

Panic Room

A robotic, woman's voice sounded all around me. "Welcome to the Panic Room, Reece Terrimine. Panic Room is a series of rooms ruled by fear. Each room a different fear. You must make it past the fear and to the next door to complete each challenge. If you can make it through all the rooms you will have passed the final test and be welcomed to the military. It is impossible to leave Panic Room without having completed the challenges. You have now begun."

The room looked like a back alley. Brick walls bathed in grey moonlight, cracked pavement, and silver garbage cans loitering on one side. The exit door was clearly outlined at the other end of the alley.

I stepped cautiously, aware of every shift of movement around me. No one else was there, nothing seemed dangerous, but the hair on the back of my neck stood straight and I felt I was being watched. I knew I was being watched and monitored for success by the Officials at the military centre, but this felt different.

Behind me, heavy footsteps pounded the pavement, someone grabbed my wrist, and a hand covered my mouth. I screamed.

"Shut up!" ordered a man's raspy voice.

Something cool touched my neck. A second man stood in front of me holding a knife to my throat.

These people would kill me or stab me and leave me to die. I was sure of it. People here were not to be trusted.

A plan began to form in my mind.

The man holding the knife was no bigger than me, making him more of an even match.

Without warning, I kicked him between the legs, and as he folded inwards I thrust my knee into his face, there was a crunch of bone. He dropped the knife. I jammed my elbow into the ribcage of the raspy voiced man and bit his hand which tasted dirty. The knife lay on the ground, and I grabbed it.

The blade was the size of a steak knife, maybe four inches long.

"Stay back!" I yelled, holding it in front of me.

The raspy voiced man laughed as I walked backwards toward the exit. He walked toward me with no weapon.

The man got close and reached to grab me again. Eyes closed, I thrust the knife towards him. When I opened my eyes he was on the ground, hands gripping his chest, blood spurting out between his fingers, body twitching, eyes wide with shock. I looked at the man, his eyes were unfocused.

The convulsions stopped, his hand fell to the pavement, his whole body went completely still. Just like that, I knew he was dead.

Guilt flooded through me. I turned and ran to the door.

I grasped the metal door handle, but let my hand fall away. Behind me were two strangers, one dead and one too injured to move. I had done that. I turned to look back at them. Both men were middle aged. They might have been fathers, husbands, or brothers. Their blood was on my hands. What would Jason think if he knew? What if he had done the same thing?

My brother Jason was admitted two years before me and I hadn't seen him since. He had written to me once since he left. He told me he was going into the final stage of training. I wanted to believe that he made it through his training and was waiting for me to finish mine. Part of me kept saying he was gone, dead or lost.

Was the hope of finding my brother worth the pain I was causing? My parents lost both their children when I chose to follow in Jason's footsteps and try to find him.

I wondered what had happened to the girl I used to be. The one who rescued abandoned baby birds and read to them. Always quiet and shy of conflict. The girl who was sweet and soft.

After Jason left I became obsessed with finding him. That girl was gone. I trained and trained waiting to be recruited.

There was no escaping here. I got myself into this and had to get myself out. I needed to live. To prove to Jason and my parents that I was strong enough, smart enough.

My mind was hardening, preparing for everything I was willing to do to get through. Steeling myself for the unexpected, I opened the next door.