

“What’s wrong, G.I.?” Amanda asked, noticing Gina’s suddenly solemn face.

“I used to think ‘the rest of my life’ meant another year or two,” Gina said. “If I was lucky. And my last year—I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

“The year you were frozen?” Jesse asked. “You remember it?”

“Had to be ’89.” Gina paused, steadying herself. “That year started so well. A promotion in the army. Then everything went haywire. First I was infected, then discharged, then living with my psychotic ex, then sleeping on the streets to get away. Just trying to survive the cold every night.”

“How’d you dig your way out?” Raymond asked.

“Found a halfway house,” she said. “And a clinic. That’s when a doctor told me life expectancy for someone with AIDS was maybe two or three years. By then I’d already been in that boat over a year.”

“And slowly sinking,” Raymond said.

“It was all I could do to stay sane,” Gina said.

“Which you obviously did,” said Amanda.

“What about your Mr. Military dad?” Jesse asked.

“Took my baby sister, moved away, never told me where.” Gina stood to shake off the memories. “That happened long before that year, partly because I accused my uncle—my father’s brother—of molesting me. Which he did. But my father refused to believe me, and my uncle turned the family against me.”

“Your mother, too?” Raymond asked.

“She died of breast cancer when I was eight,” Gina said.

“My mother died young, too,” Nathan said. “I barely remember her.”

“Me, three,” Jesse added, prompting a collective pause.

“For a while,” Gina continued, “it was just me, my dad, and my sister, who’s much younger. They were long gone by the time I hit rock bottom.”

“With no family to help,” Amanda said. “Because you’re the outcast for warning them about the pervert.”

The two women exchanged a glance—silent, but full of understanding.

Gina, overcome, reached for Jesse’s pill bottle.

“Now we just take meds to live,” she said. “The fact that I’m alive motivates me to conquer the world. To find my baby sister. I know we woke up to darkness—”

“Literally,” Raymond said.

“I don’t give a shit,” Gina said. “I’m so fucking grateful to Dr. Frankie and Dr. Fletcher. They saved our lives. If they’re alive, they should be here celebrating—not missing, on the run, or criminally prosecuted. It’s not fair. Life’s never fair. See how my emotions are all over the place?”

“It’s like that for all of us,” Amanda said.

“Probably more so for you,” Gina said. “Here I’m going on about being undetectable, and you’re not.”

“A lower viral load is a good sign,” Amanda said. “And like Connor said, you’re proof there’s hope for all of us.”

“Got that right,” Gina said.