

BINARY AWAKENING



Chapter 20: First Contact
Esteban Gallardo

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When Evan first laid eyes on Christine, she was already aware she was being watched—by someone unlike anyone she had encountered before.

She had known this day was coming.

For the past two days, Christine had sensed it. A convergence of possibilities. A shift. She hadn't mastered the art of reading people like Evan had, but she had become adept in something else: detecting vortexes of outcomes—disturbances in the probabilities of this artificial world that revealed approaching crossroads.

And this one was unlike any she had ever seen.

Christine and Justin had spent the last 48 hours preparing. Every possible version of the meeting had been studied, planned, and simulated. But still—nothing could have fully prepared her for this vortex.

It wasn't dark. Not like the others.

Most outcome vortexes swirled with chaos, tainted with hatred, rigid and predictable in their descent into destruction. But this one? This one shimmered. A spectrum of possibilities, radiant and wild. A rainbow of futures—hundreds of thousands of them—swirling around a single point of origin: him.

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Even more puzzling, these futures weren't fixed. They bent, stretched, looped. They were unpredictable. Christine could feel it in her core: this was the closest thing to real life she had ever sensed in this dead world.

"So that's what real life feels like in a place filled with ghosts," she murmured to herself.

That morning, just before leaving her apartment, another shock rippled through her perception.

She detected three smaller vortexes, tethered to the main one. They weren't as vast, but they radiated the same strange spectrum—hope, unpredictability, free will.

They were with him.

Christine's eyes narrowed, and a half-smile formed on her lips.

"Interesting," she whispered.

Evan stood on the rooftop, binoculars pressed to his face, scanning the street below. From this vantage point, he had a clear view of the apartment building. He and his friends had meticulously planned this—angles, distance, escape routes. No exposure. No risk.

It was all for nothing.

Christine stepped out onto the street.

At first, she simply blended into the crowd—just another face among the digital ghosts. But Evan saw it immediately: something others couldn't. A dark, twisted metallic thread pulsed in the space between them. A connection. Not code. Not light. Something deeper. Real.

She stopped abruptly in the middle of the sidewalk. The crowd moved around her, unbothered. They couldn't see what he saw. Couldn't feel it. They didn't know they were brushing shoulders with one of the only two truly alive beings in this dead simulation.

Christine didn't move. A statue in the stream of digital life.

Then, without hesitation, she turned her head. Her eyes found Evan's exact position. He froze.

She mouthed the words slowly.

"Let's talk. Alone. Don't worry, it's safe."

Then she turned and walked away—calm, deliberate—toward a nearby café.

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The meeting was going to happen. Evan knew it with absolute certainty, even before lowering the binoculars. She had seen him. She had known all along.

He sighed and turned to his friends.

"Our cover's blown," he said. "She already knows."

Concern flickered across their faces, but none of them looked shocked. Deep down, they had always considered this possibility.

"She wants to meet. Alone," Evan added, his tone steady.

"Hell no!" Sonia snapped. "You're not meeting that monster by yourself!"

"Sonia's right," said Daniel, his voice tight. "We don't know what she's capable of. Everything we've seen tells us she has zero moral limits. This could be a trap."

Evan inhaled slowly, grounding himself.

"I get it. I do. But I've learned to recognize truth in this system. She meant what she said."

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The group fell silent. No one could argue with that. They didn't fully understand how Evan perceived the simulation, but they had seen the results—how he could thread through probabilities like a god among ghosts.

"Okay," Sonia said finally, reluctant. "But we're staying close. Across the street. You so much as flinch, we're coming in."

Evan nodded.

"That works. I'll sit near the window. You'll have a clear view of everything."

That seemed to ease the tension just enough. His friends visibly relaxed, though their eyes still burned with worry.

They didn't need to know the truth.

Evan already understood what they couldn't yet grasp: whatever Christine was, whatever she had become—she was like him. No one else could help. No one else even mattered.