

# LIGHTS OUT

A dramatic scene of a car engulfed in flames, set within a severely damaged and partially collapsed building. The fire is intense, with bright yellow and orange flames rising from the vehicle. The surrounding environment is dark and filled with rubble, including twisted metal and broken concrete. The overall atmosphere is one of destruction and chaos.

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# Chapter One

*Stop being so clingy.*

Miranda glared at the text message while waiting for her next call to come through.

Maybe she wouldn't be so clingy if her boyfriend Marcus didn't stay out late without bothering to tell her where he was. She had waited patiently last night for him to come home, like the relaxed girlfriend she was trying to be.

He had the audacity to reply telling her she was being too clingy. Maybe that would have been true if she had messaged him at 5.30pm last night, right after he had finished work. But no, she had left it until she was about to go to bed around 11.

Would a clingy girlfriend do that?

She wasn't even awake when he came home, so god knows when that was.

Miranda didn't get to have much of a conversation with him in the morning, either. He was giving her the silent treatment, something that irked her to no end. She had wanted to cry, but she knew that wouldn't get her anywhere with him. He had no sympathy for her when it came to issues between them.

Miranda had no problem with him going out, but gosh, could he just let her know instead of avoiding her? Marcus didn't appreciate all that she had given up to be with him. He didn't seem to care. She lost a lot because of him; her

apartment, a few friends, and someone that would have done anything for her.

Miranda thought Marcus was her soulmate, but things had taken a turn so quickly after making things official. Her ex, Darcy, would have never done this to her.

She flinched at the thought of his name. Since things weren't going so smoothly lately, she wondered if she had made a massive mistake. She didn't want to think about it, though, so she tried to remember the first time she met Marcus and how charming he was.

He was so charismatic, and totally jacked. They had met at the gym during leg day, and he charmed her from the beginning. The two of them courted for about 6 months, despite her *situation*.

They snuck off together during workout sessions; the hiding felt incredible. It was like it was the two of them vs the world, sneaking around like secret agents. What on earth had happened?

There was too much resting on the decision to leave Darcy to let things go badly now. So she decided she'd keep focusing on the positive. She'd talk with Marcus tonight and he would apologize like he had last time. Things would go back to normal. It was just a minor speed bump.

She held onto that thought until her co-worker's voice brought her out of her worries.

"Did you hear what Hannah just said to that customer yesterday?" Miranda's co-worker Anna said, turning to her.

“No,” Miranda laughed, before taking a sip from her thermos, “what did she say this time?”

“I’ve been on the phone with you for three minutes, and I still have no idea what you’re asking.”

Miranda snorted, a move that didn’t go so well with hot liquid in her mouth.

“What? No, she didn’t.” Miranda cackled a little too loudly. Some of the other call center operators turned briefly in her direction.

“Oh she did,” giggled Anna. “Heard it with my own ears.”

“Is that why she isn’t in today?” Miranda asked, noting the empty seat on the other side of Anna.

“Who knows?” Anna replied.

Suddenly, the lights went out.

“Oh yay, guess we’ll have to go home then,” someone called out a few rows down.

“My call cut out. Pity I can’t call them back,” said Anna, motioning to the caller she had on hold while she and Miranda were chatting.

A loud screeching sound rang out, coming from the left-hand side of the building. The sound was joined by what sounded like mini explosions.

“What the f...” Miranda was interrupted as the screeching transformed into a heavy thump, followed by car alarms going off in the near distance.

Miranda and Anna jumped up, dashing to the far window on the left. Other staff members abandoned their posts to join them.

Thirty stories up in central Boston, Miranda was stunned as she saw two buildings crumbling a few blocks away. Something that they could only just see because of being on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor.

“Sheesh,” she muttered.

“What happened?” An older woman asked, poking her head over Miranda’s shoulder.

“No idea,” Miranda responded truthfully.

It looked like something had crashed into the buildings, but whatever it was had been hidden by the angle.

“A bomb?” Another person asked aloud.

“Maybe,” another person replied.

“I’ve gotta check this out,” a male co-worker who was pressed up against the glass said, pushing his way back through the employees trying to get a glimpse of the scene.

*Whoosh.*

The sound was low, and Miranda couldn’t tell its direction, but somewhere in the distance the same explosion-like noise sounded but much quieter. Miranda exchanged concerned looks with Anna, who was squished in next to her.

“Fuck this, I’m going home,” Miranda heard someone else said. An idea that Miranda thought was a good one. She squirmed her way out of the crowd and grabbed her handbag. If nothing else, it was a good excuse to go home to Marcus.

## Chapter Two

It didn't take her long to get back to their apartment, although because of the power outage, she had to walk up four levels of stairs. Her apartment was nearby, but in the opposite direction of the damaged buildings missing their top floors.

She rushed out of the office building, her legs feeling like jelly after running down 7 sets of stairs. The street outside seemed normal-ish, but Miranda immediately noticed all the cars had stopped and the power was out everywhere.

“Did you see it?” A woman standing near the building's entrance asked her.

“See what?” Miranda asked with intense curiosity.

“The plane just fell out of the sky.” The woman stated. Not fully looking at her.

Miranda gasped, immediately thinking it was a terrorist attack. It made her even more eager to get home to Marcus, who was working from home today. She rushed off towards her apartment building. She hoped Marcus was safe.

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Calves burning, Miranda pounded on the door.

“Marcus!” she yelled through the door, continued to knock on it.

After 10 seconds of knocking, she gave up and searched for her key in her bag. Ruffling around inside, she could hear them jingling, but they were proving to be elusive.

“Ahhh, Marcus?” She tried one more time with a few knocks.

Still no answer.

She was getting a little worried. He was normally much quicker at answering the door than it’d take her to find her keys. He shouldn’t have been hurt. Their building looked undamaged by the outside, apart from the broken windows.

Marcus pulled the door open.

“Miranda,” Marcus said, squeezing his body into the small gap he had left open. “What are you doing here?”

“Uh, the freaking plane, Marcus?” She snapped.

What did he mean what was she doing here? At her own house?

“What?” he replied grumpily.

“A plane fell out of the sky and hit a building,” Miranda told him.

“Oh okay,” he said, less shocked than Miranda had expected. “But why are you here?”

“The power went out too. Something is obviously happening. I’m not staying at work while a terrorist attack, or whatever this is, is happening.”

Marcus didn’t reply. An anxious look grew more prominent across his face. Quickly noticing, Miranda stared at him, confused.



“Uh, you know Lara?” He said avoiding eye contact.

“Lara?” She answered.

“From work,” he replied, frustrated.

“The blonde girl who wore those denim shorts with her arse hanging out at Braxton’s party?” Miranda asked, bluntly.

“Yeah, so um, her internet wasn’t working this morning, so she came here to work.” Marcus told her.

“Um, okay. Why didn’t you tell me? Is she here now?” Miranda asked, mildly annoyed. She tried to look past Marcus to their living room, but he was blocking the view.

“I didn’t want you to get super jealous and flip out like you always do.”

Miranda wasn’t thinking anything suspicious was happening until she heard that sentence. Immediately, her stomach dropped. Was Marcus cheating on her with Lara?

She pushed her way past him into the apartment, and sure enough, the petite blonde was sitting on her brand new navy couch. Lara looked over at her nervously, as if she’d been caught in the middle of something. The woman tried to make eye contact with Marcus.

Miranda walked right over to her, looking around to see if she could spot any evidence of, well, anything.

“What are you doing here?” Miranda asked her coldly.

“Oh, um, I was, um..” Lara stuttered, locking eyes with Marcus.

“I already told you,” Marcus interrupted. “Her internet wasn’t working this morning, so she came here to work.”

Lara dutifully nodded, avoiding eye contact with her. Miranda observed the woman.

“But obviously, we stopped working when the power went out,” Lara added.

Miranda was not convinced, but she didn’t have any proof otherwise. She and Marcus already had troubles. She didn’t want to accuse him of something and be wrong, looking like she was as insecure as he was making her out to be.

“Can I talk to you in private?” Marcus asked Miranda, ushering to the spare bedroom.

Miranda followed him over and inside, him closing the door after them.

“I think you should go back to the office.” He stated.

Miranda was confused.

“Why on earth would I go back to the office? This is my home.” She whined.

“Cause you’re going to make Lara uncomfortable.”

“I’m sorry? What?” Miranda replied angrily. “Maybe Lara should go back to her house.”

“I can’t make her go out there right now. It’s not safe if there’re planes falling out of the sky, and it’s just rude.” Marcus told her

“But you want me to go out there?” Miranda growled.

“You were just out there,” Marcus huffed. “Besides, your office is close by. She’d have to walk for ages.”

“Are you being serious right now?” Miranda raised her voice.

“Bloody hell, you’re always like this,” Marcus told her.

“Like what?” she replied, exasperated.

“Dramatic. Uncooperative. Jealous.” He stated, coldly.

Miranda stared at him in disbelief. She wanted to cry.

“I’m not leaving my own house,” she told him, her voice angry but becoming higher pitched with each word.

She was angry and frustrated. How dare he suggest she leave for some random girl who didn’t even live here.

“Well, you need to calm your paranoia. You’re making her uncomfortable.” Marcus advised her, emotionless.

“What on earth have I said to her to make her feel uncomfortable? I’ve said like five words to her.” She complained.

“It’s your presence.” He alleged.

“My presence?” Miranda huffed. “Just my presence makes her uncomfortable?”

“Its making me uncomfortable right now too.” Marcus stated.

“If my presence is making you uncomfortable, then you both need to grow up.” She said meanly.

“Ugh, you’re so immature.” Marcus said, rolling his eyes.

“Can you just stay in here for a bit and I’ll talk to her?”

“No, screw you. This is my house, too.” She told him firmly.

And with that, Miranda stormed back out into the living room to an anxious-looking Lara. Miranda was suspicious, but again she had no proof. She forced a fake smile and plopped

herself down on a two-seater, facing Lara at an angle. Lara shifted uncomfortably, watching Marcus as he followed her out.

Lara's discomfort made Miranda feel better, like she was clawing back some power over the situation. Miranda scanned the room, trying to see if there was any clothing lying about, but everything seemed in its rightful place. There was no sign of a romantic relationship.

“Should I go?” Lara asked, clearly uncomfortable.

“No, stay here. It might not be safe outside.” Marcus said defiantly, glaring at Miranda to make her feel bad for even suggesting it earlier.

He sat down next to Lara, which didn't help to ease any of Miranda's concerns about what Lara was doing there. Lara looked more relaxed as soon as he sat down. Miranda sat alone on their two-seater couch, simmering in insecurity.

## Chapter Three

The three of them had been making uncomfortable small talk in the darkened apartment for an hour. Well, Miranda had been trying to engage Marcus in conversation, with him answering half-heartedly. Lara and Marcus also spoke, but it was never the three of them speaking. Miranda was hoping Lara would leave so she could finally sort things out with Marcus, but the woman seemingly had no plans to leave the couch, let alone the apartment.

Outside, they had heard more faint rumbles in the distance, but it was nothing they could see. Miranda wasn't sure if it was the noise of other planes crashing or genuine explosions.

Everyone seemed uncomfortable. It's not like the three of them hadn't ever been in the same room together. It was more that this particular encounter felt like it shouldn't be happening. Marcus sharing a couch with Lara instead of her was making her feel increasingly unhinged.

"Okay, I'm going outside," Marcus said, standing up suddenly.

"What?" Lara asked, concerned.

"I can't sit around here any longer. I need to find out what's happening." Marcus advised.

"I'll go with you." Miranda said eagerly, standing up herself. Excited to finally get an excuse to be alone with him.

“No.” He told her, firmly.

“Why?” She complained, gobsmacked.

“You’re being annoying. I just want to go by myself,” he said cruelly.

“What do you mean? I’ve barely said anything,” Miranda asked, getting increasingly frustrated.

“I just..” he sighed. “I need to go outside. Just with the two of you here, I’m feeling cooped up,”

“You invited me here,” Lara stated, annoyed.

“Yeah, well, I am going outside. I’ll be back soon. I’m going to find out what’s happened.” He answered, a slight annoyance in his voice.

“What’s happening is a plane fell out of the sky, Marcus.” Miranda exclaimed. “There you go. Mystery solved.”

Marcus ignored her, walking over to his and Miranda’s bedroom where he could hear him going through the cupboard. Confused and annoyed, she stormed over to the room and stood in the doorway. She watched as he was stuffing his favorite winter coat into a small backpack.

“Are you leaving?” She asked him anxiously.

“Yes, Miranda, I literally just said that,” Marcus replied, annoyed.

“You are coming back though, right? What’s with the bag?”

Miranda wanted to go with him, but if he had to go alone, he better come back. She didn’t want to be left alone with skanky Lara.

“In case I get cold.” He replied.

“Worried there’s about to be a snowstorm?” She asked, confused with a slight hint of snark. It was nowhere near winter gear weather.

He wouldn’t even look at her.

“I bet people are injured out there. It’s in case someone needs to keep warm. You wouldn’t understand that though, as you’re a selfish person.” He growled.

“What have I done that’s so selfish?” Miranda fumed, frustrated with his constant attacks of late.

“This is why I want to go outside and finally be able to breathe. You’re always asking me stupid questions.” Marcus snapped.

“You just implied I’m selfish. How is that a stupid question?” Miranda asked in a shrill tone. She was reaching her limits.

Marcus zipped up his backpack and pushed past her through the door, causing Miranda to be pushed back against its arch. She watched as he waved to Lara as he walked towards the front door.

Miranda looked at Lara, who had a shocked look on her face.

“Marcus, are you..?” Lara asked, trailing off as he slipped outside, slamming the door behind him.

“So dramatic,” Lara said in an airy voice.

“Definitely,” Miranda agreed. She didn’t really like Lara, but at least they agreed about that.

“Do you think he’s going to be long?” Lara asked, clearly uncomfortable with being left alone with Miranda for an extended period.

“He just wanted to get some air.” Miranda snapped at her, then walked back into the bedroom and closed the door. She was annoyed too, but didn’t want Lara to catch on that she was just as blind sighted.

Miranda collapsed onto the bed and stared at the now open set of drawers on the far side of the room. She honestly wanted to cry. Marcus could be so hostile at times and she couldn’t help but feel like she didn’t sign up for this. Things had been so easy with her ex partner Darcy. He never spoke down to her, even when she left him.

She definitely didn’t want to be stuck speaking with pick-me Lara, so she intended to stay in the bedroom until she heard Marcus return. Maybe she’d get lucky and Lara would just leave, anyway.

*Knock, knock.*

Miranda turned back towards the door to see Lara pushing it open.

“Uhhh, what?” she groaned, making no intention of being nice. She was already holding back tears. She didn’t have the energy.

“Shouldn’t we stay together?” Lara asked timidly.

“No?” Miranda answered, glaring at the blonde woman.

Lara sighed.

“Why are you always so rude to me?” Lara asked.



“Are you trying to sleep with my boyfriend?” Miranda blurted out.

“Um, no.” Lara said, adamantly. Her posture straightened.

“Oh sure,” Miranda said, moving into a sitting position, legs dangling over the side of the bed.

“Marcus told me how insecure you are. Do you know that?” Lara uttered defensively.

Miranda glared at her once more. She wanted to charge her right then and there. Send her flying back into the lounge room. She felt herself start to shake, then tears started escaping from her eyes.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t, um...” Lara said, her tone changing to something more apologetic. “I’m just stressed out. I’ll leave you alone.”

“Good,” Miranda grunted, lying back down and covering herself in the blankets.

Lara closed the bedroom door, retreating into the lounge.

Miranda sobbed silently into her pillow. She had never felt so angry at someone while also feeling so desperate for their attention. Deciding to sleep off her tears, she hoped the power and Marcus would return by the time she woke up.

## Chapter Four

*Miranda.*

Miranda woke suddenly, being shaken by Lara. She realized she must have fallen asleep.

“Miranda, he’s not back,” Lara said in a worried voice.

“Who?” Miranda answered, sleepily.

“Marcus,” Lara said, taking a step back from the bed now that Miranda was awake.

“How long has it been?”

“I don’t know.” Lara shrugged, her voice whiny and high pitched.

“You don’t know? Do you know how to read a clock?” Miranda said snidely.

“Uh, there’s no power, genius,” Lara replied, matching the tone.

“Uhhh,” Miranda groaned. “Still?”

“Yeah,” Lara told her. She sat down on the bed near Miranda’s feet.

Miranda didn’t want Lara sitting so close to her. She moved her feet accidentally on purpose, causing Lara to almost fall off the bed.

“Sorry,” she said, only barely concealing her sarcasm, before moving back to lean against the headboard.

“It’s fine.” Lara said, brushing it off. “I heard gunshots earlier. And yelling.”

Lara stared at a sleepy Miranda impatiently.

“It’s probably the police,” Miranda said, not vaguely interested as she doubted it was anything to be concerned about.

“Maybe, but like, Marcus is still gone. It feels like it’s been a couple of hours.” Lara said, intending to rally Miranda.

“Does your computer still turn on?” Miranda asked her, still waking up from her sleep.

“My computer?” Lara questioned, a blank look on her face.

“Yeah, it’s really weird, but my phone won’t turn on at all despite being fully charged.” Miranda told her. “Is it the same with your computer?”

“I don’t have my laptop. Do you have one?” Lara replied matter-of-factly.

“No, my laptop is broken.” Miranda said, but then turned to look directly at Lara. “What do you mean you don’t have your laptop?”

“Oh...” she said. Lara went to respond before realizing her error.

“Are you sleeping with my boyfriend?” Miranda asked her, exasperated. Now fully awake.

Lara could no longer look at Miranda, which gave Miranda the answer she needed.

“What the hell! I can’t believe this. Get out of my apartment.” Miranda growled at her.

“I can’t go out there alone. It’s not safe.” Lara insisted.

“I don’t care. Get out!” Miranda yelled at her.

Miranda stormed out of bed, grabbing Lara by the arm and pulling her out of the bedroom. She got her as far as the lounge before Lara seriously started fighting back. The two of them struggled, with Miranda trying to push her towards the front door and Lara trying to stand her ground.

“You’re so desperate,” Miranda spat at her, realizing she wasn’t going to be able to get her to leave by force. She resorted to insults. “And it’s not even a surprise.”

“Oh, like you can talk.” Lara shrieked.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Miranda snorted.

“Like you didn’t cheat on your ex?” Lara said meanly. “Marcus told us how you guys met. You literally left your boyfriend for him, so don’t stand there and act like you’re so moral.”

Miranda charged at Lara, knocking her over as she fell down on top of her. She slapped her hand across the side of her face. Meanwhile, Lara dug her nails into her sides angrily, trying to push her off.

“You fucking bitch,” Miranda screamed at her. She tried to hit her once again, but Lara grabbed her hand, scratching her so hard she felt blood come out.

Lara managed to roll them over sideways, Miranda slamming into the wall in the entryway. Lara, now free from under her, jumped up and ran into the kitchen, putting the island counter between them. Miranda got up and gawked at

her, hating the audacity of the woman to come into her house and lie to her.

*Bang.*

The loud noise from outside startled the girls.

*Bang. Bang. Bang.*

The screams came next.

Lara and Miranda exchanged looks of fear before running over to the windows that overlooked the streets.

“I told you I heard guns,” Lara whimpered.

Miranda didn’t even look in her direction. She was too busy trying to hear where the noise was coming from. It didn’t help that it was getting dark outside. It must have been more than the few hours Lara had mentioned.

“There!” Lara said, horrified, pointing at a street corner at the far edge of their view.

Miranda squinted, just making out a group of people running.

*Bang. Bang.*

One of them fell to the ground, causing those in the group to stop, before more shots rang out and they decided to leave him. Just before they ran out of view, another one fell to the ground.

“Oh my god,” Miranda gasped.

“Its him,” Lara said loudly, drawing Miranda’s attention to a lone shooter walking into view. He carried some sort of large rifle with him.

The few people left on the streets had already cleared out. Miranda watched as the man walked over to one of the cars stopped in the road. He ran his hand along the side of it before glancing up at the windows of an apartment building opposite them.

Miranda and Lara both shrunk back, realizing the large windows in front of them would make them too visible if he looked in their direction.

“Spare room,” Miranda told her, dashing over to the room with a much smaller window for them to stare out.

By the time they got there, another two men had joined the shooter on the road. They were talking about something, and pointed round at the apartment buildings. Suddenly, one swung his gun upwards, shooting through one of the nearby windows.

Miranda and Lara jumped back, even though they could tell it wasn't in their direction.

“Its not safe here,” Lara whisper-shouted at Miranda.

“They can't come inside.” Miranda retorted, “they don't have keys.”

“Maybe they'll shoot the door open,” Lara responded, terrified.

Miranda thought about it for a second. She knew that with enough purpose, a person could break down a door, especially with a gun. However, as long as the men didn't see them, they'd have no reason to enter the apartment building at all. Right?

She cautiously stood back up so she could see out the window. The men were still down there, but they weren't pursuing anyone, so it must have been a warning shot. Suddenly, the men split into two groups, with two men walking over to the apartment building that they had previously shot at. They raised their guns and walked inside.

"What are they doing?" Lara questioned aloud, now standing up beside Miranda.

The other man walked over to the first person he had shot, carelessly rolling him over. Miranda struggled to see from the distance, but it looked like he was searching their pockets.

"Money?" Lara suggested.

"I don't know," Miranda replied, trying to figure out their motives.

Two more men walked over to the shooter. He must have heard them before seeing them, as he jumped up quickly, lifting his gun. The shooter must have known them though, as he soon lowered it and started talking with the two of them.

*Bang. Bang.*

The noise came from the apartment building across the road.

"We can't stay here. It's not safe." Lara insisted.

"We can't go down there," Miranda replied, squinting at her like she was an idiot.

"Well, not out the front. The back entrance?" Lara said excitedly.

"There isn't one," Miranda explained to her.

“Yes, there is. Its leads to an alleyway.” Lara insisted.

“How would you know that?” Miranda snapped at her. “I don’t even know that.”

“Look, this isn’t the first time I’ve been here.” Lara admitted sheepishly.

“What?” Miranda gawked at her.

“Come on, you know me and Marcus had a thing before you came along.” Lara clarified, a little annoyed.

“Before and during, clearly,” Miranda muttered, still angry at her, although the situation at hand had put that rage on a back-burner.

“I am literally living in a nightmare,” Miranda whispered, finally letting her tears creep out.

“I’m sorry. I was mad when you guys started dating.” Lara said, trying to hold back tears herself. “I know what I’m doing is wrong, and I never wanted to be that person, but I love him and I couldn’t stop.”

“You love him?” Miranda snorted, enraged at the words.

“I know that sounds stupid,” Lara said, wiping the tears from her eyes. “I’m so sorry.”

Miranda rubbed her hands over her face, which was now moist from her own tears. She pressed her fingers against her temples, trying to stop her emotions from overwhelming her.

More shots rang out from across the street. This time, they seemed to be from higher up in the building. There were screams, too. Both girls quickly ducked under the window once again.



Miranda looked over at Lara. She wanted to hate her, but she couldn't deny that she was just as bad as her. The truth was, she knew about Lara and Marcus dating when things started happening between them. Not that they were anything serious, though.

Still, she didn't let whatever was going on with them stop her own affair from moving forward. If anything, she'd felt proud that Marcus had chosen her despite how pretty Lara was. Although she was quickly realizing he wasn't the prize they both thought he was.

Chances were, nothing bad had happened to Marcus out there. He had probably decided the situation was too complicated and had run off to one of his friend's places. And despite how angry she felt towards Lara, she knew it'd be better to stick together. Safety in numbers.

"Where would we go?" Miranda asked.

"We could go to my apartment. My dad would be on his way there, so we wouldn't be alone," Lara said quickly, wiping her own tears from her eyes.

"Would it definitely be safe, or would they see us?" Miranda asked nervously. The thought of running into those men was terrifying. Surely it would be a death sentence.

"No, it goes to a street on the other side," Lara said firmly, no longer crying.

"How far is your apartment?"

"Like six blocks." Lara said, unconfidently.

*Bang. Bang. Bang.*

The girls shrunk down even lower.

“Let’s go,” Miranda replied, furiously nodding her head. The last thing she wanted to risk was being stuck up there if the men raided the apartments. Or whatever it was they were doing.

## Chapter Five

The two girls jogged down the stairs with Lara in the lead. Miranda was close behind, watching the blonde's head bob up and down as she went down each step. Part of Miranda wanted to reach out and push her over. Watch her bounce down the steps. That was the rage and hurt that was simmering within her. However, the fear of having those men enter their apartment and shoot them was stronger, and the thought of being alone terrified her.

Once they got to the bottom floor, Lara pushed open the fire door and led them into an empty alley.

"I always hated going out here." Lara told her, embracing the sunlight. "I saw a crackhead here once."

Miranda didn't reply. Instead, she rushed through the door and started towards the street. She wanted to get as far away from the building and the alley as possible.

"Wait up," Lara said, rushing after her.

At the point where the alley met the street, Miranda stopped. The coast was clear, the street was deserted.

"Lead the way," she said, turning back towards Lara. She whispered a mean name under her breath as Lara walked out into the street.

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If Miranda knew one thing to be true, it's that Lara's sense of distance was as bad as her morality. Eight blocks on and they still weren't at the woman's apartment. Fortunately though, they hadn't encountered anyone on the way brandishing guns. There were people on the streets but they were mostly wandering aimlessly, trying to figure out what was happening.

"Oh my god, how much further?" Miranda snapped at her.

"One more block, I swear," Lara said confidently.

They were in walking pace at the moment, having been tired after jogging across the first five blocks.

Lara rounded the corner ahead, momentarily disappearing from Miranda's view.

"Ugh," Miranda sighed, rushing to keep up before almost walking straight into her. "Bloody..."

Miranda stopped as she saw why Lara had stopped so suddenly.

Ahead of them were two men, staring intently at them.

"Hey ladies, where you off to?" One of them said with a grin on his face. One that Miranda did not find friendly.

Lara said nothing.

"Just going home," Miranda muttered, grabbing Lara's hand and pulling her across to the other side of the street.

"Can we come with you?" One man asked, as they both followed them.

"Yeah, I could go for some water," the other man said.

Miranda and Lara picked up the pace, quickly reaching the other side of the road.

“What’s wrong? Why are you being so unfriendly?” One of the men said, before laughing.

“We’re just trying to get home,” Miranda yelled out in as friendly a-sounding tone as she could manage. She was careful not to say anything to anger them.

“Which building?” She hissed at Lara.

“Not this block,” Lara whispered back.

“We just want to talk about what’s happening,” one man said, appearing right beside them. “Don’t you know?”

“Sorry, we really just want to get home,” Miranda told him, again, trying to sound polite despite her stomach turning.

“We’re happy to go back to your place,” the other man told her, who must have been just behind them.

Miranda looked around for help, noting that the street was completely empty apart from the four of them. She could see the end of the block just up ahead, but didn’t know if they had to go straight or turn.

“Which way?” She said to Lara, who was now gripping her hand so tightly it was becoming painful.

“Straight,” Lara whispered.

“Which building are you in?” The man next to them asked.

“Please, just leave us alone,” Lara whimpered.

Miranda could tell she was on the verge of tears. Both of them were panting, having speed walked across most of the block.

“Leave you alone? We’re trying to help you,” the man laughed.

It was then Miranda realized they couldn’t let them see which building they went into. She was certain they would hassle them all the way up, and she definitely didn’t want to be in an enclosed space with them. She stopped just as they reached the end of the block.

“We appreciate your help, but we’re fine from here,” she said firmly, looking at both of them in the eye. She was scared, but was trying not to show it.

“You don’t look fine,” the bigger one said. “What kind of men would we be if we left you here alone?”

“We’re really fine, thank you. Please, just leave us be,” Miranda re-emphasized.

The two men looked at them, then looked at each other. Miranda stared at both of them anxiously, hoping they would leave them alone. She looked past them, trying to see if she could spot anyone else around once again.

“You know, we organized this,” the bigger one told them. “This is all our doing.”

Miranda didn’t know how to respond to that, especially as she strongly doubted these two men had anything to do with the power going out. This was clearly something big, like a terrorist attack. They looked like losers. Intimidating ones, but losers none the less.

Annoyed at the lack of reaction, one man reached into his jacket, pulling out a small black gun and pointing it at them. Miranda moved back in fear, taking Lara with her.

“Hey, we don’t want any trouble,” she stated anxiously.

“You got anything valuable up there,” the smaller man said, pointing randomly at the surrounding apartments.

“No,” Lara said, sniffing.

Miranda could feel Lara shaking. Perhaps Miranda was shaking as well.

“Just let us come with you and look,” one of them insisted.

Lara shook her head furiously. Miranda didn’t know what to do.

“Don’t you want protection?” The bigger man asked them condescendingly.

“No.” Miranda replied anxiously, fighting back her tears.

“Hey!” A deep voice yelled from behind them, quickly followed by a shot of a gun which made all four of them jump.

Lara and Miranda dropped to the ground, while one man collapsed and the other took off running. Spinning around, Miranda noticed an older man running towards them.

“Daddy!” Lara yelled, jumping up and running towards the distinguished-looking man with gray hair.

Not wanting to be left with the creep, Miranda ran after her. Waiting awkwardly near them as the two hugged. She turned back toward the man who had been following them and noticed he must have been shot. He was shifting uncomfortably on the ground, red blood staining his white t-

shirt. He didn't seem to be dead, but looked like he was on his way. Miranda couldn't tell from the distance where the bullet had hit him.

"Oh my god," Miranda gasped. "Should we call someone?"

She turned back towards Lara and her father, Lara still clinging onto him.

"No, let's go." Her father said, motioning for Miranda to follow them.

Miranda didn't want to leave the man to die, but didn't want to be stuck waiting on the streets with him. What if his friend came back? Wouldn't he want revenge?

Lara's father, who looked to be in his fifties, called out to her once again as he and Lara started running over to a tall silver apartment building across the road. Miranda, though shocked, knew it would be better to follow them. The father held open a glass door for her and ushered her inside.

She glanced back out to the street, but could no longer see the man because of the angle. Lara grabbed her arm, yanking her forward towards a white door at the far end of the entrance area.

"Hope you like stairs," her gray haired, but fit looking father said to Miranda as he held the door open for them. "She's on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor."

Miranda groaned. Today was not her day for so many reasons.

*The End*