

Weapons out and eyes on all visual points around them, Bernchal and Ruderick walked quickly on the avenue as it shifted left and right through the residential neighborhoods of the nation's former capital. The streets were eerily silent; every few seconds the squawk of a bird or the call of some wild animal could be heard above the sound of their footsteps lightly trotting on the freezing asphalt beneath them.

The townhouses and buildings were abandoned, boarded up and deserted. In New York, the occasional raccoon or skunk would pop out of nowhere if only to remind humans that animals now ran most of the show, whereas in Washington D.C., it seemed everyone and everything was all but gone.

Keeping in time with the rest of the men, Bernchal and Ruderick arrived at Healy Hall fifty minutes later. The main campus was a grand layout of architectural beauty that stood out and within the silence of its surroundings, seemed every bit authentic of its medieval architecture. They entered through the double doors of Riggs Library, walking slowly through the darkened halls towards Healy. They passed under large ornamental paintings of Jesuit brothers and Georgetown's coat of arms as they made their way past Gaston Hall before they heard the voices.

It started faintly at first, like the distant sound of a television set when first arriving at the home of a host. It increased as they walked, faster and lower to the ground, as they reached the vast hallways of the school and when they made it into the gray slab of concrete east of the quad, it was clear as day.

Two voices resounded, one overlapping the other and controlling the conversation. Bernchal eyed Ruderick and indicating his intentions, pushed through the glass door marked "Department of Biochemistry and Molecular & Cellular Biology" and walked into the school's science lab. A chalkboard off to the side had numbers on it, the numbers also written on the dry erase board they'd found at the president's safe house. All around the room, countertops filled with beakers and jars of liquids lined the four walls and in the center was a sink with a large faucet and a blood-soaked towel hanging on the edge.

Bernchal followed the tiny droplets of blood falling from the towel down to the linoleum floor and around to a gurney in the center of the room, above which two men stood over the body of a small girl strapped to it. Her thick brown hair had been chopped to the ears and lay underneath her in uneven strands that stuck out from behind her neck. Her mouth was taped closed and around the edge of the tape it was red and raw. Her eyes, large as saucers, were a bright blue and shone with undried tears. Her tiny wrists and ankles were strapped in and she was completely naked.

Both men wore lab coats; one was taller, wiry, holding tortoise shell glasses between the index finger and thumb of his right hand as he reached for a handkerchief with his left to clean them; the other slightly shorter but with an athlete's build. His crystal blue eyes shot to the door as soon as they walked in.

Their unasked questions were overshadowed by the heartbreaking shriek released from the small girl on the gurney. Her body was raised from the blanket beneath her, the vein in her forehead bulging as she let out a blood-curdling scream that was barely masked by the tape over her mouth. The man with the piercing blue eyes did not flinch, only calmly took one hand and covered her taped mouth with it as he continued staring at Bernchal and Ruderick.

If he had not believed Shane, if he had not really and truly been convinced of the atrocities the women had endured at the hands of an administration which had effectively donated their bodies to science, Bernchal would not have accepted that what he had just walked into was actually real.