A man fired a gun at me, and my skin brightened like dawn. The city called me a miracle. The newspapers called me Solara Reborn.

My mother called me crying.

“Daniel,” she said, “what’s happening?”

I wanted to answer her.

Instead, I said, “Mom, I don’t know if that’s my name anymore.”

There was silence on the line.

Then, very carefully, she asked, “Are you hurt?”

It broke me a little that this was her first question.

“Yes,” I said.

“Are you safe?”

“No.”

“Come home.”

So I did.

I landed in the backyard hard enough to crack the patio stone. My father came outside holding a baseball bat, saw me glowing, and lowered it slowly. My mother touched my face like she was checking whether I had a fever.

“You look like yourself,” she said.

That was the cruel part. I did. Same brown eyes. Same crooked front tooth. Same hands, though now they could lift a train. Same body, though it no longer felt entirely like an address I lived at alone. Inside my head, Mara’s memories moved like strangers in my house. I knew the smell of her wife’s shampoo. I knew the weight of armor on hips I had never had. I knew how it felt to be called “ma’am” and feel seen. I knew how it felt to kiss Lena Vale under a burning sky while cameras flashed below. And I knew, with a grief so sharp it made me gasp at random moments, that Lena was now alone.

For three months, I stayed home. Not rested. Stayed. There is a difference.

The news played constantly until I begged them to turn it off. Solara’s Last Stand. Solara Reborn? Who Is Daniel Reyes? Null Saint Vanishes Again: Threat Over or Waiting? Every time they said Mara’s name, something inside me turned toward the television like a dog hearing its owner at the door. Every time they said mine, I felt like I was being accused of theft. My mother brought soup I did not remember liking. Mara’s mouth watered anyway. My father asked if I wanted to talk. I said no. Mara’s grief said yes. I refused to see Lena because I did not know what I would be to her. A stranger. A grave. A cruel miracle.

On the fourth month, I left before dawn because the walls of my childhood bedroom had started to feel too close. I did not mean to go to the river. Apparently, some parts of grief know the way without asking. I was hovering over the river at dawn, because apparently I did that now when I was

upset. I had always hated heights. Mara had loved the city from above. The two feelings braided together into nausea and awe.

“You fly like her,” Lena said from the bridge.

I nearly dropped into the water. She stood with both hands in the pockets of her coat. She looked smaller than she did in Mara’s memories. Real people often do.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

She flinched. Not because I apologized. Because I said it in Mara’s voice. Not fully. My throat was still mine. But the cadence, the softness on the second word, belonged to her dead wife. Lena gripped the railing.

“We need to talk,” she said.

I landed a few feet away from her. She studied me like a wound.

“Do you remember me?” she asked.

A question disguised as a test. I wanted to lie.

Instead I said, “I remember the yellow dress from your second date. I remember you hate being called Len. I remember Mara proposed during an event because she thought you were both about to die and you said yes, but then yelled at her for the timing.”

Lena closed her eyes.

“Stop,” she said.

I continued, because cruelty sometimes disguises itself as honesty.

“I remember loving you.”

Her face collapsed.

“But I don’t know if I love you,” I said. “I don’t know what’s mine.”

The river moved below us, slow and indifferent.

Finally, Lena said, “she warned me this could happen.”

We talked for hours. She refused to let me pretend to be Mara. I refused to let her pretend I was only Daniel. We agreed to meet again.

I went home afterward. Not because anything had been fixed. Because nothing had been. My mother was waiting at the kitchen table with one cup of tea and one cup of coffee, as if she had decided to prepare for every possible version of me.

“I saw Lena,” I said.

“How was she?” she asked.

I sat down slowly.

“Angry,” I said. “Sad. Kind of terrifying.”

My mother nodded. “Sounds right.”

“I hurt her.”

“You probably did.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“I know.”

That was the worst part. Everyone knew. Everyone was being so careful with me, and I was still leaving bruises. I wrapped both hands around the tea. I hated tea. I drank it anyway.

Lena asked me to meet her at a diner where she use to work. She brought a notebook and asked questions. More tests.

“What foods do you like?”

“Mine or hers?”

“Answer twice.”

So I did. Daniel liked spicy noodles, black coffee, cheap beer, women in oversized sweaters, and being left alone at parties. Mara liked tea with honey, figs, expensive whiskey, women with dangerous smiles, men who laughed with their whole bodies, and dancing even when there was no music.

“What do you like?” Lena asked.

I stared at the menu until the letters blurred.

“I don’t know yet.”

“Good,” she said, writing it down. “That’s honest.”

The city was less patient. They wanted Solara back. They wanted the golden woman with certainty in her spine. They got me instead. Someone painted Solara’s symbol on the wall outside my apartment. Beneath it, in block letters, they wrote:

COME BACK.

I stood there for ten minutes, keys in my hand, unable to move.

A little girl stopped beside me and whispered, “Are you her?”

Her father pulled her away before I could answer. I was grateful. I hated that I was grateful. I wore Mara’s armor once. It fit because it changed to fit whoever wore it. Magic, science, alien tech; nobody could agree and I now knew it was a little of each. I looked in the mirror and saw Mara’s posture settle over my shoulders. My stomach turned. Then something else happened. I liked it. Not all of it. Not the expectation. Not the ghost. But the shape. The line of the waist. The way the armor refused to apologize for beauty or strength. I took it off and cried for twenty minutes. I did not know which part of me was crying. My mother found me sitting on the bathroom floor with the armor pooled beside me like glowing like sunlight. She sat down too, knees cracking.

“When I was pregnant,” she said, “I was sure you were going to be a girl.”

I groaned. “Mom.”

“I know, I know. That’s not how it works.” She folded her hands in her lap. “But I had a name picked out.”

I looked at her.

“What name?”

“Elena.”

I laughed. Then I cried harder.

“Do you want me to call you that?” she asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Then I’ll ask again tomorrow.”

She did. Every day. Some days I said Daniel. Some days I said Elena.

Some days I said nothing, and she kissed my forehead and called me “my love,” which turned out to be the safest name in the world.

The villain returned in winter. Of course he did. Things like that have timing. Null Saint opened a black wound above the city, and the air filled with the sound of every radio station playing backward. The anchors called it a second invasion. But I knew better. Mara knew better. It was the same invasion. The same door. The same thing pressing its fingers through the crack. I flew toward him with Mara’s fury in my bones. He smiled when he saw me.

“There you are,” he said. “I wondered how much of survived.”

I hit him hard enough to shatter windows six blocks away. He laughed it off.

“That much, then.”

We fought above the skyline. He tore gravity loose. I stitched it back with light. He threw pieces of night at me. I burned through them.

“You’re wearing a dead woman’s soul,” he said. “Does it itch?”

I slammed him through the roof of an office tower. He rose from the crater, dusting glass from his coat.

“Tell me,” he said. “When you kiss someone, who wants them?”

I froze. Just for a second. Enough. He drove a blade of darkness into my chest, straight through the scar. I fell. As I dropped, the city spun around me, windows and sirens and snow. Inside my head, Mara screamed. Not words. Just refusal. I hit the street and broke it.

People ran toward me. Brave idiots. Beautiful idiots. Null Saint descended above them, arms spread like a preacher. I tried to stand. My body failed. Mara’s memories surged. Her first flight. Her first kiss. Her first time choosing her name. Her wedding. Her city. Her death. Then my own memories rose to meet them. My mother teaching me to make rice. My father pretending not to cry at my high school graduation. My first apartment with the radiator that screamed all night. My loneliness. My fear. My stubborn, ordinary life. For months, I had treated myself like a disputed border. Daniel on one side. Mara on the other. But borders are imaginary from high enough up. I stood. Null Saint looked down.

“That’s impossible,” he said.

I rose into the air, light spilling out of the wound in my chest.

“No,” I said.

My voice was mine. Not Daniel’s. Not Mara’s. Mine.

“Elena Reyes,” I said, and the name locked into place as if the universe had been waiting for me to stop asking permission. “And you are done.”

The light that came out of me was not golden. Mara’s had been sunrise. Mine was dawn through storm clouds. Silver at the edges. Blue-white at the heart. It filled the street. It filled the sky. It touched every shard of broken glass and made each one shine. Null Saint tried to speak. I did not let him. When it was over, the wound in the sky was gone. So was he.

I landed badly, on one knee, because I still had not mastered dramatic landings. The crowd stared.

Someone whispered, “Solara?”

I shook my head.

“No,” I said.

The word carried farther than it should have. Not Solara. Not Daniel. Not a resurrection. Not a replacement. Lena pushed through the crowd. Snow clung to her hair. She stopped in front of me, searching my face.

“Elena?” she asked.

I smiled. It hurt.

“Yes.”

She exhaled like she had been holding her breath for months. Then she hugged me. Not like a wife. Not like a stranger. Like someone saying goodbye and hello at the same time. Later, the papers would call me Silverlight. The name was ridiculous. It stuck anyway.

But that night, I went home. My mother opened the door before I knocked. My father stood behind her, pretending he had not been pacing. I was bruised, glowing faintly, and wearing armor that finally felt less like a hand me down and more like something I had grown into. My mother touched the scar over my heart.

“Elena?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said.

She pulled me inside with a hug. My father cleared his throat.

“Dinner’s warm,” he said. “Wasn’t sure what you liked now, so we made everything.”

I looked at the table. Spicy noodles. Tea with honey. Rice. Figs. Coffee. Whiskey nobody was going to drink. I laughed until I cried. For the first time since Mara died, not every feeling needed an owner. Some were hers. Some were mine. Some were ours. And some were new.