



Faith Guard: Uprooted

by JUDIENE HYATT

My eyes sprung open from what was, hands down, the most terrifying nightmare my imagination had drummed up to date.

Well, not the worst.

But dreaming of dangling from a Ferris Wheel was definitely in the top ten.

While I wanted to mull over the strange tendencies of my subconscious state, figuring out why I was tucked into a hospital bed with two soldiers on either side of me certainly took precedence.

One had his attention fixed on whatever was happening outside the small window in the room. The other stood by my feet, rummaging through a satchel. He donned a white band around his wrist—a scanner.

Screeners.

It had been two years since The Government dispatched this task force. They were to confine all bearers of the fatal C+ gene found only in a group of people who called themselves Believers.

I didn't know why they had any business with me.

I thought it best to feign sleep until I gathered more intel on why they were here. Before I could completely close my eyes again, the one with the bag glanced at me.

"Khal, she's up," he whispered matter-of-factly. My cover was blown.

"Good, that will make things easier," the other replied. I kept my eyes closed.

One of them snatched the sheet that covered my body. The conditioned air that took its place was as good as any unforgiving ice bath. Before I could yell in protest, the man, who the other called Khal, pressed his hand over my mouth. I glared at him, but his focus remained on the window.

"Ms. Barlowe, my apologies, but we're a bit short on time," the other Screener listlessly offered as he dropped the stolen cover to the edge of the bed and began to dump a series of items from his satchel on top of it. I struggled to speak against Khal's resistant palm.

He looked at me warily, cautioning me against screaming, then pulled his hand away.

"What am I doing here? And what do Screeners want with me?" I asked, my eyes darting from one to the other.

"I told you it would be easier to carry her while she was asleep," said the Sheet Snatcher, intent on emptying his satchel on my bed.

What?

"I'm not going anywhere until someone explains to me what is going on!" I screamed in a whisper.

"I promise I'll explain while you get dressed," Khal gestured to the clothes strewn across the bed.

"You're mistaken. I'm not a Believer. I got tested a few days ago, but you can check again if you'd like. Can you please find someone who can tell me how I ended up in the hospital? Did I faint again?"

Khal and the Satchel Carrier exchanged confused looks. "We're not Screeners. We're Believers, like you. But there are real Screeners here now— doing a raid. We need to get out of here before it's too late," Khal insisted.

"Why would I run from Screeners? You're the ones sick with the C+ gene, right? It looks like they're here for you."

Satchel Guy stepped purposefully towards me and leaned forward. His impatience teetered at the edges of his calm expression. "You know what they do to Believers, right? Do you think they'll handle you differently once they scan you?"

"But I don't have the—" He grabbed my hand and pressed it to the scanner on his wrist. It turned orange.

"It seems you love Jesus more than you realize," Satchel quipped, devoid of expression. My head spun. There was no way. I hadn't even seen the inside of a Bible, let alone been a Believer.

"Th-that's not possible. You—"

“Look, you have two choices: wait here for them to check you with their scanners, or come with us to figure out why you’re an unbeliever with the gene.”

I was confused. But he was right. They would arrest me over some stupid glitch. And do who-knows-what-else to me. Everyone’s heard of the confinement stories. I needed to fix this before a real Screener found me. I stared at Khal as I considered whether I was making the right choice.

“Can you at least tell me why I’m here?” I begged.

“You fell from a Ferris Wheel,” Satchel responded simply while closing his bag.

Of course I did.

“Hand me the top.”