

The sharp metal bites my wrists. I can't see. Everything is hazy. My panic level starts rising. "Calm down." I say out loud, at least I think I do. I run through a mental checklist. "Name: Katlin. Age: 13. Location: Un-known. I remember being with a bunch of friends in town. I was falling behind and"... throb! My temple pulses. I can't remember. I must have been hit over the head, and drugged too. That's why I can't see.

I turn my mind back to my current situation. "Ok, so I'm hanging by my wrists in a dark place. Lovely..." I smirk. "Well, at least I still have my sarcasm." Even with my limited vision I can see sharp slivers of light piercing the darkness, probably from around a door. "Why would they take me?" I wonder. "I'm a good person and I don't have any exceptional talents. Well, none except for...hold on. How would they know about that? I've never told anybody!"

It all started three summers ago, on my tenth birthday. My family was celebrating on Lake Tomahawky. Aunt Marie was taking my cousin, Janine, and me out tubing. It was hot and only a few wisps of clouds could be seen in the sky. Usually the lake would have been crowded with boats, but not that day. We pulled out the motor boat, attached the tube, and headed out into the lake. I was tubing first and Janine was the watcher. I remember being nervous because she wasn't old enough yet. She might not notice if something went wrong.

*The boat took off and I started jumping huge waves. I hit one wrong, my tube flipped in mid-air, and I landed it! My hands were shoved through the handles on impact. I was so excited that I didn't see the next wave coming. Again, the tube went flying. This time I couldn't land it. It flipped over and I was dragged along underneath. I let go of the handles but my wrists were stuck. The air was sucked out of my lungs and water forced its way in to take its place. I tried to untangle myself but the force of the water was too much. I squeezed my eyes closed to protect them from the torrent, and opened my mouth to scream, but that only got me another mouthful of water. Air was the only thing I thought of. "Why haven't they stopped?" pushed its way to the front of my mind. I attempted to imagine the tube flipping right side up. Red dots swam before my eyes.

I screamed in vain, and the water around me exploded! The tube went flying and landed, hard. The water was forced from my lungs and I lay there, gasping. Aunt Marie and Janine looked shocked, and then frightened. Immediately they started pulling the tube in. They got me untangled and wrapped in a towel. It wasn't until we were driving away that I remembered

that we were the only ones on the lake. We never told anybody. That was the first time I shifted energy.

Years later I tried to talk to them about it, but they said they had no idea what I was talking about. They just gave me a weird look and went on with their day. I assumed they had suppressed the memory enough that it faded away. After a few years, and lots of practice, I can make smaller objects appear and disappear out of thin air.

Footsteps bring me back to the present. The door opens and a blast of cool air washes over me. I hadn't realized how hot it was inside the room. My short curls press flat against my face and cheeks, damp with sweat. My eyes are worse than I thought. Everything is red. I hear the jingling of keys and feel a tug which makes me swing. There is a click and I fall to the ground. The floor feels like cement. I roll over so I'm sitting up. A cup is thrust into my hands.

A monotonous voice says, "Take these." It's male. He takes my right hand and I feel three pills pressed into it. I shake my head and hold my hand out trying to give them back. An impatient sigh echoes throughout the room. "If you ever want to see again you'll take them." Hesitantly, I sniff the glass, and then take a sip. It is water. I take another drink. Realizing how thirsty I am, I drink the entire glass. When I'm done he takes the glass and refills it. "Take the pills this time." he says. With a shaking hand I bring the cup to my lips. I take the pills quickly and instantly feel my strength and sight return. I look up at him. He wears a white lab coat, and his pale complexion looks even whiter against his short dark hair. His black, beady eyes scrutinize me. With a nod he stands up, gathers his things, and leaves. The door closes with a click. I know it's locked.

The room around me is small. The walls are a dull gray color with no windows. There is a chain hanging from the ceiling with open hand cuffs attached to the end. That must have been what I was hanging from. There are a few other things in the room. A cot is pressed against the far wall and a table, which holds a food tray and a jug of water, is on the opposite wall. An electric lantern sits on the floor, giving off an artificial light. I stand up and walk over to the table. A bottle of pills is hidden behind the water jug. I pick it up. "They expect me to take more of these pills? No way!" I scream and throw the bottle back onto the table. I stalk over to the cot and sit down. There is nothing to do so I lay down, and after an indefinite amount of time I fall asleep. I dream.

I'm looking down on an underground city. It's dark and the buildings are covered in soot, but people are going about their business as usual. They have skin of varying colors, but they are all pale. They're all skinny and have black eyes, obviously not human. One boy, around my age, catches my eye. With black hair and light brown skin he blends in easily, but he is the only one wearing sunglasses. He keeps looking over his shoulder, like he's expecting to be followed.

Three men round the corner. He doesn't notice them. The first points at the boy and they weave towards him through the crowd. They come up behind him, when he tries to run they hit him over the head. A piece of cloth is held to his face. The people on the street give it only a glance and go on with their day. The boy is human.

I wake up slick with sweat. The room had become uncomfortably hot while I slept. I walk over to the table and pour myself a glass of water. Time passes slowly, I have no idea how long ago I had been taken. "How long have I been here?" I think. I hear a key in the lock and whirl around to face the person entering my room. It's the same man as before. He locks the door behind him and looks at me. "You have not taken your pills yet today." he informs me. "I...I'm sorry." I stutter. Even to me my voice sounds weak. He nods his head towards the bottle and I quickly grab it and take the pills. All my anger from before is gone.

The man checks his clip board and turns to leave. "Wait!" I call after him, but he slams the door and locks it. With a groan I turn back to my cot. Behind me I hear a dainty giggle. Again, I whip around. A girl has appeared out of thin air sitting on the edge of the table. "He's a little uptight isn't he?" She giggles again. "My name is Christina Anne. What's yours?" I stare at her. "What's your name?" She hints. "I'm Katlin." I reply automatically. I look her over.

Christina is a tiny thing with short, straight, black hair and large, mysterious, green eyes. She isn't very tall but I can already tell that a peppy personality makes up for it. "Where am I?" I ask her. "The Hive." she replies, jumping off the table. "It's a secret organization that tracks down people with special abilities and turns us into one of them." "What?" I say and blink in confusion. She gives an understanding smile. "Haven't you noticed that the people here are different?" she asks. "I've only met that man, but, his eyes" I say. I shudder. "They remind me of the eyes of a blood sucking demon I once saw in a movie...."

Then it dawns on me. "He's a vampire!" I gasp. That sets Christina off in a fit of laughter. "No!" She smiles. "He's a Keeper, although they are similar. Keepers have been hiding

from society for thousands of years. They, like I said before, kidnap kids like us and experiment to figure out why we have special abilities. Eventually they turn us into one of them, if we have the correct DNA." I take a deep breath. "What are...?" she cuts me off. "They're humans with enhanced senses and abilities. They can run, jump, climb, and live longer than any human and are more durable too. They consume the living aura of a person to survive." I shiver. Christina continues. "A small group, including myself, rebels against them to try and stop them. We all have special talents, like yours." She explains. "What's going to happen to me?" I ask, "I don't want to die!"

She laughs. "That's what I'm here for." I blush, I hadn't thought of that. She smiles. "That's ok. I was just as confused as you are when this first happened to me" she says gently. "So what do we do?" I ask. "First we have to wait until that Carl guy comes back in so I can sneak out of the room, steal his keys and get you out without setting an alarm." I interrupt her. "How are you going to get out without him noticing you?" She smiles and disappears into thin air. I laugh. "I get it now, but what happens after that?" I ask. She returns visible, "I lead you outside without getting caught. Easy, peasy." She says and smiles. "And I get him to come here by not taking the pills." I say slowly. "Now you get it!" She laughs.

We smile at each other, then mine starts to fade. "Wait a minute," I say. "how do you know the man's name?" She shuffles and looks down at her feet. "And how did you know about my talent?" Christina gives me a rueful smile. "They wouldn't bother taking you if you aren't "talented", and I know that man's name because he was the one assigned to me when I went through this." "Oh," I mutter. "I'm sorry." This time I'm the one who looks down at my feet.

As time passes Christina sits next to me on the cot and tells me history of humans and the Keepers. She tells me about the Keepers' plans to slowly infiltrate, and eventually overwhelm the government. After that, they plan to take the world. Her Family is a group of "talented" humans who fights them. It turns out I'm in New Orleans, technically underneath it. Unknown to the humans, the Keepers have built a city underneath New Orleans. Christina's family has secret safe houses within the city. The Keepers don't know they're there.

"Your Family sounds wonderful" I say, growing drowsy. I yawn. She smiles, then yawns too. "They are." She agrees. Her Family consists of kids who have escaped the Hive. They hunt Keepers to protect the humans. I smile. "We better get some rest for tomorrow." I say. "We'll get caught for sure if we're walking like zombies!" We both giggle.

“You sleep.” she says “I’ll keep watch; it won’t matter if I’m tired or not because they can’t see me anyway.” I nod and lay down. I’m glad I finally have a friend to talk to. On that note I drift into sleep. Again, I dream.

It’s the same dream as before, but there’s more. After the boy gets dragged off, the scene changes. This time I’m looking down upon an older part of the city. A high stone wall circles a dark graveyard and large family crypts cast shadows across the ground. “This must be New Orleans” I think. The three men come into view. One remains at the corner as a look out while the other two move toward the entrance. Just before the large, iron gate, the man not holding the boy touches a brick, and then presses his palm to the wall. When he removes his hand a dim white light appears and the bricks start to move. A doorway appears and all three men enter. The door closes behind them.

I wake up and nobody’s in the room. “Christie?” I whisper. Right next to my ear I hear her. “Shhhhhh...He’s coming.” She whispers. I hear a rustle and know that she has moved next to the door. Right then I hear the lock click, Carl enters. This time he steps aside and holds the door for a woman. She has the same skinny body with pale skin and black eyes, but her waist length, wavy blond hair practically glows. She smiles, but it doesn’t reach her eyes.

“Hello Katlin.” the woman says. I stare back. She continues unfazed. “My name is Nicki. I’m the supervisor for this department. You’re going to go through a series of tests to determine if you are compatible with our DNA.” “Bite me.” I sneer. She gives a cold laugh. “It’s an injection, dear. But it’ll hurt just the same.” She snaps her fingers and leaves the room. The door closes with a snap behind her. Carl steps forward and attaches a device around my head and wrist. “The head brace gathers thoughts and reaction time. The wrist brace monitors your pulse and adrenaline.” He explains. “Am I going outside?” I ask. He gives a cruel laugh. “No. Just into a simulator.” He leads me out the door.

The hallway reminds me of a bare hospital corridor, the slick tile floor and expressionless white walls give me the chills. Once I get out of the room I hear a whisper in my ear. “Don’t worry, it’ll probably be quick. Change of plans. On the way back to your room I’ll steal the keys.” I give a subtle nod.

The next thing I know, I’m getting pulled into a room with long fluorescent lights that run the length of the room. On the far wall there is a machine that has a sleek, metallic exterior.

It's about seven feet tall and twelve feet wide. The walls on each side of the door are covered in control panels with flashing lights and way too many buttons. The man leads me over to the machine, tells me not to move, and walks over to consult with the other scientists in the room. I only hear fragments of what they say, and it doesn't sound good. Memory drug and 30% success rate are a few of the things they mention.

Carl checks a clipboard and walks back over to me. He gives me a sly smile as he holds open the door to the machine. I enter, and he follows behind me. The interior of the machine is very similar to the exterior, but it's dim. There is a chair in the center of the space. He leads me to it and attaches the contraptions on my head and wrist to wires hanging from the ceiling. "Just try to relax," he says as he walks out of the room, "and try not to die." The door closes with a hiss behind him.

The scenery around me changes. I'm at home. My family sits at the dinner table. My dad, with his freshly shaven face, and mom, with her intelligent blue eyes just like mine, are serving supper. The twins, who are giggling over their dinner, watch the television that is on in the next room. They don't notice me. I'm watching life go on as if I never existed. They don't even miss me. The scene changes again. This time I'm at school. My friends are grouped together in the class we all have. My seat is taken by a stranger. He says something and everyone cracks up laughing. Like before, they don't see me. The substitute starts taking attendance. She doesn't even call out my name. I feel so alone. I start to cry.

This time the scene changes to someplace I haven't been. I'm near a small hut made of wood. There is a light drizzle, as if fog were closing in. In the distance I hear the barking of dogs. The barking starts to grow louder and more menacing. My heart races, I scan the area for a place to hide. "The hut? No.... too obvious. Whoever is with those dogs will surely look there first." I dash for the tree line. I peer out from behind a white pine. The dogs burst into the clearing and immediately charge the hut. A sharp whistle quiets them. A man emerges from the trees. He wears a dark hat that covers his eyes and a long, black trench coat. His heavy boots thump towards the hut. One look and he can tell I'm no longer there.

He scans the trees and immediately spots me. He raises a finger and shouts, "There!" in a deep gravelly voice. I take off running. I can hear the hounds chasing after me. They're hunting their prey. I can't understand why they haven't caught me yet. I'm not that fast. I see a stream to my left. I turn toward it and struggle downstream through the water.

I come out next to a clearing with a large boulder. Immediately, I lean against it, eager for cover and rest. The dogs bark in the distance. I hear a twig snap behind me. The man in black emerges from the dense forest. He smiles and advances on me with a knife. The blade gleams in the sun. I frantically look around for a weapon. There is a large stick lying behind him. I press myself against the boulder and at the last second charge the man and roll between his legs. In a perfect scenario I would've kicked his junk and landed running, but, as it turns out, I don't. I scramble for the stick and swing it around just in time to whack the man on the side of his face. I knock him out cold. As I lean over to inspect him, his eyes pop open and he stabs me with a syringe hidden in his pocket. Right before my mind blanks, the scene returns to a dining room. The people look vaguely familiar. There are two little boys, twins, fighting over a remote. A man, who is cleanly shaven, is talking to a woman who has crystal blue eyes. I get the feeling that these people are important, but I can't remember why.

I wake up in my room again. There is an I.V. in my arm. I'm thirsty. I reach for the cup sitting next to the cot on the floor. It's too far away. A hand brings it to me. Everything feels and looks strange. A hand holds the cup to my mouth. My vision clears and a familiar face comes into focus. I can't remember anything. "Who are you?" I mumble. Worry changes to shock in her face. "They decided that you were qualified for the change." She whispered, mostly to herself. She refocuses on me. "They must have erased your memory." She gestures to the I.V. "These are the chemicals that are tuning you into one of them."

I sit up. A memory tickles my brain. I struggle to bring it into focus. "Christie?" I ask. Tears of joy flood her face; I instantly get trapped in a tiny bear hug. "Why didn't you stop them?" I inquire. "I couldn't." she sobs. "I got locked out." "Why don't we leave now?" I ask. Her expression turns to pity. "Taking out the needle now could be fatal." She explains. I look at the bag. It's a little over half gone. My resolve hardens. "I don't care." I snap. I take the needle and slowly pull it out of my arm. Christie looks paralyzed. I stand up, a tremor wracks through my body. I start to fall but Christie catches me just in time.

"Getting out of here is going to be hard." she tells me. I grimace, and nod. With her supporting me, we stumble towards the door. My strength is already returning. She leans me against the wall while she unlocks the door and peers into the hall. I look down at my hands. Tiny cuts and bruises are starting to heal and blend in with my skin on my hands. I try to remember what happened. I can only remember Christie and the Hive.

Christie turns to me, “All clear.” She whispers. In a surge, my strength returns. I stand up. She hooks her arm through mine and disappears. “Ready?” she whispers. I nod and we’re out the door and into the hall. We take off running to the right, Christina guiding me. Everything becomes a blur as we duck into doorways and sprint down halls. I lose all track of where we are.

Suddenly lights start flashing and alarms blaring. They must’ve discovered I’m missing.

I hear panting and hollering coming from the hall ahead of us and footsteps coming from behind. Beside me Christie curses. We duck into an unlocked room. Staring through the window I see men with guns run from up ahead. Moments later three men cross in front of the door from the opposite direction. One is pushing a stretcher. I gasp. The boy from my dream lays there, unconscious.

I have a sudden, strong urge to burst through the doors to help him, but he is already gone. Christie quickly drags me in the other direction, oblivious to my dilemma.

We hear a shout from behind with sounds of pursuit. We run harder. The end of the hall is a dead end. Everything is blurry again and my energy is gone. The noise and flashing lights are overwhelming. I scream at Christie, warning her about the wall ahead. She ignores me and keeps on going. I try to wrestle my arm free but she has an iron grasp.

We reach the wall and skid to a stop. An I.D. card appears out of thin air. She presses it to the wall. Nothing happens. She starts getting frustrated and screams at the wall and I.D. The men are rapidly drawing nearer. I push her out of the way and press my palm to the wall. A soft glow appears. Everything slows down. Christie turns visible and we look at each other. We smile as we step into the light, and out of the Hive.

Outside it’s barely dawn. A chilly fall breeze wafts through the trees. Old Victorian houses lean dangerously over the road. A black car with tinted windows waits. We climb inside; from behind a hand covers my eyes and presses a foul smelling cloth to my nose. My body tenses, but then relaxes as I drift into unconsciousness. I hear a muffled voice say “Good work, Christina Anne.” Then the car speeds away.