**Worthy.**

Vault 73 was hollow, a carcass of its former self. The iron clad walls had rusted and chipped, the smell of decay hung thick in the air. Silence. Silence was all that filled the emptiness of the entrance, it was still. Lost in time. Forgotten. Like everything in the merciless wastes that claimed anything in its wake. Spirits of the former inhabitants echoed within the closed walls and tight halls, the laughter, the happiness, the conformity. It slipped away like an old whisper, one that had stopped talking long ago.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The silence was replaced by an uproar of screeches, clashing, and metal shifting. Light flooded into the vault, the sun hit the ancient machinery and it glittered. Like a lost treasure. Shadows replaced the light, quick shadows that dodged and ducked in suspicion. Soothing voices drifted into the silence to replace the ghosts of the years in isolation, like a breath of life which resurrected the dead.

“The entrance is clear, as I expected. The place hasn’t been touched in decades... maybe more. You could tell by the hinges on the door.”

“Uh-huh. Just because it hasn’t been opened doesn’t mean there isn’t anything lurking.”

“I doubt anything could survive down here long enough. I mean – without supplies. Even vault dwellers need to stretch their legs.”

The two shadows moved, one was adjusting the door to make sure it was open – but not open enough to draw any attention, the other was inspecting the derelict equipment.

“Don’t touch that, Jesus, Kait.”

“I’m not doing any harm; it’s all old junk anyway. I don’t think it’ll function anymore.” There was disappointment in her voice.

Raven scowled, her hands busy tying back her long black hair into a tight bun. Her sniper was propped against her thigh and her eyes trained on the redhead with caution.

“You have a bad track record with machinery. So don’t touch it.”

The other woman, Kaitlyn, was a redhead with a gritted face. Her face scrunched into a frown at the accusation, as if she was really shocked that Raven had made it.

“I’m an excellent handy man – uh, woman.”

“You mean after the last time you ‘fixed up’ my sniper?”

“Okay, not my best work,” She mumbled, picking up and inspecting some random wrench on the table – as if she were really interested. “But at least it doesn’t make that annoying clanking sound now.”

“You broke the trigger.”

“It was an unnecessary complication.”

Kait was done listening, her eyes spotted a door which lead further into the ruins of the vault and she was giddy. She ducked before the panel and gripped it, trying to find the weaker points in the casing. Raven was behind her, arms folded and waiting patiently. The panel snapped off and wires hung loose in a cluster of tubes and sockets.

It took less than two minutes to get the door panel up and working again, it lit up green and she clipped the panel back into place.

Raven’s brow quirked, she couldn’t mask her sudden surprise that the ginger had fixed something, and neither an explosion nor an electrocution had occurred. Kait caught her stare and she scoffed.

“I don’t mess up everything, you know,” she whined with a pout.

“I didn’t utter a word.”

“But it’s written all over your pale little face.”

“Uh-huh.”

The door scraped open half way, and then seemed to get jammed. Clearly, it hadn’t been used for a long time, the mechanisms weren’t working as they should. Raven stepped forward and planted herself in the gap between the door and the frame. She gripped the door and pushed, and after a lot of work it gave way and she opened the door completely.

Raven pressed herself against the frame and Kait shuffled past, into the maze of the vault halls.

The narrow corridor branched out; two more doors hung to the right, while three placed themselves on the adjacent side. The corridor continued, at the end was an old elevator, and it continued right deeper into the vault.

Kait got a quick start, she was nosing around in the rooms in a frantic search for what she expected to find – and was cruelly disappointed every time that she didn’t find it.

“What’s this little spring-thingy suppose to look like?” Raven hollered.

“Uh, it’s small... you know, maybe you should just look for a pip boy. Like the one I’m wearing,” she replied. “It’ll be easier if I can make modifications and repairs from that, and add onto mine.”

They scavenged in silence for a while; Raven was kicking around boxes and praying that a pip-boy would fall out. Anything to get her out of these ruins will do. The bedroom she was searching through looked untouched, preserved, everything was neat and in its place. It gave her just a little bit of satisfaction to mess it up.

Raven’s ears detected something behind her, at first she brushed it off as Kait, but her instincts were telling her to turn around. Just as she was about to, a violent hand grabbed her, and covered her mouth. An arm wrapped around her waist and she kicked, furiously, to escape the grip of the unknown attacker.

She was being dragged out of the room and down the hallway, she could see two of them as she continued to struggle and fight. One of them was tapping away at the elevator and her heart sank, blood turning to ice.

Kait heard the knocking of metal and she rolled her eyes. Raven was being pouty. It was easy to tell when the sniper was fed up, even if she was very indirect about it. Her level of professionalism still told her to do her job, but she’d sulk about it too.

Something didn’t register right with the ginger, she finished checking the last box of useless machinery and headed back to the door. She registered three figures, *four?* Her hand easily found her magnum and she un-holstered it, pointing it down the direction of the hallway. First thing she saw was a flurry of limbs, Raven’s limbs, trying to break free of the vice grip of the larger man. She aimed, and fired off two shots to one of the two lackeys.

“HEY!” Kait shouted, trying to grab their attention. One of the bullets pierced his skin but he continued, unfazed. They pulled Raven into the elevator and Kait panicked, she didn’t want to fire again and risk injuring Raven, so she sprinted to the sliding door. It slid shut tightly, and she ran into the shaft door, her fists pounding onto it with immense force.

“No, no, no, no!” She knelt down before the elevator control panel and began to get to work, her shaking hands pulled and connected the wires in a frenzy. But the elevator lights cut out, along with what was left of the hallway lighting and Kait banged her head against the wall.

*The power, they’ve cut the power.*

After a few frustrating seconds of trying to resurrect the power, she let out a strangled growl and released the wires.

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Emptiness had returned to the vault corridors, the only sound that dared to disturb the silence were the shallow breaths Kait took. The girl was curled up into a tight ball, her back pressed against the elevator and she let the darkness consume her. Her mind whirled, possibilities of what had happened to her accomplice, her *friend,* filled and clouded her mind. Raven was here because of her, and now she was gone because of her.

Kait had lost the willpower to move, to think rationally, her guilt ate at her for some time before the events replayed in her head.

*The elevator had been shut from the other side, a main power source? A control room? Maybe the overseers’ office, since they pretty much ran these places back in the day. But where would they keep an over ride? If something were to go wrong, there would have to be one. Somewhere around here?*

Kait grew frustrated, her mind wasn’t fitting the pieces together and she buried her face into her hands.

*There has to be back-up generators, there’s always back-up generators – like in those old holotapes. But my pip-boy is acting up, maybe there’s a terminal where I can download schematics of the floor and base of the vault... there may have been one at the entrance – oooh maybe I can go through sound testing? But wait... ugh.*

Kait hauled herself off of the cold floor, her back still pressed against the elevator. She was done moping around, the more time she spent on a pity party, the less likely Raven’s chances of survival were. First thing she needed to do: Check the terminals. There might be a floor map of the vault, from there can work out a route.

Finding the entrance took little to no time, she skirted around the derelict machinery to find a terminal which seemed to still be in alright condition. She booted it up, and groaned when a password request appeared. Her fingers went to work quickly, she eliminated the duds and soon enough she’d cracked it.

After a few moments, she found the schematics for the floor and downloaded them onto her faulty pip boy. If she was lucky, and she was far from it, she would be able to read the map and figure it all out. And today she was taking no prisoners, her pipboy flashed up the map and she smiled with relief.

Her mind sorted out her route like a puzzle, and her legs lead her west, down some stairs and through a door that read: ‘Engineering, keep clear’.

Naturally, Kait didn’t keep clear and she entered anyway.

Up ahead, she saw a figure moving in the shadows, and a metallic voice call, “Identification.”Kait ducked behind a bunch of creates, and the robot fell silent for a while. She could hear the machinery clunk around and search for anybody, but it came up short and hovered away.

*Protectron.*

Kait despised the hunks of glorified guard robots, it was because of those talking time bombs she was left the followers of the apocalypse.

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*The old Mormon fort was much busier today, Kait noted, watching the recruits fumble around and getting from one place to another. She should be busy too, her repair and engineering was a little bit rusty and they were working on shutting down hostiles by sneaking up on them. The lesson was in theory, quite tough, but once you know what you’re doing it’s a piece of cake.*

*Her instructor, Ignacio Rivas, was trying to get her to focus on the electronic theory of it. He’d always been patient with her, she was easily distracted.*

*He tapped his pencil on the book and Kait sat upright, she’d been dreamily watching the other recruits march around with their instructor, Arcade Gannon. He was showing them some basics with the appropriate use of med-x and how to stop an infection before it spreads. Arcade was actually more of a researcher here, he’d taken the instructor position because Julie Farkas was busy today.*

*“Your lesson is in here, not out there.” He joked, and Kait flushed red.*

*“Sorry, but robotics is kinda boring. Do we have to do it?”  
“Afraid so, child, the wasteland is a very dangerous place. There are countless pre-war robots roaming around, and you’ll be a lot safer if you know how to disarm and shut them down.”*

*“Alright.” Kait sighed, flicking through the text book.*

*“Our lessons are almost over, if you felt comfortable, you could try and shut down a protectron?”*

*“You think I’m ready for that?”*

*“You’ve a very bright student, one of my finest. I think you’ll do great.” Kait smiled up at him, but her confidence wavered. Robots were always dangerous to her, they couldn’t bleed, and they couldn’t be reasoned with.*

*“I suppose I could give it a shot.”*

*The relentless heat of the Mojave sun beat down on Kait as she stood in the middle of the Mormon Fort, opposite a Protectron the followers had salvaged from robot factory north of here. Ignacio was preparing it, making sure it was working alright while Kait watched. The Protectron was to be programmed to attack only her, she was the only enemy. Her gaze fell to those around her, since they’d taken up the middle of the fort, where the open space was, she had a crowd.*

*Arcade stood with his students on the sidelines, he held his clipboard and was writing down notes. His small group of pupils were talking amongst themselves and trying to do some practical work involving what they’d been taught. Arcade, however, was watching Kait over his glasses, his curiosity piqued and he wondered if this was entirely safe.*

*Kait played with her fingers, trying to make herself as small as possible.*

*“What was it... uh, duck left, then get around it to hack off the back panel. Wait, no... it’s the combat inhibitor. Break the blue wire... or was it the red? Shit.” Kait’s thoughts jumbled up and she tugged on her red raggedy scarf.*

*Ignacio had finished prepping the robot and he gave her a thumbs up, she returned it, though less sure of herself.*

*As soon as the robot powered up, everybody stopped to watch, and Kait’s heart started to pound. In her right hand she clutched the screw driver, and in her left she held a plasma pistol – just in case. She wet her lips with her tongue and the robot started to target the redhead.*

*“Hostile Detected!” Its mechanical voice modulator rung out.*

*Kait felt like she’d frozen, moving seemed impossible and her mind was clouded with fear. She inhaled a few times, and the robot started to approach. Forcing the steps, she made a few weary movements forward, her eyes never leaving the robot’s face as it came closer and closer. She skirted left, and ducked to avoid its swinging claws. She got behind it and used the screwdriver to unhinge the panel. The hunk of metal landed with a thud on the floor, and she went to rip out the red wire.*

*“Firing weapons!” It started to move faster, and Kait watched on, baffled. It’s lasers were now working, and it started to shoot at anything that moved, never mind her. In no time, it’d fired off a few of its electronically charged shots towards the group of students. They moved out of the way, scatted in all directions and the lasers struck a supply of crates, and set it up in flames. Another laser caught a tent, and caused it to catch alight.*

*“Shit the Combat Inhibitor makes it go haywire” Kait remembered, and tackled the robot in an attempt to stop its destruction.*

*The Protectron turned sharply, its steel arm knocking Kait back a few feet before it fired its laser, and it struck Kait’s side sharply. She let out a painful cry; the right side of her body fell numb. The force knocked her back and she landed on the floor in a heap, kicking up a storm of dust when she landed.*

*Her vison blurred and time seemed to slow, she slipped close to unconsciousness but forced herself to stay away.*

*“Unable to contin-“ The mocking metallic voice lowered until it was silent. Everything fell silent.*

*Kaitlyn lifted herself up with her weak arms, they shook and she was bleeding profusely from her injury. Ignacio was stood over the robot, which was now a lump of deactivated electronics where it had previously been a frenzied killing machine. In his hand were the blue wires, and a disappointed expression painted his face.*

*She couldn’t look him in the eyes, instead she forced herself up with what was left of the adrenaline and tried to stand. One of the other students walked over and supported her. Kait’s hand was soaked in blood as she pressed it to the wound and she limped away for medical attention.*

*Arcade watched the scene with a disappointed sigh, and just then, Julie walked in, her eyes took in the scene and then she marched over to Kait.*

*“What the hell did you do?” She demanded, and Kait gritted her teeth. Ignacio walked over to interject, Kait needed medical attention and she could answer questions after.*

*“Sorry, Julie. I was teaching Kaitlyn here her robotics lesson. There were some mistakes.”*

*“Mistakes?! That robot destroyed what was left of our supplies, and we already have trouble keeping a steady income of them as it is.”*

*“Miss Farkas, I uh... I got my wires confused, this was my fault. Don’t blame Ignacio.” The adrenaline was running out, and she was starting to feel the pain.*

*Arcade approached, after letting his students go and help attend to those who were injured.*

*“If you don’t mind my interruption, would you like me to tend to her wounds?”*

*Julie clenched her fist, throwing the girl a heated glare. “Fine, fix her up. We are by no means finished talking about this.”*

*The woman left, leaving Kait, Ignacio and Arcade alone.*

*“I’m not an expert in robotics, but I don’t think that went so well. But hey, the wall is intact. That’s something.”*

*Kait didn’t speak, she lowered her eyes to the floor and allowed the student to take her towards a tent.*

*“Your bedside manner is terrible, Arcade.”*

*“This is why they keep me out back with the books, where I can’t offend anybody.”*

*Ignacio sighed. “I’d better clean up the robot and try and calm Julie down.”*

*“And i’ll tend to your student’s third degree burns. We’re both in for an exciting day.”*

*----------*

After releasing the breath she didn’t know she was holding, she slowly moved out. Kait was never a sneaker, she had the co-ordination of a three legged cyber dog. She managed two steps before the robot returned, and she clambered back into her hiding spot.

*This is getting ridiculous.*

Kait waited, her head peered out from behind the crates and the robot approached. It didn’t seem to see her and it turned around, its scanners looking for the intruder. It was now or never. A surge of adrenaline coursed through her veins and she clenched her fist which held the knife.

Within a split second she jumped from cover and tackled the robot, her knife jabbed into the robot’s back panel to pull off its power casing and her other hand ripped the *blue wires* out violently.

“Please refrain from cover until the intruder is dealt with! Please refrain from cover until the intruder is dealt wi-“

The robot’s voice droned into silence as it shut down, it’s steel shell collapsed onto the floor in a heap and Kait stood over it, knife in one hand and the wires in the other.

“That was for you, Ignacio.”