

WOLF CITY

THE STORY OF THE BROKEN KINGDOM

*To Craig,
Because I would never have done this
if you hadn't pushed me.
Thank you.*

The city of Marsev was in shambles, and it had not happened over night. But it sure as Hell seemed like it had just *happened*. Grandfathers recounted tales of when locks did not exist, of when no one looked over their shoulders. No one really knew when the change had set in. No one really knew who held power over the city anymore.

Like dust, gangs had begun settling in place around the city over the past decade. The most notorious of the delinquent groups was the ever powerful Wolf City gang. What was most surprising about Wolf City was that they were headed by a young woman barely old enough to call herself an adult.

Amoretta “Bullet” Stone was a woman well-worth the titles given to her. Enemies constantly capitulated in response to the terror she engrained in them. All the girl had to do was look a man in the eyes, and their knees would shake in what Bullet would call awe and what others would call absolute and unfiltered fear.

She was hard to miss, honestly. With her hair dyed electric blue and her ears and tongue riddled with piercings, she stood out amongst the crowd of black- and blond-haired Marsev civilians. On her right arm was a sleeve of multicolored ink, though her other tattoos were hidden by her clothing. She was slender and only stood to be about 5'3”, so the fact that so many people cowered when they saw the oh-so-familiar sights of her aqua-colored head was downright laughable to those who simply did not know any better.

Whenever someone saw the black graffiti depicting a wolf's head with *WC* signed next to it, the people of Marsev thought not of the broad and massive men that represented the gang, but instead of the thin woman with the tattoo of a wolf clawing its way down her arm. She was pretty, they said. Her face was soft when she stood in silence, but her anger was like fire, and it burned anyone in its path.

The Wolf City hideout was in an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of town. It used to supply metal sheets and iron bars, but now it was a trafficking house for weapons and contraband. Most of the Wolf City gang members were teenagers and young adults with no blood family left. They had been wronged in one way or another by the government of Marsev, and thus the brotherhood against the broken city was born. Whereas other gangs were truly malicious and destructive in nature, Wolf City was vindictive and wore a guise of genuine adolescent misbehavior. Their real intentions were not so well known, but every member knew what it meant to join. Every member knew that their ultimate goal was to bring down the government and thrust Marsev into an anarchy that would hopefully heal on the natural premise of democracy.

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“The raid is happening tonight, and not a single one of you looks prepared.” The icy blue eyes of Bullet danced over the sight of the gang members before her. The subtle look of disgust that had plastered onto her face made her subordinates shift and cough uncomfortably. “You've been slacking. Don't think for a second that I won't kill you if I sense apathy. There's only one way out of this group, and it will always and forever be death. You guys got that?”

“It's not that we're apathetic, boss. We're tired. We're defeated. We've been dropping clients like they're flies ever since the government put those border sanctions in place.” One of the braver of the members spoke up.

“And what do you think a raid is for? You think we're just gonna go tag some police buildings and run away snickering like we're some fucking Curb Rat?” Bullet folded her arms and glanced down at the ground, kicking the cement slab lightly with her boot. After a second of silence, she looked back up and eyed her people warily. “Don't disappoint me tonight,” she warned. “Now eat up and get your weight training done. We leave at 2200 hours.”

Bullet was met with a variety of responses, but all were affirmative. As the members split into different directions, she found herself anxious for the first time in years. The men (and women, few as they may be) did not seem ready. No, Bullet was quite sure of their ineptitude. She only hoped they at least had the guts to stay with her until the end. She knew tonight would be the night where she learned which members were worthy of calling themselves a wolf.

When the clanging of exercise machines and shuffling of feet vacuumed the silence out of the warehouse, Bullet took in a hot breath of air. Her hand tangled itself in her hair and pulled it away from her neck. The electricity came and went in the warehouse, and today was one of the days where inside temperatures would near eighty degrees. Bullet looked down at her evergreen tanktop and noticed that it was nearly soaked through.

“Hot, isn't it?” An older man, possibly the oldest one in the gang, approached Bullet with a smile.

Bullet smiled softly at the sight of his aging face. “Yeah, Dad.” The lines around his eyes had never been so deep and stretched with weariness.

“It's hard for them, you know. They're young and not independent like you. They need this family. They need to believe in its strength. Not just its leader, but that the family itself is fundamentally stable.” He brought a hand up and patted her on the shoulder, his smile broadening and, as a consequence, his wrinkles digging closer toward his eyes.

“All they need to believe in is me, Dad. If they can trust me, they will have nothing to fear. I won't let anything happen to them.” Her eyes were set, and her countenance was of general stoicism, but her father could see otherwise.

“You're a tough girl, Amoretta. But if you place such a big responsibility on your shoulders, you *will* cave from the weight. That isn't an undermining of your abilities, but instead it is an assessment of your humanity. And Amoretta, you are very, very human.” His smile faded to sadness, for his little girl was caught up in a world of dark politics and turmoil as thick as sludge.

“Please don't call me that,” she said under her breath, a tint of red coming to her cheeks. Her father merely chuckled and walked away, causing Bullet to smile along with him. She would heed his words as she turned to face the general direction of where most of her subordinates occupied. “Meeting in one hour!” she yelled so that her voice could be heard throughout the compound.

The young gang leader would use that time to enter her personal quarters and change clothes. She slipped on a black tank top and new khaki-colored cargo pants. She laced up her black work boots and put her hair up into a loose ponytail. The young woman was still sweaty and had not showered in about two days, but the must of the warehouse would undoubtedly cover any odor her body produced. She was sure her fellow wolves showered even less often than she, anyhow.

Before the hour of wait was up, Bullet made herself a sandwich, noting that the bread was bad, the cheese was bad, and the meat was bad. In these days, one could not afford to be choosy. Meat was almost a rarity in Marsev, and the only reason they got their hands on it was because they had intercepted a truck full of packaged meat a week ago.

Once everyone gathered around the commons, Bullet sipped from a water bottle and addressed her listeners. “There is going to be a little more delegation than usual tonight. I don't want to hear any bitching about my choices.” Her audience seemed genuinely surprised, and it stung a little to know that they thought her to be such a power-hoarder. “Aiden will serve as my second-in-command.” He already was her right hand man as is, but it needed to be stated, especially when people were so eager to take charge in attempt to impress the cold leader of theirs. “Mango, surveyor. I don't want you involved in any action. You are the lookout. Don't screw that up.” She saw the girl nod. “I'm going to divide everyone up into groups of three or four along with a team captain. Rich, Z.Z., and Tips, you'll be the captains.” She listed off who would belong to which captain, and it ended up being an even four-man team on every team.

Though there were fifteen of them going, that was not the entire Wolf City force. There were wolves that had to stay behind at the warehouse to continue conducting business – packaging arms, taking inventory, etc. Generally, any injured or new members stayed behind. Today, more would stay

behind than usual. Bullet did not want anything less than an A-team, and she believed she had it. Or she tried to.

“I’ve already went over how this should go, but I’ll clarify since I’ve introduced sub-leaders into the equation.” Everyone was still in the process of high-fiving one another on being teammates or being chosen as a leader. “I’m talking!” Bullet barked, and everyone froze in an instant. “Celebrate after we take down the South Side Police Station. Your fooling around could get someone killed tonight.” When she was sure she had everyone’s attention, Bullet continued. “We are not the stealthiest of gangs, as you all know. Many of you have a flare for the dramatics on many nights. Tonight will not be one of those nights. We will move in. I will give your team leaders specific instructions, and they will deliver any pertinent information down to you.

“Once Mango gives us the clear to make contact with the building, the first team will slip in and take out any initial security personnel. South Side is the least secured station in Marsev, but don’t get cocky. We’re all banking on the fact that the government is too stupid to realize we’re trying to overthrow them. If they really haven’t sniffed us out as anarchists, then tonight should go smoothly.

“Every person should have two handguns, an assault rifle, and a melee weapon of your choice. Tear gas is not allowed for two reasons: we’re low on supply, and I’d rather not take masks with us. We want to pack as lightly as possible, and lugging around so much weaponry is already going to slow us down.” Bullet opened her mouth to continue but stopped upon seeing a raised hand. She merely nodded once and waited.

“Did the vests ever come in?”

Bullet bit on her lip and quickly licked it before responding. “No.” She stared harshly into the eyes of her comrades. “But if everything goes according to plan, we shouldn’t need them. Besides, wolfskin is what?”

“All we need!” the group recited in elation.

A small smirk twitched at the corner of Bullet’s mouth, tugging upward. “Alright. Meet at the front at 2200. Don’t any of you dare be late.”

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There was sweat collecting under Bullet’s brows. She sat behind a hill next to Aiden, her eyes watching as Mango meandered the dangerous waters of South Side grounds. Her second-in-command was a man her age, light brown-skinned, hair curly brown, and skin covered in tattoos. The only part of him safe from the ink was his face. “Stop worrying.”

“Something isn’t right, Aiden. It doesn’t feel right.” Bullet remained crouched next to her makeshift confidant.

“You're out of your element because you've given so many people such large amounts of power. Trust us.”

“I trust you, Aiden,” she bit out before realizing how incriminating that sounded. “I trust them, too. It's the police I distrust. What if they've prepared for something like this?”

“We've prepared for even longer, so it doesn't matter.” Aiden's brown eyes wandered down to the small girl next to him. She was so scary and so intimidating and yet here she was, trembling and recoiling into herself. “Let us show you what we're capable of tonight.”

Bullet glanced at him warily and nodded curtly. Then, averting her eyes back to the police ground below the hill, she waited. Her eyes studied the swaying grass, black in the night because the only light Marsev had in the later hours was the moon. She dared not look up and get lost in the many stars that littered the sky above. She would not be fooled into thinking that this world was beautiful.

“Did you ever think you would be a world-changer at the ripe age of twenty, Bullet?” Aiden asked quietly.

“No.” She saw Aiden's smile and made sure to decimate it with her own feelings of abhorrence for this world. “When I was nine, I thought I would die. And I thought that every day until I met others that thought like me.”

“That's pretty cynical.” He shrugged. “I was always aware of the harsh world, but I knew there was a savior lurking in the shadows somewhere.” He grinned and nudged the blue-haired woman. “Little did I know it would be in a trashcan.”

“Shut up,” Bullet quipped, trying to restrain the smile that fought its way onto her face.

“I'm pretty sure I've never been so disgusted in my life,” Aiden added in an easy attempt to lighten the surrounding tension. He ran a hand through his matted hair and laughed quietly. “You were so pathetic and dirty and...broken.” His words rang in solemnness, but he smiled toward her. “But you kept your chin up even when my mother cleaned you up. You frowned and you glared, not showing any emotion other than contempt and self-pride as she scrubbed you raw. I knew just then that you would change this world.”

“Don't give me that credit yet. I haven't changed anything. We could all die tonight.” Her eyes kept on Mango, though the haze glossed over her irises told Aiden she wasn't really in this universe.

“You've changed the lives of all of us. And that's more than any Marsev citizen can claim.” When Bullet chose not to respond, Aiden let the conversation go. He knew Bullet was not one to display her emotions in such a forthright manner, especially on the job. He had never once seen the girl cry, but he knew it was in there. He knew that Amoretta and Bullet were two very different people.

Bullet's cool, blue eyes focused on Mango once more. Her dark clothing coupled with her

midnight skin allowed for ultimate covert ground-crawling. Even Bullet lost sight of her a few times. Mango was always the surveyor, her skills of stealth and speed unmatched in Wolf City. The girl was tiny and lithe, able to get in and out of most spaces without any issues.

Finally, Bullet saw the girl wave an arm back and forth twice, and the Wolf City leader squinted. Like a creeping mist, the first group moved down the hill silently. Their assault rifles were on their back, attached to a sling. Most of them carried some type of blade, but one person had opted for a steel pipe instead. Bullet's blood warmed under her skin, enjoying that person's sense of ruthlessness. She showed nothing, however. Her eyes never blinked. She just crouched there behind the hill, waiting.

The first squad pressed their backs against the gray stone walling of the police compound so as to keep hidden. The leader, Z.Z., was a tall, olive-skinned man with a sharp and narrow face. He was slender enough to fit between a groove between two windows, and he subtly peered inside the building to see if anyone traversed the main hall. Z.Z. gave a roll of his hand in the air, signaling for the second team to come down the hill.

At this point in time, Mango had hurriedly returned to behind the hill where Bullet and Aiden sat in wait. She huffed and pulled at the collar of her black shirt. "No one even standing outside watch? This place has really let itself go," she whispered.

"No one has even showed resistance to the system. They don't think anyone cares that they live in a shithole." Aiden seemed to shrug the thought off easily.

Bullet's stomach churned with sickness. Her eyes never left the two squads that had entered enemy territory. Though they were well-equipped with weaponry, there were still only ten of them down there and God knew how many officers inside the building. They weren't ready for this. She had planned this entirely too early. She needed to call it off before something happened.

"Bullet, calm down," Aiden said as he rubbed her shoulder. An easy smile sat on his lips. "I have a good feeling about this."

Pop.

The sound of a bullet snapping through the air was made, and Bullet felt her breathing cease. Her lungs tightened coldly as she turned her head in horror at the feeling of a body slumping against her. The gang leader shook visibly, her eyes almost quivering as she stared down at her friend.

"Aiden?!" Mango shouted through a whisper, and she quickly grabbed the boy to turn him over and lay him on his back. When she did so, however, her mouth hung open in hysteria as she saw the clear entry wound in the dead center of his forehead.

Bullet said nothing. She stared and seethed, her hand trembling on her lap in a balled-up fist. Tears of anger shook in her eyes, but none dared to fall. Her teeth grit so hardly that her jaw ebbed a

dull aching pain. No longer was the frigid, controlled leader of Wolf City there. In her place was a monster, so crazed that she could not even fathom language at the moment.

She hopped over the top of the hill and ran down it quickly, pulling her gun from her hip holster. The grounds below had already broke out into chaos as her wolves took cover. More bullets flew through the air, and Bullet was not sure if anyone else had been hit. At the moment, logical thought process was nonexistent, and instead she functioned with raw aggression and animalistic drive alone.

She saw the tiny head of a sniper in the distance. It was hard to make out because of the darkness of the night, but she could see him nonetheless. She ran across the level plain, her arms swinging rapidly as she pushed past her human limits. She saw the rifle being aimed, and she made sure to run in an uneven zig-zag fashion. Once she was close enough to the initial incline of the hill, she stopped and raised her handgun, both hands wrapping firmly around the grip. With scary accuracy, she shot once and saw the body roll onto its side.

She wasted no time in turning around and rushing back to the police grounds where she knew her gang members were in danger. There was no confirmation that no other officers lurked about behind other hills, so Bullet made an executive decision that drew uneasy stares from many. “Storm it!” she shouted, leading the way.

She holstered her handgun and twisted the strap of her rifle around so that it was brought to the front. Once she slipped the sling off, her hands gripped the rifle tightly. She marched up to the front entrance of the police station and kicked in the door. It flung open and slammed back against the wall. No one was immediately in the vicinity as she stepped inside the building, so she traveled forward quickly, her squads trailing right behind her.

They moved down the halls swiftly, but still no officers were in sight. “Search each room,” Bullet ordered with heavy darkness in her tone. After a couple minutes of the team searching, Bullet finally stood still and thought sensibly. As she stood in a briefing room, her eyes slowly traveled up to the corner of the ceiling where a camera moved its angle slightly to focus on the girl. “Everyone get out!” she yelled. She ran out of the room in a panic. “Get out now!”

Suddenly, panels in the floorboard slid to the side with about six feet in between each one. A small, silver bar raised up from the opening and began releasing a smoke-like substance into the air. Bullet ran down the hall as the gas began to fill the compound, but before she could even reach the end of the wing, blackness bled into her eyesight, and she collapsed.

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A searing ache throbbed on the right side of her brain. Slowly, her eyelids opened before fluttering and trying to adjust to the light. When her senses flooded back to her one by one, she looked

around and took in the details of the empty stone room. She sat at a table in a tan, metal folding chair. Her arms were tied with nylon rope behind her back and to the chair. Before her was nothing but a table and two other chairs. She glanced around warily, noting that there was nothing else. No cameras, no pictures. Nothing.

The sight of Aiden finally made its way back into her memory bank, and she felt her rage begin to grow. She tugged relentlessly at her restraints, rattling the chair around on the floor in the process as it scraped against the cold stone slab. After a few moments of fruitless struggling, she yelled angrily. “Come fucking fight me! Face me, you bitches!”

As if in reply, the door swung open and in walked two uniformed men. The uniform Marsev policemen wore consisted of black slacks, black boots, and a black button-up pressed shirt with the name of the officer on the right breast pocket and any medals they had earned on the left. The officer who sat in the chair closest to the door was short and stocky with a patch of chin hair and no other outstanding features other than his beady black eyes.

The other officer sat in the chair directly across from Bullet. He was older, in his forties perhaps, with dark gray-black hair and a neatly trimmed face. He slapped down a manilla envelope on the table and smirked with a malevolent twinkle in his brown eyes. “Amoretta Stone,” he breathed through thin lips. “Your gang is a fucking joke. Did you know that? I feel like you should know that already.” When he saw the acerbic look on Bullet's face, he put on a mock display of surprise. “Oh, you didn't know. I'm so sorry.”

“Where are the others? I swear to God, if you hurt them—!”

“You'll do nothing,” Officer Wilkes, as his uniform read, interrupted. He flipped open the folder and started reciting a list tiredly. “Stone. Mother murdered, father detained as a suspect for six years. Started a gang when she was sixteen. Has single-handedly killed four hundred ninety one people.” He whistled. “Even for a gang leader, that's a bit high. You enjoy ending lives, eh?”

“Only if someone fucks with me.” Bullet stared icily.

“Or looks at you wrong. Or breathes the wrong way.” He laughed lightly. “Amoretta, you're a loose canon. I don't know how you managed to convince a gang of over thirty members that you're competent enough to lead a revolt against the government.”

Bullet leaned forward and smirked slightly. “I must be doing something right if the government is so scared of me.” When she saw Wilkes's eyebrow perk curiously, she continued. “You planned this ambush because you've been keeping tabs on us. You're scared of what we can do.”

The humor that lit up in Wilkes's eyes was borderline insulting. “You think the government gives two shits about an angst-y teenage girl who dyes her hair weird colors and surrounds herself with

gang bangers? That's rich, Amoretta. That's really rich." He knew she was newly twenty-years-old, but for effect he decidedly placed her in the adolescent age group.

"Don't call me that," she seethed. "You can't fool me. Why else would you put so much effort into an ambush?"

"Effort?" the shorter officer, Officer Derrida, snorted. "It wasn't too hard to set a sniper up on the west hill and control the gas sprayers remotely from another building. I think all of what, Wilkes, twenty minutes went into actual preparation?" he asked his partner.

Wilkes's grin spread from ear to ear as he stared down the girl with blue hair and numerous tattoos. "We know all about Wolf City. Its location, its clients, its suppliers, its members. We've had an informant with you guys for over a year now, just for shits and giggles. Never thought you'd be dumb enough to attack a government building."

Bullet grew furious at the thought of someone betraying her and the others. "You're lying," she hissed through her teeth.

"I'm not. But that is neither here nor there." Wilkes stood up and straightened his collar. "There is one thing we don't know about you and your little gang of anarchist misfits, however." He walked around the table and stood next to Bullet, staring down at her with condescending kindness. "Who are you getting your assault rifles from? There are no dealers in Marsey, even in the black market. And there are none within a fifty mile radius of the city. No unidentified trucks have passed through the borders in six months, yet I know you have received at least two shipments since then."

Bullet leaned back casually and stared up at the policeman with a taunting smile. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Immediately, Wilkes dragged his hand across her face. The slap was so hard that it caused her head to jerk to the side, and her cheek reddened from the impact. Still, the man smiled. "Sweetheart, I don't think you want this going down a bad path tonight. You may be tough on the streets, but I can do things to you that would break your body and spirit so irreparably that you would beg for the mercy that is death."

The young criminal did not falter in her countenance of genuine enjoyment. "There is a reason why people fear my name," she uttered in a half-whisper.

Wilkes leaned down and turned her chair quickly so that she faced him fully. He placed his hands on the back of her chair, boxing her inside of his arms. His lips turned into a menacing frown, and his eyes locked onto her's. After a few seconds, he moved his head forward so that his lips pressed softly against her ear. "You are an a lamb, Amoretta. Not a wolf. You have never been a wolf. You are a lamb that believes you have power of the likes of lions. And I swear to God, if you do not give me the

name of your supplier, I will make sure you scream until your voice leaves you. And then I'll stop the foreplay and really get down to business.”

In a flash, Bullet twisted her head to the side and latched her teeth onto his ear. She yanked her head back swiftly, and his ear tore from his head with ease. She spit the bloody piece of flesh out and grinned as blood covered her chin. Wilkes jerked to a stand and grabbed at his ear, yelling.

Derrida stood up quickly as well, but Bullet was too fast for him. She stood, lifting the chair that she was tied to, and she kicked her foot upwards under the table, flipping it over and into Derrida. She took this moment to whip her body around in a full circle and smack Wilkes with the legs of the chair on her back. It only knocked him slightly, and she turned her back to him and rushed backwards, stabbing one of the metal legs into Wilkes's stomach.

“Augh!” he cried as the leg penetrated him and sunk deep into his stomach.

Bullet ran forward, consequently pulling the leg out of Wilkes's wound, and she moved for Derrida, who had recovered and was coming for her. She raised a leg and kicked it harshly into his groin, and he dropped instantly. She knelt down quickly and turned to the side so her hands could have access to his utility belt. She unsheathed the combat knife and awkwardly twisted it to cut the ropes. The chair came loose, but a knot still kept her wrists bound. With a difficult angle, she accidentally incurred a mild cut on her palm, but she ignored it.

Once free, she made no hesitation in stabbing the knife into the side of Derrida's neck, as he had been rolling and grabbing himself in pain. The girl then turned to see Wilkes stumbling forward, grabbing his stomach. A line of blood slipped down from the corner of his mouth, and his eyes were crazed and hostile.

Bullet moved forward swiftly and stabbed the knife into his shoulder. He cried out in pain, but she did not stop. She yanked him by his shirt and twisted him by utilizing the momentum in order to get him to fall to the ground. She placed her foot on his neck to keep him down, and she stared coldly at the wounded man.

“Who the fuck do you think you are?” he whispered through a mangled, hoarse voice. “Who the fuck do you think you are?!” he screamed.

Bullet stared dully, the blood on her chin dripping every couple of seconds. The sight of the distressed, hurting man pleased her immensely. “Wolf City, bitch.” She exerted force downward with her leg and subsequently crushed his windpipe and snapped his cervical cord. The crunch had not been as satisfying as she had hoped, but she had no time to reflect on her failed moment of ecstasy.

She grabbed his handgun and shoved it in her waistband. She then moved over to Derrida's corpse and retrieved his as well. With haste, she exited the room and noticed that she was not in the

wing she had been in when the gas leaked.

By way of absolute luck, she found a staircase. After descending down to the lower level, she listened for any noises. A faint, muffled shouting could be heard, and she quickly tried to move in its direction to get closer. She held her gun down, finger on the trigger, as she walked, sliding her back along the wall. A door slammed, and she heard footsteps leave the room around the corner in the opposite direction of the hall Bullet was in. Once the person seemed far enough away, Bullet peered around the corner to make sure all was clear.

Her eyes locked onto a door with the label 'SUSPECT R' taped to the door frame. Bullet moved and found the door unlocked. She slipped inside and saw a similar set-up to the room she had been detained in. In the chair, however, sat a familiar face. Bullet dropped her arms lifelessly to her side, and it felt like her soul escaped her body in one breath.

Z.Z. sat limply, his head lolled back and his neck split open. Blood gushed down his neck, soaking his black shirt. Bullet stared at him for many seconds before averting her eyes to the table. She felt like her body was still in shock from what happened, but how could it be? She had seen this very sight before, with her mother lying on her bed with blood dried and matted in her hair and clothing.

Her legs buckled, and she fell to her knees. Before she could engage in any kind of self-pity, the door swung open and a surprised officer stood before her. Bullet stood up angrily and showed no vacillation in firing bullets directly into the man's face. His body fell, but she continued to fire into the bloody, mangled face on the ground until her clip was empty.

At that moment, a siren began to ring throughout the compound. Red lights flashed in the hallway, and Bullet reacted quickly. Discarding her emptied gun, she pulled the one from her waistband and left the room without a word.

She ran down the hall and toward the stairwell, running down as fast as her legs could manage. She encountered a couple of officers along the way, but she ended their lives quickly with one bullet each. Once she reached the ground level, she ran outside into the dark of the night. A body collided with her, and Bullet jerked her gun in the direction of the assailant, but the girl shouted.

“It's me! It's Mango! Don't shoot!” she yelled.

Bullet felt relief wash through her for the first time that night. “You're alright?”

“Yeah. You told me to stay back no matter what, but I couldn't bare it any longer and was coming to see what was going on inside there.”

“No others have been outside?”

“Rich, Nathan, and Aurellus are on their way to the base. They said we needed more people and more firepower to take this place and save the others.”

“Good. We need to go, too. There's no way we can save anyone with just the two of us.” Bullet began running, and Mango ran alongside her dutifully.

“Did you see anyone in there? What happened?” She had seen the blood on Bullet, but she was not afraid to ask. Mango was a tough girl, and she could take it straight.

“Z.Z. is dead. I didn't find anyone else. Didn't have time.” Bullet ran until her legs hurt, and even then, she kept running. “They're looking for the name of our assault rifle supplier. Apparently that's the only bit of information they haven't gotten their hands on.”

“Really?” Mango breathed as she struggled to keep up with Bullet. “Who is it, anyway?”

Bullet slowed her running to a jog, and then she stopped entirely. Mango stopped, curiosity evident on her face. “Why does it matter?” Bullet asked coldly.

Mango blinked. “It doesn't. I was just curious. You always handle those shipments, and the car is always unmarked. It's not a big deal,” she said through an exasperated laugh.

Bullet narrowed her eyes, but she decided to handle this matter later. Now was not the time to decide on a whim if one of her most loyal gang members was guilty of treason or not. “Let's hurry,” was all she said before resuming her earlier pace.

As they reached the outskirts of the city, Bullet saw a yellow light in the distance. “No,” she said curtly, and miraculously, her speed got even faster. Mango trailed behind, but Bullet did not stop. The fire climbed high into the sky, and as Bullet neared the warehouse engulfed in flames, she did not think of all the work poured into building Wolf City, but everyone who had likely been inside. One person she was absolutely sure was inside was her father.

“Dad,” Bullet breathed.

Mango finally arrived, tears streaming down her face. “No! Was it them?! How did they do this? I don't understand. We were just here.” She began babbling incoherently through her sobs.

“We've got to go,” Bullet said, holding herself together with the last bit of mental glue she possessed. “Now,” she said sternly, tugging Mango by her sleeve.

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“Marsev is just a city. I don't understand how a city could be totally separated from the rest of the country,” Mango said lowly. She sat in the forest with Bullet, both of them watching the small fire flicker as the rabbit cooked above it.

“I don't even think it can be considered a country anymore. It's all zoned territories controlled by their own government. If we get technical, Marsev doesn't even belong to the actual mainland anymore. Not for a while.”

“I heard stories about the mainland from my grandmother. She says it used to actually have a

name, but everyone has forgotten it because we're all so separated." Mango's eyes were strained and tired as they stared into the fire.

"People call the country a lot of different names."

"Yeah, but it had an actual one. You know, one that everyone called it. At least a few hundred years ago."

"Oh yeah?" Bullet asked, though she wasn't that interested.

"Yeah. They called it America," Mango replied, and both of the girls stayed silent for a long while until Mango spoke up again. "Fuck America."

"Nah," Bullet said. "America doesn't exist." She pinched the bridge of her nose and tried not to think of everyone she lost tonight, because she knew she would break down into a sobbing mess if she did. "Fuck Marsev."

You have reached the end of the first story of the Wolf City collection. The next installment is estimated to be published in April of 2015. These stories are free, but I put a lot of hard work into them. Please consider donating if you enjoy my work!