

Chapter 16

Leaving

"Well what do we do now?" Nicole asked. No one really knew. Sadie was shaking so hard that it was very visible.

"Sadie, are you okay?" Xander asked.

"Yeah!" She started, "No. This is all too much, I can't stop thinking about the strikes and being stuck here forever and-and-"

"Woah," Xander put his hand on her shoulder. "No one's going to be stuck here. We're going to make it out. All of us."

"Hold up. Who are you and who kidnapped Xander?" Nicholas asked, laughing.

"Look, I'm just being helpful where I'm needed, and right now Sadie looks like she needs some help."

"Hey!" Sadie retorted, punching him in the shoulder.

"Look, she's not shaking anymore!" Xander looked at her and said, "Sorry, but it's true." Sadie huffed and walked towards Nicole, and Jess followed.

"I say we just head out that door and see what happens." Jess suggested.

"Absolutely not." Nicholas refused. "I for one don't think that is a good idea, or even a safe idea. I say we stay here for a while and just think about it. She never said we actually had to play the game."

"Yeah but something could still happen to this cabin, like...a tornado or something. What I think we should do is look in our cabins for any sign of what's to come." Gwen suggested.

"Of course the detective says that." Campbell mumbled sitting back in a rocking chair and judging everyone from afar.

"Where did that come from?" Robyn asked, perplexed.

"Oh I don't know, maybe it's been sitting here the entire time. It's not my fault that all of you have been too busy fretting, while I actually took my time to relax and store up some energy." Campbell said with a shrug.

Jess rolled her eyes "My gosh, you are so full of yourself. Let's just go already so that I don't have to listen to more of this." Jess gestured around her, motioning to everyone in the room, before turning around and heading toward the door. Robyn and Nicole followed her leading the group towards the door. Only Sadie remained. She stared at them with her big blue eyes wide, a look of utter fear on her face.

"I-I'd rather not. I-I can just stay here." She stuttered.

"No you can't," Xander protested, "You're coming with us." He walked behind her, grabbed her shoulders and practically shoved her out the door. As they stepped outside they were surrounded by a lush green forest. Everyone looked in wonder at the ripe fruit hanging from the trees and the dim sparkle of fireflies. It wasn't

night time despite their late arrival. Suddenly someone started coughing. Nicole screamed.

"Robyn! Someone help!" Nicole was crouched over Robyn who was on the ground, looking pale as if he couldn't breathe.

Chapter 17

Poisoned

"What do we do?!" Nicole asked, frantic.

"Well if I were you, I would go look for an antidote in the woods that surround you." The holographic woman appeared out of nowhere.

"You!" Jess pointed a finger at her, "You did this to him!"

"Did I? You have five minutes before he...I would just start looking." She said, "Oh and Robyn," she looked at him with faked pity, "Might want to keep your heart rate down." With that the woman disappeared. Nicholas took off running into the woods with Gwen and Xander on his heels. Campbell took his time, walking into the woods at a slow casual pace, before Jess shoved him into the forest. She started running to catch up with the others. Sadie stared at Robyn in shock before kneeling down next to Nicole and putting a hand on her shoulder.

"Hey look at me," Sadie whispered. Nicole turned her head "He's gonna be okay. Trust me. The most you can do for him now is just keep your heart rate down and make sure nothing else happens to him." Nicole nodded in response and closed her eyes before taking a deep breath. "There you go. Just keep that up." Sadie assured her before following the others into the forest.

Everyone was scattered deep in the trees when they heard a scream. It sounded like Gwen.

"Gwen?" Nicholas called out. He ran towards the sound. Had she found it? He found Gwen in a clearing laying on her back, breathing hard. He looked at her neck. "No." He said out loud.

She looked at him. "What? Is the injury that bad?" Nicholas looked up at her to find that her face had a small bite mark just centimeters above her eyebrow. Nicholas shook his head.

"Gwen. You lost a strike." He said gloomily. "What happened?" She looked at him in shock before embarrassment flooded her cheeks.

"Well I thought I saw a vial in a tree. It turns out it was a snake." So that explained the bite mark. He helped her off the ground.

"Come on, let's get back to camp, I'm sure they've already found the potion and Robyn is probably already back to normal." He assured her, as they made their way back to camp.

As Sadie jogged into the forest, she ran face first into Xander's back.

"Watch where you're going!" He said sharply before he turned around to meet her gaze. "Oh. Sadie! Didn't see you there." He said with embarrassment.

"Yeah I got that message." She retorted briskly, before looking into the surrounding trees. Xander walked up beside her.

"Sorry about that" he apologized.

"You're fine," she brushed off casually.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

"I'm fine. Are you able to leave anyone alone for even a second?" Xander was silent. "That's what I thought." She jogged off into the forest, gazing around at the possible hiding spots for a vial. What kind of game were they even in? A cruel one, that's for sure. Sadie thought to herself. Suddenly she was back in the clearing. How had she gotten there? She hadn't been going in circles...had she?

"Sadie! Did you find it? The time's almost up!" Nicole said, breathing fast. Sadie shook her head. Nicole looked down at Robyn, panic spreading through her eyes. She couldn't tell whether or not he was breathing.

"Nicole! His neck!" Sadie pointed out. One of the lines on Robyn's neck was slowly disappearing. She kneeled down next to Nicole before placing two fingers on his wrist. "His pulse is extremely fast. We need to calm him down. Do you have any water, or anything cold?"

"No, of course I don't! What am I, a magician?" Nicole asked, breathing hard.

"Hey, hey! Stay calm! You can't waste any strikes!" Sadie reminded her. Suddenly, Gwen and Nicholas came out of the forest.

"Hey is Robyn oka-oh no he's not." Nicholas stopped at the edge of the clearing. "I thought you guys had found the antidote already!"

"Nope." Sadie said matter-of-factly "Wait...Gwen...your neck. Did you-"

Nicholas interrupted her. "She was bitten by a snake. Apparently injuries count as strikes. Holograph lady sure didn't tell us that."

"Yeah well she didn't tell us Robyn was gonna be poisoned either, so..." Nicole replied. They all looked down at Robyn fearfully, who was now turning blue at his fingertips. "Guys, I don't know if Robyn's gonna make it." Nicole whispered. Right as Sadie went to comfort her, Jess burst out of the woods, breathing hard, followed by Xander.

"I...found...the antidote" Jess said between breaths. She held out the red bottle to Nicole who grabbed it before rushing to Robyn's side with Xander.

"Come on Robyn..." Nicole muttered, "Hang on. Please." She handed the bottle to Xander, who poured it gently into Robyn's mouth, and closed her eyes. After what felt like forever, Robyn took a huge breath in and laid there with his eyes open.

"Nikki? Guys? I..." Robyn started. Nicole wrapped him in a hug and sat up with a smile on her face. "I-I'm confused. What happened?" Robyn asked.

"I'm kinda wondering the same thing." Campbell walked slowly out of the forest. "Robyn, good to see that you're back to...whatever it is you're back to, and Gwen. How did you already lose a strike?"

Nicholas shut him up and explained to the group what had happened. "...and now we're here." He finished. The holographic woman appeared quickly, as if waiting for the end of his sentence, before starting her own monologue.

"Well, I'm sure you've seen the dangers of this game, and I assure there are more to come." She started.

"Thankfully, you saved Robyn in enough time, and he didn't...anyways! I'm sure you're all wondering what's next, and I'm sure at least one of you has noticed your dear friend Gwen is gone. No? Well let me point you in the right direction." The group looked panicked. Nicholas turned around scanning the area. She had been right behind him. Hadn't she? Where was Gwen? He wondered. The forest scene around them faded to reveal a bright, modern furnished room, the floor covered in keys. In the middle of the room was a tank, and in that tank was Gwen. And that same tank was slowly filling with water that pooled around her ankles. Gwen pounded on the glass around her, but it didn't budge.

Chapter 18

Submerged

Marion. That was all Nicholas could think of, as he watched the water around Gwen start to rise.

Commotion surrounded him, people picking up handfuls of keys and trying them in the lock to the tank, but he just stood still in the middle of it all. Useless. He chastised himself. She's literally drowning and all you can do is stand there. Nicholas shook himself and bent down to grab some keys. He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned around to see Campbell, of all people, looking at him with sadness in his eyes.

"Hey, um..." Campbell said, "I lost someone close to me, my little sister, to be exact, and this already hurts for me, alot. So...if you need anything, I'm willing to listen...cause I know what it's like to relive this kind of stuff."

Nicholas nodded and went back to picking up keys alongside Campbell.

"None of them are working!" Jess called out, "We may have to find one that is hidden. Look everywhere for a key." She dug through couch cushions and plant leaves, looked under chairs and under tables, to no avail.

"Nick!" Nicholas looked up to see Gwen pounding on the glass, trying to get it to shatter. "It won't break, it won't..." she kept slamming her fist against the panes but they wouldn't give. Nicholas grabbed a key and attempted to use it to break the glass, but nothing happened.

"My gosh Nicholas, get over here and actually help her by looking for the key, the glass obviously isn't going to break." Jess said exasperated. Nicholas turned away from Gwen to continue looking for the key. The water was around her waist now and it was obvious her heart rate was rising. Sadie stood next to the tank, talking to

Gwen in attempts to keep her heart rate down. By now, the pile of useless keys had grown to knee height, and was continuing to grow. They were frantic now, trying everything they had to get Gwen out of the tank, slamming key after key into the slot with little progress.

"Guys! Please!" Gwen pleaded. The water was up to her shoulders and was now rising faster and faster. "Is it going to be like this every time?" Nicole shouted. "How many people have to almost die before this stupid holograph woman is satisfied?" The water had risen to Gwen's neck, and she was now trying to keep her head above the water, as she advanced towards the top of the capsule. Robyn threw his shoulder into the glass, joined by Xander and Campbell, trying to break her out of the capsule, despite its sturdiness. Gwen let out one more scream before her head submerged and she started fighting to breathe.

"Hold on Gwen, hold on..." Sadie repeated, her fists clenched so hard that her knuckles had turned white.

Suddenly Gwen froze and her body lay still, as the capsule disappeared.

"Where the heck did she go?!" Campbell shouted.

"I think what you mean to say is thank for not completely killing my dear friend Gwendolyn." The woman appeared from out of nowhere, holding a key made out of pure diamond. "And I believe you were looking for this." She held it up, letting the lights reflect off of it.

"You witch!" Nicole exclaimed, "you had the key the whole time? That whole search was fruitless and Gwen is gone because of you!"

"All you had to do..." the woman said with a shrug, "was ask."

"Wait." Xander interrupted. "You also said that Gwen was still alive. So, where is she?"

"I did say that didn't I?" the woman flicked her blue, translucent hair behind her. "You will see her after the next challenge. Well...at least some of you will." Jess stomped in anger.

"So you mean to tell me, that even more of us are going to just die. And all you have to say about that is," she gestured with air quotations, "at least some of you will." Jess huffed and turned her back to the group.

"Well I don't mean to be rude but..." Xander started.

"What is it now?" Sadie asked sharply.

Xander rolled his eyes at Sadie before continuing. "Shouldn't we start the next challenge?" The group stared daggers at Xander while the holographic woman started smiling.

"Well isn't that a splendid idea?!" she exclaimed, "I'll get right to it." She disappeared, and with that, the scenery around them shifted to a large cliff overlooking a crystal clear ocean. The woman reappeared, this time wearing a fashionable wetsuit. "The instructions are simple. All you have to do is jump!" She said with a wicked smile, before leaping off of the cliff headfirst.

"Oh heck no." Campbell said, his eyes going wide at the thought.

