

"I need a father. I need a mother. I need some older, wiser being to cry to.

I talk to God . . ." – Sylvia Path

Abigail Atner held the golden rod steady as she paced down the center aisle of her church. All eyes were on her as she carried the Light of Christ to the front of the room. She delicately lit the right candle then the left, just as she was trained, before quietly turning around. Her father watched her proud that his daughter was finally contributing to church and moving closer to God. Perhaps he just liked the fact it was *his* daughter in front of everyone.

She stumbled on her way out and fell forward. Her eyes shut closed to hide the impending impact from her mind. When she reopened her eyes, she was in the body of a fifty-year-old woman falling through the air. Air rushed across her suit and synthetic hairs fluttered in the wind. The wind effortlessly crossed over her dirty Kevlar costume lit by the moon.

In her arms, a woman screamed out in rage. She had long, red hair. Instead of hands, at her elbow's blades replaced her forearms. She swung viciously at Mongoose and the blades scratched into her armor. Abigail took the hits as what mattered was making sure she held Blady toward the ground so she would break the fall. With a loud thud they both collapsed against the concrete. Mongoose slowly rolled herself off Blady and stood back up. She stared at Blady who had made an imprint in the ground.

Blady stirred slightly.

"Why won't you die?" Mongoose asked as she walked forward. She kicked Blady in the stomach and she went flying into the air. Midair, she repositioned herself, so she landed on her feet and slid to a stop with her blades scratching against the ground.

"How'd you find me? I've done everything to keep you heroes off my back," Blady said.

“Your stench hangs heavy in the air. Any half-decent predator could smell you,”
Mongoose said. This was a lie.

Blady ran forward and jumped up. She spun through the air, so her blades crashed against Mongoose’s body. Her years of training were apparent as she ran through every move she knew dancing around Mongoose dabbling her with slashes. What would happen when she had performed every move she had been taught and Mongoose still stood? Never before had someone so carelessly experienced her assault. Mongoose raised her arms up to block any attacks from reaching under her armor. She just needed to get one good hit in. If she could grab Blady it would be over. She watched Blady dance through the air looking for any sort of a pattern.

Her moment to strike arrived. Mongoose ripped her arm out and grabbed Blady’s upper arm. Mongoose pulled her close and broke the blades over her knees. The bodies of the blades flew upward. Mongoose grabbed them and jammed the pieces of metal into Blady’s chest. She staggered before falling forward onto her knees. Mongoose rammed her foot upward into Blady’s chin and she was knocked onto the ground.

As Blady clung to her life quietly in the night, Mongoose returned home to obtain her next mission.

The following night, Abigail was awoken from her sleep by letters clicking as the white tiles flipped over one another to slowly spell out a message. She calmly donned her costume as she waited for the address to form. Abigail lifted the heavy Kevlar outfit over her body so it

covered her skintight spandex suit. The headpiece to the suit was connected to the torso and she slipped her face into it.

The first part of the address was spelled out. “193.” The board continued to hum as letters slowly fell into place.

Her hands, covered in scars and weathered skin, tightened the strap beneath her chin. The headpiece covered her entire face with two pieces of black plastic over her eyes. A pair of low ears pointed out of the top of the helmet.

“193 Levi Drive.”

Abigail finished tightening the straps on her gloves and walked over to the table by her bed. She picked up a frame containing the picture of a man and a woman and held it to her chest briefly. The Mongoose exited her room.

It was the middle of the night when she parked her car one block down from the address. She approached from the alleys to see a large warehouse. Three men stood at the entrance each of them with crowbars in hand.

The moon cast a large shadow from the warehouse onto the ground and she used it to disguise her approach.

“You hear about the assassinations at the other sites? It’s ramping up,” one of the men said.

Mongoose continued to approach as they spoke. She remained hunched over and close to the ground.

“They couldn’t even get an ID on the bodies because they were so mangled,” another guard said.

Her foot made contact with a can, and it rattled across the ground.

“What was that?” the first man asked.

Mongoose stood up straight and the men locked eyes with her.

“Thank God. It’s just a superhero. Kill her!” the man shouted as the other two charged at Mongoose. She ran forward and grabbed the men by their head then lifted them into the air. They struggled briefly before she slammed her fists together. Their skulls collided and shattered instantly. Porous chunks of gray matter and bright red blood just now touched by oxygen splattered through the air. The bodies fell to the ground and all that was left in her hands were chunks of flesh. She flicked her hands clean as she continued her approach.

“Holy shit. You guys aren’t supposed to kill people,” the man said as he began to run toward the door of the warehouse.

From a distance, all that could be made out were two shadows. The one with pointed ears bent to the ground and moved its hand around until it picked up what it was looking for. The other was sprinting with its legs extended and arms swinging. A thin, pointed object flew through the air and pierced the running shadow in its neck.

Mongoose approached the man squirming on the ground as he attempted to pry the piece of bone from his neck. She ripped it out and blood erupted in bursts. He opened his mouth to speak but was stopped by her boot coming down upon him. Her sole squelched as she rubbed it against the ground.

His chest was ripped open by her bare hands and she scraped away the flesh at the surface to reach his ribs. Each rib cracked as it was torn out and she did not stop until eight of them laid on the ground. Once she had that many, she nested them in between the base of her fingers and stood back up.

Seconds before, a grunt in the warehouse listened to the sound of bones cracking outside. She waved her hand to signal everyone to get to their positions. Had everything in her life led to this? Was she meant to be mercilessly killed by some vigilante? This was supposed to be a temporary gig. She was going to do this for a few months just so she could get off the ground. Perhaps she was never going to get the chance to open that café. Her hands had a slight shake as they put her hair into a ponytail. Less hair out meant less for the monster to grab at. She retreated into the shadows.

Mongoose kicked the door open. With a loud groan it swung forward. As soon as she entered, she was greeted by gunfire. Bullets fired off and lodged themselves in her skin. Her body rocked back and forth from the force of the metal piercing her body.

The gunfire ceased and she fell to the ground.

“Did we get her?” the grunt with the blond ponytail asked as she stepped from the shadows. Nineteen people followed behind her.

Bullets clinked against the ground, but no one was moving. Mongoose stirred slightly.

“Something isn’t right. Get back!” a grunt shouted.

“No. No one could have survived that,” she said as she inspected Mongoose.

Mongoose swiped her arm forward and a piece of bone ripped into the woman's skin. She began to collapse to the ground and as she did Mongoose leapt up. Mongoose wrapped her arms around the woman's neck and pushed the rib cage fragments against her back.

"Walk," a raspy voice demanded.

"Please. I didn't . . ."

"WALK!"

She took one step forward. Her eyes were shut as her lips began to quiver. At this moment, all the woman could think of was the last time she had eaten a meal with her family. It had to have been Christmas. She hadn't given the meal much thought as it was assumed an Easter breakfast was guaranteed.

"Don't shoot. Just let us by . . ." the nervous grunt said.

Bone began to dig into her flesh. Mongoose urged her to pick up the pace as blood began to trickle slowly down the woman's back.

The echo of a gunshot rang through the warehouse. The small chunk of metal lodged itself in the woman's forehead. Another life gone. All her hopes, dreams, and aspirations worthless. Mongoose pushed against the back of the woman and used her as a battering ram. She ran forward as more grunts began firing. The woman's lifeless corpse flopped up and down with each step Mongoose took. Her tied hair waved in the air.

Once Mongoose reached the group, she flung the corpse forward knocking down about three of them. She fought the rest all at the same time.

Frequently, a fight such as this would be described as a dance. The hero effortlessly bouncing between each criminal delivering swift blows and evading retaliation. Light shines upon them as this pillar of human morals and determinations pushes forward to create a better day for society.

Not tonight. Each punch delivered by Mongoose was slow and deliberate. Her fists spent whole seconds smashing against a face as blood splattered into the air and flesh tore. She did not evade every hit. When someone was lucky enough to make contact, she staggered back before continuing her assault. At one point, she managed to catch an arm flying toward her. She slammed it down against her knee and the forearm separated from their body.

A bright light did not shine down upon her. Dim, artificial light caressed the carcasses and illuminated Mongoose. All she shared with these heroes was determination. Her soul burned with rage as she tore down every adversary. Like a wild animal, she mauled each of them.

When no one was left standing, she turned around and went home. She showered, prayed to God, then went to bed.

The following morning, Abigail sat in a diner across from her friend, Ahisma. Waiters quickly bustled around as plates clattered against each other and people chattered around them. Bright red and white tiling covered the floor. The worker's suits were a similarly bright, but fake, color.

Abigail carefully watched the box TV above the kitchen. Four people were being interviewed. One of them was a man wearing a bright green costume that resembled a snake. He stood proudly behind the other three women.

The one front and center wore jeans and had her hair tied back by a bandana. Long chains hung from her hands. Another woman wore a green Kevlar suit with large shields on both of her arms. She had a large H plastered on her helmet. The final woman was shorter than the rest and wore a leather jacket with a necklace on. A small, yellow totem hung on it.

“How did you guys manage to stop that drug sale?” the news reporter asked.

“Well, once Totem managed to find the location, it didn’t take much for Hero and I to capture each of the criminals,” the woman with the chains in her hands said.

“I was there too! I coiled around a couple of them so the team could get some easy hits in!” the man in the snake suit said.

“What bullshit,” Abigail said as she looked over to Ahisma.

“What? The Protectors for Profit? You know people don’t have to pay anymore to get help from them,” Ahisma said as she looked up from her menu. Her black hair was tied in a bun.

“It’s not the money. It’s the game they play. You can’t capture villains. People die. It’s a part of life,” Abigail said as she took a sip of her black coffee.

“Abby, you know I don’t like talking about this. Besides, people need something to look up to and that’s what heroes do.”

“That’s what God does,” Abigail said.

“As far as I see it, he hasn’t felt the need to inspire hope recently.”

“He does in me.”

“There’s a difference between authority and inspiration,” Ahisma said sharply.

“Only one of those gets results,” Abigail responded.

“Are you talking about that board of yours? Don’t tell me you got another message—Let me see your hands,” Ahisma said as she reached over the table.

“No,” Abigail said as she resisted the pull on her arms. Eventually, she gave up and her hands came into view. Ahisma stared quietly at the gashes across her knuckles. Scabs scattered her palms.

“Abby, oh my . . . How many were there?”

“About twenty-three.”

“Did you leave any alive?”

“No.”

“How could you do that? You’re not in the army anymore and you don’t have to kill. We do things differently at home because it isn’t a war here.”

“That’s what you don’t get. It is a war—”

“I know and you’re God’s soldier. It’s not God sending those messages on your board,” Ahisma said as she remembered Abigail’s usual speech.

“Who could it be then?”

“What can I get for you girls?” a waiter asked. Neither of them had noticed his approach.

“I’ll just take the breakfast special,” Abigail said.

“Same for me, but scratch the bacon,” Ahisma said.

The waiter nodded before walking off. Ahisma took a sip from her iced water.

“You can’t trust that board. We have no idea what it is or why it keeps sending you to these places,” Ahisma said.

“Why can’t I trust it? Every single time it takes me right to criminals.”

“And how do you know they deserve to die? What if you get led to some kid spraying graffiti?”

“Because God knows who needs to die,” Abigail said as she sipped her freshly filled cup of coffee.

“It’s not God sending you those messages. I don’t know how that board works but it could be anything. It could be a rival gang specifically sending you after enemies to open up territory or maybe it’s an evil magician tricking you.”

“Then I will kill them too,” Abigail said. This discussion seemed pointless to her.

“You don’t care about justice or God. You just need someone telling you what to do. You don’t care if it’s your parents, the army, God, or anyone else! I know how you work, but I don’t get why you won’t listen to what I tell you then.”

Abigail did not respond. They had been through this conversation numerous times before, but this was the first time Ahisma said that. Perhaps that new, slightly deeper cutting comment would change the normal outcome.

Each time Ahisma would desperately plead to Abigail. She knew the kind of person Abigail was before her time serving. She had been the only person there for Ahisma all her life. Ahisma still remembered every name she had been called. Her parents would tell her things like,

“It gets better when you grow older.” Maybe they would say, “Don’t listen to them. You’ll be more successful someday.” It never changed and it only got worse as she aged. Abigail was the only person by her side through it all.

But she was different after her time in the army was done. They used her then dumped her. A soldier left to wake up and go to church or cook meals. You can’t just go back to normal.

Abigail was growing frustrated. Ahisma would never understand. She got to just stay here. She still had her parents. She had a husband. She didn’t know what it was like to be alone.

“You don’t get it. I have no one. I’m too old to ever have kids and no man is going to even think of coming near me. My parents were dead weeks after I got back. There’s nothing to my life. This board gives me purpose. I’m fifty years old, Ahisma. There isn’t a happy ending for me past this point.”

The reporter on the TV stopped interviewing the heroes and it cut to a news anchor at his desk.

“Reports are just coming in of a massacre that occurred in a warehouse last night. Twenty-two were found dead. Bodies are still being identified,” the man said.

“I thought you said there were twenty-three?” Ahisma asked.

“There were.”

“There was only one survivor from last night. She has been put in emergency care at Anika Hospital,” the man continued to say.

“I didn’t finish the job . . .”

“Don’t do it,” Ahisma pleaded.

“What are you going to do? Call the Protectors on me?” Abigail asked.

“You aren’t the government’s puppet anymore. You can decide who you want to be.”

“Go back home to your husband,” Abigail said as she got up to leave.

That night, Mongoose approached the hospital. She looked up at the tall building to see a bright red cross glowing in the night. A metal plate crashed into the back of her head, and she turned around to see Hero step out of the shadows. Chainlink, Cobra Commando, and Totem stood behind her.

“I don’t want to hurt you guys. We’re on the same side,” Mongoose said.

“I beg to differ. I’ve read mongoose kill snakes to eat,” Cobra Commando said.

“This doesn’t have to end with bloodshed,” Hero said.

Totem was quietly muttering something to herself as they spoke. Yellow energy began to form around her. Abigail knew their conversation was simply a distraction so Totem could charge up. It was time for Mongoose to take action.

“When doesn’t it end that way?” Mongoose asked. She ran forward and rammed into Hero, knocking her into Chainlink. They both toppled to the ground.

With a swift strike from Mongoose’s boot, Totem went spiraling through the air and crashed against the ground. The yellow energy faded as she lost consciousness. She ran forward and grabbed Cobra Commando by his head. She twisted it around, but heard no crack.

“You knew my power was to contort, right? Or did you just try and kill me?” Cobra Commando asked.

He twisted his body, so he wrapped his legs and arms around her. Mongoose flexed her arms as he continued to tighten. Like taffy stuck to your teeth, she eventually pried him off and flung him into the ground.

A chain lashed outward and struck Mongoose across the face. Her helmet tilted sideways. As she adjusted it, Hero ran forward. She shouted out before leaping into the air and smashing her fist into Mongoose’s face. Her helmet was ripped off and clattered to the ground.

Abigail staggered back and was met by Chainlink’s fist. The two heroes rallied Abigail between each other like a tennis ball. She was knocked from Hero to Chainlink and back to Hero as they pummeled her.

At this instant, all she could think of was the smell of the pews in her church. The dried oak that would creak at the slightest touch. To the right, her mother was beginning to doze off as the sermon dragged on. Abigail quietly drew pictures on the back of the offering envelopes to kill time. Pictures of fantastical heroes bashing away fictitious villains were etched on the back of the paper.

Abigail was lashed again and toppled over toward Hero who uppercut her. She flew through the air and tumbled across the ground. The scrapes from the sidewalk quickly healed.

Abigail spit blood from her mouth.

“She has a name. Her name is Afra. She has dreams. She is no different from any of us,” Hero said.

“You don’t get to just execute people,” Chainlink said.

Abigail quietly picked herself up.

“She should have picked a better profession.”

“Please. I don’t want to keep fighting,” Hero said.

Chainlink’s chain swung toward Abigail. She grabbed the end of it and ripped it toward herself. Chainlink went flying through the air and Abigail’s fist rammed into her stomach.

A small grunt of pain escaped her mouth as blood spit out onto Abigail. Chainlink fell to the ground. Hero ran forward and rolled her over. She ignored Abigail who walked past her.

“Stop her . . .” Chainlink whispered into Hero’s ear.

“But you’re bleeding,” Hero said.

“I am going to be fine. Afra won’t be.”

Abigail entered the lobby of the hospital. The bright blue, fluorescent lights shined down on her. The patients quickly grew quiet as she stepped forward. Blood dripped off her costume.

She approached the clerk and asked, “Afra. What room?”

“I can’t tell you that, Miss.” the clerk said. His voice cracked from the fear rising out of his stomach.

Mongoose slammed her fists down on the counter.

“ . . . 236.”

Abigail walked past the bright red sign and into the hallway leading toward the stairwell. The echo of her boots rung through the corridor. It was quiet. The nurses stood frozen watching her as she continued her approach.

She opened the door to the stairs and was ripped back. Hero tore her away from the door and threw her against the ground. Abigail pushed herself back up. They stood there quietly staring at each other. Crimson fluid dripped off their outfits and bruises covered their faces.

“I can’t let you kill her,” Hero said.

“You people love telling others what to do,” Abigail muttered before running forward. She crashed into Hero and knocked her against the wall. The wind was knocked out of Hero when Abigail’s fist collided with her stomach.

“You fight in this fake war where you smile for the cameras and the bad guys drop quips. That isn’t what it’s like in real war. People get shot and when you open your eyes all you can see it that you’re the one holding the gun,” Abigail said as her fists continued to racket off Hero’s bones.

“We stand for something . . . People need something to look up to. They need to see that they can be better, that they can be more,” Hero choked out.

“No. They need authority.”

Abigail threw her to the side and Hero slid across the ground. She continued up the stairs and marched to Room 236. She kicked open the door and saw Afra laying in the bed with the blanket covering her body. Tubes poked out from the blanket and entered machines next to the bed where the screens showed various lines pushing up and down.

Abigail stomped forward and slammed her fist down into the bed. Her fist crashed through a pile of pillows and into a beartrap. It snapped down on her arm and she screamed out in pain. The door to the hospital room closed and she turned around to see a man standing behind her. He wore cargo pants, a camo vest, and had black paint striped under his eyes. His hair was spiked in the air and an assault rifle hung over his back.

She knew who this was. Soldier 21, one of the government's lackies. Where he was, Battle Gal and H8ywire were likely one step behind.

"From one soldier to another, I must say I respect you," Soldier 21 said as he watched Abigail squirm.

"What are you doing here? Government only sends you out to clean up messes and I was just about to finish cleaning up this one," she said as she clenched her muscles, seizing from the pain. She wondered what he was doing here. There were no government missions in progress on home territory as far as she knew.

"One hundred and thirty-six kills. You are incredible," he said. His blue eyes appeared ice cold as they stared blankly forward unphased by the apparent pain Abigail was in.

"I only ever killed ten people while serving."

"The war never stopped, Abigail."

"Why aren't you helping me?" Abigail pleaded.

"Just heal it off. That is one of the powers the government's experiment gave you after all."

"I can't. I just keep healing over the metal teeth. I can't heal until it's off me."

“Glad to hear it’s working as planned.”

“As planned?” Abigail asked. She slowly began to put the pieces together. They were here to clean up a mess. They were sent to kill her.

“You’re out of control, Abby. You served a real purpose here. A soldier on the streets willing to eliminate any criminal that stood in your way. I know how you think. You’re a fighter and a doer, but you’ve gone off the rails. Government thought with your parents out of the picture they could point you in a direction with that fancy board.”

Abigail’s stomach dropped at the notion that her board was fake.

“I thought it was a little crazy myself, but they knew you were a religious freak, so they thought you’d bite. I’ll be damned if their plan didn’t turn out perfectly. Except, at this point you’re a rabid animal snapping at anything that gets too close. I’m here to clean up the mess.”

“My parents? WHAT DID YOU DO TO THEM?”

“Made their lives mean something,” he said.

“I’ll kill you as soon as I get this off,” she said. She began to muster her strength in order to take action shortly.

“Sounds like a plan,” he said.

“Was Afra ever alive?” Abigail asked. She winced as the slightest movement of her arm caused the teeth to dig in farther. She questioned where she had gone wrong to force the government to sick their hounds on her.

“Never. Just needed to get you here,” he said.

“You are a controlling piece of shit and I’m going to be sure that you end up in Hell even if it takes dragging you down with me,” she said. Abigail slowly stood back up.

“I think it’s best you stay down,” he said as Abigail stumbled toward him. The wall behind him erupted as a woman crashed through it. She donned bright red and yellow armor. She wielded a mace in her hand. Her golden helmet glistened under the artificial lighting. She knocked into Abigail. A tall robot followed after her. It was in similar proportions to a human, but rounded in between limbs and had only one large, blue eye.

Battle Gal’s mace smashed into Abigail’s face, knocking her to the ground. Soldier 21 stepped onto the bear trap on her arm. It pressed into her flesh, and she screamed out in pain. The teeth drew blood that pooled around Abigail.

“Wonder if it has hit bone yet?” he asked.

Chainlink appeared in the hole created by Battle Gal. She was hunched over as the weight of tonight bore down on her.

“What the hell . . . is happening in here?” Chainlink asked.

“It does not concern you,” Battle Gal said.

“I came here to protect lives. Not a single person is going to die tonight,” Chainlink said.

“H8ywire, take care of her,” Battle Gal said. The robot nodded and began stepping toward Chainlink who prepared for another fight.

Abigail took advantage of the brief moment Battle Gal was looking away to rip her arm back. She shouted in agony as her hand tore off her body. She grabbed the bear trap and threw it at Soldier 21’s face. It collided with him, and he went flying backward. Before the bear trap

could crush his face against the wall, a chain whipped forward and yanked the bear trap. Chainlink ripped it backward, so it collided into H8ywire.

“I said NO KILLING!” Chainlink shouted.

Solider 21 collided with the wall and slumped over. Chainlink continued to swing the bear trap, offensively scraping it against H8ywire’s body.

Chainlink knew she would not win this battle. Her energy had been drained from her fight earlier and this mechanical marvel would likely pose a threat even if she was at her best. Her only hope was to hold out long enough for Abigail. She was able to beat all of the Protectors earlier; there was no doubt she could handle Battle Gal then H8ywire. She just needed time.

Abigail’s left arm hung in the air as blood spurted out of her wound. It quickly healed over, and a stump of flesh was formed at the end of her arm. For the first time she could remember, there was no anger, at least she didn’t feel any. Where would she have directed it? Everyone had used her.

Everything had been meaningless. All those people dead at war, but at least she thought she had to do that to protect her family at home. Without them, why bother protecting home? After their funeral, the mysterious board had appeared. She thought God had finally taken pity on her and decided to give her another purpose. From the very start, it was manipulation.

She’d channeled everything she felt into hunting criminals. If she erased enough evil from the face of this Earth maybe it would bring her parents back to it. Maybe if she served God enough, He would forgive her for what she had done while serving. At the very least, she may be granted the opportunity to meet with her parents after. It had been acceptable for emotions to

burn brighter than ever because it was directed by the man up high himself, but it was the man in the chair the whole time. Authority never cared what happened to her, just what she could do.

Abigail was so deep in thought she didn't think about the fight going on in front of her. She mindlessly dodged swings from the mace. Chains rung out as Chainlink swung the beartrap against H8ywire's body. The robot detangled the beartrap from her chains and threw the hunk of metal off to the side.

"I was told you were a warrior. Has your spirit finally broken?" Battle Gal asked. She had a sly grin. It was clear she enjoyed what was happening right now.

Had God ever been there? Were those Sundays wasted? If God was never here, then where were her parents?

Chainlink wrapped the chains around H8ywire's neck and pulled downward. The robot collapsed to the ground and while it was restrained, she spoke, "Abigail, I know what it's like to be angry. To feel like you've been doing everything for the wrong reasons. To be angry at the world. To be angry at God. There's never anywhere to put it all, but tonight there is. Fight back!"

Abigail continued to effortlessly dodge Battle Gal's attacks. She knew she could just give in. Without her mission, there was no purpose anymore. She watched as Chainlink continued her onslaught against H8ywire. Chainlink stumbled and H8ywire's arms whirled as they spun upward, knocking her back.

She flew into the wall, cracking the plaster. H8ywire stepped forward as Chainlink shakily pushed herself back up. Her arms trembled as the weight of her own body felt to be too much. H8ywire's leg rotated upward, kicking Chainlink in the stomach. She rolled backward and laid on the ground facing the ceiling. Her breaths were slow as she stared upward.

Abigail didn't know if she wanted to end it here, but Chainlink wasn't supposed to stop now. She was still young. There was still time to be saved.

Battle Gal swung forward again, but Abigail grabbed her by the wrist with her right hand and held her steady.

"Go ahead. Hit me with your left hand," Battle Gal said with a smirk.

Abigail rammed the stump of her arm against Battle Gal's face. Teeth flew into the air and as she stumbled backward her helmet was ripped off by a right hand. Abigail held the helmet in her hand and swung it forward. The metal rung out as it smashed against Battle Gal's head.

Abigail continued to swing it right then left, right then left crashing it into her skull. Battle Gal fell to the ground, and Abigail lifted the helmet into the air planning to pierce her chest with it. Abigail began to swing the helmet downward, but instead threw it to the right. It flew through the air and sliced H8ywire's body right beneath the head. The robot stumbled over as the head separated from the body.

She turned back around and picked Battle Gal up by her shirt. Battle Gal spit blood from her mouth onto Abigail's face. The red slowly slipped down her purple cheeks.

"You're a killer. You were one in the military. You were one at home. It's what you do. What's one more . . ."

Abigail looked over to Chainlink who continued to breath quietly on the ground. Her blue and white striped shirt was stained a dark brown from oil and blood.

"You can't make it on your own. You need someone guiding you like a missile whether it be the military or the idea of God. I know people like you. You self-destruct on your own."

Visions of her parents crossed her mind. She inhaled heavy as her chest ached from the night's battles.

Abigail let go off Battle Gal who collapsed onto the ground.

She hobbled over to the hospital bed where she had originally believed Afra to be resting. Sparks flew off H8ywire's body, blood seeped out off Battle Gal's mouth, and Chainlink exhaled slowly. Abigail kneeled at the bedside and looked up to the ceiling. She screamed. Chainlink tilted her head to the side and watched Abigail wail in agony through her squinted eyes.

At this moment, Abigail could finally see through the cracks. The government may have been the one pulling the strings, but it was the world that had left her so vulnerable. It was everything's fault. Every single thing in her life had closed off any other option. Her youth had been wasted at war and no one valued what remained after.

Without her board dishing out directions, there was nothing to use as a guiding star in this dark sea. Now no longer distracted by looking at the sky for directions, it was apparent how lost she was. With no mission to hide behind all Abigail could do was soak in the fact she knew she would never have kids. There would be no celebration of her daughter's baptism. She would never come home to a partner that had made her dinner. No one knew her favorite type of candy. There was no white picket fence in her future. No dog would ever come when she called.

No one left on this world loved her. She was a ghost in the making to others. These people didn't believe in spirits but would still tune in to watch celebrities hunt them on the travel channel. They'd walk past and listen to her moan, crying out to save her before she sunk below the surface. No one would stop because what benefit would saving her provide? There was a He waiting at home that would fix her. There would never be relief from this anguish.

She wiped at her eyes with her only arm and looked over to Chainlink who stared quietly at her.

“I’m sorry . . .” Chainlink muttered through her torn lips.

Abigail picked up Chainlink so she rested over her shoulder and carried her toward the front desk. The path stormed across minutes ago now felt long and unbearable. Right foot first then the left foot. That was the only way to make it out. That’s all she had ever done. One foot in front of the other. She returned to the desk at the front and laid out Chainlink’s body on it.

A nurse ran forward then looked Abigail up and down. He stared at the stump where her arm should be. Her mouth was dry from the battle and her muscles ached. Blood rapidly pumped across her body as the adrenaline still coated her veins.

“We—We can help treat that,” he said. Abigail heard what he said but could barely understand it. Her world spun around her now that it had been ripped up by the roots.

Abigail knew how these people saw her. She was a feral animal cornered and beaten. They didn’t see her as an equal. Support came from a place of pity instead of comradery. She would never be viewed like the other heroes. Any semblance of nobility was masked by a thin spattering of blood.

“STAY AWAY FROM ME!” she shouted before pushing him to the side.

On the way out she grabbed her helmet off the ground and slid it over her head.

“I need a father. I need a mother. I need some older, wiser being to cry to.

I talk to God, but the sky is empty.” – Sylvia Path