

Tears in Rain

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In memory of Pablo Lizcano

Non ignoravi me mortalem genuisse.

[I have always known that I was mortal.]

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

Agg'íe nagné 'eggins anyg nein'yié.

[What I do shows me what I am seeking.]

—Sulagnés, artist from the planet Gnío

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to break down and a time to build up;

a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance;

a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to get and a time to lose,

a time to keep and a time to cast away;

a time to rend and a time to sew,

a time to keep silence and a time to speak;

a time to love and a time to hate,

a time of war and a time of peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3: 1–8

Chapter One

Bruna awoke with a start and remembered that she was going to die.

But not right now.

A whiplash of pain shot between her temples. The apartment was in semidarkness and the afternoon light had faded on the other side of the window. Dazed, she looked out over the familiar urban landscape, the towers, the flat rooftops, and the hundreds of windows over which shadows were falling, as the pain inside her head continued to pound. It took her a few moments to register that the thudding was not just inside her skull. Someone was hammering on the door. The clock showed 19:21. She caught her breath and sat up with a grunt. Seated on the edge of the bed, her clothes twisted and her bare feet on the ground, she waited a few seconds while the liquid mess that was her brain stopped sloshing around and stabilized. *Four years, three months, and twenty-nine days*, she calculated rapidly. Even a hangover couldn't prevent her from repeating the manic routine. If there was anything that depressed her more than getting drunk, it was doing so during the day. Alcohol seemed less harmful, less despicable, at night. But starting to drink at midday was pathetic.

The hammering at the door continued, chaotic, frenzied. Brunna tensed. It seemed more like an assault than an unexpected visitor. "Home, check the door," she whispered, and the face of the invader appeared on the main screen. A female intruder. It took her a few seconds to recognize the twisted and convulsed features, but that awful hair, dyed a shocking orange, was unmistakable. It was one of her neighbors, a replicant who lived in the east wing of the building. She'd barely exchanged a greeting with her in the last few months and didn't even know her name. Brunna was not particularly keen to have dealings with other reps. Although, if truth be told, she didn't mix much with humans either. *Stop and be done, damn it*, she moaned to herself, tortured by the noise. But the unbearable din forced her to get up and head for the door.

"What's up?" she mumbled.

The neighbor's fist stopped midblow and she jumped back, startled by Brunna's sudden appearance. She turned sideways, as if she were about to run off, and fixed Brunna with a distrustful look of her left eye—an opaque, yellowish eye split by the striking vertical pupil of the reps.

"You're Brunna Husky."

It didn't seem to be a question, but she answered anyway.

"Yes."

"I have to speak to you about something very important."

Bruna looked her up and down. Her hair was tangled, her cheeks were smudged, and her clothes were dirty and wrinkled as if she'd been sleeping in them. Not unlike what Brunna herself had just been doing, to be fair.

"Is it a work-related matter?"

The question seemed to throw the woman off balance momentarily, but then she nodded her head in agreement and smiled. A half-smile, in profile.

"Yes. That's it. Work-related."

There was something disturbing, something not quite right, about this slovenly, trembling rep. Brunna weighed up the possibility of telling her to come back another day, but her hangover was killing her and she sensed that turning away a person so clearly full of nervous tension would prove much more difficult and tiring than listening to her. So she stepped back and let her in.

"Come in."

The android obeyed. She walked with short little hops, as if the floor were burning hot. Brunna shut the door and headed toward the kitchen area. She felt dehydrated and urgently in need of a drink.

"I've got purified water. Do you want a—?"

She didn't finish the sentence because she somehow sensed what was about to happen. She started to turn around, but it was already too late. A wire had been wrapped around her neck and was beginning to strangle her. She put her hands up to her throat where the wire was biting into her skin and tried to free herself, but the woman continued to tighten it more and more with an unexpected determination. Fatally attached to one another, assailant and victim moved around the room in a frenetic dance of violence, banging into walls and overturning chairs as the loop kept tightening and Brunna started to run out of oxygen. Until Brunna, desperately thrashing about, managed to sink an elbow into some sensitive part of her enemy's body, which caused the woman momentarily to relax her grip on her target. A second later, the woman was on the floor, and Brunna had immobilized her by falling on top of her. It was difficult to do, despite the fact that Brunna was a combat replicant, and hence bigger and more athletic than most. The neighbor seemed to possess an inhuman energy, the desperate strength of an animal.

"Cool it!" shouted Brunna, enraged.

And to her amazement, the woman obeyed and stopped writhing, as if she had been waiting for someone to tell her what she should do.

They eyed each other for a few seconds, gasping for air.

"Why did you do this to me?" asked Brunna.

"Why did *you* do this to *me*?" babbled the android.

There was a deluded and feverish look in her catlike eyes.

"What have you taken? You're high."

"You people drugged me; you've poisoned me," moaned the woman, and she started to cry with profound despair.

"*We* people? Who are *we*?"

"You...technohumans...reps. You kidnapped me; you infected me; you implanted your filthy things to turn me into one of you. Why have you done this to me? What had I ever done to you?"

Her moans had been increasing in volume and now she was shrieking like a woman possessed. *The neighbors are bound to complain again*, thought Bruna, irritated. She frowned with annoyance.

"What's behind all this idiocy? Are you mad, or just pretending to be? You're a replicant, too. Look in the mirror. Check out your eyes. You're a technohuman like me. And you've just tried to strangle me."

The woman had started to shake violently; she seemed to be suffering a panic attack.

"Don't hurt me! Please, don't hurt me! Help! Please!"

Her obvious terror was becoming unbearable. Bruna relaxed her hold a little.

"Calm down. I'm not going to do anything to you. See? I'm letting go. If you stay calm and still, I'll release you."

She let go of the woman little by little, as cautiously as she would a snake, and then jumped backward, beyond the reach of her hands. Whimpering, the android dragged herself away a foot or so and rested her back against the wall. Although the woman did seem to be somewhat calmer, Bruna regretted that she wasn't carrying her little plasma gun. It was hidden behind the stove, and to get it she would briefly have to take her eye off the android. It really was totally stupid to hide a weapon so well that there was no way of using it when it was needed. She glanced at the intruder, who was breathing with difficulty in the corner.

"What did you take? You're out of it."

"I'm a human...I'm a human and I have a son!"

"Sure. I'm going to call the police to come and get you. You tried to kill me."

"I'm a human!"

"What you are is a damned menace."

The android stared at Bruna in bewilderment. It was a wild and defiant stare.

“You people aren’t going to succeed in confusing me. You won’t trick me. I’ve exposed you. This is what I do with your wretched implants.”

And with that, she twisted her head a little, sank her fingers quickly and violently into the socket of one of her eyes and gouged out the eyeball. There was a soft, squishy sound, a muffled gasp, a few trickles of blood. It was a moment of anguished, petrified madness. Then Bruna recovered her mobility and threw herself on the woman, who had collapsed in convulsions.

“By the great Morlay! What have you done, you wretched woman? A curse on all species! Emergency! Home, call Emergency!”

She was so stressed that the computer didn’t recognize her voice. She had to take a deep breath, make a conscious effort to calm down and try again.

“Home, call Emergency. Call and be done with it, damn it!”

It was a high-speed connection, sound only. A male voice answered: “Emergency.”

“A woman has just...A woman has just lost her eye.”

“Insurance number, please.”

Bruna pulled up the sleeves of her neighbor’s dress and uncovered two bare, bony wrists. She wasn’t wearing a mobile. She searched through the woman’s pockets looking for her ID tag. She even checked around her neck in case she was wearing it on a chain, as many did. She didn’t find a thing.

“I don’t know. Can’t we leave it till later? Her eye is on the floor. She’s pulled it out.”

“Most unfortunate, but if she’s not insured and up to date with her payments, we can’t do anything.”

The man cut the connection. Bruna could feel something firing up inside her, a spasm of anger that she knew intimately and which functioned with the precision of a piece of machinery; in some hidden spot within her brain, the sluice gates of hatred opened and her veins flooded with its thick poison. *You’re so full of fury that you end up cold as ice*, old Yiannis had once said to her. And it was true. The more irate she was, the more controlled she seemed—calmer and impassive, empty of emotions, save for that pure, sharp hatred that condensed in her chest like a black stone.

“Home, call Samaritans,” she enunciated syllable by syllable.

“Samaritans at your service,” replied a robotic voice immediately with its conventionally melodious voice. “Please forgive our delay in attending to you; we are the only civic association that offers health services to those who have no insurance. If you wish to make a financial contribution to our project, say *donations*. If this is a medical emergency, please hold the line.”

The woman moaned softly in Bruna's arms, and the eye really was on the floor, round and much bigger than one could imagine, a greasy ball with a tuft of pale fibers, like a dead jellyfish or a sea polyp torn from its rock and thrown up on the beach by the tide.

"Samaritans at your service. Please forgive our delay in attending to you; we are..."

Bruna had seen worse things in her years in the military. Much worse. However, she found her neighbor's unexpected and ferocious action particularly disturbing. Pain and turmoil had erupted in her home in the middle of the afternoon.

"...say *donations*. If this is a medical emergency, please hold the line."

And that's what everyone did, wait and wait, because Samaritans couldn't cope with all the requests from the uninsured and was always overloaded. It was conceivable that the woman had insurance, but she was still unconscious or perhaps hopelessly deranged; either way, she wasn't responding to Bruna's shakes or calls, which in some ways was preferable, as her lack of consciousness was protecting her from the horror of what she had done. Maybe that was why she wasn't coming around. Bruna had seen it many times in the military: merciful loss of consciousness so as not to feel anything. Night had fallen, and the apartment was nearly dark, illuminated only by the glow of the city and the fleeting lights of the sky-trams.

"Home, lights."

The lamps obediently switched themselves on, wiping out the urban landscape on the other side of the window and adding a viscous, wet and bloody sheen to the eyeball on the floor. Bruna looked away from the extracted object, and her glance fell on the woman's face and the empty socket. A sinister hole. So in order to have something else to contemplate, she gazed at the main screen. She had the sound turned off, but the news was on and they were showing Myriam Chi, the leader of the RRM. They must have filmed her at a meeting, and she was speaking from the stage with her customary virulence. Bruna had no time for either Myriam or her Radical Replicant Movement. She had a deep mistrust of all political groups, and she was particularly repelled by the "we are victims" self-indulgence, the hysterical mythification of the rep identity. And where Myriam was concerned, Bruna knew her type well—people buried deep in their emotions like beetles in dung; junkies dependent on the most aggravating and deceitful sentimentality.

"Samaritans, how can I help you?"

Finally.

"There's been an incident in District Five, Dardenelles Avenue, apartment 2334. A woman has lost her eye. What I mean is, she's lost it completely; she plucked it out. The eyeball is on the floor."

“Victim’s age?”

“Thirty.”

All reps were around thirty. Between twenty-five and thirty, to be precise.

“Human or technohuman?”

Again the fury, again the rage.

“That question is anticonstitutional, as you well know.”

There was a brief silence at the other end of the line. In any case, thought Bruna, her answer had already betrayed her.

“We’ll be there as soon as we can,” said the man. “Thank you for calling Samaritans.”

Everyone knew that they prioritized humans, of course, a practice that wasn’t legally acceptable, but it was what happened. And the worst bit, Bruna thought to herself, was that it made sense on one level. When a medical service was overloaded, maybe it was sensible to give priority to those who had a much longer life expectancy—to those who weren’t condemned to a premature death, like the reps. Was it more beneficial to save a human who might still live another fifty years or a technohuman who might have only a few months to go? A cold, bitter taste of bile rose in her throat. She looked at the grotesquely incomplete face of her neighbor and felt a stab of resentment toward her. *Idiot, idiot, why have you done this? And why have you done it in my home?* Bruna had no idea what had motivated the woman, the reason for her strange behavior. She might be drugged, or perhaps unwell. But there was no doubting that the unfortunate, crazy woman hated herself—that much was clear—and hatred was an emotion that Bruna could well understand. Nothing better than cold hatred to combat burning anguish.