

11. Redemption

One Hour Until Dawn

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Kapitel 1: Basis Ground

Desperate to come free from the claw holding his head in a firm grip he reaches at everything within range. His breath goes fast, although he feels like drowning with every missed opportunity to hold onto a bigger stone for a few seconds of security but, all he gets to grasp is cold air slipping mercilessly through his fingers. Sharp rocks leave scarpes all over his bare skin while his nails finally find something to hold on, although the mere touch with the wiry hand, too big to be human, around his head is unreal.

Like a weightless puppet this thing has lifted him out of the water and is now dragging him step by step through the dark shafts of the mine. He has tried to brace his feet against the pulling, but all he accomplished was an aching knee.

When he has entered the water together with Mike he has been careful not to fully submerge in the water. To have wet shoes was bad enough so neither of them was eager to get a soaked upper body on top of that, but when he got attacked this thing has pushed his whole body under the water before it started dragging him.

The same moment he has landed feet first in the water his breath was taken away by the cold. Josh never has been good in dealing with the chill running through his body caused by the icy grip of winter, although he should be used to it living in Alberta. A few years ago, there has been a winter in which it never got warmer than -20°C but for Josh it wasn't just the winter causing problems. More than once even during the hottest of summers while the others were enjoying the warm breeze he was shaking uncontrollably unable to get himself warm. He always has felt worse when he was alone. He hates being alone. When he was alone there only was the cold clasp at him, and there were the voices.

A sharp stone scrapping through his clothes reminds him that right now he isn't alone.

"No, you're not real. You can't be real," he mumbles over and over again like a prayer. He has cried out in agony leaving him hoarse when his head was taken in an iron grip sealing his fate. All those exertions and mental stress of the last hours has left him barely conscious by now. He starts to lose his grip at the large hand around his head, but he is able to hold on once again with his fingernails. His feet are motionless

wrapped up in his soaked wet jumpsuit adding the pain of burning cold whenever he tries to move them.

Why is he so wet? For some seconds he can't remember where he is or why there is water in his shoes. Suddenly he spots Mike's face appearing from the shadows. He is taking a big swing at him. Josh cramps reflexively.

"Don't. Don't hit!" he cries, eyes wide open, but too afraid to move his hands. As sudden as Mike has appeared in his thoughts, he was gone. Mike isn't here. He was with him, walking through the mines after they have left Sam, but now he's gone. "*He has to be there,*" Josh frowns.

"Mike? Mike! Where are you, buddy? Come on, don't scare me like that. It's Jessica, isn't it?" He tries to lift his head against the hand in order to see behind him. A soft laugh escapes his mouth as a rattled sound.

"Jessica is in the costume!" he breathes hard. "Jess! Jess, you got me. Please, let me go. Sam, please. Tell them to stop!"

Sam will help him, he tells himself. Sam is always on his side. She was there with Mike so she must be around watching Jessica dragging him.

"Chris? Bro'! You there?"

With every second of silence his heartbeat gets up. He tries to smile as if he is laughing about the prank not admitting his mistake.

Chris will do something soon. "*He won't leave me hanging,*" he thinks. If it's not Chris then, Sam will take actions like when Mike was hitting him. The memory of being in the cave hits him, making his innards convulse. He struggles to get some air.

"*She was there.*" Sam's voice is echoing on the walls around him.

"Who was there?" he asks breathlessly.

"*She was digging up Beth and-*"

"*You killed Jessica.*"

"No, I didn't DO it!" he shouts at Mike's voice till his throat is aching.

"*Josh, she was there. Weeks...a month.*"

"*-digging up Beth and-*"

Suddenly he feels like vomiting. The image of a plain, but familiar butterfly manifests before his eyes. Hannah had asked for his opinion about getting a tattoo. He remembers frowning at her because getting a tattoo wasn't something his shy little sister would do. In the end he has laughed at her suggestion to run away instead so he

approved of the butterfly choosing the lesser evil. It feels like ages ago.

The same butterfly is on the arm of this thing behind him. They wouldn't play with his memory of his sisters just to prank him. They wouldn't do it.

"*You are alone.*" Once again the voice of Dr. Hill reminds him about having lost his friends and that they would certainly be able to hurt him.

"No! Go away!" No matter what, they wouldn't play with him like that, he tells himself.

A loud shrieking breaks the silence of the mine around him. All this time he could only hear his own breath and blood running through his ears together with the shuffled sound of his body getting dragged over the ground. The sudden outburst of noise makes him flinch, but it brings him back to reality.

"Hannah." It is only as much as a whisper, but he is as clear as he wasn't for hours, if not weeks. "Han," he calls her once again.

A sudden pain flashes through his neck as his body was lifted up. For a moment he expects to see Hannah's face, but instead he feels his body flying through the darkness hitting something hard pressing the air from his lungs. With a bump he comes finally to a rest where he tries to suppress the urge to cough.

He takes a few moments to get his head together, as far as it is possible. Like a child he rolls himself up, clasping his knees. Some water drips through the textile as he presses his trouser washing some of the dirt and blood from his fingers. In the last hours he was beaten, yelled at, dragged over the ground and mentally attacked by both his friends and own nightmares. He now is at a point where his body and his mind are on the brink of collapsing.

"Deep breaths, Josh. Deep breaths," he whispers into the ground in order to calm himself, but every gasp causes flashes of pain through his back. The dragging and the sudden throw at the wall have left gnawing marks. When he has hit the stones he accidentally bit his lip inflicting himself with a small, bleeding wound. With a grimace he swallows the blood as he hears a crunching noise in his head followed by a nasty sensation on his teeth. Some dust has found its way into his mouth, but he hasn't the idea to spit it out to relieve himself of the bitter taste on his tongue.

While he is lying on the ground, he expects Hannah to take actions of some kind but the awaited impact never comes. Hannah would kill him slowly instead of snapping his neck and granting him a fast death, tormenting him like his nightmares, he was sure of it. He couldn't do it anymore, couldn't bear up with the situation. He thought everyone would understand once he has showed them their mistakes, healing them and bringing them together. But everything went wrong.

"It was just a game. I didn't want to hurt anyone." He once again is on the verge of slipping away when some cries in the distance snap him back. Without the grip on his head he finally is able to move and examine his surroundings. However, in the darkness he can't make out as much as his own hand in front of him. As his eyes search

for something like a faint light he sees two pale, but shining dots not far away.

Josh slowly stretches his feet while he makes an attempt of pushing himself from the ground. Little by little he straightens himself up groaning loudly, although it feels as if he is lifting one of those damn heavy pigs rather than his own body. At first he simply thinks his legs are too weak to keep him up but as he notices the strange pull of gravity he realizes that the additional weight caused by the water in his clothes is the problem. His socks squelch unpleasantly in his boots as he takes some faint steps over the ground almost making him trip.

During the course of standing up his gaze was fixed at the dots floating above the soil. Since the moment he noticed them, the dots haven't been moving at all. Without taking his eyes away, he stretches out his arm in hopes of getting something to grasp. His fingers brush against a cold, wet wall at which he immediately settles his body in order to relieve the pressure on his feet. Rather than walking he is dragging his legs behind when he suddenly hit something hard.

There was a rock which he hasn't seen in the darkness and now he was falling once again. While he desperate is in search for something to help him keeping his balance he knocks some smaller stones resting on the big one over which are now rambling over the floor making heavy noises. Josh has to cover his ears because he can't bear the uproar around him but without his hands to stabilize himself he now was back on the earthy ground. Almost in an instance the cry of Hannah in front of him adds to the turmoil.

Like a flash the dots dash at him.

1."Talk to Hannah."

2."Defend yourself."