

## 2. Torn – Bad Influence



“I can teach you some good bad habits.”

And that’s how it started.

The creed of a generation, a symbol of where we’d come from and where we were going. A few simple words to separate the saved from the damned.

Between death and damnation.

We’re already dead, in some ways. Damnation might be a step up. Depends on the subject. Depends on the crime.

A bad habit is merely a distraction from a bad life. With enough flashing lights and colors, most anything can be overthrown.

“I’ll teach you some good bad habits,” she repeated with smoke trailing from her mouth between the words. She leaned simply; her body bent just enough to stay standing. The nonchalant shrug, the uncaring gaze. I nodded my approval and stepped

away.

She was Me. Every so often I tried to take a step back, to see what they saw. But it was impossible, even being as removed as I was. There was a wall that bore my own convictions, devoid of their preconceptions. I walked away, exhaling smoke as I went, the image of myself in the mirror dissipating like the smoke.

She was Me. And I'm Maven.

A Merrick by birth. By indecision and deception. Love is merely a fairy tale, a nice story for ignorant children or dying fools. The most pleasant fiction of all.

I was bred for madness. My heritage demanded it.

I am the child of Pandora Riddle and Doyle Merrick.

Pandora – solitary daughter of Draven and Madison Riddle. Madison, daughter of Sketch, a past owner of the local tattoo parlor. Draven – older brother of Darius, and murderer of dozens of people. Out of all those names, only Pandora lives.

Doyle – only son of Cicero Merrick and the girl he raped. Cicero, baby brother to the legendary Magus, older than Elysium. Half-brother to Vincent. Born of Jasper and Erika. The entire family – dead.

My lineage lay lost, six feet deep. Forgotten by those who should have known better. The body dies, but the name lives on. The idea continues.

If you institute it properly.

If you know what you're doing and why. What was I doing? Why?

Upholding a good name. Because even the insane deserve respect.

What am I?

An actress. A manipulator of deception. A fool, a lunatic. You name it – I might be part of it. Overall though, I was just the leader of the act. The most extravagant liar of all if you will. Years of practice will do that for you.

I led the distraction. And below the streets, I was home. I stayed there more than I stayed at home. As long as I showed up at school, the family didn't care too much. They cared I guess, but they knew where I was and that I was safe. They established the show, after all.

The show – the circus. They set up shop. And we took over. They'd come around every so often to check up. Harley most of all. It's because they used to be here, because they're out of the loop. Because they've been replaced. And they're too old to be as strong as they were. Age stole tone from their commanding voices, took light from their shining eyes.

It's something...to see the wheel turn, the cycle continue, and the survivors collect dust. Times like these I'm glad that the great Merrick family was spared from the fate of age. We were meant to drive fast and die young. What does the badass do when she grows up anyway? What job is waiting for the adult rebel?

That's why we're all artists of sorts. So we can be free.

That's also why we work the circus. Layne takes care of everybody. The circus was a cover for the drug ring. There was more going on than drugs. That's probably obvious. Layne and his girl took good care of their "family" of the streets and sewers. It was named for her.

It was my home. I was the ringleader now. I took Harley's place at the top. And it suited me just fine. I learned from the best. We were a family of truly exceptional people.

Excellence breeds excellence. The same principle applies to madness. It breeds. I tried to deny reality, but the blood doesn't lie. The words are there, proof positive.

You can't hide or run from who and what you are. The truth is the same, and always existent, whether you choose to see it or not.

I am Maven Merrick.

I am a street demon. I'm the ringleader of the show. I'm an addict. I am the self-proclaimed reincarnation of my grandfather.

I can't act like I knew him personally. I merely have the perceptions of other, more ignorant persons. And a small piece that's supposedly his. He was gone long before me. I can honestly say that I'm truly disappointed that I didn't have the pleasure of meeting him. From what I've found, he was truly remarkable.

Ambition can be dangerous. Deadly at times. I'm torn between my duty to those who raised me, the duty that I owe my mother. And my true family. My dead relatives. The real, true, Merrick family. Buried six feet deep. Lost from this world.

Welcome to the show, kids. This should be fun.