

**FORT POINT**

I would never have agreed to this if it hadn't been Leo's idea. But it was his idea, and that changed everything. A waft of alcohol and adrenaline mixed with the primordial smell of the kelp-filled ocean. Freezing water streamed from my hair and beard. Beside me, Leo whooped and shot me a thumbs-up like a raving lunatic.

Leo, Lydia, and I clung to the Rust-Oleum painted barrier chain on the Fort Point seawall. The four-story fortification loomed behind us on a stout cliff at the end of the spit of land where the Pacific Ocean became the San Francisco Bay. Reaching from its anchor at the base of the fort, the Golden Gate Bridge stood sentinel. Lighting crackled through the grid of orange girders and cables. Across the screaming mouth of water, dark thunderheads bristled over Mount Tam, crazing the dome of the moonlit sky.

My whiskey and ginger ale sat half-finished on the coffee table in my warm, dry apartment. Thanks to Leo's obsession with the Suicide Club, he dragged Lydia and me from our comfortable spot in front of Doom VR 2030 to this godforsaken place. During the original inception of that now-defunct secret society, nearly fifty years ago, the four founding members faced their deaths by challenging hurricane-force winds and waves on this exact spot. With climate change, the violence and frequency of dangerous weather had grown on the Pacific seaboard, but this storm was one for the records. This was what Leo had been waiting for.

Weather Girl sheltered herself from the worst of the hurricane. Under the streetlights set back from the walking path, toothpaste-blue braids peeked out from behind a long Nikon lens that blocked most of her face. Her cheap plastic poncho snapped a rhythm in the gusts.

Bracing for the biggest wave yet, I held fast. An anxious thought snapped my eyes in Lydia's direction. Water towered so high over us that it cast her shadow and blocked the sight of the bridge. As the tumult fell, her arms lifted to the air like wings.

*What the fuck?! She let go!*

When the water receded, she was gone, carried away in the surge to the gloomy, wet world below. Her shape appeared, hard to see, tossed into the cement jacks that plunged from the promenade in a sloping jumble. No beach, just sharp rocks and whirlpools.

"Lydia!" Leo shouted down the drop of the wall.

“I’m here,” she called back faintly.

“Lower me!” Leo yelled.

I stared, unable to move, frozen to the spot by a shotgun blast of fear.

“Snap out of it, Evan! We don’t have much time! Quick! Lower me!” Leo roared again over the wind.

My skin prickled as I willed myself into action. I used my body as a counterbalance and eased Leo down the ten-foot drop to the jagged terrain of the breakwater. Hand to wrist, his skin was slick, he slipped free of my arms, giving way just as his feet touched the ground. Leo didn’t think, he just leaped from precarious foothold to foothold. My own clumsy feet would have betrayed me. I was sure of it.

Moonglow faintly illuminated the two dark figures in the rocks. I could just make out Leo standing over Lydia’s prone shape. He heaved her up to her feet and I breathed a sigh of relief. At least she was able to stand. The waves came in sets. I’d been counting. Every fifth wave had crashed over the walking path and reached the wall of the fort. A telltale swell grew in the bay and rolled toward them. My neck strained as the power of my voice erupted, “Hurry up! The next one’s huge!”

Weather Girl appeared at my side. She framed me in a closeup then swept the darkness below with her camera to capture the rescue.

“Get back!” I ordered.

Thankfully, she obeyed, returning to the safe circles of light at the edge of the parking lot. Weather Girl shouted

something, but I couldn't hear her over the rush of blood in my ears. It flashed across my mind that she had caught my heroics on video and not the frozen state of panic from a moment before. I pushed the vanity from my thoughts.

In the last yard of the escape, Lydia disengaged herself from Leo's grip, grappled with the top of the wet wall, and swung her petite body up with little effort. Close behind, the rising whitewater lifted Leo over the embankment and onto the footpath. He grabbed me as the airless suck of the tide pulled at my clothes and body.

Weather Girl rushed forward again to help drag us out of the storm surge before the receding wave washed us back into the break. She held up her SmartCuff to show the scrolling comments and rocketing viewer count of her live stream.

"Oh my god, that was fuckin' spectacular! Are you alright—Damn, you guys are nuts. I'm sure you're really freaked, but do you think we can do an interview? Look at this. We're at nearly a million viewers."

Leo accepted a lapel mic from Weather Girl with unnatural calm. She adjusted her lens for a closeup, the wild sea and plumes of spray framed the shot.

"We don't believe that one person can dictate what another can do. It doesn't matter if he's a judge, a cop, or a tax collector. I mean, America is supposedly a democracy, but no one consulted me on whether or not I can risk my own life for my own reasons. We push boundaries. We fear nothing. To forego dignity and face one's own death means real freedom," Leo delivered with his madman's charm.

Calm descended, despite the pure chaos of the situation. We should have been killed, yet I felt electric and invincible. That was the start of it—a feeling of stepping out of time. It was a feeling I would chase for the rest of my life.