Corruption: The Beginning of the End

By : Atton Brown

If you've read the other two books in the Corruption Series you should know what to expect. All i can say is this is Vigor's final stand against Atton and both of them will not survive this time

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Corruption: The Beginning of the End : Chapter 1

Das
Ende
Ist
Erst
der Anfang.
The end
Is only
The beginning
-The Butterfly Effect
I walk this empty street on the Boulevard of Broken Dreams, when the city sleeps and I'm the only one and I walk alone. -Billie Joe Armstrong
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A single emaciated foot collided with the ground in the outskirts of Airosfield as fog settled gently on the plains. He stalked his target, ever so carefully, occasionally leaning on the staff in his right hand.
The chilled night air whipped against his bones and nearly blew his cloak away. His breath was visible in a small, thin cloud in front of him. He looked to the left, then to the right, and then he set his sights on a sole house set upon a winding hill. Inside was an elderly man on the eve of his 100th birthday.
Shakily the elderly man grasped his cane, rose out of his chair, and inched towards his bed. Just then, he was struck with a violent cough; grasping his chest, he dropped his cane and fell to the floor. The man's door crept open and a black mist slithered in. The mist settled in front of the old man and took on a deathly shape. The man turned around, coughing and wheezing, he regained his balance and when he turned around, he faced his demise, the Grim Reaper.
"The - The," he hoarsely wheezed.
"Ceasel Kingman, I have come for thee," the voiced hissed. Ceasel's cough intensified, but with the stroke of his scythe, there was silence. The old man's head lay gruesomely on the ground, mouth agape. The Reaper tipped the point of his scythe into the neck hole. It radiated a fierce green ember as he carefully extracted the old man's soul. Atton Brown had yet another reaping.
"110,000 deaths," he muttered to himself. "Hmm, I've had a slow year."
Atton stole into the shadows and found his way to Mid-Airosfield where the love of his life, Nirvana, lived. It was a cozy looking one-story house; hand built by Chris himself on 817 Depriest Downs. He looked into the house and saw her, he also saw her husband Chris Jacobson.
"Don't worry your time will come, Chris," he promised himself.
He promised himself that same thing every day because Chris was sleeping with the woman Atton loved. Nirvana stood up and walked silent as the night to her closet. She pulled out Atton's old jacket, and, oddly enough, she danced with it.
Nirvana did a quiet waltz around her room and for a moment, Atton was there with her. He pictured himself human, dancing with Nirvana. They were together in a ballroom, just the two of them. When the dance stopped, she buried her face in the jacket and sobbed.
He passed the children's rooms. A boy, AJ and Atton also noticed the twin girls in the other beds, Willow and Winter.
After his visit, he returned to the hill where he'd reaped the old man. Instead of revisiting the house, he pressed his hands to the hill and phased through to his lair. It could not compare to the size of the lair in Limbo but Atton rather liked it, it wasâ ¦comfy.
There Atton beheld his throne, two extra rooms, and all of his gremlins, imps, and demons, including Marty.
"Hey Marty," Atton said walking to his throne.
"Ay boss," he said having to run to keep up with Atton's steps. "So uhâ ¦110 thou, ya having kind of a slow year," he noted.
"Yeah, well people just don't die like they used to Marty. Have you found her yet?" Atton asked.

"Uhâ ¦ well ya see-," Marty stuttered.
The "her" he had referred to was Vigor's ferocious pet banshee, Berzerk. She was actually a half- breed, a cross between werewolf and a banshee. She was the most ferocious and vicious half-breed ever, seven and a half feet tall, white fur, and claws as sharp as The Grim Reaper's scythe. Berzerk was born with a lust to kill. She had narrowly escaped the grasp of Atton before and now they were both hunting each other. If she ever found Atton, she would take his scythe, revive Vigor, and then kill Atton; but if he found her, he would kill her before she had the chance.
Berserk was of one of the few of Vigor's followers that operated outside of Airosfield. She was drawn back when Vigor died, because when he died, she felt it and she wanted revenge on his killer.
"It's a yes or no question, Marty," Atton looked down.
"No," Marty confessed. Atton let out an exasperated sigh, "but we still don't know da extent uh her power," Marty spat out, "If Berzerk can inhabit bodies, she could be anywhere's." Changing the subject, "Ya know, tomorrow is da first day of school."
"Yeah Winter and Willow are moving on to high school and AJ's starting 10th grade. Man, I remember my first day. My freshman year sucked so I tried to start a new trend; going to school barefoot."
"You watch dat family real close doncha?"
"Just the boy," Atton snapped, "there's something special about him."
"But sir," Marty interrupted, "you know what's gonna happen, doncha?" Atton wasn't paying attention. He was reminiscing about the times when he could go to school, when he was normal. "Boss, ya lissnen?"
"What? Oh yes, yes Marty, that crazy kid Leroy right?"
"Yeah, but how's ya gonna get da body 'round all dem people?" Marty asked.
"I'll find a way, Marty," he mounted his throne, "I always do."

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Nirvana's house was going crazy with everyone was preparing for the first day of school. AJ was starting his sophomore year and now had to watch out for his two little sisters, Winter and Willow, who were starting their first year in high school. He'd had a rough freshman year and wanting to start something new. He came flying downstairs and tried to make it out the door beforeâ ¦
"And where do you think you're going?" Nirvana stopped him.
"To school," AJ said, casually.
"You're forgetting your sisters and," she glanced at his feet, "and your shoes."
"Come on ma let me try it, just for a day," AJ pleaded.
"Upstairs. Shoes," she told him.
"But-," he started.
"Aaron Christopher Jacobson; now," she ordered.
"Pull out the government name," he groaned, "jeez."
AJ reluctantly trotted back up the stairs and swore under his breath.
At the breakfast table, Winter and Willow just finished a quick bowl of cereal. Then Winter reminded her mom, "Don't forget, hair salon after school today."
"Yes I know, but do you really want blonde streaks?" Nirvana asked. Willow and Winter's hair was a brunette color like their fathers.
"Yeah, I'm tired of looking like Willow."
"But you're twins, you're supposed to look alike," Nirvana said trying to hide her frustration.
"Hey mom, where's dad?" Willow wondered.
"He uhâ ¦ had to go away early on a business trip," she lied. Chris was a mercenary and had left at about 3 a.m. on a special contract.
"What does he do anyway?" Willow continued to question.
"He umâ ¦" Saving her from another uneasy lie, AJ came back downstairs with shoes and socks on.
"Are ya happy now?" he said wearing his shoes.
"Yes," she said kissing his forehead and she did so with the girls as well.
His sisters started out to the bus stop. As AJ left, his mother grabbed his arm. "Watch out for your sister's," she whispered.

"Willow could probably take half the people in that high school," AJ said honestly. "I don't know where she learned to fight like that."
From me, Nirvana thought. Willow had inherited Nirvana's intense fighting skills, but Winter was the exact opposite of Nirvana. She was somewhat ditzy. Winter was the type of the girl that cried when she broke a nail.
"True," Nirvana realized, "watch out for Winter."
"Sure," AJ grumbled to himself.
As he and his sisters walked to the bus stop AJ noticed the bullies that tormented him almost all his life, Buzz and Spike.
"Well look who it is, and just who are these twin turds," Spike asked pushing AJ.
Not making eye contact he told them, "This is Willow and Winter. They're my sisters."
"Three sisters in one house," Buzz joked. AJ didn't respond.
"Was that supposed to be funny?" Willow dryly questioned.
"Yes, little girl, so laugh," Spike said pushing her.
"Ha," she chuckled, "you called me little girl. You should take that back, now."
"Aw you gonna get big brother to beat me up," he continued to taunt. "I'd love to see him try."
"No," she said slowly. Spike went to push her again but she grabbed his hand and twisted his wrist.
"Aieeeee," he tried to hold it in, but ended up screaming in pain.
"Demonic littleâ ¦" Buzz began, but stopped.
"Please," Willow prompted, "finish."
AJ stood idle, enjoying their slight torment but Winter decided to intervene.
"Willow," she pleaded, "stop it. Girls don't do that."
Willow rolled her eyes and released the bully's wrist, just as the bus came. Spike started to board the bus, but decided to let Willow go first.
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AJ wasn't a complete loser, he wasn't anti-social or without friends. In his mind, he had enough friends; he had one best friend, Malik. He plopped down next to Malik on the bus.
"Malik," he said, "what's up, man?"
"Not much," he responded. "My folks made me work this summer."
"For real?"
"Yeah," he continued. "They sent me down to the ranch where my grandparents live."
"Manual labor," AJ shook his head. Last summer, AJ had wasted away into a vat of laziness.
"Yeah, believe it or not AJ; not everyone detests hard work as much as you."
"Whatever," he rolled his eyes. As he did, he started taking off his shoes and socks. "So I've been thinking," he started.
"Hmm, that's a first, what about?" Malik asked.
"This year we need girlfriends," AJ told his friend.
"I've got one," his friend told him.
"What?" AJ was taken back, "When?"
"This summer, one of the ranch-hands that worked for my grandparents, she's sexy as hell dude."
"Is she your cousin?" AJ joked.
"No," Malik forced a smile, "I ain't that desperate, her name's Carrie. Looks like you're out to dry but don't worry I'll help you out."
"Cool," AJ said, "thanks man."
"For starters," Malik began, "put some shoes on."
66
Half of the school day passed until AJ met up with Malik again.
"You ready?" he asked AJ.
"For what?" AJ wondered.
"Your crash course," Malik told him. "Now to get a girl you'll need -"
"Wait, wait hold up, stop," AJ interrupted. "I've had girlfriends before, I can get girls. It's just in this school you never know who's with who, or who's available."

"Oh," he realized, "you need the breakdown."
"Breakdown?"
"Yep, listen up. There're roughly one thousand girls in this school. Five hundred are taken in a never-ending on again/off again relationship with complete douches. Two hundred are saving themselves."
"For marriage?" AJ asked.
"For prom night," Malik told him. "Don't interrupt. Now if you eliminate all of the whores, sluts, hookers, lesbians, transvestites and girls that are just plain uglyâ ¦ you are left with about twenty girls. Seventeen of those girls are desperately, and I mean desperately, out of your league. The remaining three are always free: Alison Kwan, Elora Smith, and Sierra Reagan. Take your pick."
"Isn't Alison's dad a -," he paused. "Hey, what's going on over there?"
67
Across from him was another row of lockers and a sophomore named Leroy, who was an even older victim of Buzz and Spike than AJ and he was sick of it.
"Hey Leroy," Spike said slamming him against his locker.
"Did you like your midday swirly?" Buzz asked. "You'll get one every time you come in our bathroom."
"Look," Leroy said shaking, "can I just go to my locker in peace?"
"Sure," Buzz slapped him and stepped away. Just as quickly as he did, Leroy pulled a gun from his locker. It was his dad's .9-millimeter.
"Back up!" He said holding the gun to Buzz and Spike. AJ eyes widened.
"Someone should do something," Malik realized.
"Why don't you?" AJ snapped.
"I ain't gettin' shot for them."
"N -now Leroy, don't do anything crazy," Spike said cautiously.
"Ha! You don't want to slap me now, do you? Do you! All my life," he began with his whole body shaking, "I've had to put up with you two. You tortured and humiliated me. You made me wish I was dead." Leroy cocked the gun.
"Leroy what are you doing?" The principal appeared in the hallway. Leroy quickly turned and his finger slipped. The students watched in horror as the hot lead poured through his forehead and came out, only to ricochet off a nearby locker.
AJ took out his cell phone and called the police. When they got there, Leroy confessed to it all.
"I didn't mean to kill him," he said shaking intensely and crying. "I didn't mean to kill him."
After this, the halls cleared so the police could get statements from the witnesses and the body just lay in the halls. Slowly out of a corner, the Reaper emerged. Atton knew he couldn't slice the head because that would cause new complications to arise, so he extracted the soul from the bullet hole in his head. After finishing his statement, AJ reentered the building to get the rest of his things to go home. There, he stood face to face with the Reaper. AJ stood as still as a statue in a hall as silent as a grave. He couldn't believe it; but the moment he blinked Atton disappeared into the shadows.
"Whoa," AJ said in disbelief.
68
That day school was released early for obvious reasons. AJ called his mom to pick them up; she did, and took Winter to the hair salon.
Nirvana walked her daughter in and told the hairdresser what to do. While they waited, Nirvana wanted to know what had happened.
"Somebody got shot," AJ said putting it plain and simple.
"That's it, no motive or anything?" Nirvana asked. "There's got to be more to the story than that."
Willow chimed in with the rest of the story, "This kid, Leroy, got real pissed at Buzz and Spike. So he got a gun but he missed and hit the principal."
"Wow," Nirvana said, surprised at what kids did these days. Nirvana would have taken him on, no weapons. His sister left to use the bathroom and Nirvana noticed AJ seemed more distant than usual. "AJ what's wrong?"

At first, he didn't answer; he was filing through his thoughts making sure what he saw was real. "Today in school," AJ began. "I sawâ ¦ what's the use, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."
"Try me," Nirvana prompted. "I've seen plenty of wild and crazy things in my time."
"I saw a manâ ¦ but he had no skin," AJ began slowly. He wore a black cloak and held aâ ¦ a blade. I think it's called a scythe. However crazy it sounds I think I saw the Grim Reaper," AJ blurted out. "There I said it."
Nirvana gasped, "Atton," she half-whispered to herself. She thought about it and it made sense, every time someone died, he had to be there. Was he there every time Chris killed someone?
Nirvana's thoughts wandered back to the months she spent with Atton. He said it would last fifty years. He said Vigor wouldn't die, but she'd seen him slice off his head. Was he still alive? Were these events leading up to something greater than she could imagine? Would AJ be safe?
"What, ma? I was just seeing stuff right," AJ asked but she didn't reply. After waiting awhile, Winter's hair was done, but Nirvana wasn't expecting what she saw next.
"What did you do to her hair?" Her hair was all white. "I said blonde streaks, you flippin' moron!"
"Oops. That's $50 please," the hairdresser said twisting her gum around her finger.
"Yeah right, I'm not paying for this you retarded bimbo!" Nirvana said taking her family and leaving. In the car, Nirvana kept looking in the rearview mirror at Winter's hair.
"It's not that bad," Winter said stroking it. "At least people can tell me and Willow apart now." AJ sat there laughing to himself.
When they got home Chris was there waiting. "Hey guys. You're home early, I made you guys lunch." As the kids settled in for lunch, Nirvana walked up to Chris. "Who'd you kill today?" she said kissing him.
"Nobody important," he responded with a smile.

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When Chris and Nirvana went to bed, she was in a strange mood. All she could think about was Atton. Chris kissed her on the cheek.
"I love you," he whispered in her ear. He awaited her response. "Nirvana?" Chris asked.
Nirvana did not respond because she was lost in thought and unfocused on Chris. Chris sat up in bed. He decided that it was his job to console her, whatever the problem was.
"Nirvana," he asked again, "what's wrong?"
"Nothing," she lied.
"Nirvana," Chris started, "I know you better than that."
"Ok, Chris, when I married you," she began. Chris rolled his eyes because he knew what she was going to say. They had had this conversation many times before. They had never finished it though, tonight they would. "I hoped you'd fill a void."
"And I did, right?" Chris asked hopefully.
"No, and I kind of knew you wouldn't, but I still needed something to replace him," Nirvana continued.
"Oh, here we go, Atton, right; your imaginary boyfriend. After all those years of therapy you should know he was never real," Chris explained.
"He was real," she angrily snapped. Actually, she was unsure of her own words. Many years in therapy had changed her views on Atton. She was almost convinced he was not real.
"I know he was," Nirvana whispered. "It's not even about him really. I thought you'd at least be here for me, for us. I have to lie to the kids every day!" "Nirvana, you know I can't tell them the truth," Chris reminded her.
"I just wanted you to be there for me," she said sadly. She'd always had someone there for her. First, she had her father, then CJ, then she met Zak, then there was Atton, and now no one. She still talked to CJ but it wasn't the same.
"Nirvana, I love you," he repeated. "I -"
"You say that," Nirvana snapped. "You say you love me, you want me, you need me; but you don't mean it."
"I do," Chris pleaded.
"No you don't. They're justâ ¦words, empty words and I'm sick of hearing them. Cus, guess what, I don't want you or need you," Nirvana said harshly.
"Nirvana," he said, shocked, "I'm sorry I -"
"It's too late," she spat out, "to apologize. It is over. I don't love you," she whispered.

"Well," Chris inhaled deeply and gritted his teeth, "I've got aâ ¦uh - special contract in the morning, looks like I can leave early." He got out of the bed and decided he would get dressed on the way there. "When I come back we can-"
"Don't come back," Nirvana interrupted.
"Nirv&ndas

Chapter 2

70
Back in the Hill Atton awaited a report from Marty.
"Have you found her? Tell me you've found her," Atton urged eagerly.
"We found her boss, we found her." Marty gave him the coordinates and it led him to a familiar place, 817 Depriest Downs.
"No, you've got to be lying," Atton said reeling in disbelief.
"No lie boss. Berzerk can inhabit bodies an' she's n one uh dem," Marty continued.
"Well which one is she?" Atton nearly shouted.
"We don't know," Marty said timidly.
Atton swore under his breath. "We just know Berzerk is in da house," he said trying to cover up his mistake.
Atton let out an exasperated sigh. "I saw AJ today; face to face and he saw me. And that Chris has me running all over the world."
"Yeah I heard about dat. He had ya in Guam, huh." He changed the subject. "So how ya gonna catch Berzerk."
"I'll watch them closely and see who acts out of character," Atton said confidently.
"You really tink it's dat easy?" Marty chuckled. "Berzerk's a sly one."
"No, but it never hurts to have a plan," Atton said satisfied.
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The next morning Nirvana had an appointment with Minerva, her therapist. Nirvana had been seeing Minerva for years with her frequent visits. Minerva was the one who convinced Nirvana that Atton was not real.
"Why have you come to see me?" Minerva asked.
"Everything is falling apart," Nirvana admitted. "Chris is gone and I keep thinking about-"
"Oh, so this is what it's about. You are feeling regret in kicking Chris out," she deduced.
"No I'm - well yeah butâ ¦ that's not what this is about. It's about a dream I keep having, actually a nightmare, and a lingering daydream. He's all I can think about," she confessed.
"And what happens in this dream of yours?"
"I'm being choked," she began, "but I can't see who's doing it; all I can see is him."
"Who is 'He' Nirvana?"
"Atton," she said as if it was obvious.
"No such person," Minerva snapped. "We've been through this, Atton is not real. He is simply a figment of your imagination. He is a scapegoat your mind devised to satisfy unfulfilled needs. You need to find a boyfriend -a real person that can do that."
"I'll never love anyone else," Nirvana said sadly.
"What's love got to do with it?" she snapped. "I just said you need someone to be there for you. You don't need love."
"I do need it. I've only loved one person in my entire life; and do you know where he is?" Nirvana asked.
"No," Minerva replied.
"Me neither," Nirvana said coldly.
"Atton is not real," she continued.
"No," Nirvana shook her head in dismay, "he was real; I know it."
"Must we go through this ever session? There is no such person as Atton Brown," Minerva told her.
"There is no such person as Atton Brown," Nirvana repeated.
"Again," Minerva ordered.
"There is no such person as Atton Brown." Nirvana still was not convinced. "Prove it," she whispered.
"Prove he is," she retorted.
Nirvana did not reply. She could not prove it, but part of her knew he was real. Still, another part wondered if she had simply imagined it all. Nirvana was torn in confusion.
"Never speak his name again," Minerva commanded.
With those words said, a fire ignited in Nirvana. She took orders from no one.

"Or what?" Nirvana questioned.
"I'll -I'll," she stuttered.
"Let's get one thing straight, Atton may or may not have been real, but either way; I take orders from no one!" Nirvana yelled.
Nirvana wanted much to fight the woman at this moment. These feelings were becoming more frequent, the lust for a good fight, even a small one would suffice. Nirvana had learned to restrain herself; she was saving up for a battle to come.
"Our hour is up," Nirvana sneered "and don't expect to be paid. By the way, this will be our last visit."
"You can't just run away Nirvana," Minerva called after her. "Sometimes, you just have to face the truth."
Ahem.... excuse me! Can I have the attention of the class for one second? -Marshall Mathers
72
It'd been a month since the incident with Leroy. Ever since then Buzz and Spike had moved because they feared AJ would do something as rash as Leroy. Today in AJ's homeroom there was a new student, Wesley.
"Class, this is our new student Wesley Adams. He used to live here in Airosfield but due to his parent's careers, he moves a lot. And lucky us he ended up back in Airosfield," she said with a fake smile.
In front of the class, they saw a goopy looking child. He wasn't exactly tall for his age, five foot six. Wesley's hair was slopped to the back and his nose continuously ran. Wesley wore a dusky gray jacket, a worn out white t-shirt, and baggy, ripped blue jeans that most likely belonged to his father.
"Wesley your seat is beside Mr. Jacobson here," Mrs. Taylor said pointing at AJ.
AJ made a disgusted smirk as Wesley sat next to him. He forced a smile when Wesley looked at him. "Hey," he said wiping his nose.
"AJ," the teacher began, "he has all your classes so I expect you'll show him around," she said sternly.
"Whatever," he mumbled.
"AJ," she repeated.
"Sure I'll show him around," he said reluctant and unenthusiastically. "Dag."
True to Mrs. Taylor's word Wesley followed AJ to all his classes. His last class was art. The teacher, Mr. Cohol, wasn't there today so they had a substitute. He didn't really care what they did so everyone walked around and talked to their friends. AJ looked around for Malik, but he remembered Malik always skips his last class. AJ was tired of sitting there alone so he went to talk to Wesley.
"Watcha drawing?" He showed him the drawing and AJ's eyes broadened.
"It's a scythe," Wesley told him.
"Heh," AJ said, "like that show."
"Show; what show? Wesley wondered.
"Uhâ ¦ The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy," AJ told him, "that show is hilarious."
"That show is a farce," Wesley snapped. "The Reaper could not be capture by children."
"You do know the Grim Reaper isn't realâ ¦ right?" AJ said, wondering if Wesley thought he was.
"Well my dad tells these stories about him. He says that every ten to twenty years he is replaced and when an heir is found I events fall into place so they can meet," Wesley said, extremely into his own story. "My dad tells a lot of stories, like he was there."
"Is it really that serious? It's just a myth or legend or whatever," AJ shrugged it off.
"My dad talks about him like he's real. You wanna meet him? I know you'd like him."
"Well," he began.
"We're havin' one of his old friends over. CJ McCoy, I think," he tried.
"CJ McCoy. That's my uncle," AJ realized. Why would Wesley know his uncle? And why wouldn't CJ tell them he was in town?
"Really; cool, so we'll meet at my house?"
"Okay," AJ gave in. "Just let me call my mom and tell her where I'll be."
When the bell rang to go home, AJ stayed in the hall and called his mom.
"Hey, Ma, I'm going over to a friend's house after school," AJ told Nirvana.
"What's his name?" His mom asked.
"Uhâ ¦ Wesley. He said he knew Uncle CJ," AJ made sure to mention.

"What's his father's name?" Nirvana said curiously.
"Uhâ ¦hold on. Hey Wesley come here?" AJ called to Wesley and he came over. "What's your dad's name?"
"Werly, Werly Adams," Wesley told him.
"Okay. Hey Ma, his name's Werly," AJ said oddly. The name sounded so weird to AJ but not to Nirvana.
Nirvana put her hand over her mouth. "So mom, can I go?" AJ said awaiting an answer.
"Yeah," she agreed, "but I'm coming with you. Tell your sisters to wait with you."
"Okay, bye." He spotted his sisters in the hallway. "Hey Winter, Willow hold up. We're goin' home with Wesley."
73
There was an extremely awkward silence when everyone was in the car.
"So," Nirvana finally spoke up, "Wesley is it? How are you liking being back in the Field?"
"So much has changed," he told her. "I mean it's been fifteen years since I've been here. It seems a little brighter than when I left but some of the people; they're so reserved, like they're hiding something."
"You talk funny, kid," Willow noted, "like you're old."
"Na," he shrugged, "it's just how my dad tells it to me. He tells me all these stories about what this place used to be like, how dark it was."
"You know anything about that Ma?" AJ wondered.
"How come you never tell us stories?" Winter asked.
"Maybe her stories are too scary," Willow suggested.
"Is that right Ma?" AJ laughed. "What, were you some kind of freaky warrior in a past life?"
You have no idea, Nirvana thought. I was the best. She wanted to tell them everything, but in her mind, it wasn't the right time.
"Ha," she faked a laugh, "you kids know your mom was nothing more than a teacher."
"A teacher?" Wesley contested, "Why did you stop?"
"It just wasn't for me," she shrugged.
She was actually a little mad at herself. A teacher; that was the best lie she could think of. Nirvana honestly barely remembered her teachers.
"Where do I turn from here?" Nirvana asked Wesley.
He directed them to a quaint little house in Upper-Airosfield. They rang the doorbell and May answered the door.
74
"I have no skin," Atton said stroking his skull.
"Iss been like dat fo a while boss," Marty noted.
"Skin protects your organs and your bones," Atton continued. Marty listened attentively and nodded. "It's connected to nerves that help you feel, butâ ¦I can't feel. I can't feel the wind against my head or the grass beneath my toes." Atton inhaled deeply.
"I can't even smell anymore, Marty. Not the scent of flowers or the soft smell of Nirvana's hair; I can't taste. I taste nothing, not wine or the sweetness of her kiss. God, I miss her kiss Marty."
"But ya can feel some stuff, can't ya boss?" Marty asked.
"Yeah, Marty," Atton said almost angry. "I can feel the blood spew onto my face when I kill them. I can smell their fear as I draw closer. I can hear their cries as I'm slicing off their heads," the fury in his voice intensified. "But I will never feel the sting of death, even though I deserve it most of all."
"Boss," Marty started.
"I'm a murderer, Marty!" he snapped. "I'm the one everyone fears and I'm the one everyone hates. I am Death but I don't get to die. Every day now, I wish I could. It's so hard to keep going every day. It's hard to think I might have to give this fate to someone else. I am a killer, a run of the mill assassin. Yet I was given a throne, as if I'm some sort of king! I am no king. I'm just some crazy kid with some crazy life," he was no longer angry, he had become sad and depressed. "I am no one."
"But ya gotta tuff it out," Marty encouraged him.
Atton looked off into the distance. He shook his head. "You don't know what it's like Marty. I know people say that all the time, but nobody knows what this is like."

Marty stared up at him. At first, his eyes were caring and understanding but then he said, "Is ya lil moment ova boss? We have work to do."
Atton shot him a quick glance. He didn't expect such an impassive response. "Yeah," Atton said, somewhat depressed. "Let's continue the hunt."
75
"Hey honey," she said to Wesley. "Who are they?" May eyed Nirvana and her family.
"Mom, this is AJ, Winter, Willow, and their mom, Nirvana," Wesley introduced.
"Oh. Honey Nirvana's here," May called to Werly.
"So," May started, "how do you know Werly?"
"Um - well, we," Nirvana stuttered.
"Old girlfriend?" May suspiciously asked.
"Oh, no," Nirvana spat out, "Nothing like that. We uh - fought together?" She said unsure of how that sounded.
"Oh, you were in the army. I don't remember Werly mentioning you," she realized.
"I-," Nirvana started.
Werly came to the door hardly believing his own ears.
"Nirvana? Nirvana." He approached the door and saw her. "Long time no see, huh?"
"Yeah, you didn't tell me you were back in the Field," Nirvana smiled, happy to see her old friend.
"I uh, just got here yesterday. Oh, oh come in," Werly greeted them.
"Nice place you've got," she said looking around. Wesley took AJ over to a desk with some of his father's things. "So I knew about Joy but you never told me you had a son."
"Oh, we adopted him about a year and a half ago," Werly explained.
"He said CJ was coming over," Nirvana told him.
"Yeah I called him over to go over a new invention. I haven't gotten any from you in a while," Werly said giving her a strange look.
"Oh I work on special weapons for Chris. I guess they don't need patenting," Nirvana told him.
"So what have you been up to?" Werly wondered.
"I've been thinking," Nirvana started, "about something Atton had said."
"Hmm, really, what?" Werly asked.
"He said that it wouldn't end with us," Nirvana remembered.
"Nirvana," Werly tried to stop her.
"No, what if Vigor's not dead," Nirvana beseeched him. "What if, somehow, he comes back?"
"Nirvana, we all saw Atton kill him," Werly told her. "It's over."
As they conversed, catching up with his each other, Wesley showed AJ pictures and writings his father had.
"Hey, AJ, look at this. It's just like I said." He read the text aloud:
The Reaper is a fascinating subject. It appears if his heir isn't found within twenty years he will die. The passing of the torch is simple; the next human who willingly grasps the scythe and is has the stamina to contain the power is the new Grim Reaper. Whoever grasps the scythe must hold it for a full sixty seconds, or there will be no effects. If an appropriate heir is not found in sufficient time, his closest servant will receive the honor of the Reaper. I have also observed strange ageing in the Reaper. He ages three times as slow as a normal human does.
He continued to read. "Wow this makes it sound so real," Wesley noted. They continued to search the old drawings and writings. They saw sketches of Nirvana in the fight against Vigor. Then they found a picture that shocked AJ, a sketch of Atton and Nirvana when they were teenagers.
"Dude is that your mom? She's hot," Wesley said with a small bit of drool.
AJ popped him in the head and said, "Keep those thoughts in your head. Hey mom, come here for a second."
"Yes what is it?" He showed her the sketch. "Oh my God, Atton."
"What? Who's he," AJ asked.
"Werly, whose things are these," Nirvana asked.
"They were some old sketches from Kip when we wereâ ¦" At that moment, CJ McCoy entered the house.
"Hey, everybody, CJ's here," CJ said walking in the house.

"Uncle CJ," the girls said running to hug their uncle.
"Hey girls," CJ said surprised to see them. He had only expected to see Werly and his family. "Where's my favorite nephew?"
"Wassup, Uncle CJ?"
Nirvana hugged her brother. "Hey bro, been keeping in touch, that's nice."
"Yeah, I was gonna surprise you all and drop in tonight," he started, trying to figure out why everyone was at Werly's house.
"Uncle CJ, you know who this guy is?" AJ pointed to Atton. "Mom says it's some dude named Atton."
AJ handed his uncle the drawing. "Hmm, it is Atton," he realized.
"Who is Atton?" AJ asked confused.
CJ turned to his sister. "You haven't told him?"
"Told me what?" AJ snapped.
"Well AJ you're-," CJ began.
"CJ don't," Nirvana stopped him.
"Why not?" CJ wondered.
"He isn't ready," she whispered.
"Ready for what?" AJ said but he was ignored.
"He's not ready or you're not?" CJ asked.
"CJ-," Nirvana started only to be cut off.
"You can't hide it forever sis," CJ said trying to make her realize that he was right.
"Does someone want to tell me what the heck's going on?" AJ said with extreme aggravation.
"AJ that man is your father," his uncle told him against his sister's approval.

Chapter 3

76
"What about Chris, mom; I thought he was my dad," AJ said even more confused than before.
"He isn't your father, he's Winter and Willow's," Nirvana admitted.
"That explains so much," Winter whispered to Willow. "He's so lame."
"This man is Atton Brown. These paper's and sketches are from his father, your granddad, Kip Brown," CJ told him.
"Is my dad dead?" AJ asked, not ready for the response.
"Notâ ¦technically," Nirvana said, "your grandfather is though. Your dad is uhâ ¦I don't know how to put this lightly he umâ ¦is the uh Grim Reaper," Nirvana continued to explain.
"Right," AJ said slowly. "Do you need another trip to Minerva?"
"I'm serious," his mother said bluntly.
"What? He's not real. He's- whatâ ¦no," AJ was sent back reeling.
"Dude your dad's the Reaper? Sweet!" Wesley said excitedly.
Werly shot him a glance warning him to hush.
"There is no such thing," AJ said firmly. "It's im...impossible."
"AJ just calm down," Werly quieted his nerves. "Your father was - is a great man. It's just; there was darkness inside of him." Werly showed him a sketch of Vigor.
"He looks just like my dad," AJ realized, "but sort of grayish and his eyes are red."
"That is a beast that lived inside your father. Because of him we lived years in fear and darkness," Werly went on.
"So let's say I buy this. Let's say I have nothing better to do than to listen to you. How did Atton become this -this Reaper character?" AJ finally asked.
There was a moment of silence. CJ now questioned if his nephew was truly ready. If AJ wanted his question answered, he would have to hear the whole story.
"AJ, are you sure you can handle this?" CJ asked.
"Yes," AJ said, unsure if he could.
"Your mom, Nirvana, was the leader of a group of rebels, the Valinior Force."
"Stop," AJ interrupted, "the what?"
"Valinior Force," he repeated. "In a time of crisis, they were the rebels, Airosfield's defense. She, Atton, Zak, Ralph, and Reggie ventured to Limbo to ask the Grim Reaper for help," CJ explained.
"Things like this don't happen in real life," AJ still dazed in confusion.
"This is Airosfield," Nirvana reminded him, "things like this happen all the time."
"If that happened, why didn't anyone else hear about it?" AJ wondered.
"There is a fact of life in the human race," CJ began. "If something is too painful to bear, we choose to forget it. AJ you have to know this was real, it did happen. It's happening now."
"OK," AJ breathed, "let's say I believe you. Who are those people you mentioned?"
"You might know Ralph and Reggie better from A little R&R," CJ began.
"Wait, wait, wait Ralph and Reggie, the doofs on TV are heroes? Eh, okay, but who's Zak?" AJ wondered.
There was a tear in Nirvana's eye. She hadn't heard that name since his death.
"Zak was Nirvana'sâ ¦best friend. He died in the final battle against Vigor," Werly told AJ.
"Vigor? I thought that was just an urban myth, a scary story," Wesley pointed out.
"No, he was plenty real, and to beat him we needed the power of the Reaper. When we met the Reaper, he tricked Atton into taking the scythe. Now your father is the Grim Reaper and you're his heir," Nirvana concluded.
"I saw him," AJ realized, "in school. This is too muchâ ¦because, if I accept what you've just told meâ ¦then I'm the next Grim Reaper," AJ exhaled deeply. He took a moment to think about what he had just been told. "I have to take the scythe," AJ said, "or he'll die. But how am I supposed to get the scythe if I don't know where he is?" AJ asked his mother.

Nirvana gave an explosive answer. "Are you nuts?" Nirvana asked. "I'm not gonna let you do this. You'll die."
"Sis, he has to," CJ told her. "If Vigor really is coming back, we'll need that scythe again."
"No," Nirvana said sternly.
"Ma I have to," AJ said, "Or millions of people will die," he said softly.
"You sound exactly like your father," Nirvana smiled. "No," she said again. "There's got to be another way." She paused. "Something is changing. Something is about to happen. Vigor is coming back and we have to do something about it."
Nirvana could not explain it, but she had a feeling. It could have been her overactive paranoia but she felt something. Nirvana knew if anything were.
77
Nirvana took her children home and CJ was staying at a hotel. AJ, however, was tired of waiting. All his life he'd lived a man calling himself his father, but he wasn't. That night AJ snuck out. He didn't know exactly where he was going but a feeling led him to the Hill. Before him stood the hill, he reached out and his hand was consumed by the shadows and pulled him in. He couldn't believe it, the Grim Reaper.
"Dad, it's you," AJ said elated.
"Son, you shouldn't be here," Atton warned.
Marty bit AJ on his leg. "You ain't uh posed uh be here. Who are you?"
"I'm the heir," AJ said proudly.
"No!" Atton boomed. "AJ I could never sentence you to the same fate as mine!"
"Dad, you could die in here," AJ pointed out.
"I don't care," Atton snapped.
"If I leave I will come back to get the scythe," AJ promised.
"No son, you can't."
"I have to. You need a chance to live your life, you deserve it after all these years," he told his dad.
"I don't deserve anything, not life, not even death. You deserve a real life. Leave son," Atton cajoled his son, "you have to."
"But dad-," AJ started.
"Boss," Marty intoned, "you just gonna let dis moral buss up in ur lair like dis. Kill im!"
"I am truly sorry, son. This will hurt me more than it will hurt you," Atton said sadly to his son.
He raised his scythe and AJ shut his eyes when he opened them he was panting on his bed in his room safe at home.
"Whoa."
78
At the same time, in the Hill, Atton is receiving news he been waiting forever to hear.
"Boss I've identified Berzerk," Marty said proudly.
"Finally," Atton said relieved. "Who is it?"
Marty gave him a cynical grin, "It's me."
"What?" Atton recoiled.
"All dis time you been searching for someone right unda ya boney chin." Berzerk broke out of Marty's skin revealing her true form.
"What'd you do to Marty?" Atton yelled.
"You fool," she hissed, "There never was a Marty. It was always me." She lunged at him but he drove his scythe into her stomach. She looked down at the scythe then up at Atton, and smiled. "You're gonna have to do better than that, Brown." Berzerk took one swipe towards Atton's face and knocked him to the ground. "I'll need this," Berzerk said, removing the scythe from her stomach.
Then she pushed his throne out of the way and below it was a hole that led to the Reaper's Pit of Souls. She jumped in and began looking for Vigor. It wasn't hard because Berzerk had been in there many times before as Marty and Vigor was at the very end. Regaining his balance, Atton jumped down the hole and caught up with Berzerk.
"No," but it was too late, she released Vigor. He stepped out of his casing, emerged and Berzerk handed him the scythe.

"Thank you, my love." He looked down and saw Atton. "Atton, is that you? Some Reaper you are," Vigor snidely commented.
"You'll never be the Grim Reaper," Atton said, his heart raced with fear of Vigor. Atton knew only humans could be the Reaper and Vigor was far from human.
"Oh and why is that? I have the scythe, I have the power," he boldly stated.
"But you aren't the Reaper." Atton looked at his hands and saw there was skin. He felt his hair, and it was growing back.
"Neither are you," Vigor noticed.
"So neither of us is he Reaper; do you know what this means?"
"Actually," Vigor said, "I do."
Atton's eyes widened but he held his composure, quickly changing surprise to focus. "Then let it begin."
He held out the scythe and they both placed their hands on it and stated, "Agon a mors mortis." An electric shock surged throughout their bodies and Atton and Vigor were transported to their starting points. Atton was sent to Nirvana's house and Vigor went to the top of the Hill.
79
Atton looked around Nirvana's house and waited for her to return. He looked around the house, for some evidence that she still loved him.
He walked up to her room and saw his old jacket. Atton remembered how she'd danced with it, an odd moment, yes, but a nice one. He took it out of her closet to see if it still fit and it did, like a glove. Atton continued to look around her room until he found her diary. Dare I read it? It's wrong, but right, butâ¦ugh. He picked up the diary and opened it then he started flipping through the pages.
April 9,
Today I went to my brother's funeral; I was the only one there, standing alone in the rain. I wish I could have at least had a chance to say good-bye. I hadn't seen him in so long, and I don't even know how he died. Actually, they told me it was a drug overdose, but I don't believe that, not my Charlie.
He thumbed past the next few pages.
April 17
I met a man today who talked to me about meeting him somewhere. He said that I was meant to be leader, according to some writings he'd read. But I'm only fourteen; how can I be a leader?
He skimmed the rest of the page to find nothing of real excitement. He flipped through the diary until he saw his name.
July 11
We are close to defeating Vigor. One of our spies stole his knife today and uncovered critical information. He heard Vigorâ¦speaking to himself, calling himself Atton and Brown. Atton Brown is another side of Vigor, the human side. Our materials are limited but I must begin construction on a divider. We must separate the two.
The next few pages outlined the construction of the Divider.
July 25
It worked; we have separated them. Atton Brown is still asleep, and I don't know if he will even wake up. I didn't even think the Divider would work, but now, I guess it's just a waiting game.
July 26
I hate him. He is the most obnoxious immature little twit I have EVER met. I tried to have a serious conversation with him, he kept making the most irrelevant comments, and I kept getting the feeling that the creeper was staring at me.
Butâ¦I like him to. He's the most fun person in this place. He questions meâ¦not in an inappropriate, "challenge of authority" way. He asked me who I was. I'm Nirvana, of course. But I don't know what that means anymore.
CONFUSED
July 31
Craaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaap. I really, really like him. He likeâ¦saved my life. Now he said he's gonna stay by my side till I'm betterâ¦Not a Florence Nightingale thing I really, really like him.

Atton smiled to himself.

September 11

I've accepted it; I love this guy I mean he's like perfect. He's handsome, funny and just amaaaaaazing. He's rugged but sensitive and he's been through a lot, I really feel for himâ ¦

I walked in on him todayâ ¦while he was showeringâ ¦(:

Atton remembered that day too. She thought he hadn't seen herâ ¦he did. He flipped through a more recent entry.

January 17

Atton Brownâ ¦ Minerva told me he wasn't real. Chris told me he wasn't real. I honestly don't know what to believe anymore. It was a really intense delusion, but it all seemed so real. Vigor, Zak, Atton, I know they were real I just know itâ ¦but I don't know itâ ¦ It's the anniversary of mom's death. CJ and I went to the cemetery where they buried her. She was real. Was Attonâ ¦?

Atton couldn't believe what he was reading. Who was this Minerva? How could she challenge his existence? He knew he was real, how could Nirvana doubt that after all they had been through?

He heard the key in the lock opening the front door and rushed back downstairs.

80

When she walked through the door, she all but fainted.

"Oh God," Nirvana said, reeling back.

"Hola," Atton said casually.

"No, no, no," Nirvana repeated to herself. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no. You're not real!"

Atton looked at his hands then touched his face. Then he walked over to Nirvana and felt her face.

"Seems pretty real to me," Atton shrugged.

"No!" she screamed quickly. "I paid six hundred thousand dollars to have you removed from my mind."

"Six hundred thousand dollars," Atton whispered to himself. "That's a lot of money to convince you of a lie."

She peered and squinted at Atton, then examined him thoroughly. "It's really me, Nirvana. I'm back."

" Okay," Nirvana said panting, "I'm going to pass out now."

"I guessed as much," Atton said nonchalantly. As he did Nirvana's body collapsed, Atton caught her and placed her on the couch.

In ten minutes, Nirvana woke up to see Atton eating a sandwich in her kitchen.

"Rise and shine Sleeping Beauty," Atton joked. "You're out of ketchup, by the way."

"Atton, how- how is this even possible." Nirvana was about thirty-two and hadn't seen Atton in about fifteen years but he had barely aged five years. "Howâ ¦ who -where did you come from?"

"I'd like to think from my mother," Atton said, then smiled.

"Always the jokester," Nirvana chuckled. "Seriously though, how are you human again?"

"I called 'agon a mors mortis'," Atton explained.

"What?" Nirvana said confused.

"It's a death challenge, a fight for the title of the Grim Reaper and I challenged Vigor. We have to get AJ."

"What's going to happen?" Nirvana asked Atton.

"He wants to kill AJ because he's the heir."

Nirvana closed her eyes and squeezed them tightly. Her tongue slid across her lips, struggling to ask the question.

"Is my son going to live, Atton? Tell me he'll be ok," she asked very tense, unsure she could handle the truth.

Atton slid towards her and invited her into his arms where he found comfort. He kissed her on the forehead, wiping her lone tear he began,

"I swear to you he will live Nirvana. I swear on my life, our son will live," he said in a sort of half whisper, though no one was around.

"Okay," she said almost silently.

"Where is everyone?" Atton wondered.

"At school," Nirvana shrugged.

"What about Chris? Out on some more mercenary work?" Atton commented.

"How did youâ ¦" she began.

"Nirvana, that merc had me reaping all over the world," Atton said irritably. "I mean, I do that anyway, but he threw off the whole schedule."
"Well, Chris isn't here," Nirvana said remembering their fight. "He's gone."
"Gone as in; a special contract or gone as in; you finally got enough sense to cut the fool loose?" Atton asked.
"The latter," Nirvana smiled, but wiped it away as soon as she thought of her son. "We need to get to the school and get AJ before Vigor. We'll take my car," Nirvana said but Atton grabbed her hand.
"Vigor may have my scythe but he doesn't have my power," Atton said, starting to smile.
"What do you mean?" she wondered.
"Hold on," Atton warned. Atton tried hard to concentrate on the shadows. He and Nirvana slowly merged with the shadows and they literally lurked the shadows to the school.
Mentally ill from Amityvilllle, accidentally kill your family. Still thinking he won't? Goddamn it he will He's Mentally ill from Amityville -Marshall Mathers
81
The bell rang and the halls flooded with children.
"AJ, over here," his mom called.
"Mom, what are you doing here?" he said in a hushed voice, embarrassed.
"I'll tell you later, just get your sisters," she said hurriedly.
"Ok, I-," he took a second look at Atton. "Is thatâ ¦Atton?"
"Hello AJ," Atton said looking at his son.
"Hey Winter, Willow, let's go," AJ called his sisters, still unsure if what was happening.
Just then, the doors blew open and everyone saw Vigor but he was without Berzerk. His right hand, a clenched fist; in his left hand, he held a shotgun.
"All right, nobody move!" he yelled, but of course, everyone ran and scrambled in panic. "Morons," he mumbled under his breath. "Why do they always run?" he wondered. Vigor shot the gun at the ceiling a few times just to scare them.
Nirvana was trying to get control of Winter and Willow who were in a frightened, frantic, frenzy. They were running around wildly, ignoring the mother's instructions to calm down. AJ tried to gather them but they ignored him. Vigor precariously followed their motions waiting for their little heads to line up; he cocked the gun.
"Two birds," Vigor whispered, "one stone." Winter and Willow's heads lined up and Vigor got a direct hit, spiraling through their heads. Nirvana came storming towards him.
She charged towards him and popped him dead in his jaw. Nirvana delivered a sharp round kick to his chest knocking the wind from him. She then seized the gun and he ran. Nirvana shot wildly, hitting him in the shoulder. She began to fire again but the gun was out of ammo.
Vigor charged towards her and using all the strength in his good arm, he rammed her down. Then he whipped out a handgun and aimed it towards Nirvana. Seeing what was happening, Atton rushed to her. Vigor built up enough strength to shoot and he shot Atton who was defending Nirvana. But he didn't move, he didn't falter, and he didn't bleed, the bullet went straight through Atton's forehead.
"He's stronger," Vigor whispered in realization. Atton helped Nirvana to her feet. Vigor took the butt of the shotgun and whacked Nirvana back to the ground. Atton turned to her and Vigor ran like hell to escape. He and Nirvana ran over to Winter and Willow. Next to them was AJ, crying beside them in a pool of blood.

Chapter 4

B
AJ took his face out of his trembling hands. "Winter, Willow," he said staring down at his sisters. Vigor had killed them so simply. "I'll kill him." He chased after Vigor. "I'll kill that bastard!"
Vigor did not think anyone would chase after him so he toned down his pace, just enough for AJ to catch up with him.
AJ came up behind him, grabbed him by the neck and his hair, and said, "What did they do to you! If you want to kill someone kill me!"
"Not the time," Vigor breathed.
AJ turned Vigor around and stole his gun. AJ put the gun in Vigor's hands and held it to his own chest, prompting Vigor to shoot.
"Kill me!"
Vigor trembled and wondered what he was feeling. He wondered why he couldn't pull the trigger. Nothing had ever stopped him from killing anyone. Vigor had come back to life, but not fully. His evil entity was still intact but he wasâ ¦mortal.
Vigor dropped the gun and collapse to the ground. Atton and Nirvana came running outside.
"Did you kill him?" AJ moved out of the way and let him see Vigor. He was still alive although he didn't deserve it. Atton looked at Nirvana who was ready to kill Vigor.
"Let him live," he said holding Nirvana back, "for now." They went to Werly's instead of Nirvana's house.
Vigor was left on the streets in his first real taste of pain. The streets were clear; no one was on them but Vigor. Blood leaked from his mouth and his arm and Vigor let out a cry of pain and anguish. He could not move or feel his left arm and he wanted desperately for the pain to stop. A dog ran in front of him and treated him like a fire hydrant. He lashed out at the dog and cussed at it, but it was no use. After a while, Vigor managed to lift his head. In front of him, he saw a furry white foot, Berzerk.
"How you doing?" She stood him up on his feet. "Still think that you should've left me behind?"
"Just get me back to the Hill," he said in an irritated tone. She picked him up and tossed him in her back. Berzerk to him back to the Hill as ordered. When they were there, Vigor was in a daze by Atton's strength.
"What happened to your arm?" Berzerk asked.
"Nirvana shot me," he admitted.
"I thought you were invincible," she noted.
"That makes two of us." Vigor held his hurt arm. To him it was just dead weight and he didn't need anything to weigh him down. "Could you do me a favor?" he asked Berzerk.
"What is it?" Berzerk asked.
"Bite it off," Vigor pleaded. "This arm is useless, bite if off." Without question, she bit it off. "Ah, that feels better," he said releasing a sigh of relief.
She gave him a queer look out of the corner of her eye. "Freak," she said under her breath. "So what's our next move?" she said aloud.
"Berzerk, how do you bring an empire down?" Vigor asked quizzically.
"Do you always have to talk in riddles?" she asked, with annoyance in her voice.
"The heart," he explained, "his love. You attack the heart."
"You're going to kill Nirvana?" Berzerk said eagerly.
"No," he said with a wicked grin, "you are,"
"With pleasure," she said releasing her claws.
83
"He bled," Atton realized. "Vigor always seemed so much more powerful than I was but todayâ ¦he bled."
"He was never stronger than you. He only seemed that way because you let him," Nirvana consoled him.
"You have to kill him dad," AJ sneered.
"We just have to stop him," Atton told AJ. "If that leads to his death, then so be it. Don't be so eager to kill, AJ. If you give in to those feelings, you'll end up like Vigor."

"You killed him," AJ noted.
"I had no choice," Atton snapped.
"This time you do," Werly said, "look at this."
"What's that?" CJ asked. Werly was reading a page of Kip's text.
"Read it." Atton began reading: In an event of a death challenge, a player can call a stalemate. What he/she must do is break the scythe. If this ever happensâ ¦ Atton read the rest in his head.
"This is genius," he exclaimed, "pure genius. All I do is, break the scythe."
"You ready to end this right now?" CJ asked.
"I was born ready," Atton stood up only to be knocked down.
84
Berzerk busted through the window, barreling over Atton. She bellowed and screeched as she narrowed in on Nirvana.
"Atton," Nirvana called out. Berzerk scooped up Nirvana. CJ and Werly lunged at her only to be knocked back by the simple swipe of her arm.
Berzerk released an animalistic roar. Then she looked down at Atton and could not help but to laugh at him.
"This is the once proud Reaper," she scoffed. "Pathetic."
"Let her go," Atton demanded.
"What are you going to do, bleed on me? Ha! You wish to kill me? Here I stand boy," Berzerk taunted. Atton lunged for her but Berzerk easily avoided him. "This," she held up Nirvana, "this is what you want?"
"Atton help me!" Nirvana cried out. "Atton!"
"All that screaming won't help you, child."
"Atton!" she continued to scream.
Berzerk tossed Nirvana across the room like a ragdoll. It rendered her unconscious. This was the quickest way Berzerk could think of to shut her up. She leaped across the room and scooped up Nirvana.
Berzerk saw the hurt in Atton's eyes. This was his one weakness. The fact that he showed compassion could easily be used against him -and it was. Vigor knew his love for Nirvana could destroy him.
"If this is your weakness," she said shaking Nirvana, "you stand no chance against Vigor." Berzerk looked out onto the horizon. The sun was getting closer to the horizon and the entrance to the Hill would soon be open to mortals. "You know you can't do anything until sundown," she snidely noted. "Until then, Vigor will be waiting."
85
In the Hill Vigor was preparing for Atton.
"Let's resurrect an old friend of mine," Vigor said, "just to make things interesting."
"Since you had so many," Berzerk sarcastically commented. "I thought you said I get to kill Nirvana. You had better not go back on your word Vigor," Berzerk warned, claws drawn.
"When they come here you will. Trust me Berzerk you will have your chance to kill Nirvana but now I need to concentrate." Using the mere shreds of power he had left he resurrected 'an old friend.'
"This is your friend? Why would you bring him back and not the behemoth, Zak? At least he'd put up a fight," she contested.
"Zak has too much free will, but if I give this man just a little power, he can take down Atton. Or distract him long enough for me to break the scythe," Vigor explained.
"Why not just break it now?" Berzerk wondered.
"It can only be done in the presence of the Reaper and the challenger," he continued.
"What happens if you break the scythe?" Vigor whispered something in her ear. "That's genius, pure genius," Berzerk exclaimed.
"What is my job?" The friend spoke up.
"I want you to kill Atton Brown; show no mercy," Vigor ordered. "Do you understand?"
"Yes sir. I will do your will," he said showing no emotion.
"Good. Atton will come; I will kill him, and disprove the Prophecy. I can sense wherever he isâ ¦ and he is getting closer." A smile crossed Vigor's face. "Let the games begin."
86

"Damn it," Atton angrily pounded the wall.
"Why didn't you go after her dad?" AJ wondered.
"She took her to the Hill. The Hill is an outpost for underworld creatures and those worlds can only mix when the sun hits the horizon," CJ explained.
"We have to go now," Atton said urgently. "The time is nearing and Vigor is waiting. This time he's going to stay dead. I'll break the scythe and fix all of this."
"It's not all about you, Atton," Werly snapped. "We care about her but we have to be patient," he cautioned. "Don't let your love for Nirvana and your vendetta towards Vigor, work against you."
"Patient," Atton contested. "I'm surprised you two aren't already halfway there! In case you didn't notice Vigor has Nirvana." He looked at AJ, "Your mom," then at CJ, "your sister," then back at Werly, "and one of you best friends and you're asking me to be patient? No; hell no," Atton continued to rant. "I'm going in now with or without you guys."
Atton stormed out and slammed the door behind him.
"I don't want my mom to die," AJ said sadly.
"I know buddy, I know. We're not going to let that happen," CJ consoled him. "Werly call for reinforcements, we're going to the Hill."
CJ and AJ walked out and caught up with Atton. "Atton wait up. We're in."
"The sun is setting we have to get there fast," he warned. Werly came jogging out to meet up with them on the curb.
"It's all set up," he assured.
"AJ," Atton began, "come here," Atton hugged his son. "This might be the last calm moment we have to speak." Atton breathed deeply. "I'm so proud of you, son." AJ nodded."You're about to change the world, you ready?"
"As ready as I'll ever be," AJ said, trembling slightly. Atton smiled for some reason, and then dropped back to a serious expression.
"Let's go."
87
"Atton will kill you," Nirvana said boldly.
Vigor tried his hardest to ignore her. She'd been on his nerves for about an hour now. At times, he was tempted to let Berzerk kill her early but that would ruin his entire plan.
"You won't be so lucky this time Atton will -"
"You are an annoying one aren't you?" Vigor finally interrupted. "I don't know how the hell Atton puts up with you. All of your screaming and bitching ain't gonna make him get here any faster! Jeez, you aggravating little prude, I can't wait till you and Atton are dead."
"What makes you so confident?" Nirvana asked. "What makes you so damn sure you'll win?"
"Two things, one; I'm Vigor. Two; you do," he told her. "No one counted on me pulling a classic 'bad guy.' It came down to either killing you or kidnapping you. I've done the whole, 'maim and slaughter' thing and when choosing between two evils, I always prefer the one I've never tried before.
I mean, yeah kidnapping the girlfriend is old school, but it is effective. When Atton comes, I will have Berzerk kill you right in front of him. His suffering will bring me much joy."
"It makes you stronger, doesn't it? His suffering." she clarified.
"Oh," Vigor sarcastically cheered for her, "ladies and gentlemen we have a winner, very good Nirvana. You finally understand. When you die Atton's suffering will peak, then I'll kill him and my power will reach its peak as well.
Atton and I share aâ ¦ special hatred for each other. This and his love for you is all that drives him. He will come here in anger and he will die."
"You won't succeed," Nirvana said stonily.
"Maybe I won't," Vigor shrugged. "Even if I don't I have a plan. My army has strength as well," he reminded her. With this said he was ready for the conversation to end. However, she continued to talk.
"It doesn't matter Atton willâ ¦"
Blah, blah, blah is all Vigor heard. Then Berzerk made a suggestion.

"May I suggest a forceful thump to the head?"
"Hmm," Vigor looked at her, first confused, and then he realized what she meant. "Good idea."
He walked over to Nirvana's cage and in the middle of her sentence; he gave her, a hard thump to her head. Nirvana was rendered unconscious for about five minutes.
As she wearily awoke, she could hear Vigor say, "Three; two; one."
88
On one, they entered the Hill. "Oh hello Atton, you surprised me. You really did," he said mockingly.
"Can I please kill her now?" Berzerk pleaded.
"Oh go ahead," Vigor said sick of her constant whining.
Berzerk stepped down to fight Nirvana. Nirvana was released from her cage and allowed to fight Berserk. However, when Nirvana's eyes met Berzerk's eyes, fear struck her heart.
"Tell me girl," Berzerk began, "why is it you fight when you know you will lose?"
Nirvana taken aback by the question responded with, "For the exhilarating feeling, for the expression on someone's face when they realize I'm not a weak, helpless woman. And for the outright fun," Nirvana explained.
"Really," Berzerk did not expect such an annoyingly longwinded answer, "because I fight to kill." Berzerk lunged at Nirvana with fury and joy.
"Atton I believe you know my guest," Vigor said, hoping to get a rise out of Atton. From behind Vigor walked a familiar face. He got the response he expected.
When Atton saw him, he hung his head back in dismay. "That is just stupid!" It was Kip. "Don't you ever die? First Vigor comes back and now you. Come on!" Atton yelled in pure aggravation.
"Hello to you too, son," Kip said, casually.
"You should have learned; never wound what you can't kill, Atton," Vigor said cryptically.
"Who is that?" AJ wondered.
"Oh, AJ this is your grandpa, Kip. Dad this is your grandson AJ. O.K," he said anxiously, "now that we all know each other, AJ you said you were going to kill Vigor. He's weak it, shouldn't be too hard. You two," he acknowledged Werly and CJ, "go help Nirvana, she can't take Berzerk alone. And you," he pointed to Kip, "you're gonna die." AJ went to engage Vigor then Werly and CJ went to help Nirvana. Atton stayed to face his father. "Now you're really starting to piss me off. You die in Limbo and come back. So then, I destroy Limbo and you still come back. I'm gonna kill you I want you to do me a favor; stay dead."
"Yeah you can try to kill me but I have power now," Kip said calmly.
"Whatever." He aimed a straight punch at his father but his father disappeared. Then he reappeared on the other side of the room.
"Told you," Kip smiled.
"This might be a problem," Atton realized.
About forty feet over Nirvana, Werly, and CJ were having problems of their own with Berzerk. Berzerk was on top of Nirvana, beating her.
Werly and CJ pulled her off but she was scratched up and a bloody mess. Berzerk had the taste of Nirvana's blood waving about in her mouth. She licked her furry lips and began to attack again. Just then, Berzerk felt rapid gunfire in her back. She turned around and she saw Ralph and Reggie.
"Did someone call for reinforcements?" Reggie asked. No one knew exactly how Ralph and Reggie got inside the Hill, they were just glad they had.
Berzerk felt the shots, but barely. Nirvana regained her balance and gave Berzerk and sharp round kick to the chest, leaving Berzerk gasping for air. Ralph and Reggie tossed CJ and Werly a pair of handguns. Nirvana preferred to use her fists. Now it was five on one. Then they surrounded and unloaded on Berzerk. It wasn't exactly a fair fight but who said they had to play by the rules.
89
Atton was getting his butt handed to him. All around him, he saw ten Kips and didn't know which one was real. He punched straight at one, only to be struck in the back by another.
"All my life all I wanted to do was help people." Kip elbowed his son in the back. "But everybody wanted me dead!" He showed him an illusion of his mother.

"Mom," Atton walked towards his mother. He reached out and tried to touch her but his hand passed through her.
"Yeah, you miss her, don't you?" He grabbed Atton and shoved him against a wall. "Well you can't have her! I couldn't even have her! She deserved to die," he said bitterly.
He grabbed his dad by the throat and turned him against the wall. "No, she'd done nothing wrong! You don't deserve to talk about her like that!" Kip kneed him in the stomach, and then pushed him out of the way.
Ralph tossed Atton a gun, "Atton catch," he yelled.
Atton rammed Kip into a wall then held the gun to his head. "You move, you die," Atton threatened. "I will ask you one question and you had better give a straight answer. How did you know everything that was going to happen?"
"I told you," he said gasping for breath. "I injected us both. We both had the power. I have lived through everything you have."
"How," Atton said furiously, "I think I'd remember that."
"You should. Remember the Grim Reaper that gave you the power? The scythe can only be passed down through a bloodline," Kip explained.
"How were you yourself and the Reaper?" Atton demanded.
"I broke the scythe," he said simply. "Son, youâ ¦" his words were cut short by a whack with Atton's gun knocking him to the ground.
"Go ahead," Kip prompted his son, "kill me."
Atton kicked him sharply in the ribs. "I should, after everything you've done to me, why shouldn't I kill you? Why do you deserve to live?" His father was silent. Atton cocked the gun and pressed it to his father's head. Atton's hands shook violently; his finger inched towards the trigger, ready to pull it at any moment but, he threw the gun aside, proclaiming, "No, I'm not like you."
"You are weak," his father yelled. "Even when you have nothing to lose; you do not have the strength to kill!"
"It does not take strength to kill!" Atton retorted. Atton was tired of hearing this. You didn't need to be strong to take someone's life. An idiot could do it. "It takes strength not to kill."
I was taught if you're gonna murder somebody you should face em; tell em why, look em dead in the eye, then waste them. -Marshall Mathers
90
Vigor, AJ had chosen to face Vigor, which wasn't such a hard task.
"You had your chance to kill me and you refused. You killed my sisters!" AJ kneed him in the stomach.
"Killing you won't actually be asâ ¦" AJ uppercut him in the jaw, "â ¦satisfying since you've lost one arm."
"How's this for satisfying?" Vigor gave him a sharp kick to the groin.
"That was a cheap shot you son of a-" Vigor knocked his head back and ran towards the scythe. AJ chased him and clipped him before he got to it, then he took the scythe. "Is this what you want?" AJ mocked him.
AJ knocked Vigor in the head with the end of the scythe.
"AJ, AJ," Vigor pleaded frantically. "Now AJ, you couldn't kill your own father," Vigor said, hoping this last idea would work.
"Atton is my father," AJ angrily replied.
"Atton and I were one and the same. I am the better half," he lied. "There are pieces of me in you. If you would just embrace your inner demons you could feel my power."
"I'm not evil," AJ stated.
"Evil is only evil from a certain point of view," Vigor coaxed. "You could choose have unlimited power, play by your own rules."
"I'm not evil," AJ repeated. "I would never choose to be anything like you."
"You think you're being brave?" Vigor began. "You think you're doing what's right. Let me tell you, there is no difference between right and wrong; it all comes down to who has the power to make the rules."
"What do you mean?" AJ asked.
"I mean what's right to you isn't right to me. We live by a different set of rules," Vigor continued. "But you havethe power to make the rules. With that weapon, you could achieve everything your tiny mind is contemplating. You, Aaron Jacobson, could rule!"

AJ hesitated; he would not mind making the rules. He would not mind being the one in power for a change.
"That scythe," Vigor whispered, "can do whatever you want it to do. It can affect emotions. It can change history. It can bring people to life."
AJ immediately thought of his sisters. Vigor had killed them in cold blood, but the scythe could bring them back.
"You mean my sisters," AJ's anger mounted. "The two you killed!"
"Now I -I AJâ ¦ you," he began.
"Shut up!" AJ held the scythe to Vigor's neck.
"Do it," Vigor prompted. "Kill me." AJ stood there, his eyes locked on Vigor. "I knew it you don't have the guts. When it comes down to it you don't have the balls to take a man's life."
"You're not a man," AJ replied. "You're nothing but pure evil and evil always deserves to die," AJ said with ice in his voice. "There is a difference, between wrong and right, Vigor. Trust me; you're wrong in so many ways."
"Then do it," Vigor provoked. AJ jabbed the scythe into his stomach. Vigor felt the blood leak from his stomach. "This isn't over," Vigor said calmly accepted his fate. Not even a second after he said that, Vigor's head was lying apart from his body. His eyes still held a vicious stare.
AJ stared at the head for a moment, mesmerized by something unspoken. "Dad, catch!" He tossed Atton the scythe.
Werly, Ralph, Reggie, and Nirvana were on the verge of defeating Berzerk. Nirvana delivered a hard cross to her jaw nearly snapping it out of place. Then she gave Berzerk a sharp uppercut to the stomach forcing her to cough up blood. Berzerk looked over to Atton.
"NO!" Berzerk screeched. Just then, a shot was heard, the bullet pierced Berzerk's skin and the burning lead spiraled through her brain and came out of the other side. Berzerk's eyes went black, her body cold, and she fell to the ground, dead.
"Fight to kill," Nirvana said holding a gun. "You've no more reason to fight." Nirvana ran to Atton.
"You don't have to do this. Vigor and Berzerk are both dead. Stay here, with me," Nirvana beseeched him.
"I can't," he said regretfully. "I told you, this won't end here. I have to go back." Nirvana paused in grief.
"Don't ever forget me," Atton whispered to her. "I could never," she said, her voice breaking.
"And don't -don't let people like Minerva tell you that I'm not real. I'll always be with you, in one way or another," he continued.
"Whatever destiny this world has planned for us, will be and in case those destinies take us different ways," Nirvana said, "don't forgetâ ¦ you're still that goofy kid who I met fifteen years ago."
Atton could not help but to smile. "And you're still the beautiful girl that saved my life," he ended.
"It doesn't have to end like this," she pleaded. "You could -"
"I can't, I have work to do," he told her. "I wish I could stay but this is just where my destiny takes me. Even if I never see you again, I love you Nirvana, don't you ever forget that."
For a moment, Atton thought of what would happen if he did stay. He would be happy and Vigor was dead. However, it still would not be right. Vigor could easily re-manifest himself inside of Atton. "Goodbye," he finally said with a kiss. Somehow, he knew she'd get over him but he would never stop thinking about her.
Atton waited for her to reply. Nirvana did not have the heart to say goodbye to her love, Atton Brown. Everything around them stopped, and he stared deeply into her eyes. He knew if he truly loved her, he had to do what was best, even though if hurt. Letting her go pained Atton more than Vigor ever could.
Atton forcefully brought the scythe to his knee and snapped it in half. In doing so, he opened a cosmic rift projecting him back through time. Breaking the Grim Reaper's scythe led the holder back to the day of his or her choice. All they needed was an intense concentration. Knowing this would happen, he concentrated on when he wanted to be, and was there.
"I love you too," Nirvana said, trying to control her emotions. It was no use; she could not stop her tears. AJ, Werly, Ralph, Reggie, and CJ tried to comfort her, the best they could.
Nirvana shrugged them off and left the Hill. As she did things around her began to change. Atton had done it.

Chapter 5

91

Atton found himself sixteen years old, planting explosives in Werly's car. Once he realized what he was doing, he stopped immediately.

"Why have you stopped?" a voice whispered inside of Atton.

"I wasâ ¦just thinking." He decided to proceed to fool Vigor. When he had finished and planted the timed explosives, it was about ten till five. He picked up a nearby rock and hurled it at the window.

"What? Who?" Werly woke up in shock. He looked at his clock. "Hey, I almost missed my jog." Werly got up and proceeded with his jog.

"Why did you do that?" Vigor asked.

"So he wouldn't die," Atton said stonily.

"What? The whole point was to kill him. He threatened you; he put his hands on you," Vigor tried to manipulate Atton.

"So then why kill him for a threat he made to have me arrested? And the reason he hit me isn't that we annoyed him, it was because you got handsy with his daughter," Atton reminded him.

Atton then ran to CJ McCoy's house and rang the doorbell.

Ralph answered. "Hey, you're early. I mean we could always kill him in his sleep. But-"

"I'm not going to kill him," Atton stated.

"What?"

"Look here's your money back," Atton said tossing Ralph a wad of cash.

"How do we get him back for all the times he did us wrong?" Ralph asked.

"I don't know, but I know revenge isn't the answer. Tell him to call his sister when he wakes up," Atton said remembering Nirvana.

"Whatever," Ralph shirked.

"I'm serious," he said firmly.

"Okay, alright, jeez."

Ralph delivered the message to CJ. CJ had told them never to speak of Nirvana. He had a sort of dÃ©jÃ vu feeling and knew it was what he had to do. Once Werly returned home, he saw his car blown to bits and was thankful he wasn't in it. Atton had one more task.

"What is wrong with you," Vigor began, "you've contradicted everything I've told you!"

"You wanted me to kill people so you could grow stronger. You had your own plan from the beginning. You want to rule this place but you won't. You're weak. You are nothing but a whisper in my mind," Atton contested.

"I will grow more powerful than you and I will rule. You will pay for your insolence, boy," Vigor screamed in his head.

"I know. I know everything that will happen if I listen to you and the thing is, even though I know, I can still feel you tugging at me. Even though I know, I still cannot resist. That's why I have to kill you."

"Ha. You wouldn't dare. Besides you can't kill me without killing both of us."

"Then so be it. We will both die," Atton said boldly.

"You're bluffing."

"Try me." Atton ran back to where he and his dad lived.

92

"Dad I'm leaving," Atton told his father.

"What do you mean? Whatâ ¦" Suddenly he found himself rubbing his temples, overcome with the same dÃ©jÃ vu feeling as CJ. He remembered everything that had happened.

"You remember don't you?" Atton realized.

"Yes, but Atton you don't have anywhere to go. Stay here," Kip almost begged his son. Kip did not like nor did he want to be alone. "Please."

"I believe that everything happens for a reason," Atton said wisely.

"Huh?" Kip said confused. "What do you mean?"
"All this happened to make me realize that I can't be here -not without Vigor coming back. I want to, but- but I can't. All that I've done is bring darkness to the world and pain to everyone I've met. If I live, I can try to rectify the damage I've done but Dad, I will always be trapped by the will of Vigor."
"So I'm left alone again?"
"Doesn't it bother you that every time you've died you were resurrected by someone or something evil?" Atton asked.
"Atton I'm not meant to die yet. I'm meant to help people," Kip wasn't even convinced of his own words.
"You keep telling yourself that, Dad, but you don't believe it," Atton noted.
Atton failed to notice that Kip had avoided the question. The fact of the matter was it did not bother Kip. He was becoming a person devoid of sympathy and remorse. He did not care who brought him to life; he just wanted to live.
"I just want to help people," he said again.
"Maybe what you want to do isn't what you're meant to do. I want to live, but I can't. I'll die for what I believe is right. You, on the other hand, will continue to hurt everyone you think you love," Atton said meanly to his father.
"Damn it Atton, if you want to live, then live. You don't have to play the martyr," his father yelled. "Werly and CJ say you sacrificed yourself in Limbo," Atton snapped.
"Son what happened in Limbo wasâ ¦" Kip began.
"I know what it was." Atton stood up and faced his father. "You planned the whole thing so you wouldn't die. You knew if you died in Limboâ ¦"
"â ¦I'd be there as the Reaper to save myself. And by creating that reputation I knew Vigor would want to use me," Kip continued.
"Then I'd break the scythe and we'd end up here. You were willing to do anything to survive; pure apathy with no remorse." Atton laughed to himself, "Survival of the fittest. You were doing anything to protect yourself." He put his hand on Kip's shoulder. "In these respects you are my father."
"In others respects?" Kip asked his son.
"In other respects you are no one," Atton turned away.
"Atton," he began.
"You said you want to help people. What could you give them -what have you ever given?" Atton continued to antagonize his dad.
"I gave you-," he started.
"You gave me what," he snapped, "torment, suffering, misery?"
"I gave you Nirvana. Without me you never would have met her," Kip tried.
"Then you took her away from me," Atton spat out angrily. He turned away from his father to he sit on the edge of the cliff. He noticed how the waves of the waterfall crashed against the rocks. The water was a small thought in his mind. Atton could only think of Nirvana.
93
Nirvana sat in yet another cheap trashed hotel room that she'd scrummed up the money to pay for. Her body was overcome with a shiver as she stared at the phone. It rang. She grabbed her head; it was as if a knife was being jammed through her temples. It rang twice. She fell over as years worth of information were forced into her head. It rang a third time. Her eyes traced two points on the floor back and forth, as she watched, the memories play out before her. The fourth time it rang Nirvana answered, knowing exactly who it was.
"CJ," she breathed. The salvia in the back of her throat was beaten down. "He told me where he used to live."
"We'll talk later," CJ assured his sister. "Go to him."
She jolted up looking around for Zak. Her heart jumped when he saw the he was alive. He was sleeping, but still, alive.
She was in her ripped faded golden nightgown, but she didn't care. She was barefoot (she thought of AJ), but she didn't care. She hailed the first taxi she could find and gave him directions. When they got there, she didn't have any money, and she still didn't care. Nirvana busted through the door and took off through the forest, determined to save him. She broke through the tress and cried out his name,

"Atton!"
94
"You took her from me, Dad. You showed me that the world could be cruel. You forced me to be the Reaper, and you forced me to kill them. You also showed me people make choices and decisions. I guess, a long time ago, you decided to look out for yourself and no one else.
Dad, you also showed me there was a little good inside of everyone. They can choose to either embrace it or ignore it. People choose to be good or evil. I choose to be good. I choose not to be a killer anymore," Atton stated. "You took everything away from me the day your experiments began. You led me to this point."
"What point is this?" Kip asked.
"You never gave me anything," Atton said miserably. "Well I giveâ ¦" Atton gulped and looked down.
"You give what?" Kip snapped. "What!"
"â ¦my life." With that said, Atton slid off the edge to his certain doom.
"Atton!" A scream was heard behind him and echoed in Atton's mind as he fell.
Kip yelled then he backed away. "Good-bye."
Kip and Atton suffered the same personality disorder. Even if they tried to stop hurting people, their other side could easily come out and make them do something they would regret. Atton truly was trapped no matter his choice.
95
Kip sat in the vacant land, thinking of what had just happened. The sad part is that Kip had planned to kill his son anyway. He had developed a fast acting poison just for the occasion.
He looked to the sky. "Heaven," Kip began. "My son and my wife," Kip looked down, "Me?"
He thought about what his son had said, "Pure apathy with no remorse." If that was true, what was he feeling now?
"I want to help people," Kip said to himself. "But I hurt them." Kip realized what he'd really said. "I hurt people. I don't want to hurt them, not anymore. I choose not to," he breathed.
He eyed the fast acting poison. "I can leave the formula to someone else. I can't finish it." He finally acknowledged Nirvana, who was just sitting in silence, still overcome by the shock.
"You take it," he told her. "You finish it."
"I can't," she shook her head.
"For him," he offered.
Nirvana wanted to be angry with Kip, but he couldn't. She pulled the tears away from her eyes and just nodded at him.
Kip picked up the syringe; shut his eyes and his muscles tensed. He jabbed the needle into his wrist and his hand instantly went limp.
"Ah - Ow," he let out groans of pain. He stared off into the distance. Kip's vision became cloudy and all outside sounds faded. Nirvana was saying something, but he couldn't even hear her mumble. His hand trembled as he touched his face. "Tears," Kip chuckled. He did not know why he was laughing, but he did. Then his body turned pale, his breaths became short and scarce. Kip Brown gave his life.
96
"There is a difference between suicide and sacrifice," CJ continued. "When a person commits suicide that person gives up on life and gives in to everyone around them. But when a person chooses sacrifice, they are not giving up; they give it all for their cause. They are accepting it and doing what needs to be done.
Atton Brown gave his life so that we could live. He was a true martyr for his cause."
Atton's funeral was held in company of his closest, and only, friends. Many were sad and mourned his passing but Nirvana was in the worst condition. CJ stepped down from the podium to comfort his sister. Nirvana walked to Atton's casket.
"I'm sorry," CJ said, hugging his sister.
"Charlie," Nirvana began, "have you ever loved someone? I don't mean someone in our family. I know you've been with a lot of women, but have you ever really loved anyone?"
CJ paused in thought for a moment before answering, "No."
"Then don't try to tell me you know how I feel. Don't tell me you're sorry, just let me be."

"Nirvana-," CJ started.
"You know," she wiped her tears, "Kip left me his work. He thinks I should finish it."
"His immortality formula?" CJ wondered.
"Yeah, do you think if you put an immortality formula in a dead personâ ¦?"
"Nirvana if people were meant to be revived they never would have died in the first place. Only God has the power to give life," CJ warned.
"But maybe -," she tried.
"No Nirvana, don't play God, it's dangerous. Just forget about it."
"Forget," she said, her voice breaking. "You think I can forget anything. I can't! I can't forget about Atton. I can't forget you left. I can't forget dad's dead. I can't forget where Zak came from. I can't forget I fought in a battle that didn't happened but did happen. I can't forget that I had a life; children for God's sake! I can't ignore this voice swirling around in my head screaming, 'Your life's a fucking mess and there's not a damn thing you can do about it!' I can't forget anything Charlie!" Her emotions got the best of her and her words were overrun with tears.
"Nirvana," CJ began to console her.
"No," she pushed him away. Nirvana took a deep breath, in attempts to calm down. "You know I used to sit at home," she started. "After Dad died I would just sit at home, waiting for him -and mom, just to pull up in the driveway. Then they would tell me everything was all right. Part of me used to hope what I saw wasn't real; part of me still wishes that day was just a nightmare I've yet to wake up from."
"Me too Nirvana, we're all hurting now," CJ told his sister.
"I'm not just hurting. I'm confused, sad, angry, and so much more. So many emotions are battling inside of me. I have all these experiences but I have to live all of that againâ ¦ without him.
You know maybe if he didn't love me this wouldn't hurt so much. Maybe if I didn't love him back I wouldn't want to rip my heart out and gag myself with it, just to stop this pain. You're lucky you've never been in love. It hurts."
"But the pain," CJ began only to be interrupted.
"He's in a better place," Werly said as he walked over to Atton's casket.
"Yeah," Nirvana said quietly.
She honestly didn't know where he was. All of the killing he did under Vigor could have sent him to Hell. Nirvana truly didn't know where Atton was right now.
"This knife was his," Nirvana realized, wide-eyed. "What ifâ ¦"
She aimed the knife towards her stomach. Nirvana moved it there hoping to join Atton but Zak grabbed her wrist.
"Nirvana!" he said as he restrained her. Nirvana was screaming and crying, and struggling to get out of his arms.
"Let me go!" CJ ripped the knife from her hands.
"Nirvana," he said in a quiet tone. "He's gone."
She was still screaming, trying to free herself of Zak, but she knew she couldn't. Nirvana was only fourteen now but she had so much experience. She had thirty years worth of memories; she had to relive everyday over again.
As she finally calmed down, she found her way into CJ's arms. He held her to comfort her and to keep her from throwing another tantrum. For a while, he just hugged his sister.
"It's over, Nirvana," whispered into her ear. "It's finally over."
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Vigor and Atton are both dead. Werly and CJ reestablished their friendship with Nirvana and Zak by their side. Ralph and Reggie called the studio and booked their show.
Kip Brown is dead; he willingly gave his life. He acknowledged the fact that he hurt people and did not want to. Kip was not all bad. In killing himself, he could feel the pain of those he'd hurt.
Kip felt somewhat relieved with his choice. It was his only choice. He had no friends for him, no one to love him. He'd lost everything, and with no way to get it back, he accepted it. He was done with his apathy. At the end of it all, Kip truly felt remorse towards all he had done. Now Kip had no progeny, no line of descendents

and after all these years, the Browns were no more.

Everything that you have just read was true. You might have thought I was throwing you random ideas of pure fiction, but it all happened, the rise and fall of the Browns and the years of darkness. Some survived this period, some escaped Airosfield, and live to tell the story, but you'll never be able to tell. You see, those who remember never speak of it, and many others do not want to remember. Believe me; Earth did suffer through a perilous and hellacious time. And the only documented remembrance still existing is what you have just finished reading. Remember, this was just the beginning.

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