

THE AFTER SOCIETY

RIAN

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PROLOGUE

There was a girl. At times she sat alone in the dark just think. For just a moment, it was quiet and just a little too peaceful. It felt like a dream. What's wrong? But the real question was: what is right? Nothing. Nothing at all. It was the world that was wrong, and nothing was truly right, and we can't get it all back. So there I was. I am that girl. Sitting there alone. In the dark.

What really happened that day? That one day. The day everything began. I'll tell you what happened then, what's happening now and what has happened before, but I can't tell

you what will happen next..

We went into hiding. It was the only way we could stay safe. There were people out there that wanted to get us. We stayed hidden. Where they can't see us and won't find us.

These things. They're like police gone mad. They can kill you, and they will if they choose to. And, if you are ever out in the open desert during the daytime these days, well, you're already dead meat.

Dead meat. They eat people. And the people like me? Well, we'd a special delight to them. A thrilling hunt, if you will. If they can catch us, which rarely happens, then we're history. Gone. Gobbled up and into the black hole of their stomachs, never to be seen again.

I'm fast. Real fast, and strong as well. There are more like me, you see. Before society crashed, we were being made in labs. Created in test tubes and kept in tanks, cages, and chambers. Asleep, just waiting to be woken up, and to be tested again.

The tests were harsh. Many of us died because they used their other vicious creatures to attack us. But the survivors, such as myself, lived and thrived once the labs had burned down. Another one of their experiments also made it to the outside world. They are blood thirsty and inhuman. A cross between a serial killer, a wolf or alligator or something like that. We're not really sure. But they were a newer addition to the group of genetically engineered creatures.

But us, we are the genetically enhanced. The ones made to

survive in extreme environments. We can organize, fight and improvise in a split second. We have the ability to do all of that and more. There's very few of us left though. There was few at first, but still. We are true survivors.

I'm Rian, and I'm approximately seven-teen years old. Welcome to the After Society. It's not much, but it's all we got. I should tell you a bit about myself. My name stands for something. Something that makes me special, it's something I have.

Rapidly
Impulsive
Adapting
Nervous-system

That's my name, or what I am named for. But the others like to think it means:

Ruthlessly
Intelligent
Annoying
Nuisance

It doesn't. But that's how they describe me. I'm a bit tough and can have a bad temper. I'm very smart and can figure out any problems we have in some way. I'm annoying because I can go

on and on when yelling at some one who did something wrong, and that's why they say I'm a nuisance. I'm not like the normal teenagers that used to exist about ten years ago. If one of them were put in this situation, they couldn't last a week.

I was kept in those labs for seven years and I was trained for these situations. They on the other hand, were not. In this world, every city is a ghost town. Houses are falling apart and becoming dirty. Windows are broken and animals decide to live in them instead. Humans, normal humans without genetic enhancements, are gone. Most of them anyway. As far as we know.

Technology is scarce. I took a few flashlights and cameras from some deserted houses, and batteries too. Some music players, and radios that only play static. That's all.

I never lived a normal life, so I don't feel that sense of loss. But sometimes I miss back when meals were brought to you and you didn't have to hunt and gather like we do now. The days when the next meal was always guaranteed. The times when you didn't always have to worry about being killed by some kind of creature unless you were being tested. You couldn't believe how much I really do miss those times.

It is night now. The moon is glowing as it rises. It's shaped like a smile. One that hides evil. A malicious smile. One that masks the deceit that lies behind.

This is our time now. We can move around freely. We all can see pretty well in the dark. Although, the moon and stars help a lot. Tess can see the best, of course. She has much better eye sight than the rest of us. Tess is fifteen years old. She has raven black hair, light skin and deep golden eyes, like a hawk. Her eyes have more in common with a hawk's than just their color. Her name, Tess means:

Triple

Eyesight
Sensory
System

She can see in ultra violet and infra red besides super acute eyesight in the visible light, and has a transparent third eyelid to protect her eyes. She pretty much can see a lot more than we can. That's why she's so useful to us on a regular basis. She can detect even the slightest movements and see traces of what creatures leave behind. She can see body temperature, she sees so much.

She says it looks amazing when she switches over to her ultraviolet sight. The world is a little more stunning. Every drop of pee, saliva or skin oil has a touch of neon color to it. Beautiful.

I have known Tess her whole life of course. We're like sisters, only not genetically. We are just look too different to be sisters. My hair is such a light blond, it's almost white. My skin is just as pale as Tess's, though, maybe even a bit paler. My eyes are like liquid silver, contrary to her gold ones.

My ability? I can react and adapt fast to anything. If you shot at me with a hand gun, I'd probably be out of the way and behind you holding the gun before that bullet could move two meters.

I'm that fast. Seriously. But that doesn't mean I could run on water and around the world. Especially not in a minute.

I'm fast in reactions, but not so fast that I could run that far that fast, but instead, only fast enough to react to any little thing some

one throws my way. But there was this one time I wasn't fast enough.

About a year ago something really bad happened. That day must have been the worst day in my life. Worse than any day back in the lab had been. Even worse than any day out here in the wilderness or the desert.

I feel responsible for what happened and I regret what I did, or didn't do. I'm the reason why Lani is gone and probably dead. She disappeared and never came back. It really is all my fault. I should have never said what I said to her.

She was like my other younger, but more annoying sister. She fooled around a lot. Tess says it's not my fault. I shouldn't blame myself, it was her choice.

Dare and Shaz, the two guys of our group, went out to look for Lani, while me and Tess stayed back at camp.

I didn't cry. At least not on the outside. I hung my head in shame while Tess had eyes filled with tears. I'm not the type of girl who cries anyway. I'm tough. I'm a survivor. I can handle this, I think. Crying isn't the way to handle something like this. I had to keep my feeling under control. We just sat there, on two dry logs near the fire and didn't talk.

When the boys came back in the late afternoon, they didn't have the dead body of Lani in their arms, but instead, two dead rabbits and a squirrel. Yes, we eat rodents. They're easy to catch and cook way faster than a wild deer. We pretty much eat anything we can to survive. We learned about poisonous plants

and animals from some books we picked up at abandoned libraries and houses we raided. Very useful. We also stole canned foods, and a manual can opener, some Twinkies (After ten years, they still don't go bad) and what ever else isn't rotten or moldy. Many of the houses we've been into smell even worse than Shaz when he doesn't bathe in the river for a month.

Rather than telling you about our grotesque at the beginning of the story, I think I should describe the members of our group who are not me and Tess. Dare is my age, seventeen. He's Taller than me by six inches though. I'm pretty tall, so he has to be like six-foot-something. He has chocolate brown hair (I could use some chocolate right now. Too bad we already cleaned out all the near by abandoned stores) and eyes that are a deep blue. His skin is fair, but still darker than mine. His abilities are super strength related.

Back at the labs we read our files. He is supposed to be able to lift a two-ton car at least. Really tight muscles, but he's not un-flexible. I'm more flexible that him. We both have good balance though. He also has armored skin. If you shot a bullet at him, the bullet would flatten as it hit his chest. I remember why he is so strong because his name meant:

Dual
Adrenal
Reaction
Enhancement

The chemical epinephrine, also known as adrenaline, increases strength and reactions. Both me and him have bodies that can handle large amounts of the chemical, which creates a stress reaction and the body starts working faster. There's this whole thing about three stages, but I won't get into that. It's way too much information for now. But Dare is the kind of guy who takes risks, and luckily he has those abilities to back him up when he wants to act tough and be out going.

Shaz acts like he's Dare's best bud at times, but they also get into boy arguments and brawls with each other. Shaz is fourteen and he has dark eyes and dark hair, and medium skin. He's as tall as me, and I'm taller than Tess. He's a dark kind of guy. In terms of people from the past, emo, I guess, but geeky, also. He's really smart, and can figure out any kind of technology we happen upon. There's still solar powered energy and batteries out there. All power plants were shut down years ago. Some still were running two years after people disappeared. The former Los Angeles was the only light you could see on a dark night, for miles. According to the maps we have, Shaz figures we're in the state of California right now, not Nevada.

Shaz can hear so well, it's creepy. I swear, he doesn't even need his eyes. We have to give him ear plugs when he sleeps because even little sounds could wake him up. He can feel vibrations in the ground and air too. If there was an earthquake, he'd be the first to know. He can walk into the basement of a dark house and

know what's in the room before anyone. If I had his ability I would go crazy. I don't know how he handles any sharp noise with the hearing. If we're too loud sometimes he winces. His name is a acronym for:

Superior
Hearing
Accuracy
Zoning

Yeah, his hearing is so super accurate, that he can figure out the zone of any object or where the sound is coming from. It fits him, I guess.

Lani, who probably got lost and starved or got eaten by a hungry pack of predators, had dark blond hair that seemed reddish in the sunlight. They called it auburn, and she cut it pretty short. She was the shortest of us, her eyes were green or hazel, and she had freckles on her face. She was fourteen when she disappeared. If she's still alive, she's fifteen. But I doubt that.

She was how I already said, annoying, silly or crazy. She had anger issues. But somehow ended up as the center of attention. She had this ability that seemed so unrealistic. It sometimes scared me. The scientists back at the labs called it “telekinesis,” which is moving things with your mind. But her telekinesis could also cause her to control fire, or even create it. Sort of like

spontaneous combustion. She could blow stuff up. They didn't expect that really. They made her as an experiment for the military, like the rest of us. Except she was able to picture something happening, like a brick levitating, or water moving in a cup, or possibly an explosion, and then will it into reality with her mind. They did something to her mind. We were sure of it. Her file had her name down as:

Limited
Active
Neural
Imaging

But the truth is, she wasn't limited. They thought she was, but after we left the labs, she discovered more abilities. Power over fire was just the start. She could also control water just as much. Freezing it, boiling it, moving it. She could toss a half-human predator with a flick of her wrist. She could make them stop doing what ever they were doing. Controlling them.

Then, one day, we got into this argument about survival, and how her abilities were getting out of hand. She was starting to act strange too. She was eating more than us, and stranger food than us. Her eyes were reddening around the rims. Her skin was flaking. She was starting to become one of them, Shaz had said. I agreed. I think she heard us. After that argument, she left. Maybe it wasn't all my fault. But if we just had the cure to the predator

disease.

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When I saw her file back when I was only six or seven, I could barely remember one other file with a name I never saw.

Amia:

Active

Mental

Interception

Abilities

Four-letter acronyms are what make our names, but this name strangely reminded me of Lani's. We were all very young, but we were well developed with what we were made for, except Lani, which had a long way to go.

Just four days after Lani disappeared, after a day of traveling, and hoping to find her still, we came upon a body. We all thought it was Lani's body. Even me, at first. There was a younger girl in the middle of what looked like an explosion or something, because a few burnt cacti fell down, and she was unconscious.

Dare pick up a charred stick and poked her body, and said, “Lani? Is that you? It's me, Dare, and the rest of us. Lani? Wake up!”

The girl's hair was too long to be Lani's, unless she suddenly developed an ability to grow hair fast, but the girl was still too young. She was maybe, twelve. Not as tall as Lani. But, just lying there, she reminded me of Lani when she was twelve. The girl opened her eyes slowly. I noticed what she was wearing, her ripped jeans were filthy and her t-shirt was too small. She had a pair of muddy sneaker. Mud and some bruises also covered her face. As she started to sit up, she asked, “Where am I?” At least she could talk.

“You're in the Nevada desert,” Shaz said happily.

“A desert? Hmm....who are you guys?” Her face was full of confusion.

“I'm Rian, he's Dare, and that was Shaz. Tess is the girl next to me. Lani is...,” I was about to say, the other girl, but then I stopped. Lani is gone, I told myself.

“Lani? Who's Lani, again?” She asked me.

“Lani is dead. I'm sorry sweetie. We were looking for a girl named Lani, but you're obviously not her,” I explained.

“Oh, no, of course not. I'm Amia. And I....I'm twelve?” she said in an unsure way. Amia. That sounds familiar, I thought.

“Sorry....I just....can't remember anything. I remember only my name and age and that I'm a girl. The rest is blank” I heard of this before, it's called amnesia. Memory loss.

“That's sad. I'm sorry to hear that. Do you feel hungry? Or thirsty?” I asked her in sympathy. She reminded me so much of Lani. I could help myself with wanting to help her.

“Now that you mention it, yeah. My mouth feels as dry as this desert,” she said.

“Then let's go cut open some cactus. And find some aloe. You got this nasty sunburn on your neck.” Nurse Tess, to the rescue. She an expert with injuries and such. I think some day she'll develop x-ray vision, like Superman (The 2030 version of Superman, anyway. That was like ten year ago, of course.) in the old comic books.

And so, Amia became part of our group. We learned more about her, and she started acting and looking so much more like Lani everyday, a more shy Lani. The major difference, Amia claimed she could read minds. She never clarified what that meant, but she said that she could hear thoughts. Does she know what Tess thinks of her? What we all do? Sooner than later, I started to like her, and Tess started to dislike her. And maybe that was because Tess missed Lani so much, and felt that no one could fill that place. Now back to the present.

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These days, you just can't get out in daylight anymore. Where we are now is a place loaded with predators. They come out in the daylight because they have crappy eyesight. It's like they only

see in red.

They're vicious, hairy, smell bad. I hope I'm not describing Shaz here, he's somewhat nice. But these guys are not. No They're more blood-thirsty than a starved vampire at midnight. (I read Dracula a few years ago. What an outdated book!) We were told it was like a disease. One day there was this meteorite that came down and hit the earth, and BAM! That was three years of crazy climate change. And we were in those underground labs still for about a year.

I know I'll talking about the past still, but I have to mention something about that meteorite. It had a type of bacteria or virus on it. One that infects certain animal. Mostly humans or pig or dogs or cats. But it spread like wildfire. Through blood and contact. And if you took a breath of meteor dust, you could be infected too. I killed most people, and made some go crazy. The scientist at the military labs I'm from took a sample of that bacteria/virus/whatever and inserted human genes into it (Maybe it was a bacteria then.) and then they went and did the opposites and inserted the bacteria genes into humans. They grew a few embryos, and those test tube babies matured fast and wha-la! You have your really strong and blood thirsty predators.

And then, guess what? You know how they keep them in glass cages? Well, those didn't hold up very long. (I suggest diamond or titanium steel next time.) They broke out of the lab faster than you could say "GEE! OMG!!!! THEY'RE GETTING AWAY!" The twenty "successful" science experiments went on a rampage

across California, Nevada, Arizona and who-knows-else-where, killing more people and changing them into predators too.

Want to know a strange thing about these predators? Well, they're really into cannibalism. They eat the dead, rather than bury them. And let me tell you, many, many, died. Sooner or later we escaped because the labs couldn't hold up much longer, and the scientist were starting to become truly crazy. We broke out of there in one-two-three, with the help of a telekinetic four year old. Leaving the labs meant freedom for us, right? Wrong. We had no protection but our abilities. At a young age we were easy, easy prey. Now, older, we're a greater challenge.

Now, back to the present! “So, can we get some grub then?” Amia asked hungrily.

“Shhh,” went Tess. ”Do you want to wake them up?”

“Of course not, I'm just really, super hungry.” Amia's stomach grumbled.

“Well then, shut up,” Tess told her.

“Will you both just be silent, please?” I asked them.

“Yeah sure, Amia just won't, hey! You stepped on my foot!” Tess yelped.

“Whisper,” Dare demanded. Tess covered her mouth. Amia the same.

“Sorry, Tess,” Shaz said. We tip toed over the sleeping predator's body. It looked injured. The big gash in the back of the knee stood out.

“It looks hurt,” I said quietly.

“Good. Let it be hurt.” Dare says the only reason why you don't want to kill an injured predator is because it's full of diseases and stuff you don't want, so don't touch the infected blood. If you want to kill them, do it cleanly.

“Oh, holy....,” started Shaz. Was that deer feces? Shaz stepped by it's face. He stopped. I heard it too. A sniffing sound. The predator, shot it's eyes open. It moaned, making a sound like a wolf's howl.

“Crap!” I said. There was a whole pack, maybe about twenty, meat eating psycho predator all growling at us. We were completely surrounded.