

# 11. Redemption

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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 scarps 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."**

## Kapitel 2: 2A Talk to Hannah

The moment he heard the scratching of sharp claws crushing pebbles together, he presses his back against the wall behind him. He is staring into the darkness with his cramped hands digging into the ground beside him. The sudden movement of those white dots has startled him, pushing him now into a motionless state.

A cold breeze blows in his face, bringing a shiver down his spine when the words just come out of his mouth.

"Han, it's me. Josh." His voice seems higher in his ears, but for some reason he is grinning.

Her hands scrape across the floor coming to halt beside him. Although he can't see anything he can feel her quick movements as if her body forcefully convulses the air.

Slowly he moves his head in the direction to where he believes to sense his sister; or rather what once has been a member of his family. Immediately he was greeted by those white dots he had lost sight of only seconds ago. It was a lot easier to keep their gaze when they were far away, hovering above him, but now they're separated by a few inches only. They are so close that Josh can see what once had been Hannah's beautiful brown eyes. There still are the dark freckles around her pupil like a shadow of her past self covered with a white veil. He cannot help but hold his breath and watch her eyes coming closer, reminding him so much of those cold, dead eyes from his nightmares like irony incarnated. For months they are staring at him, judging him, accusing him of being a failure and tormenting his being. He thought they would go when he had brought everyone together, but now he has learned that his nightmares had always been there; living down here.

*"Where are you, Josh?"* The mocking continues even now.

Her foul breath runs like a warm breeze over his cheeks as she finally stops moving forward, but inhaling deeply causing the air around her to vibrate as if she is trying to catch his scent. All this time he has not been daring to blink, but a stinging pain in his eyes reminds him to wet them. It only takes a second, but when he opens his eyes, hers are gone. Stones are toppling from above like raindrops making muffled sounds when they're falling on him when suddenly it's quiet.

He remains motionless for a few more heartbeats, but starts to nibble his lip where already is a wound, making the injury bigger. Somewhere water is dripping; something he hasn't noticed before, but now every drop seems to get louder than the previous one. He can't bear hearing the repetitious bubbling so he moves his hands across the earthly ground back and forth to cover the annoyance with his scratching.

"How are you? How are you? How are you, today?" While sweeping for movements, he starts singing with a faint voice in a simple melody to himself. He repeats it over and over again, until he is calmer and until he is sure that really no one is here anymore.

After a while with only his own chant in his ear, he examines his freezing feet and

carefully pulls them closer. The wet and heavy cloths tighten around his legs and knees making him shiver, but he doesn't stop singing for fear of drifting away. Right now he is roughly of sound mind thanks to the calming effect of his hands moving across the ground. He knows for sure that this is real. The dirt is real as is the pain from his various scratches all over his body and the burning in his limbs caused by the cold of the water.

"I trust you. I trust you." New words replace the childish questions in his chant when he remembers the tattoo on the arm of the monster. He only got a glimpse of the full body before he got captured. It wasn't the first time for him seeing something strange, so he immediately doubted his mind at the sight of this large skeleton like thing with too many thin but razor sharp teeth. He still would think of it as a figment of his imagination, if he wouldn't have seen the tattoo on the arm. He trusts his friends not to go that far just to prank him. If he therefore can trust them and if he can in addition believe his own train of thoughts, only one assumption is left. This thing is real as well and it once was Hannah.

Despite all the pain flashing through his body at every movement he suddenly feels happy. He found his sister and she is still alive.

"I'm here!" he cries into the darkness. "Your brother! I'm here, Hannah!" He starts shivering everywhere and he can't control his hands anymore. All he wants to do is standing up again, but every time he tries his legs just give in unable to keep him up. After several attempts, he is now on all fours breathing heavily.

"I'm coming." Unsteadily he manages to pull up his right leg without falling over, giving him enough momentum to finally pull himself up. The sudden movement makes him dizzy so he closes his eyes and just waits till the unpleasant feeling fades away.

Standing up was a lot more exhausting this time as it has been only a few minutes ago. Slowly but surely his adrenaline level is falling, he realizes. Without the chemical mix in his body, moving will be difficult. Not that he would be fond of having any chemical potpourri in his body. Not anymore. Although right now he would prefer the natural mix flowing through his veins than nothing at all.

He gives himself a few moments to regain some strength while remaining on the same spot. All this time he waits for something, or someone, to come, but all he could hear then was his own breath and these damn water drops somewhere in the dark. To get rid of the shaking he shakes his hands and when he is sure of not falling down again he does the same with his legs.

"I trust you. I trust you," he keeps repeating to himself so that he won't forget the reality. Besides, he rather hears himself talking than something else. As if this thought was a reminder the silence suddenly gets pierced.

*"Jooosh. How are you today?"* The voices are singing one and the same verse as he did; they even use the same melody. Josh doesn't have the wish to answer and continues shaking his limbs. He can't afford to lose reality again. Rather than talking to the voices he recites the same three words like a broken record when in addition to the singing the voices start laughing. They're the laughs of children.

*"Come with us, Josh. Don't stand there."* Although he doesn't want to react in any form, his head nevertheless searches for the origin of the noise. The laughter seems to come from everywhere. Even from behind him. A ridiculous thought since there is a solid wall of rocks. In denial, he closes his eyes and inhales deeply with his head hanging down.

*"Are you sad? Watch something with us, won't you?"* Such an odd request, Josh remarks to himself, although it kindles a nostalgic feeling in his chest. Hannah loved watching TV when she was younger. He remembers to keep her from watching the movies their dad made, so instead he watched dreadful cartoons such as the one about the inner world of a computer system. He always had given in and watched with her because it made her happy.

A tender whisper escapes his mouth without his notice. "We d-don't have a TV."

As soon as the last syllable is out the darkness gets driven away by a white flash of light dazzling him and making him blind. He cries out in surprise and because of the sudden sting in his eyes which have become light-sensitive after all this time in the dark.

*"You have to try **harder!**"* The children have stopped with their laughing and now begin yelling instead. Although the voices are louder he can't hear them as clearly as before as if they're calling while being behind a glass.

Still blind from the light, he reaches out with one hand while the other lies over his eyes to cover them. His dirt and earth stricken fingers connect with an unusual smooth material which feels warm under his touch. Driven by curiosity he carefully opens his eyes, pinching them against the light to see what is right before him. His hand floats in the air seemingly touching nothing, but he definitely feels something under his palm.

In order to test the material he puts his other hand on it as well. He frowns at the various scratches and cuts all over his hands which are sticky with dried blood, but he quickly calls his attention back to the mysterious thing in front of him. As he leans against the invisible wall something clashed at it with a bump on the level of his eyes making him stumble back nearly giving him a heart attack. He catches his breath when he sees what clings at the back of the wall of glass. It's Hannah; the way she should look like. Her glasses are broken and she has some scratches on her face, but other than this she looks fine: healthy. She mirrors his previous pose with both hands at the wall looking him in the eyes. He moves forward to cover hers with his.

"I t-try. I. I tried. I did my b-best, sis," he react to the demand that was hanging in the air for quite some time. She looks so fragile, he notices. He should have protected her. When he is about to open his mouth again Hannah, who was standing like a statue, starts moving. She swings her head around until her glasses fall off before she arches her back. Josh doesn't know what's wrong when he realizes that she is not moving, but her body is changing.

The fingers grow larger till her hand is twice the size of Josh's. He hears load cracks as if someone breaks big piles of wood in half with brute force and the ripping of clothes.



"No. No. No. No. GO AWAY!"

Her limbs grow in lengths and her hair is falling down one strand after another. Some strands get tangled up in the needlelike teeth sticking out of her dislocated jaw, making it look as if devoured an animal neck and crop. Like a zipper her growing teeth rip her mouth open making her bleed until her lips become one large gap. Her eyes are losing their shine until they are two white, dead globes in the middle of a distorted face. It's the face he briefly saw just before he was brought here. All he can do now is watching the image of his sister become the monster where he stands.

*"Your efforts are not **enough**,"* she speaks with her inhuman mouth, her voice being higher reminding Josh of a tinnitus.

She presses with her body against the glass which immediately gets cracks under her claws.

*"It was never enough. You're a failure, Josh."*

Merciless she brings her now skeletal body closer to the glass making the breaches grow larger until she can fit her thin claw-like nails through them.

He hears a long high pitched tinnitus which changes to a cry of a woman. There is no escape since the glass is not only in front him being the only thing which separates him from Hannah but it's also surrounding him. All he can do is watch wide-eyes how Hannah breaks through the wall.

*"You don't deserve it. You don't deserve **anything**."*

"Shut the fuck up!" In an attempt of blocking her out he covers his ears, but it was no use. He can still hear every word, every new crack in the glass.

*"I needed you and you weren't there. Where were you? Where have you been when I needed you most? You're a failure."* Once started the high voice just would shut up.

*"I was alone, Josh. I was alone for weeks and you weren't there."*

He knows what it's like to be alone. The thought of his own sister living the hell he does for years is almost too much to bear.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Again he feels like vomiting causing him to produce more saliva. The words are driveled with a mouth full of water because he can't swallow fast enough. The blood running through his ears gets louder until it becomes a high pitched tone of its own. He can't hear anything anymore besides this agonizing tone.

Hannah tears her mouth wide open when the glass begins to shatter under her weight. Yet instead of lashing forward to attack him she draws back leaving him. The radiant light slowly vanishes, leaving him once again in the dark.

*"What will you do, Josh?"* Hannah's voice oozes through the gap in the glass reaching his ear. *"Will you be a failure?"*

"I tried, Hannah!" Once again he feels as if he needs to apologize but he gets interrupted by a scream loud enough to make the glass collapse once and for all.

"Hannah?" he calls for his sister. It was her scream he is sure of it. "What should I do? What should I do?" He moves around in order to find a way out when his eyes finally see some light. This must be the way Hannah went.

"What should I do? Hannah!"

1. **"Stay here."**
2. **"Go after Hannah."**

## Kapitel 3: 2B Defend yourself

He follows the eyes dashing at him as if they're moving in slow motion. In a hurry, he sweeps through the earth around him for something he could use as a weapon. After all the hardship he doesn't want to go down without a fight anymore. Finally, his fingers touch a big rock which has to be one of those fallen ones from earlier. The size of the rock is too big for a single hand to grasp it, but he doesn't have time to use his second hand to help.

With all his might he lifts his new weapon in the air. The weight is tearing on his fingers and shoulder, but he refuses to let go. With a shove of his upper body the heavy mass clashes against something. Josh can feel the sudden impact vibrating down his arm right into his chest. The panic which has risen inside him brought his senses on the edge, making him flinch in surprise of the cry of the creature. He really has found his target in the darkness - with dumb luck that is. Nevertheless the hit has been hard. Unfortunately, he has let go of his only weapon which was now lost somewhere in the cave.

Hannah seemed as surprised by the hit as Josh was, yet she recovers much faster. He may be blind, but he can nevertheless feel her move towards him. The brief rebellion only has bought him some time.

His triumphant smirk gets frozen by the cry of a querulous Hannah right in front of him. He opens his mouth to say anything, although he knows that it probably would be in vain. He will never know.

Before he can form his first word he once again is caught in a familiar grip. While he is unable to get even a single noise out, his head is pressed with brute force, squeezing his skin. The last thing he notices is a sharp rip on his neck when his already darkened vision fades away completely.

A slow rhythm reaches his mind, but his ghost still floats weightless through an empty space. After all this pain he had to endure such an indolent state is like heaven to him if not for the disturbing drumming.

*Don.*

*Don.*

*Don.*

Why can't it be quiet for him to appreciate the peace? Silence. All he wants is finally some silence.

*Don.*

*Drop.*

*Drop.*

The noise grows louder until his mind realizes what it is. It's water. The rhythm of falling drops gets disrupted by his stretched groaning when he begins to move. He doesn't know how long he has lain face first in the dirt, but he doubts it could have been for long, since his clothes still are slippery wet. His limbs feel numb which is better than being in misery, he remarks to himself. If he would have lain here for much longer without being conscious he could have died, though. He isn't sure if the latter wouldn't have been the better alternative.

Without thinking about any consequences he slowly moves his fingers and neck. He covers carefully his face with his dirty hand and immediately spits out in agony. His mouth is covered with a gooey fluid and his nose and forehead are burning under his touch. The wound above his left eye must have started bleeding again when his head got smacked on the ground. He blows his aching nose in order to breathe more freely, but he is too weak to get it free. Now he is sure that being dead would be the better option.

*"So, you gave up at last."* Josh is irritated by the dark voice he knows all too well. He had to listen to it for weeks after all, but he has expected he'd never hear him again.

"I thought you wanted to leave. Why are you still here?" His mouth is dry. He has to collect saliva to get the words out clearly and yet he still sounds drunk.

*"It is me who asks the questions, Joshua. You should know that. On the other hand, what do you know anyway?"* Someone is walking around him in heavy shoes as if he has all the time in the world. Josh doesn't care that he is being mocked by Dr. Hill. All he wants is to lay here and move as little as possible avoiding the pain. There is always pain. He is so sick of it.

*"The only one to blame is you. Every choice you made, every path you took has led to this moment. You're in pain because you deserve it."* After every word penetrating the air Josh buries himself further into his palm.

"Stop messing with my head!" he has to press out every word through his constricted lips. "You are NOT real!"

A chuckle taunts him from the shadows causing Josh to flinch. *"Of course I'm not. I thought we already had established that in one of our previous sessions. Pay more attention, boy."*

"I did pay attention. You wanted to leave. Just go and leave me alone like everyone else." A deep sigh escapes him.

*"You are alone because you totally screwed up. We already did establish that as well. The question is what will you do about it?"*

All he wants to do is to ignore the voice of his doctor, but Hill silently demands a reaction; so Josh gives in.

"The game is over. I lost. There is nothing I can do." He doesn't have the courage to talk the truth out loud so he whispers the words.

*"Precisely. You lost."* Dr. Hill has been moving around him the whole time, but when he spat out his last word, he immediately stops. *"However, you may have lost one game, but you still are a piece of this game board."* Josh has spent hours with the man talking behind closed doors and learned that almost everything which comes out of his mouth is a lecture or an advice of its own. The doctor has the gift of planting an idea inside the head of his patients so that they think they had figured out everything on their own when in fact they only were led to what the doctor wanted them to believe. The game was his idea. He has told Josh to reconnect with his friends. All Josh did, was deepen the idea of healing himself by healing everyone else in the process.

It is happening all over again. Dr. Hill wants to plant something inside his head. Should he accept it?

"This is not a game board. This is not a game."

Dr. Hill stomps down in disgust. *"Life is the biggest game, is it not? Every insect, every plant is a piece gambling on the biggest game board called life. You played and you put yourself on the sideline with your actions. Will you bring your piece back on the board, or will you accept your defeat, cursing the rules like a spoiled kid?"*

Those words spoken by an illusion shouldn't affect him, he knows that. And yet, despite being cramped and rolled up on the ground, he doesn't want to prove them right. He straightens his body, ignoring the stinging in his limbs until he lies on his back with his hand still covering his face.

"Could a child do what I have done? I planned everything and-"

*"And yet you're crawling in front of me like a baby. The time we discussed your past is over, what happened doesn't matter anymore. What matters is your future. What will your future be, Joshua? Will this cave be your future?"*

Josh doesn't answer, but he does think about what was said.

*"Do you want to live?"* It is always Dr. Hill who asks the important questions.

"Yes," he hears himself whispering. Is he speaking the truth? Does he want to live? Dr. Hill doesn't seem to care whether it was a lie or not.

*"That's what I wanted to hear."* Josh can feel something grab his hand in a firm grip forcing it away from his face. He doesn't even have time to react to the sensation of getting pulled up. A little nauseous but steady he is back on his feet again. In disbelief about what just happened he observes the hand with which he recently got forced upright, but he can't make anything out in the darkness. Nevertheless, he gropes his way through the air around him, but there he can't find anything as well. He is alone.

"I can do this. I can do this", he assures himself, although he still doesn't know just what exactly he can do. Despite having a throbbing head and still being unable to get enough air through his nose, he stumbles a few steps until he meets something to hold on to being moist under his touch. He follows what he believes to be some wooden planks in hope to find the exit.

He absently licks his lips, tasting copper and dirt again. This time, however, he doesn't swallow but instead spits it out. He smudges the stain of blood drying under his nose with his sleeves when he finally discovers a faint light in the distance.

"Will this cave be your future?" The words of Dr. Hill resound in his ear. After a few seconds he lets go of the plank and walks out into a much wider area. It's still dark in here as well, but somewhere above him have to be a few small holes through which moonlight finds its way in. At least now he can see what he is walking on.

He passes stalagmites and stalactites while he searches for any clue about how he might get out of here. After what couldn't even have been ten minutes he already is out of breath causing him to pant when he notices some grooves in the dirt which have to be made by men. He attempts to bend down to examine it, but after almost falling over, he decides it is for the best to stand upright for now. Those grooves have to be some kind of rails, remnants from the old miners.

His head twitches when he hears something crack and presumably splashing on water, but he can't make out from which direction the sound comes from. Down here in those damn mines noises seem to come from everywhere.

"It's fine. You're fine," he's talking out loud to distract himself from whatever he just heard. At least his illusions seem to have decided to restrain themselves. He starts humming while he follows the rails on the ground.

Once in a while he stumbles, but he is able to catch himself by grasping the wall every time. *Mike and Sam had come here so there has to be a way out.* That thought keeps him walking. He never has had the desire of walking down into the mines. Beth had suggested that they all could do a test of courage by going down here, but their mother had made them swear to never attempt to climb down the shafts. The mines weren't a good place for a test of courage anyway, Josh had said to his sister. He had smirked at her and told her they rather should go into the sanatorium.

Everything had been planned. Hannah wanted to pretend to get abducted while Beth would get the others on edge with her talking. Josh had prepared some recordings of screaming people and strange noises he wanted to play while walking through the building. They wanted to pull it off last year, but then the snow storm had started condemning them all to stay inside the lodge.

He stops in his move and inhales deeply through his mouth. He has to focus on his situation.

By now he doesn't dare to take his hand from the cold wall out of fear of collapsing. He shakes all over and he doesn't even know if it's because of the cold or if it's because of exhaustion, but he keeps

going.

The shaft gets smaller and he already fears that he has made the wrong decision and that he will meet a dead end when his eyes finally see a warm, yellow light. He quickens his steps, eager to reach it sooner rather than later. The amber light of the torch stings in his eyes which already have accustomed to the darkness around him. He gets as close to the torch as he can, taking as much of the heat as he can. He shuts his eyes and savors every second of being near something warm. After heating up his fingers, he fumbles at the torch in order to get it out of its holder. A dry laugh escapes his lips when he finally gets it free. Now he would at least be able to see.

With the torch in hand, he continues his walk, humming louder than before. He doesn't think about who might have lit the torch or has put it on the wall in the first place. All he cares is that he has a source of light. Unfortunately, this small victory doesn't last long since he gets tired again all too soon. The weight of the torch seems to increase in time to a point at which Josh nearly loses his grip. He needs to rest.

The shaft has ended some time ago and he now stands in a larger area. He spots a big stalagmite against which he leans his body, but it's not enough. His head hanging down, he slips along the raw surface until he kneels on the ground, catching his breath.

It's then when something catches his eye. In the light of his torch something flickers silver on the ground right beside him. He blinks and loses sight of it, making him believe he was just imagining things all over again, when the unnatural flicker happens a second time. He carefully digs in the earth just to tense in shock the moment he touches the object. His fingers still brush the wet sand from the small thing. But Josh immediately recognizes what he is holding.

"Beth," he groans silently. With his thumb he carefully strokes the little beads on the ribbon and caresses the thin metal plate beside it. His gaze wanders to the almost identical bracelet on his own wrist. Some of the blue pearls on Beth's bracelet are cracked, but other than that it's still whole. Holding it after such a long time almost feels like holding his sister once again. He clasps the ribbon into a fist and leans his head back on the stone looking up into the black cave.

1. **"Take the bracelet with you."**
2. **"Dig a grave for it and leave it behind."**