

BOUND BY  
GLASS



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**BOUND BY GLASS**

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This is dedicated to all of you.



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# *Book One*



*Hello, stranger.*

*You must've noticed by now that our world is dead.*

*Destroyed by the sheer force of nature and a devastating war, the environment eventually became so toxic you couldn't even breathe its air or walk outside. Mankind was forced to find shelter in enormous glass spheres, which they soon started to call the Globes. Quite ironic, actually, since it's basically a glass prison—the prison in which they are waiting for the air to clear and the world to return back to normal. They have been waiting for nearly two centuries. I wonder if they forgot why they were there in the first place.*

*They don't know you can walk outside once more. At least, I think they don't. Still, some of the Globes' inhabitants choose to remain in their glass cage. I'm not sure if they have even realised the world has fixed itself—to some extent, of course.*

*However, some of the Globers don't seem to find their idea of home so horrible. Like always, you've got the entitled and the poor. The rich and the wealthy, also known as the High Families, live in sophisticated mansions and sip on their wine, while the poor die in the streets. The suppressed, starving, lower class regg work all day and night to please them. Ruled by the mysterious, tyrannical set of five Masters, they live in constant fear, unlike the High Families who have nothing to be afraid of—well, except for a bad hair day.*

*And, of course, you have us. The Outsiders.*

*I was under the impression the name explained itself. Apparently not. We, the Outsiders, are the ones who have succeeded in escaping the tyranny of the Masters, but still have to face their wrath every single day. The Masters' Authorities do their best to hunt us down and kill us, but, we haven't given them the luxury yet. They'll find our Tribe one day or*

*another, or one of the other eight somewhere else. I have no idea where they are, or how big those Tribes are though.*

*Either way, we are all going to die—whether it's by the hand of the Authorities, disease or wild wolves. We've accepted that, but we try to make it as hard as possible for them. We are all accustomed to death, especially me.*

*In the Globes, you're only allowed to have a single child. Otherwise, it'll simply become too crowded. My mother became pregnant—for the second time. My parents and brother had to escape, or face the wrath of the Authorities; having a second child is a capital crime and punishable by death. They planned their escape for months, and even then, when they took a run for it my father and brother died trying to protect my mother. She made it, but she disappeared once she gave birth to me... outside the Globes.*

*So, here I am. A seventeen-year-old Outsider who has lost everyone except for her foster dad and friends.*

*Who would ever believe I'd return to that glass prison that had taken everything from me?*

*It seems like destiny had a different plan.*

*My name is Tenna, and this is the story of the girl who returned.*

I threw down my small pencil, blunt from all the writing I'd done. Why was I writing this all down? Now, I had wasted paper for nothing.

I re-read my words. Ridiculous. I crumpled the scrap of paper, squeezing it in my fist.

Wind blew through my papers and books I had spread out on the rock in front of me. Globe Studies, History, Survival Skills, Tribe 101... even as an Outsider you had to go to school. I hated it, but it had saved my life a couple of times. Never let the teacher hear that though—I'd never hear the end of that joke.

But still, I enjoyed the silence of the woods. With only the sounds of the wind braiding its way through the trees, it was peaceful down here. Back at camp, people were always talking, there was always a fire going, and there were always these sounds of life bustling around you.

I swatted away a branch that tried to land in my face.

The world was messed up. After decades of natural disasters, the earth had already been standing on its brink. But, of course, man thought the world had just needed that little push to doom it forever—a destructive, nuclear war.

As I said: the world was screwed up. I was sitting right under the evidence of that.

After nearly two centuries of enduring acid rain and suffering from the remnants of radiation, the plants had finally started to grow again. A new species of trees had evolved, bailas, a resilient, strong tree which sprouted everywhere in the rocky underground. It might not be flourishing, no, but slowly yet steadily, the bailas had started to grow.

*Let's hope it stays that way.*

With a sigh I looked up at the crown of the bailas twin I was sitting under. Multiple rough light grey trunks all twisted up together, trying to stand still in the ever-present winds. Its spiky leaves were turning brown instead of their usual purple, which meant winter was closing in.

I looked down again, at the crumpled piece of paper I was holding tight in my hand. Straightening the sheet I exhaled and stared at the words, which were dangerous, but true. I folded the sheet, tapping it against my chin in a subconscious gesture.

I didn't know what had come over me to write this. Maybe the feeling of injustice towards the Globes, or simply because I had to get it off my chest. Either way, if anyone but other Outsiders found this, I'd be seriously screwed. I flipped the piece of paper over, with the intention of ripping it to shreds.

Suddenly, a wind tore the paper out of my hands, sending it sailing through the air. *If an Authority found it...*

Cursing, I jumped up and ran through the dense bailas woods, following the dangerous words. I watched it getting caught in the winds, every time I tried to grasp it, the paper just out of my reach. I dodged trees and boulders, leaping over whatever was in my way.

Without noticing where I was running to, I ran straight through camp. Camp's not much, an old cabin which miraculously survived the war, surrounded by tents and self-made huts, set up in rings. Several women were hanging up laundry in the outer ring, and some children were helping them. As I raced by, I watched them get into a soap fight.

I almost bumped into my dad, Otanec, his calloused hands shooting up in surprise. He wasn't really my dad, but he adopted me when my mother disappeared. He had been the Leader of the Third Tribe for as long as everyone could remember—which made him automatically also the oldest person in the Tribe. (Well, maybe save from Granny Froster). His ash grey hair fell on his leather-clad shoulders, as a smile appeared on his tan and wrinkly face. He was just over fifty, exceptionally old for an Outsider, but his eyes were still as observant as an eagle's.

He smiled when I neatly avoided him.

“In a hurry, Tenna?” he asked, raising his bushy eyebrows.

I waved him away with a hand, trying not to let the parchment-coloured sheet out of my sight.

“Better run!” he yelled after me. I looked around one more time, and saw him straighten his strong shoulders under his worn leather jacket before he continued his way.

I focused back on running, following the scrap of paper. Seriously, how the hell was it doing this? I swore under my breath, pushing myself forward—it was as if this sheet had a life of its own. I took a deep breath, ignoring my burning legs and kept moving. I actually quite enjoyed the run, it had always been something I had found joy in.

An Outsider must always be in good shape. In this tempo, I could run for hours. Good thing that I was small, that way I was fast—very fast.

Before I knew it, I was out of the habituated part of camp, and back into the woods. The bailas trees had made place for pine trees, their evergreen branches immediately softening the light and dampening the sounds of camp. It suddenly got really quiet. My boots thumped on the soft underground, kicking up dirt and needles in my wake.

Rays of light penetrated the blanket of leaves overhead, speckling the ground with golden spots, illuminating small bits and pieces of the young forest.

The thin sheet slowed down, lowering gently. Pushing myself for a last sprint, I jumped on a fallen tree trunk, leaping into the air. I grabbed the sheet before it could get caught by the upper winds. I exhaled.

*Gotcha.*

Swiftly, I tore the paper in a dozen pieces, burying half and throwing the other half in a puddle. Outsider paper dissolved in water in a couple of minutes, so I didn't have to be afraid an Authority would find it.

I heard a rustle.

I looked up from my crouch, all my senses immediately in alert mode. I scanned my surroundings, searching for potential danger.

The clearing was dead-silent, part from the rustling of the bailas trees, swaying in the wind. But it hadn't been the rustling of the branches what I'd heard—it was definitely the snap of—

There it was again. Like a footstep, or a careful step to maintain balance.

I unsheathed my old dagger, wincing as the metal scraped against the worn leather. I passed the blade to my dominant left hand, flipping it over. The Dark Iron metal reflected the dim sunlight, mirroring the grey clouds drifting above me. I left my gun in the holster fastened around my leg, because it made too much noise, and bullets were too precious. We were low on supplies already. I hoped the raiders had hit a weapons cart this time.

I twisted my head around, carefully holding my footing. There was a large bush, just behind me. It still had all its dark purple leaves, like it was trying to resist the upcoming winter.

With my eyes still strained in the direction the sound had come from, I slowly moved in the direction of the bush. One step. Two steps. With a final step I turned behind the bush, safely hidden from sight. I exhaled, glad I was out of sight. Still, I gripped the dagger tight in my hand, ready to jump out at any moment.

I whipped my head around as I heard something next to me—

*Oh gods.*

*How the hell can I manage to hide behind the bush where Jaedie's making out with her boyfriend Cilen?*

My best friend Jaedie put my thoughts into words. “Oh my gods, Tenna!” she exclaimed, tugging her green pullover down to cover herself up, “What are you doing—”

I slapped a hand over her mouth, shutting her up. I glanced to Cilen, who was swiftly buttoning up his flannel. Red stained his cheekbones, his blue eyes full of shame. He felt guilty so fast, it was unbelievable.

I laid a finger against my lips, urging them to be quiet. I released my other hand from Jaedie's mouth, using that hand to sign.

*'Something. Over there.'* I signed, mouthing the words as



well. I knew Jaedie was horrible at signing—she usually spent the time when she should be studying them, sleeping—or, as it seemed to be the case the last couple of weeks, making out with Cilen.

Cilen, who was a hunter and did know what I was signing, started to sign as well. His hands angled inwards, moving up and down slightly, creating the words; *‘What is it?’* he asked, lowering his eyebrows.

I shrugged, my hand discreetly brushing past my temple. *‘I don’t know.’*

I shifted again, positioning myself so I could see just between the branches of the bush. I could only see a small portion of the clearing, but it was enough.

An enormous wolf had stepped into the clearing, its white fur rippling with every movement its strong muscles made. The elongated snout and longer legs made it different from normal wolves—this was a Rifecsa wolf. Ruthless, strong and wild, these wolves were on top of the food chain, even going as far as attacking camps. We lost many good people because of these bastards. I kept my eyes focused on the snow-white wolf, as I made the best-known sign of all Outsiders. I arched four fingers as a claw; *Wolves*.

Even Jaedie knew the sign, as I heard her gasp silently beside me. I held my breath, looking at the beast as it crossed the clearing. It seemed to walk in slow motion, its careful steps slowing making way to the undergrowth on the other side of the clearing. I could hear it sniff the air, looking around cautiously. I felt the wind hit my face—we were on the good side of the clearing. It couldn’t smell us.

When it was gone, I exhaled slowly. My heart was beating rapidly in my chest, and I wiped my sweaty palms on my pants. That had been close. When I turned back around, Jaedie was holding Cilen, who had a grim look on his face.

“This is the closest they’ve been so far,” Cilen whispered. “There are bound to be more. We have to tell the Leader—we have to tell your father.”

I nodded. Rifecsa travelled and hunted in packs of four or five: we had to expect more to come.

I swore. Goodbye, sneaking out and going for a run. After a sighting, Otanec always established a curfew. Somehow, he was always stricter with me. It had probably something to do with his son who died, Wax. I bet it had been wolves as well.

After several minutes had passed, I dared to stand up. I gestured Cilen and Jaedie to come as well.

When we were walking back to camp, Jaedie hooked her arm in mine. She grinned as she turned to me. “Next time you decide to barge in on Cilen and I, please leave the wolf behind, would you?” she whispered, so that Cilen couldn’t hear. She was always able to bounce back, cheer me up. I admired her for that, for her calmness. Or was it naivety?

I rolled my eyes. “You’re unbelievable,” I said, shaking my head. I couldn’t hide a smile, though.

We actually didn’t fit together at all: while Jaedie was taller, bustier, and had a boyfriend, I was shorter, had a petite frame and short brown hair I’d cut myself with my dagger. She was loud while I was quiet. Most of the time.

We walked back in silence, sometimes running, and occasionally looking over our shoulder. We walked back to camp, where—what we couldn’t have known—chaos had arisen.

“What did I tell you!” Nasher was fuming. “You knew it was going to go wrong someday!” he yelled, his eyes bloodshot.

\* \* \*

After the bush incident, Jaedie and I came back to the Tribe, where we found everyone rushing around.

“What the...” Jaedie said, and shot a worried look toward the cabin.

Anya, Jaedie’s mom, went on a tricky raid this morning. They were going to raid a train which carried weapons and ammunition. These raids were dangerous, but necessary. Without the ammo and guns, the Authorities would be able to catch us much faster, and the wolves would be able to snatch us during our sleep. Anya was the only tech in the Tribe, after Sil had died. He was old, and it had been wolves. It happens. Luckily he had taught her everything before he became wolf-chow. That might sound harsh, but it was the truth.

The train carriages are armed with multiple electronic locks. They have to be disarmed, which requires you to possess some technical skills. You can’t just blow it up—that’d only make it worse. Not only would that set off the alarm on the cart, but the entire Globe would be notified about it as well. Anya was the only one who could do it, but she never went on raids. Jaedie was worried sick.

I stopped the first couple of kids who ran past me. I focussed on a boy with red hair, bending down and holding his shoulder. “Tell Astra there was a sighting, quick.” The boy frowned,

his brown eyes filled with confusion. I sighed. “The head of patrol. Wait, just tell anyone on patrol duty—just go.” The boy nodded solemnly, before waving off his friends and running in the direction of the patrols.

I turned my attention to his friend, a boy with sandy blonde hair. “You guys should know who the head of patrol is by now, you know,” I said. “What’s going on?” I asked the twelve-year-old.

“Raid’s back,” he said, with a horrible accent. I had to concentrate to understand what he said. “Thing is, those gals no have be out of there in over an ‘our,” he whispered, “We no allowed to open the door. But, some of eh’ scouts said they saw an ‘thority convey, just several kilometres out,” he glanced around before scurrying away again. My mom escaped the Globes herself, so she’s a first generation. They’re pretty rare. I’m her child, so I’m a second. Jaedie is a third: her grandparents escaped the Globes. What generation Outsider you are is determined by how many generations back your ancestors escaped the Globes. There’s a game kids play, in which they look at Outsiders and guess which generation they are. I never played it.

“Mom,” Jaedie breathed with a smile. She ran onto the porch of the cabin and started banging on the door. “Mom!” she exclaimed, hitting with her fist on the old wood. “Otanec! Open up! I want to speak to her—”

The door swung open, revealing Otanec in the threshold. Jaedie muttered a thanks and dipped her chin in respect, slipping past him into the hallway. I wanted to follow her, but Otanec held up a hand.

“Tenna... this is for them. You can better come back in a little while,” he said. I wanted to ask why, but he already shut the door in my face. Great. Thanks, Dad.

I turned on my heel, looking through camp. Even though it was early in the morning, the camp was full of activity.

I saw a bunch of kids running after each other with sticks, scolded by their mothers who were preoccupied with hanging up laundry or sharpening daggers and other weapons.

A group of men and women had just come back from a

hunt, with their catch hung over their shoulders or on their belt. Some started flaying the animals, while some went to their partners to give them a kiss and help them with what they were doing.

However, I didn't see the person I was looking for—Kael. My blonde haired, best friend was nowhere to be seen. Typical. I jumped off the porch and jogged over to the infirmary. After I threw a glance into the makeshift building lined with beds, I came to the conclusion he wasn't there, so I turned around and set in a sprint to the rock formation. There was a fat chance he'd be there.

I slipped past the patrols, which were already stopping people from leaving the premises. News travelled fast. Tiptoeing past the post, I quickly hid behind the trees, where they couldn't see me. They were too busy discussing with each other anyways—something about the mountains, about the vast caves which stretched beneath the surface. They were far, far away, but they were our last resort if we had to hide from the Authorities for a prolonged and indefinite amount of time. Our last plan—and our last hope, need it ever be necessary.

As I was running through the woods, I heard the soft echoes of the trains rushing through the valley, packed with supplies, machinery and who knows what else. Those were the trains our raiders would slip into and steal supplies from.

My best friend, Kael, who I was looking for right now, was one of them. Being a healer and a raider may sound like a strange combination, but every fast runner in camp always ended up being a raider somehow. His medical skills had proven to be useful at times, so they kept him in the loop—if he didn't have urgent patients to tend to. Like now; a patroller had fallen out of a tree and broke his rib, which is why Kael didn't go along with this particular raid.

Wait—did I say *every* fast runner?

There was only one exception: me. I was one of the fastest runners, but my father, Otanec, didn't let me join the raiders. So, I ended up being a switcher, helping out wherever I could. I had to admit I liked the variety of tasks I was given—I had never been one to be able to commit to one single thing for

the rest of my life.

Still, switchers were always regarded with a bit of prejudice: we were perceived as useless because we weren't particularly good at something. But did it look like I cared what others thought of me? No. That mentality had saved me a lot of trouble.

When I reached the rock formation, I saw I had been right. I already noticed a golden mop of hair at the base of the rocks.

The boulders were covered in small plants and bright green moss. I had no idea where these rocks had come from, but someone told me that there had been an incredibly long winter, thousands of years ago. Apparently, these rocks were the remains of enormous ice glaciers. That was pretty crazy to imagine, even for me. The smallest rocks were about two metres in diameter, and the largest about six, and rested all the way on top. They were placed on a hill, and you could see the valley stretch out under you if you sat on the boulders.

Kael and I joked about it, and called it Ol' Tom, because of the big crack in it shaped like a T, the blemish caused by the extreme cold, back in the day. The temperatures had dropped to incredible lows back then. Mankind had nearly gone extinct, but, luckily, two groups survived. These two groups grew out to be the two Races—the two who still exist and live in the Globes till this day

Kael was fumbling with something in his hand. He was sitting a bit folded up, his long legs almost touching his chin. As he looked up, his ash blonde hair reflected the rays of the dim sun.

Kael saw me and raised a hand, "Hiya Tanners!" he said, using my nickname. He patted the rock next to him. "May I have the honour?"

Kael and I had been best friends since the crib. He was a fourth generation, and we had been in the same nursery when we were babies. His great grandfather escaped the Globes, if I'd remembered correctly. We used to play hide and seek between the rocks of this very formation when we were little. Nobody came here, except us. I sat down next to him.

"Dad won't let me in the Cabin," I sulked, "Something is

going on and I don't know what." As I laid my head on his shoulder, I sighed. "I don't like not knowing." I looked at the bailas trees softly swaying in the wind. Somewhere between the trees was camp, and I could see thin swirls of smoke rising from the numerous campfires.

"You're just too curious, Tenna," Kael answered with a knowing grin. "Luckily, I am too."

I perked up. "What?" *Did he know something?* I grabbed his shoulder. "What happened?" I said, digging my nails in his shoulder.

"Yeah... oi! That hurts!" Kael exclaimed. He took a deep breath and turned to me, his dark brown eyes serious. "They've come back from the weapons raid," he said.

I perched up, "But that's great!" I exclaimed. "We—"

He interrupted me. "Not everyone came back, Tenna. Anya was left behind."

\* \* \*

"What did I tell you!" Nasher was fuming. "You knew it was going to go wrong someday!" he yelled, his eyes bloodshot.

"Nasher, calm down. We are going to fix this," Otanec assured him. "There is a chance that Anya is still alive," he said, lifting a hand to ease him.

Nasher Froster was Jaedie's dad. He was a robust, stubborn man, and would protect his family at all costs. He had brown hair, streaked with grey, and calloused hands from the hard work of being a lumberman. Together with others, he provided warmth in the harsh winter, which was yet to come. His personality was also quite similar to his work—hard, but with a warm heart.

Anya was pretty much the opposite. She was one of the kindest people I knew, and always stood ready to help another person. She could be very strict, though—don't try sneaking out at night with that lady on guard. But, even when she was away, her presence lingered; my mouth started to water when I thought about the *kalla* pancakes she made for us just yesterday, made from wheat and the small sour berries that

grew near the river. They were delicious.

Kael had to go back to the patroller with the broken rib—apparently he didn't stop whining about the pain. Jaedie was sitting on the couch, her elbows on her knees, staring off into empty space.

I sat down next to her. "Hey...It's gonna be okay," I assured her. Even though it felt a little awkward, I put my hand on her shoulder, giving it a small squeeze. "She's strong."

If the Authorities had taken her, they would probably torture her for information. It broke my heart, but somewhere deep down I hoped she wouldn't make it, or she'd end up like Galli.

A few years ago Galli was found on the border of the forest, bloody, hurt, scared and confused out of his wits. They somehow managed to get a seemingly logical story out of him.

He was tortured, for months, in the catacombs under the Globes. It had been nearly constant, and only interrupted by short moments of peace where he would be patched up. After that, they would take him again. He was tortured so much and so badly that he went mad.

He once talked to me, his pale blue eyes clear of madness. He had grabbed my arm with his bony fingers and said darkness would claim me. Before I could say anything, his eyes had clouded over again. I had ignored it, knowing that Galli said stranger things. One time, he even proclaimed he had seen the future; he talked about the fall of the Globes and the extinction of the Races. Like that's even possible.

Otanec cleared his throat. "Ryth..." he said, "Could you tell us what happened?"

A figure stepped out of the shadows next to the fireplace. It was a woman, with dark skin and long, brown hair. Her shoulders sagged under her dark red shirt, which was splattered with mud and other substances that I couldn't identify. It looked like blood, but I refused to believe that. Tyrell Rickerson was standing just behind her—I hadn't seen him standing there. I supposed he was Ryth's shadow—the person who would step into her shoes after she retired, or died. Brown hair, and eyes which matched the colour of the algae the Globes, he stood in the shadows, almost camouflaged against the brown



wood of the wall. When we locked eyes, his eyes twinkled, as he brought his hand up to his eyes, faking to cry with pouted lips. I immediately turned my head away from him—he was being incredibly disrespectful. But still, there was no other person who could do such a thing, besides Tyrell *Dickerson*. Ryth cleared her throat.

“We...” she started a bit dazed, but she straightened her shoulders and continued with more power. She sounded like a soldier, her back as straight as a ruler and her voice strong and clear.

“We had successfully traced and entered the weapons train cart. Anya started working the locks as we stood guard. We—” her voice faltered. “We were ambushed. We had covered our tracks—someone must’ve seen us, or someone sold us out.”

I couldn’t believe why someone would do that—we Outsiders were a close-knit family. No one would betray family.

“We were ambushed,” Ryth continued. “A whole platoon of Authorities came and overran us, shooting with electro-guns. Nasty buggers,” she said, “When you’re hit by one of those darts, it’s over. Electric shocks rage throughout your body, but no one can help you. They’ll get electrocuted as well.”

I felt Jaedie tense next to me, and I grabbed her hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Klarc and I were able to get away,” Ryth continued, “But, we lost Xando. He got shot—I’ll inform his partner and daughter as soon as possible. Anya...” Ryth took a deep breath, avoiding Jaedie’s gaze. “She hid in an alcove near the door, but Authorities swarmed the place. We had to run. I heard a scream, and then silence. I wasn’t able to confirm her status. I’m sorry,” she said, “She fought honourably. Her soul will find—”

“No!” Jaedie jumped up, cutting her off. “Her soul will *not* find rest—she’s not dead!” She balled her fists, stepping closer to Ryth. She took another breath, hissing through her teeth. “She’s my mother! Don’t you fu—”

“JAEDIE!” Otanec roared, silencing the eighteen-year old. My eyes grew wide. I had rarely heard my father raise his voice—he was tapping into his full potential as Leader. The

entire room was quiet; it even sounded like the fireplace had silenced by the outburst of the usually oh-so reserved and just Leader.

Jaedie immediately lowered her head. She knew she had crossed the line. Otanec walked up to her, laying a hand on her shoulder. "I know you're upset, dear. But you have to accept this information, and react to it wisely. You are almost of age, and I expect you to be a good shadow. Sit down. Listen. *Learn.*"

*Shadow.* Otanec had offered Jaedie a place at his side—to practice, learn how it is to be a Leader; that also included masking your emotions for the sake of the Tribe. I had never felt the urge to lead—I had rejected my father's offer months ago. Jaedie's calm demeanour and charismatic attitude had been the attributes which had intrigued my father the most. Now, they seemed to have melted away.

The room was still silent. I had stepped back, too. Otanec cleared his throat. "Continue."

Ryth looked up, flashing a worried look Jaedie, who was sitting on the couch. "We weren't able to retrieve any weapons," she said, sounding even more defeated than before. "Not that it matters now."

Nasher promptly stood up. "It *does* matter!» he exclaimed, his voice broken by grief. He walked up to Otanec, looking straight in his eyes. He was taller than him, and a lot bulkier, but Otanec was the one who held the stakes. Somehow, the old man looked much more important and impressive than Nasher, respect surrounding him like a pulsing aura.

"The wolves have been coming closer and closer," said Nasher, his eyes full of fire. "Especially with the winter coming. We have to protect ourselves, just look at what happened!" He pointed at the door, "The Authorities came this far. We need that ammunition to protect our families."

Otanec looked defeated and put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry Nasher," he said, "We can't open the locks, we don't have any technicians," he exhaled. "I'm sorry."

Jaedie lifted her head. "We do," she said softly, but with a steady voice. "Me."

# 103

## WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND

“Mom taught me how. I can dismantle the locks,” Jaedie said blankly, shrugging.

“No,” Nasher said, “No! I’m not going to lose you too!” he said, grabbing her shoulders. “We will get your mother back. I promise,” he whispered.

“Lose me too? You have already given up on her!” she scoffed. “I can’t believe it,” she shook her head, “I know I haven’t given up. You can’t keep me here.” She tried to pull herself loose with a jerk of her shoulder.

“I won’t! I won’t let you Jaedie!” Nasher exclaimed.

“Mom’s not gone,” Jaedie said softly, but poisonously, and stood up. Jaedie wasn’t the loud-angry one. She screamed in silence, which might be even worse.

Jaedie stormed out of the cabin, leaving the three of us behind. Otanec was quietly observing, stroking his beard while Nasher sunk on his knees, defeated. I hadn’t seen Ryth nor Tyrell leave, but they must’ve slipped out when my attention was focused elsewhere.

It was dead-silent, the only sound in the room the soft crackling coming from the burning fireplace.

Nasher exhaled deeply and lifted his head, staring in the flames. Sadness washed over his features, as he closed his eyes briefly, taking a deep breath.

“Tenna...” he said in a low voice. He scoffed. “Jaedie. She’s—” his voice cracked and he turned to me. “She’s too much like her mother. I can’t get through to her—you have to make her

realise. Stop her. Please.”

I didn't know what to say. I had never seen her like this—I knew Jaedie as a bubbly, yet responsible teen. I couldn't imagine what she was going through; she had always been incredibly close with her mother.

I nodded at both my dad and Nasher, before jumping up and following my best friend.

\* \* \*

I found her at the well. It was placed in the most outer ring of the camp, next to the laundry rocks and lines.

As you see, the camp is set up in rings. You have the inner ring, where the cabin, nursery, infirmary and the supplies are. Around that, you have two bigger rings, separated by large pointy stakes, as lines of defence. That's where all the tents and huts are located. Now that I thought about it, the surface of the Tribe is pretty big, even though it holds only about twenty five families, say, 150 inhabitants.

It's nothing compared to the thousands who live in a single Globe.

The outermost rings were meant for washing, training, pelt drying, and similar activities. The well was also there. Jaedie always went there if she was upset. She liked to throw rocks into the water, deep down, and hear the splash echo up. It calmed her, somehow. I couldn't blame her, but I bet there was a good twenty kilos of rock at the bottom of that well thanks to that lady over there. That said something about her temper.

She was leaning against the worn stone of the well, staring down in its depths. Her brown hair cascaded over her shoulders, reaching till halfway her back. I watched her for a few moments, as she picked up pebbles, letting them drop into the abyss below.

Walking up to her, I made sure I coughed—Jaedie got startled really easily, and I didn't want her to accidentally fall into the well.

“So,” I said, “What's the plan?”

Jaedie kept still, as she threw another pebble. “Get my

mother back. But my father sent you, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did," I replied, picking up a pebble and rolling it between my fingers. "He wanted me to stop you—but I'm not going to do that."

Only now Jaedie turned her head, locking eyes with me. I could see complete confusion flash over those stormy grey eyes, as they were trying to understand what I had just said. "You're not?"

"Nah," I said, stepping back and heading to one of the old grinding stones. We once had used them for grinding seeds, but we didn't use them anymore. I climbed on the heavy stone disc, balancing on the rim before sinking down and sitting on the stone. I swung my feet in the air, hitting the gravel when my feet came back down. "Joke's on him."

Jaedie jumped to me, flinging her arms around my neck. "Thank you," she whispered, "She can't be dead. I can't accept she is."

I wrapped my arms around her as well, rubbing over her back. "It's okay. I'll come with you—that's what friends are for." I gently pushed her away—that was enough hugging for today. Jaedie knew I didn't like hugs.

Anya was most probably gone, but Jaedie and her father didn't want to believe it. Neither did I—but it was better to prepare for the worst than hope for something and have your heart broken. I had hoped for my mother to come back to me for years. In the end, it had only caused me disappointment and regret, so I knew better than to hope for something that was doomed from the beginning. I did want to support my friend though—this venture might help her in her grief.

"Thanks," Jaedie said again, sitting on the stone next to me. "You know, if we—"

Jaedie got cut off by a voice sounding in the distance. "Oi, I see some tits!" I recognised that voice—Tyrell Rickerson: the one person I did not want to see right now.

"Hello ladies," he greeted as he walked up to us. "Ah, are you guys having a moment? How adorable." His thin lips pulled into a sneer, his eyes twinkling with joy.

Since he had joined the raiders crew, the scrawny boy I

knew from school had grown up. He was pretty muscular, a bit too much for my liking, with muddy brown hair and green eyes like coloured glass, or the algae on the Globes. They were plain, washed out, and just didn't do to me what green eyes normally would. They had a mean look in them. To some people though, he could be described as handsome, but I knew him. His personality made him ugly, and that was the worst kind.

His nose was crooked, like he had broken it several times—which he probably also had. He believed he was the 'big guy' and all the girls were drooling about him. He couldn't be more wrong, because he was by far the rudest person I had ever met.

I slipped off the grinding stone, crossing my arms. Jaedie followed.

Tyrell grinned as he threw his arms around the both of us. "Get off me, Tyrell," I said, and shook his dirt-splashed arm away. "Leave us alone."

"Rawr!" Tyrell laughed, "Kitty-cat got claws!"

I sighed and pushed his arm off my shoulder, with two hands this time.

He pulled Jaedie a bit closer. "Oh, Jaedie, I feel so sorry about your mommy," he said, knotting his eyebrows together in a pitiful frown. "I can still hear her screams, you know. Very traumatic."

I saw Jaedie ball her fists at her sides, as she leaned away from him. I could see she was trying to restrain herself.

"Hey babe," Tyrell whispered, pulling her closer, "If you ever need someone to cheer you up, you know where I am."

"Let me go, Ty," Jaedie said in a calm voice, but I could hear she was forcing herself to keep her voice down, "I've got a boyfriend," she said, this time venomously.

"Oh, that guy?" Tyrell acted surprised, "What's his name? Cilen? I can do much better than that, I thought ya' knew that by now," he said, laughing, his lips close to her ear.

"That was a long time ago, Ty," Jaedie hissed.

Tyrell laughed again and tried to grab her butt, but that was when I exploded. Red clouded my vision, and before I knew it I was yelling.

"What the hell, Rickerson!" I bursted out. "What is your

problem? Leave her alone! She specifically asked for it. You—” I walked up to him, and poked my finger in his chest, accenting every word I said. “Could you, *for once*, not only think about yourself, and imagine how it is to lose someone who you love? Can you? Can’t you let us be, even if it’s just for a moment, before you start wasting the air again? You’re being an ass,” I huffed, “I’m surprised no one has punched you in the face yet.”

I spat the words at him, meaning every single word. I was done with him treating everybody like they were nothing, of him thinking like he was the most important person in the entire world—like everything revolved around *him*. He had come exactly at the wrong time—Jaedie and I were *not* in the best mood right now.

It was completely unlike me, but I was glad *someone* finally told to him to cut his crap. That someone just so happening to be me.

But then something great happened—my best friend Jaedie Froster came to the rescue.

She punched him in the face.

Twice.

And even though I was just a bystander, it felt *good*.

As Tyrell stumbled back defeated, a bloodstained hand over his nose, I heard him mumble something.

Jaedie interrupted, deadpanning: “Oh look Tenna, his nose is now aligned with his mouth!”

The boy strode away, his face like a storm, muttering about something that was pretty much intelligible. I didn’t care.

When he was out of sight, disappeared between the trees, Jaedie let out a deep sigh. “I’ve wanted to do that for a long time.”

“Me too.”

“Felt good, didn’t it?” Jaedie said, still looking at the direction Tyrell left in.

“Very,” I replied. “Let’s do that again sometime.”

“Deal.”

## 04 | NO ONE AGREES WITH US

“Jaedie doesn’t want to realise Anya is probably gone,” I said, dropping my hands in my lap, as I watched over the valley stretching out in front of me. Jaedie was hellbent on going after her mother—which meant going to the Globes. No one had ever attempted going back into the Globes; we would be mad if we tried to figure it out on our own. Even then, we would still have to find a way to slip out of camp—which was virtually impossible, now the curfew had been set in.

Darkness was already setting in, the rays of sunlight casting long shadows on the trees with the river slitting through the forest like a silver thread. I followed it with my eyes, squinting when I reached the horizon where the red sun was slowly closing in on it. Over a few hours, it would be completely dark.

I turned my gaze down to Kael, who was sitting on one of the rocks below me. “She’s my best friend, and I *want* to do this—for her sake. I just don’t want her to get killed.” I sighed and put my head in my hands. I looked at the pale purple-blue skies and the strands of ever-present ash grey clouds, thinking about how Jaedie seemed to believe it’d be a piece of cake.

She was sure we would make it. I had my doubts.

So, I consulted the professional, Kael Jonah. He’d been on several train raids, since he’s already eighteen, unlike me who had to wait another bloody four months.

“So, uh—” I pulled some loose bits of bright blue-green moss from the rough surface of the rock. I could better get this over with. I inhaled deeply. “Can you help us? Tell us what we have to do?” I pleaded, claspng my hands together. “Please?” I said, dragging the word.