

Chapter 1

I wake up with several drops of sweat rushing down my face. I begin to pant vigorously. It was a nightmare. For an instant I wonder where I am, then remember the camping trip I'm on with my family. I glance over at Kylie, my little sister, who is sleeping in her pink sleeping bag in the cramped tent beside me.

"Kylie? Kylie wake up," I say while I shove her a bit. She makes a slight groan and rolls over.

"Kylie. Please wake up. I had a nightmare."

"Leave me alone. Go back to sleep Paige." she says. Suddenly, I hear a very loud scream. My heart starts beating extraordinarily fast. Kylie jolts awake.

"Did you hear that?" Kylie asks. I take a huge gulp that I'm pretty sure that Kylie heard as well.

"Um... yes." I say nervously. Olivia's awake now. Then a mischievous smile creeps upon her face.

"Lets go check it out," she says.

"No! Of course not! Are you crazy? We have no idea who or what that was!"

"I may be crazy, but then again, I'm not the one who's chicken." She says with that weird smile still on her face. My sister has always been that one weird kid who likes going on adventures outside instead staying inside and playing with dolls, while I was that kid who always sat in the library reading travel guides and survival books.

"Whatever. Lets go, but only if we come back quick." Kylie gives a quick nod and tosses me a flashlight from her backpack and one for herself. I turn on the flashlight and my eyes slowly adjust to the light.

"All right, lets go!" she calls quietly. Kylie unzips the tent and steps out as I follow her. We both aim our flashlights ahead of us towards the dark woods.

"I think the sound came from over there." I point towards a path between a small tree and a bush.

"Okay I'll lead," Kylie says.

"No. *I'll* lead," I say determinedly. After all, I am older. We pass our parents' tent and continue onto a trail headed in the direction we wanted. With the tall pine trees

casting a dark shadow upon us from the moonlight, we continue onto a journey that we may never return from.

## Chapter 2

“STOP STEPPING ON MY SHOES! Watch where you’re going!” I yell at Kylie, rolling my eyes, repeatedly. I can feel myself slipping into cranky and grumpy mood. Lack of sleep does that to me.

“Well maybe Paige, just maybe, I wouldn’t have to step on your feet if you WOULD STOP PUSHING ME!” she yells right back. She has that same cranky gene that I have. That’s one of the things I just love about her.

“Okay then! Hey, did you bring your backpack?” I ask. I wouldn’t mind a delicious snack right about now. The last time I ate was yesterday at lunch and all I had was beans and bread, which was extremely hard to get down past my throat. I turn around when she doesn’t answer after a few moments.

“Kylie? Kylie where are you?” I stumble while I look around, but everywhere I look, she isn’t there.

“Okay Kylie, you can stop now, I know you’re hiding!” I yell. I try to make my voice sound calm. And then, the whispers start. First I think that it’s just the wind swaying the trees, but then I realize it’s not the trees, it’s someone. Maybe even multiple people whispering in every direction around me. I rub my ears, thinking that I’ve gone crazy in these dense woods. The whispering continues and I can feel my head throbbing. I can’t understand what they’re saying, but I do make out two words, “*she’s dead.*”

“PAIGE!!!” A pulse wave runs through me, forcing me to run towards my name, to run towards Kylie, to run away from the whispers. I ditch the path that I’m on and start sprinting, doing my best to dodge the trees. I trip a few times, picking myself up every time. I keep running until I find myself in a clear opening between the pine trees.

“Kylie!” I somewhat whisper and sort of yell this. I find her crunched up with her arms tightly wrapped around her legs, looking straight ahead and crying like the entire world had melted away before her eyes.

“Kylie, are you okay?” I run up to her and hold her hands. She screams and quickly pulls them away. That’s when I realize the burns on her hands. I quickly grab a large leaf from the nearest tree I see and wrap it around her hand. The thing is that it wasn’t just some ordinary burn from a fire. It had a shape, almost like a symbol, or a bite. I ignore it and shake the weird feeling off. I look around and above her and notice something really unusual. A pomegranate tree. Why is there a pomegranate tree in the middle of the woods. Why would there be a pomegranate tree in the whole state of Washington. I don’t think they grow anywhere around here! *This is a really weird place*, I think to myself. I look back down at Kylie’s face.

“Kylie what happened? Are you okay?”

“I...I... I’m not sure. S...s...something grabbed me, and then my hand really hurt. When I turned around, no one was there...” she begins to shiver.

“Paige, I’m scared.”

“Yeah... me too.”

### Chapter 3

By the time I settle myself down, I know that we’re completely lost now. Kylie and I just sit there in the silence. I don’t know what to think about what happened to Kylie, and I’m not sure I want to know. I don’t know how to comfort her. All I do know is that we have to keep moving and keep up our strength. I decide to make a fire. Kylie is still sitting crunched up. I get up from beside her and find the two driest sticks that I could find. I start rubbing as hard and fast as I can. Then I see a spark, followed by a fire, and then I hear a weird noise. It’s my laugh. I made a fire. All by myself! I guess reading all those survival guides came in handy after all.

I get up and walk over to Kylie.

“Kylie? Do you want to sit by the fire?” That’s when I realize that Kylie is... I don’t know, different. I’m pretty sure she’s pale and she’s gone into some kind of a catatonic state. I help her up and together we slowly walk over to the fire and she lies down. I sit down and watch her fall asleep.

I can't sleep all night. I just watch Kylie sleep. She looks so peaceful when she sleeps. I think about Mom and Dad. I'm sure that they've notice we're missing soon and find us. They have to. I don't know how long we can stay out here without any food or water.

When the sun rises, Kylie starts to wake up. She's still in the same state as before, but she seems a little bit better now. I tell her that I'll be right back and that I'm just going to get some more firewood. I wanted to wait until she woke up so that she wouldn't be afraid and run off when she saw that I wasn't there.

I manage to find two or three decent sized branches and a few smaller sticks. I carry as much as I can and make my way back to our "camp." When I get there, I dump them all in a pile.

"Alright. I think I got us enough wood for a couple of hours. After that, I think we should start moving, maybe find a road, or a pond." I say to Kylie. I look up, and then she isn't there. Again. I shout her name, hoping that she just went to stretch her legs or something. I look everywhere around the camp, but Kylie isn't anywhere to be seen. I start freaking out. I mean, what will I do now? Should I try to find Kylie? If I do, that could take probably days and I don't have days. I need to find some water. Suddenly, I become extremely thirsty.

I decide that finding water is my top priority. Once I find a pond, or maybe a lake, then I can move on and either find Kylie, or a road, whichever one comes first. So, I start walking. I keep a constant pace, not too slow, but also not too fast. I want to keep moving as fast as possible, but I don't want to wear myself out. At this point, I really wish Kylie were here. After walking for an entire day, a companion to talk to would be really nice. After not talking to someone for a while, you get this feeling inside. I can't really explain it, but it truly is horrible. I don't know how long I can go on like this.

It's dark now. I lie down against a tree. I'm awfully tired. I rest my head on the tree and gradually fall asleep.

The whispers. I hear them again in the middle of the night. I jump up. I anxiously look around, between every tree and bush, to find where they're coming from. I can feel anger rising rapidly inside of me.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?” I scream from the top of my lungs. I can't take this anymore. The anger is at that rate where you can't keep it inside of you for any longer. Then I begin to run. I don't know where or in what direction, I just sprint faster than I ever knew I could. I close my eyes and my heart tells me which way to go. I run until I can't anymore. Until my legs feel like jelly. I stop and rest my hands on my knees, still not opening my eyes. I breathing incredibly quick now and my heart is almost beating as fast as a hummingbird.

And when I open my eyes, what do I see? A cabin. I feel a rush of relief, like maybe all of this is over now. Now, I can get help. I can get help from whoever is in there. I have never felt extreme joy like I feel right now. I straighten myself up and begin to walk towards the wooden door of the cabin. The cabin isn't too big, probably as big as a normal garage, and it's made of very old wood that's pretty much peeling off. I control the urge to just burst inside and see who is in there, but I don't. I knock, like everything is normal and as though what happened to me in these past two days never happened.

As I knock, the door slowly creaks open, just slightly. Then I think, “*What if finding this cabin wasn't a coincidence? What are the chances that as soon as I give up on life, I find help?*” However, I ignore all these thoughts. This is my last chance, my only chance. I can't just leave.

“Hello?”

I push the door a little wider, just enough so that I can slip inside. I look around the one tiny room, but it's empty. The whole cabin is entirely empty, except for one small thing. There's a phone, exactly in the middle of the room as though it was placed there on purpose. It is also red, like it's an emergency phone. I walk up to it and place my hand on the handle of the phone. As soon as I touch it, it rings. I jump up, surprised at this, but also curious. It's not a normal ring, but it was like one of those rings that you hear on old T.V. shows. I quickly pick it up and jump back, as though there was a snake right next to it.

"Hello?" I say this slowly and cautiously, while my voice cracks this time. There's a long silence, where I can't hear a single thing. Not even the person breathing. Then I hear this low pitched but quiet voice that said just one thing.

"Run." I obey and clutch the phone and run. I can't let go because my squeezing that phone as hard as I can is what's keeping me from exploding on the inside. Luckily, there's a back door that look similar to the other one and I rush through it. I'm about to run back into the woods when something catches my eye.

## Chapter 5

Kylie has a birthmark. It was sort of shaped like a goldfish. I used to tease her about it all the time. On some occasions, I even made her cry when she was really little. At first, I think I see some rope tied from one tree to another. I thought that there was laundry drying on the rope. But when my eyes focused, it wasn't laundry. It wasn't laundry at all. As my eyes focused, all I can see is horror. All that I can see is pure evil. I couldn't believe my eyes. I thought that it had finally happened; I thought that I had gone insane from food and water deprivation, sleep deprivation, and from loneliness. Then I came to realize that this couldn't be a hallucination. No one and I mean no one imagines these kinds of things.

In these kinds of situations, they tell us that everyone will do one of either two things, and that it's pure instinct: fight, or flight. But right now, right in this very moment, I can't do anything. I don't fight, but I also don't run. I... I just stand there. What I see, is skin? Skinned people. People who were cut down the middle and had their skin just peeled away from them almost like skinning a fish before eating it. There was maybe six or seven of them, just hanging there on the ropes like laundry, like they weren't even human. The blood on some of them is fresh, while others have dried. I want to cry, or scream out, but I can't. When I believe that things can't get worse, I see something that makes me want to tear my heart out and die. On the first human, I see a goldfish.

I collapse on the ground and cry. All I want and all I can think about is my old life. I want Kylie back. I want to go back home to my parents and I want to be in the library reading travel guides and survival guides. I want to go back, but all I can do, all that I have control of doing, is sitting there and crying. I cry until I can't cry anymore and then I lay down. I close my eyes. I imagine that I'm back home. I hear the whispers again. I know that they want me. That they want to take me, like they took Kylie and do to me what they did to her. At this point, I don't care anymore. I just lay there, eyes closed, imagining home. I feel a ghostly cold hand grab my ankle. I don't struggle. I don't fight. I just let it take me; drag me back into the cabin, so that now... now I can be with Kylie.