

# The Cult of The Enemy

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Preview Chapter

# Chapter One

The scarf of mist ensnared the mountainside. A fierce gale tore down the valley; trees cowering in nature's might; moonlight spilling through the dappled cloud, partnered by the fantastical gems of the foreboding night's sky. Autumn snarled, baring its sharp teeth.

Fields blanketed the valley, stretching up the hillsides as if continually yawning. Not a single light shone as far as any eye could see; not bulb, not hearth; not even a wick. Spattered sporadically throughout the vista, woodlands and forests encompassed any sign of humanity. Isolated houses, farms and villages were all painted with a hue of deepest green. Snaking along the valley itself, a gentle river meandered ever onwards to the tempestuous Atlantic Ocean.

The cruel wind tainted an otherwise idyllic countryside. As somewhere in the dark landscape a clock chimed thrice, a single man stalked the courtyard. In his hand was a loaded gun, carried territorially as he continued to patrol the Eastern gate. He kept his figure in the shadow of the farmhouse wall, never exposed to the moonlight for more than a few brief seconds. When he reached the edge of the brick wall that fortified the grounds, he turned on his heel, casting a stern gaze across his horizon, before retracing his steps back towards the farmhouse. Eight times he had made this exact journey in the past hour. Eight times he had been alarmed by billowing branches being torn from their boughs by the wind; eight times he had imagined a creeping figure in the dark and eight times he had wished he were down in the warmth of the bunker, deep beneath his feet.

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Three men glared across the room at an inanimate figure. Their long bedraggled hair was damp from the rain shower that had just swooped across the valley. Huddled together, they whispered to each other and pointed accusingly towards the lifeless body that lay sprawled across the mattress of the lower bunk bed.

Time was of no consequence to the man. He was not able to reckon how many hours he had lain isolated in his thoughts; it might even have been days and could easily have been weeks. All that mattered to him were his thoughts, for it was all that remained of his life. Every relationship, burned; every decision, regretted; every moment of happiness, tarnished. More than a decade of hurt trailed behind him and for one brief week he had fooled himself into thinking he could put it all behind him and fight through the pain and doubt. He was wrong.

Jack Blackwood turned slowly onto his side. Peripherally he could hear the others' murmur their gossip, but he did not care. They were not his friends. Briefly acknowledging reality as a whale rises to the surface for air, he plunged once more into his reveries and whimsically imagined the sound of rain pattering against a window pane. His childhood bedroom's window.

Seven years, nearly, it had been since he last stood in that tiny capsule of childhood. Upon his final visit, he had idly noted his boyhood toys spilling free from their boxes. His parents never liked to let go of the past. As he lay on the bunkbed, he recalled memories he had presumed long forgotten or suppressed by grief. Memories of goblins and ghouls lurking under the bed; bedtime stories of wizards and knights; long summer days of building castles on the carpet with his friends; short winter evenings of his little sister running in for night-time hugs.

It was too painful to remember, but memory was all he had left. There was no going back for Jack. There was no family home, no happy memories and no little sister. Jess had died and changing his identity, pretending his parents were dead and fooling himself into believing it had all been someone else's fault would never be able to camouflage the guilt he felt and the blame he deserved. He had been driving; he had been angry; and a lifetime had changed in the blink of a headlight, a swerve of a car.

The day he buried his sister was the worst day of his life. It was the day his parents disowned him and the day he started running; running from guilt, running from the pain and running from responsibility. Steven Lennox died and Jack Blackwood was born. Jack Blackwood, a man of loyalty and love was ultimately a liar. Inside six years his disguise had worn away; day by day, week by week until eventually the Steven beneath his skin smirked in broad daylight. It had been Steven who signed the release forms, damning Scar to a prison sentence she did not wholly deserve. It had been Steven that had stolen the Rations from work. It was Steven who had lied pathologically until he was cornered by the truth, exposed for his surrogate family, the Readers, to see with absolute clarity.

It was all Steven, never Jack.

And now, here he was, entombed in the bunker of The Resistance. Their vile beliefs were etched into the atmosphere. Terrorists. Cold, calculated mass murderers and their leader was none other than Alex Reader; so close a friend, he might have called him a brother.

Days after his capture, the thought still made him physically sick. He had not eaten since he arrived and had only sipped water to stay alive. By now he was not sure what he was fighting to stay alive for, but some small part of him must have been yearning for survival. He could not understand why. There was nothing to live for now. He was an inmate of an unknown prison, never allowed to leave unless he participated in their games of war and hate. Outside, if ever he were to see it again, was all but lost to him. No hope for employment, no Rations and all trust broken. His only hope was bestowed in Eliza, for whom he loved and hoped not for anything in return.

The last time he saw Alex they were both looking out across the valley as he was told that he could not leave until he relented and joined The Resistance. Jack remembered how the mist enveloped the distant mountains and the chilling dawn shivered around them. Unable to find any words to persuade Alex, Jack surrendered his fight and was escorted back inside the secret underground bunker.

They watched what he did constantly. They watched him sleep; watched him slowly sip his glass of water; surveyed him as he lay incapacitated by thought and examined, quite remotely, how he silently burst into intermittent sobbing. Every moment, every movement was watched and he knew to whom it was all being reported. Alex loathed not being informed of any event and over the past year had taken particular pleasure in investigating every aspect of Jack's life.

For hours, Jack would envisage what he would do to Alex if he ever saw him again. Although he was certain that moment would come, he was less assured of how he would react when it did. Rage and shout he might in his head, there was little spirit left in him to even make the slightest noise. Any attack would be feeble, and more than likely take place entirely in his mind. Still, he could not help imagine rising up and attacking his former friend until he could no longer move. It was all he could possibly think of to make himself feel better; there was no other vice left to him.

The men whispering together across the room broke apart as a bedraggled man in a loosely tied ponytail stepped through and approached Jack taciturnly. Perching himself on the edge of the bed, Kyle Monteith, nestled down into a determined silence, as if he were carefully designing a speech inside his head. Jack ignored his presence, caring not if he stayed or left. There was very little that Kyle could say to persuade him from his tormented solace. He knew the arguments

fell from the same branch as Alex's. Kyle was as much a murderer as Alex was, potentially more so.

Kyle Monteith, another friend who was a liar. Another deceiver, another terrorist. To Jack, he had been nothing more than an irresponsible hippie seeking the next craze of his life; and even when he suspected him of being in the Democratic Demolitioners, he never expected the extent of his murderous capabilities. Kyle Monteith was a daft Glaswegian who up until a few years ago cared more about dreadlocks and his latest tattoo than political ambition, let alone going the lengths he had done to assure it.

After several minutes, Kyle leaned over - his confidence in what he was about to say having finally spiked - and put a hand on Jack's shoulder. There was an awkwardness to his touch, as if he were comforting a stranger. His mouth opened and stammered a few short syllables of an incomplete sentence before shutting tight again. It seemed his confidence was premature, but moments later it stole a second wind.

"Jack," he said, his slow laidback voice was like treacle, "Please, come eat wi' me. Yer starving yoursel' tae death."

His gaze unwaveringly fixed ahead, Jack's voice crackled upon use, "Maybe that's the aim."

"Yeh dinnae mean that," Kyle persuaded, "That isnae the Jack I know." At this point Jack scoffed, seemingly at a private joke for Kyle's face screwed into confusion, "What are yeh laughin' at?"

"The Jack you knew didn't kill his sister," he said, maniacally.

Kyle reacted immediately, "Shush! Keep yer voice down."

"What? Why should I try to hide it now! I know what Alex must have told you. What I say cannot be a surprise."

"Please, Jack," Kyle pleaded, "This isnae the place to make these things public."

"Oh is it not?" Jack pulled himself up to a sitting position, "My mistake. I thought terrorist headquarters were exactly the place for admitting your failings as a human fucking being!"

Kyle swung round at the congregation of comrades in the corner of the room, who were all keenly displaying signs that their attentions were elsewhere.

"You lot," Kyle shouted, "Fuck off! That's an order. And close the damn door."

They scarpered at once, shutting the door obediently.

"A superior officer?" Jack asked sarcastically, "I didn't know you lot were that civilised."

"Jack, stop this," Kyle advised.

"Stop what? Is this not how you want your prisoners to behave?" Jack mocked.

"Yer not a prisoner, Jack. You know that."

"Am I not? Well then, I'll just skip upstairs and leave, shall I? Oh no, wait. Your guards have been ordered to shoot me on sight."

"You go home an' those guards' bullets will be the preferable option, Jack. You know what they are like. Yeh've been through it yourself, twice."

"I did wrong, Kyle. I deserved it."

"No you didn't -"

"I attended those meetings! Terrorist meetings!"

"You attended a protest, Jack. A fucking protest. And you never actually went to that other meeting."

"A fucking protest you invited me to. What was that for, eh? To lure me in so that Alex wouldn't have to?"

"No," Kyle sighed, "It was a test."

"A what?" Jack was stunned.

"Alex ordered me to test you, see if you would come. He wanted to know how you would react around those people, know whose side you were truly on," Kyle explained, "He suspected you were up to something."

"Did he now? Well I hope I fucking pleased him and passed his bloody test," Jack spat scathingly.

"In a way, you did. He didn't think you had the guts to be there and was shocked you spoke to the Masked Man."

"That's a fucking point," Jack asked, "If you lot are so fucking high and mighty, how the fuck did you let me get anywhere near that man? Or are you going to tell me that the DD are actually the good guys too?"

Kyle leant back against the bed's headboard, "We try and recruit from wherever we can. Sometimes I go into other organisations and pose as one of them before I slowly attempt to recruit for The Resistance from within. At the time you saw me, I was deeply undercover in the DD. They trusted me entirely."

Jack was shocked at the level of deception, "The layers of lies... It's unbelievable."

Kyle leaned in, "And are you any better?"

"Piss off," Jack muttered.

"Why is it one rule for you and another for everyone else?"

Jack glared at Kyle, "I trusted you. I only ever tried to do what was right!"

"So did I," Kyle said.

"What? As a terrorist? Blowing people up - oh no, gunning them down from a distance is more your style, isn't it?" Jack snarled.

Kyle slipped off the bed, "I'm going to order someone to bring you some food. Tomorrow I will come back and I will keep coming back, every day if I have to, until you realise what side you ought to be on."

Without waiting for protest, Kyle left the room, leaving Jack in the company of his own misery once more.

Alone, Jack examined the room he was in for the first time. Though he had been here days, he had no inclination to know anything of his surroundings. To do so was to come to terms with his imprisonment and up until the point where Kyle walked in, that was not something Jack was quite prepared to do.

Something had changed, however. Jack could not quite put his finger on it, perhaps there was nothing substantial to determine; but he felt different having used his voice for the first time in days. It was as if his thoughts were somehow lighter on his mind; his chest felt incrementally less tight.

Getting up from the bed, his legs unsteady with their lack of use, Jack staggered around the room. There were at least twelve bunkbeds in addition to his own. Each had been perfectly made. Barely aware of reality for the past few days though he was, Jack did not recall the room being filled with this many people. It was like a hostel dormitory. Sweeping his eyes around like radar, he could only spot a few sporadic emblems of personal effects.

By the side of the first bed he approached lay a photograph. Wrinkled by over-affection, the photograph depicted a middle aged, balding man beaming at the photographer. A sepia toned summery vista spread out behind him. Curious, Jack turned it over to read the words "Love Harry" written in blue ink. He replaced it on the table. Lying next to it was an old watch with a leather strap whose battery had died. Over on another table was a small plastic dinosaur - the kind that Jack used to play with as a child. This table had a drawer compartment which Jack could not resist. Opening it revealed a half written letter which had not yet been addressed to someone. Temptation stole Jack's conscience.

*I expect you'll never read this as most likely I will never send it. Still, it is comforting to write to you. It makes me feel that I am still, in some remote way, a part of your life. I've been here too long. I'm starting to forget your face - forget the things you laugh at, the little quirks I wished I'd appreciated at the time. Life here isn't easy. Every morning we train. Day after day we act like soldiers, but I am very afraid. We all are, nobody's scared to admit it. Four of our leaders have died already. This new one seems nice. I don't know him well, but some of the others do. I fear the fight is nearly over, but please, god, I hope you know that I will fight to the death for you. You are my life. You're the whole reason I'm here.*

*I'm sorry I had to leave you. I'm sorry I didn't give you the chance to say goodbye. I'm sure you hate me. I'm sure you've listened to the stories the CRU have told. I wish I could tell you the truth, but I know it would put you and the children in too much danger. I can't think of*

*Megan and Jake right now. How can soldiers go to war when they have beautiful children like ours sitting at home? I can't. I can't do it. I need to shut them out of my mind. I need to -  
I need to go. Something's happened*

"Curiosity is a dangerous thing, sir," a gentle voice sounded from behind him and Jack wheeled round, dropping the letter.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean -"

A teenage boy was standing before him. Red haired and flaring freckles. He carried a bowl in his hands.

"Don't worry, it wasn't mine," the boy said, striding forth and picking up the letter with his spare hand before offering it to Jack, "But that doesn't make it any nicer."

Jack took the letter and put it back in the drawer, "I..." he was lost for anything constructive to say. The contents of the letter had wiped his brains. It was a stream of someone's conscious thought; of a woman missing her husband and denying her mind of the memory of her children just to become a member of The Resistance. It frightened him.

"Who are you?" he asked the boy, "You look too young to be... to be..."

"One of them?" the boy second-guessed him.

"Yes, I suppose," Jack said, "Whatever that is."

The boy pressed the bowl into Jack's hands, "Kyle sent me to give you this."

Jack automatically took the bowl, forgetting momentarily that he was refusing to eat. It contained a strange gloopy green stew, protruding from which was a sad spoon. He perused it suspiciously, wondering if it were possible to both eat it and still refuse the hospitality.

"Kyle said you would refuse it," the boy said.

"What's your name?" Jack asked, taking the bowl over to his bed and sitting down. Having not yet made a decision on the future of the stew, he held it awkwardly in his hands.

"Aiden," the boy said, "I know you're Steven."

"Jack," he interrupted, "My name is Jack."

Aiden wrinkled his brow with confusion, "But I overheard Alex and Kyle talking. They mentioned you as Steven?"

"They got it wrong," Jack said curtly, as his hunger betrayed him.

A voice from outwith the room shouted Aiden's name and the boy turned sheepishly to answer, "Coming, Dad!"

But just before the boy had left the room entirely, Jack called to him, "You live here?"

"Of course I do, it's my family's farm," he swept out of the room and could be heard running along the concrete corridor.

Jack sat with his bowl of stew and glared at it. No one had returned to the room as of yet. He felt that by eating their food, he was complying to their beliefs, and complicit in their actions. But the more he thought about it, the more he considered his scenario. He had been

involuntarily attacked and shoved in the back of a car to be taken here. Several hours later he had woken up in a dark cell and for hours he had not heard a single other voice. Then, when he imagined his life was about to end in that hell hole, he was removed and the bastard, Alex Reader, revealed himself to be the orchestrator of all this evil. Surely having a few spoonfuls was not giving in?

He raised the spoon to his mouth and did not need to blow for it was already lukewarm. It resembled a conglomeration of snot and seaweed but to his surprise its taste defied its look. Whilst it was not the most delicious of meals, it was food and comforting and, without realising it, he had eaten every last drop. Upon staring down at the empty bowl, he felt nervous. He did not want to them to read this as a sign that he was ready to hear their mad plottings.

The Resistance, that's what they had called themselves. The Prime Minister himself revealed that they had been behind the attack on Edinburgh on September twenty-eighth and Jack had heard nothing different until Alex told him the truth; *his version of the truth*. After months of Jack's speculation about the second suicide bomber, Alex revealed that it was not the second one he should have been concerned about, but the first. Kyle had shot the first one, saving Alex's life and from that moment a series of events had been triggered. Jack was sketchy on the details, but soon after the attack, Alex joined The Resistance and began leading a secret life away from the family - a life they had been led to believe was a flourishing career in journalism.

Alex then told him of all the good that The Resistance were doing - they weren't terrorists, they were fighting the sinister government. The story was lifted from the plot of a bad film and Jack could barely stomach it. After a decade of a crippling economy, Rations, riots and minor terrorist threats, why had the government suddenly become this oppressive regime? They had set up specialist units of the police to deal specifically with crime. The CRU, while forceful in their methods, was there for the common good. Martial Law had been implemented to protect the people of Britain; as had the Curfew and the Nightstalker police division who enforced it. How were they not able to see this?

Jack placed the bowl on the bedside table and lay back on his bed. He imagined rain on his bedroom window again, this time his one in Relugas Road. Painful though it was to dwell on, he thought of how Eliza and Maggie were coping. Both he and Alex had disappeared on the same day and Jack was sure that Alex meant not to return. How were they coping? How were they feeling? Did Eliza hate him for running out on her? It was not possible for her to know the truth. He missed her. Her smile, her touch, even her small tantrums. He longed to overhear a screaming match between her and her mother.

The door to the dormitory opened again and several people filed in. They all glanced over at Jack, but as usual left him be. They seemed to be undressing and climbing into bed. The concept of time was a stranger to Jack but he guessed it must be night already. Inside the windowless bunker, day and night were as meaningless as each other.

As the men chatted with each other, Jack quietly listened.

“Good job today, guys,” one man said, “We’re one step closer now.”

“Aye, an’ then we’ll make the bugger’s eyes water, pal!” another said jovially.

They might have been discussing a football match.

“One less day till I see my kids,” the woman said and Jack felt a surge of guilt for he was sure that it was her letter he’d read.

With that, the last of the lit candles were blown out and the room crashed into the chaos of the dark. Jack lay as still as a statue, frightened to move in case one of them attacked; for after all, he was quite surrounded by trained and murderous terrorists.