Chapter 19

A Leap of Faith

Jess looked precariously over the cliff's edge to the sparkling waters below. "I don't know about you guys, but I don't see Gwen or the woman down there." she suggested.

"Oh well" Xander started "Maybe that's because the lady's a stupid hologram, and I'm pretty sure that Gwen just died in water, so no wonder we don't see anyone down there!" Jess slapped him across the face.

"Would you shut up?!" She retorted, and took a deep breath. "We could all just jump together so that if anything happens to one of us it happens to all of us."

"Well that's a splendid idea isn't it," Xander said sarcastically, "if one person dies then we all get to die. Yippee!" He said with mocked enthusiasm. Nicole gave him a pointed look before stepping forward, to face the group.

"I say we do it." she said confidently. The group nodded in agreement but Xander looked dumbfounded.

"Did none of you hear what I just said?" he spoke up.

"No we did," Jess said with a shrug, "we just didn't care." She motioned everyone together in a line facing the cliff edge. "Everyone joins hands and on the count of three we jump, okay?"

"Of course I'm on the end, of course I'm the one that's going to die first. Because everyone wants me to die. Thanks a lot guys." Campbell complained.

"Would you stop complaining and get ready to jump? Thank you." She raised her voice, "One, two, three."

And with that they were off the cliff. At least most of them were.

"Sadie oh my gosh, what are you still doing here?" Xander asked.

"I could ask you the same exact thing and your answer wouldn't be any different." Sadie answered. Xander looked confused.

"So you're staying here because you don't want to give in to Jess' annoying, overpowering attitude?" He asked.

"Oh. I guess not." Sadie looked down. "It's just...my friend. Well my boyfriend I guess. He died from falling... and..."

"Oh." Xander looked a little stunned, "I'm sorry, I... didn't know." He looked over the cliff as the rest of the group became smaller and smaller in their approach to the water. "Um Sadie? I think someone's hurt. We better go down there." Xander gestured to the figure, limply falling with the others.

"Well shoot." Sadie said. "It's Campbell."

As Campbell fell, the others looked at him, nervous. He hadn't made it fully off the cliff in the jump, and had lost a strike because of it. Now the group was arguing about whose fault it was.

"I swear, I jumped with the rest of you." Nicole explained.

Robyn nodded in agreement.

"Same here."

"Same."

"Me too." The others answered the same.

"It's probably Xander's fault." Jess started, "after all, he's the one who-wait. Where are Xander and Sadie?" They looked around, panicked. They weren't in sight.

"Guys look!" Nicholas pointed upwards. Two faces could be seen peeking over the edge of the cliff, so far away, that they had to squint to see them. "Uh-oh, if they're that far away, then that means…" Nicholas looked down. They were falling faster and faster, the water rushing up to meet them. "Everyone brace yourselves!" He shouted. "And someone grab Campbell!" Jess looked to her right, and seeing that she was the only one in arms reach of Campbell, she grabbed his arm, and wrapped her free arm around her knees.

"Um guys?" Robyn asked, "Where are we?" Only Jess, Nicole, Campbell, and Robyn, sat in a large, heavily padded room. "And where are the others?" Campbell suddenly woke up and looked around.

"What the heck just happened to me?" He asked, confused and frustrated. He reached for his neck to find only three remaining strikes, and groaned. "I knew it. You guys! Why did you have to put me on the end?" Jess shrugged with a sly smirk.

"Most efficient way to get rid of you." Robyn and Nicole laughed, and Campbell punched her in the shoulder.

"Not cool." He said, fighting back a smile. He looked around. "But, where are the others?"

"Hello?" Nicholas sat in a large padded room by himself. "Guys?" He shouted, "Gwen? Robyn? Jess? Campbell? Anybody?"

"AaAaAaHhHhH!" Sadie and Xander appeared, falling from out of nowhere, and landing beside him.

"What the frickle-frackle just happened? I know that I jumped, and then Sadie. You just kinda…fell." Xander recalled.

"Apparently I didn't 'jump in time'" Sadie said with air quotes, "And I lost a stupid strike for it! Ugh!" She exhaled with frustration and looked around. "Where's everyone else?"

"I don't know," Nicholas said, confused, "the group isn't here, and neither is Gwen."

"But she is," Xander pointed to the corner of the room, "That's her, right?" Gwen's body was asleep,

curled up on a couch, hidden in the very farthest point in the room.

"I swear, she was not there a second ago." Nicholas assured them. Suddenly, Gwen opened her eyes and slowly sat up.

"Um...guys?" She asked hesitantly, "Did I die?"

"Gwen!" Sadie rushed over to her and gave her a big hug. "You didn't die, but...oh. You lost another strike." Gwen's eyes widened.

"No, no, I can't... that means I only have two left, and if I lose the last one I..." she stressed.

"No." Nicholas said, "It's not going to come to that. You're not going to lose anymore," he gestured to Xander and Sadie. "We'll make sure of it." Gwen nodded and sighed. Xander looked up with big eyes.

"So, um not to ruin the moment or anything, but what do we do now?" He asked. No one was able to answer, because suddenly, the floor dropped beneath them.

Chapter 20

Melody

They landed in a large arena, everyone but Robyn and Nicole sitting on bleachers. A large stage rose up in front of them, and placed close to the front were two podiums. Robyn stood behind one, Nicole behind the other.

"What are we supposed to do?" Nicole asked him.

"Just be glad that our lives aren't in ultimate danger right now," Robyn said with a half-hearted smile, just as music started blasting into their ear drums. A loud overhead voice announced the beginning of the game.

"Welcome folks! Today, we're gonna play a little game called: Name...That...TUNE!" The voice sounded like a game show host, only slightly more menacing. A smile appeared on Nicole's face, right as Robyn's smile dropped. "You will be able to work as a team, until our special little teammate Nicole, will have to work by herself." The voice instructed. "Got it? Great." Xander looked to his right, where Jess was seated.

"Jess." He whispered. No reply. "Jess!" He said, this time more demanding.

"What?" She turned around, her hair flying over her shoulder.

"Were you guys in a big white room before you came here?" He asked.

"Uh yeah. Why?" She looked a little perplexed.

"No reason," Xander said casually, "Just trying to figure things out." Jess turned back to the stage in front of them, and so did Xander, watching as Robyn and Nicole named song after song correctly.

"Royals"

"Hello"

"Bird Song"

"Footloose"

"Hey There Delilah"

"Happy"

"Lovely"

"Umbrella"

It went on like that for about five minutes before the spotlight on Robyn went down, and Campbell heard a muffled oof next to him. Robyn sat, sprawled on the bleacher next to him.

"Bro, you good?" Campbell asked, casually.

"Yeah," Robyn responded, "gosh, that was stressful." He turned his eyes back to the stage where Nicole stood, continuing their previous streak. Suddenly, a sweet, almost melancholy song came on, and Nicole froze.

"No no no no no!" Robyn jumped out of his seat.

"What is happening?" Gwen asked, curious "Why isn't she answering?" Robyn looked at her, his eyes grim.

"This was Kitty's favorite song. She's not going to be able to name it, because she's frozen!" Robyn recounted. The bittersweet notes played carefully, told a story of their own, leaving behind traces of hope but also despair. A buzzer went off, loud above their heads. Nicole was shook herself out of her daze and reached for her neck. Three strikes remained. Sadie stood up and called out to her from the seats.

"Nicole!" She yelled, "You okay?" Nicole responded with a very half-hearted thumbs up, before the light went down on her podium. Another muffled oof landed next to Robyn. Nicole righted herself and sat quietly with her head in her hands.

"So um not to break up the moment or anything-" Xander started.

"You realize by saying that," Jess started laughing, "you actually are breaking up the moment?"

"Shut up." Xander countered, trying to hide his own laughter. "What I was trying to say was that we should probably try to leave this building and get out of whatever this is." He gestured around the stadium. Nicholas nodded.

"He's right, we should probably find a way out." He looked resolutely to his left and right, "I mean, we might be able to-" SPLASH!

Chapter 21

Stroke

"Where did Xander and Nicholas go?" Gwen asked. They were now in a swimming pool facility, sitting on metal stands amid the humid air. She was right, both Xander and Nicholas had disappeared

from beside them, and were nowhere to be found.

"They are probably just trying to find a way out, but that wouldn't explain the swimming pool…" Jess said skeptically.

"I mean, was it just me, or did you guys hear that splash when the floor you know," Robyn pointed to their surroundings, "just kinda dropped." Suddenly the holographic woman appeared, in the same "fashionable wetsuit" as she had before, but she seemed out of breath, and the holograph itself was… glitching.

"N-n-next ch-challenge i-is s-s-s-swimming!" She said, her voice cutting in and out. She looked almost scared, her prim and proper facade from before, gone. However, it was no longer a mystery where Xander and Nicholas had gone. They stood at one length of the pool, looking around with confusion.

"Guys look! They're down there!" Robyn pointed to the two figures standing on the pool tile.

"Yeah, we saw them." Campbell said, annoyed.

"O-on y-y-your m-mark," the holographic woman started up again, "g-get s-s-set go!" She managed, before disappearing completely. The two guys jumped into the water and swam through it with surprisingly concise and speedy strokes. They were making good progress when a dark, shadowy cloud appeared in the water behind them.

"Guys? GUYS?" Nicole asked nervous, "what is that?" The looked toward the cloud, that was now spreading within the pool.

"I mean, at least they can swim fast, maybe they'll make it?" Jess said hopefully. "Please make it…" she whispered under her breath.

"What did you say?" Sadie asked her.

"Oh, it's nothing." Jess said, and shook it off. The guys finally made it to the other side of the pool, and Nicholas quickly jumped out. Xander started to pull himself ashore, but his suit was stuck in the pool tile.

"Xander, come on." Nicholas said casually, and offered his hand to pull him up. Xander stood up and brushed himself off, before waving to the group and smiling wide.

"Oh my gosh," Gwen put her head to her palm, "He literally could've just lost a strike, or multiple, and now he's smiling. I mean do we expect anything different though?" She started laughing and Nicole laughed along with her. The two girls chatted with each other, all the while giggling, and doubling over with laughter. Suddenly the boys appeared behind them.

"Hey guys!" Xander practically yelled.

"Ah!" Gwen jumped.

"Woah, calm down. We have to keep our heart rates down. You especially." Nicholas put his hand on Gwen's shoulder, and she nodded.

"Oh my gosh guys. Literally chill. No one cares about your heart rate right now. Well maybe except Nicholas." Campbell said pointedly to Gwen, as Sadie worked to stifle a laugh.

"Campbell, would you be quiet? You're not the one who's already lost two strikes!" Gwen persisted, "You wouldn't underst-" A low rumble overtook her voice, as the pool sunk into the floor, and a large metal room appeared in its place. Screens covered the walls, and displayed the inside. Targets of all shapes, sizes, and colors rotated around the room in circles, making their ways up the walls and around the center mark.

"Alright, who's gone this time?" Xander asked loudly.