Chapter 74 Brotherly Relationship

Henry tried to catch his balance from being pushed into the room. With the rocky terrain, he should have been thankful he hadn’t been pushed too hard. Even with the rough skin one gains from living in caves, there was still a chance to be cut. The young black band turned around and smiled nervously as his brother entered the room after him. Brothamo had a serious look. Even though Henry had seen that look many times since his dad had died, it still made him nervous. The chain in his hand, once again, began to spin around his index finger.

Brothamo’s walk was silent and slow but at the same time fierce. If it wasn’t so easy to call him Bro, his nickname would probably be “intimidation.” Well, maybe not the word “intimidation” itself, but something along the lines of it. The guy knew how to scare someone. The lantern on the ceiling 6 inches above Brothamo did not make Henry feel any comfortable as dark shadows were being casted across his brother’s face. Out of instinct, when he felt threatened, Henry’s eyes searched around for an escape route. There were two blankets. One neatly folded and leant up against the wall, the other still lie across the floor in a messed up fashion. That blanket on the floor was the only thing in the room that belonged to Henry. Everything else: the weapons on the wall, the maps neatly folded in the corner, even the dirt on the floor belonged to Brothamo. Henry figured he could probably use any one of that stuff to escape if he really needed to, but he was not trying to run. He never ran from Brothamo.

Brothamo, keeping his scowl, leant up against the wall by the entrance, opposite of where Henry was. The black clothe he had in his possession seemed to flop on its own out of Brothamo’s arms and down onto the floor. As soon as it hit, Henry knew what it was.

“Oh yeah.” Henry said now more nervous than when he had entered. “I guess I forgot again.”

Brothamo, now with his arms crossed, closed his eye and looked down in disappointment.

“You guess you forgot. After I just finished telling you how important it is that you think about everyone’s safety, you run off guessing you forgot to put your mask on.”

“Dude, I’m sorry. Mistakes happen.”

“Yes! They do!” Brothamo yelled. “And that’s how people die! Every time you leave without your mask, someone can identify you! The more times they do, the more people will know that the same black band is stealing from them!”

“I know...”

“No, obviously you don’t! Because if you did, you wouldn’t leave without putting it on! I mean, have you ever left black base by yourself with your mask on?! No! You run off and do what you want and put the rest of us in danger!”

“The mask doesn’t make a difference, if the Discretes see me...”

“They’ll figure you out, yes, but the mask isn’t for them. If you get found by Discrete, you’re dead anyway. But the Discretes aren’t only the enemies we have. The rest of Wig-Or-Log I need not to come hunting us down! Dad’s security plans leaves us undiscovered by both the Discretes AND the colored bands of Wig-Or-Log. The Discretes may be able to identify you no matter what, but everyone else won’t be able to unless you do something stupid like LET THEM SEE YOUR FACE!”

Henry did not speak. Brothamo sighed, not moving any part of his posture but his head.

“I just don’t know what to do with you. Everybody else gets it. You stay careful or you die. But for some reason not Henry. He just can’t grasp that concept. You do what you want, when you want just cause you’re the youngest in the group and you figure that means something. But this isn’t a game. I tell you over and over and…”

Brothamo stopped in the middle of his speech. He had given Henry this speech more times than he cared to remember. He knew giving it one more time wasn’t going to make much of a difference. The silence in the air kept Henry in his place. But he remembered that today was not like another day. He had something important, something that could keep the black bands safe from any more threats. He began to spin his chain again as he tried to muster up the courage to break the silence as well as the news. However, before his courage could gain full strength, Brothamo spoke first, as though purposely interrupting Henry.

“Please tell me... that girl who you brought with you is here because she wants to be a black band.”

This was bad. Henry had wanted to bring up the conversation of the girl his way. Breaking the news had to be done in a certain fashion. Without it, the explanation wouldn’t come out right and could be immediately dismissed as a bad idea.

“Listen…” he tried to explain.

“So that’s a no.” Brothamo said firmly. Henry could tell his brother’s frustration was growing.

“Dude listen. I found something. And that girl could be the key to getting it.”

“A treasure? Get your priorities straight! No treasure is worth exposing us to non black bands. The whole point of stealing stuff is to keep the group protected. Tools that allow us to survive incase we’re attacked. Do you know how many people know this group exists? As many as there are black bands. And with the Discretes running around, that number isn’t much more than the people in this base.”

“Brothamo, just hear me out.” Henry said trying to maintain his self. His chain continued to spin in his hand, only now he was catching it back and forth and spinning it in different directions. “This girl, she’s not just any girl…”

“Oh, here we go! Let me guess, you’ve found your ‘true love.’”

“No it’s not like that…”

“It’s not? The way you were staring at her, I’ve seen it a hundred times on others faces. You think you’ve found the one for you.”

Henry had been caught. He did indeed like Keely, but he was trying to get past that point.

“Okay, you got me. I do like her. But that’s not why I brought her here. Listen. I was walking through the woods when I came across some Discretes. They didn’t see me, but I overheard their conversation. They were talking about a guy... a guy named... named Baas. They’re following the group he’s in because he’s some kind of threat to them. I don’t know why, but for some reason they haven’t killed him. If we can get on this Baas guy’s good side, make an ally of him, maybe even get him to turn into a black band, we won’t have anything to worry about! But right now, he’s locked up within the Golds. Their closest base is a couple of days away, maybe a couple of weeks at most. You could lead a group of people to rescue him with this girl by your side. She’s part of his group. If she testifies how much we’ve helped out, he’ll practically be in our debt. And with someone like that…”

“Wait, wait wait.” Brothamo said. “You said the Discretes were following this guy’s group.”

“Yeah.” Henry answered. “Because they think he’s a threat.”

“And that girl is a part of his group?”

“Yes!” Henry said thinking his brother was starting to get it.

“You idiot!” Brothamo screamed getting off the wall he was leaning against. “Did it ever occur to you that they’d follow you here?! Expose all of us!?”

“They said they stopped following her.” Henry sad intimidated.

“And that’s not the only hole in your plan. You want me to risk the lives of the people here to bring out an escape party for someone who **may** be able to help us with the Discretes?”

Henry nodded without speaking.

“I don’t think you realize what you’re asking. The Gold bases are the hardest to escape from.” Brothamo went and grabbed a map from his pile. As he searched he spoke out loud.

“Get caught by a blue? Easy to get away from. Oranges? If they don’t kill you first, being careful can get you out of their territory.”

Brothamo then found the map he was looking for.

“Golds... are something else entirely.”

He then layed the paper on the floor directly under the lantern. On it was a detailed layout of a base.

“Do you see this?” Brothamo asked rhetorically. “This is practically impossible to escape from. Walls on all sides of the territory with only one giant door as an escape. If you want to escape from this your timing has to be perfect. It took our guys forever to find the weak link in this base. If Savvi hadn’t joined us, we probably never would have seen it. And with all this, you can guarantee that if we attempt and succeed at escaping, the Golds will rearrange everything making it impossible to do twice.”

Brothamo paused and looked at Henry.

“Don’t you get it Henry? We’re saving this plan. Saving it for when we really need it. For when one of ours get captured by the Golds and needs to escape. Every important member of black base has this plan memorized in case they get caught by the Golds. And we’re not wasting it on a complete stranger.”

“I realize that.” Henry said. “But I think it’s worth it.”

“Of course you do.” Brothamo said. “You say you want to protect us from the Discretes but the fact is you just want to show off. True that outside black base we’ve been killed by them. But the Discretes have yet to be a serious threat to us. There’s an old saying. ‘If a sword isn’t dull, then there’s no need to sharpen it. You could just wind up cutting yourself.’” He then stood up, put his hands on his hips, and faced the wall. It was a universal sign of frustration. Brothamo was obviously trying to calm himself down.

After a good, long pause, the slience was broken. But this time, it was done by Henry.

“You know,” Henry said trying to choose his words carefully, “you’re always talking down my ideas and my ways. Considering what happened with mom, I can’t blame you.” Brothamo twitched when heard the word ‘mom.’ “But things never turned out like you thought they would when I did them my way. I’ve never been caught, I’ve never been killed, none of the things you said would happen did. In fact, I’ve produced good result by doing what I feel is right. I’ve brought in plenty of treasure for us to use. And now, I feel that helping that girl could be the best thing to happen to black base. My sword is sharp, and I’m not about to let it dull.”

Henry stood to his feet.

“So, I’m going to help her. I’m going to go and rescue that guy from the Golds. If you don’t want to help me, fine. I’ll do it myself. I’ll break him out of there and the Discretes will be a worry of the past.”

Henry turned and began marching out of the room. Firm in what he believed in, yet still somewhat nervous.

Brothamo waited a second. Then, his mouth did something it did not want. “Wait.”

Henry stopped and turned around as Brothamo approached him.

“Apparently, there’s no stopping you from doing this stupid thing. I’m not going to go with you, nor will I let anyone else here help you. We can’t risk that on a hunch.” Brothamo looked down. He turned and walked toward the pile of charts.

“But if you’re going to a Gold base, you’re going to need the proper details. A map. A schedule of their guard duty. All the stuff that will ensure that you and everyone you’re trying to rescue get out alive. And the good thing about Golds, is they write everything down.”

Henry grinned when he heard his brother say this. Brothamo came back with a good deal of folded paper.

“After all, if my brother’s going to rescue someone from a base, he’s going to do it right.”

Chapter 74 End

Chapter 75 : Black History

Keely was really curious as to where Henry had gone, but she knew better than to wonder into a place she had strictly been told not to go. Her father was a very strict person, and if any of these guys were like him, she did not want to encounter their wrath. Not only that, but she was still a little scared of these black bands. After all, they were criminals. Even though they had shown personality, she couldn’t help but think that they had once in their lives been like Brute. However, Keely’s fear of the Blacks did not completely override her curiosity of them. Nor did it calm her anxiety. She decided to have a look around. Apparently, as long as she was Henry’s guest, she was untouchable. Thus she shouldn’t have to worry about...

“Stay where I can see you.” Barkon ordered. Since Henry had left, he and Keely had not left from the entrance of black base. They had both made themselves comfortable by sitting on chair like stones that were near. Keely hadn’t been sure why Barkon felt he had to just sit there, but she had had a suspicion it was to keep an eye on her. Now, her suspicions were confirmed.

“I just want to take a look around.” Keely said trying to stay polite.

“Too bad.” Barkon said. The boom of the base in his voice seemed to echo throughout the walls. It made Keely want to hide her head in her shoulders. “The little brat may have exposed our hideout to you, but you don’t need to find out anymore than you already know. Plus, I want you right in front of me in case Brothamo gives the order to kill you.”

Keely gave a horrified look at Barkon. She was so terrified of him, she could feel it in her ankles. Her mind decided that she should look away, hoping his eyes wouldn’t follow her. The concept of “If I can’t see him, he can’t see me” helped her to cope. Focusing on parts of the base that she could see was a much happier thought. What she could see wasn’t much though. The circular inside of the structure was smoothed out. She watched as the different black bands wandered around doing different black band things. Some went into caves, only to appear coming out of another that was on a different level. Because of that, Keely began to understand that the caves to her far right were not entrances to rooms like the others, but that inside were stairs of some kind. It was interesting because there were also rope ladders that lead from one floor to the next. Apparently the Blacks felt they needed several ways to get from one level to another.

Then there were the caves people went into and yet didn’t come out. In those caves, lights sometimes were extinguished from them. Keely figured those had to be bedrooms of some kind. Of course, she didn’t know for sure since she wasn’t allowed to leave her spot.

Then there were the things her eyes couldn’t see. There was a smell. It was... familiar. Not like food, but... metal. Where had she smelled it before?

“Hey Barkon!” A voice called out. It startled Keely as it had come from right above her shoulder. Standing next to her was a man. He looked about as young as Atsuma did, and since Atsuma looked really young for is age, this guy had to be younger than him. His skin was dark, but a lighter tone then Barkon’s was. He wore a type of choler shirt with short sleeves and button down center. His pants were nice and neat. Keely could not understand how someone could wear something like that in such an environment like this. Or… any environment for that matter. His boots were the only thing that seemed fit for rough terrain.

The guy walked past Keely toward Barkon. In his hands was a flat sword.

“I was trying to increase the sharpness quality of this sword but the sharpener I made-”

“Let me guess.” Barkon said, “You need something else.”

“I know. I know I keep requiring demands, but-“

“Savvi, you realized that if you weren’t a genius, you would be dead. Not by colored bands, but WE would kill you because you’re so needy.”

The man, apparently named Savvi, gave a nervous smile without looking directly at Barkon. Barkon continued to speak.

“Why don’t you get out there and work on the other areas you’re lacking in? Maybe retrieve this part you need yourself.”

“We can’t all be swords, Barkon. Or in your case, hammers. Now about that piece.” Savvi then put the flat sword he had in his possession in front of Barkon’s face. A vibrating sound that did not last long was heard from the sword after the guy flicked it.

“You hear that? That is the sound of a sword with perfectly flat sides. An exquisite flat sword for hammering your opponents. But, the edges aren’t sharp enough. Thus, it will only be able to hammer, not cut.”

“What do you need Savvi?” Barkon’s face still showed no sign of interest.

“If you see it, I need a spring. A small one. You get it, and I can increase the speed of the sword sharpener which will allow me to sharpen the edges of the flat sword while keeping the sides...”

“Whatever.”

“And that is the sound of...”

“Yeah yeah yeah. Sounds. You’re the reason Henry says so many stupid things.”

“Catch phrases help when you’re in the heat of battle. Gets your adrenaline pumping.”

“And how would you know? You’ve never been in a fight.”

“Well... uh... it applies to everything.”

“Whatever. It’s rare that anyone would carry a spring outside of the bases, but I’ll get the word out to keep an eye out for it. Of course, you could just leave black base once in a while and go get it yourself.”

“I’d rather not be seen. If the Discretes ever saw me, I would freak out and panic.”

“Grow some courage why don’t you.”

“I refuse!” Savvi said. Now he had a smile on his face which showed he was only joking. He then quickly walked away from Barkon as if trying to avoid his wrath. Still, his smile did not leave. It was all a joke to him. His hearty attitude did not change as he walked away from Barkon, heading to one of the rooms to turn in for the night.

“You could use juice.”

Savvi turned and looked at Keely.

“What?” He asked her.

“Back at home, whenever I sharpen weapons, juice from just about any fruit helps with the problem you’re having.”

Keely was happy to try and help. The smell was that of a freshly sharpened sword. One she smelled all the time. She was ashamed she didn’t notice it immediately, but when she had, it reminded her of her home. It was a comforting feeling.

“Juice.” Savvi repeated thinking to himself. “I see. The juice would decrease the friction on the surface giving the illusion that the velocity is increasing but in reality it’s just...”

Savvi then noticed Keely’s confused look. He had began ranting again.

“Uh… good idea.” He said deciding to rephrase.

Keely smiled at the compliment. The young looking man returned her smile with one of his own. But the smile quickly faded.

“What in the Wig!” Savvi yelled loudly with a nervous tone. Keely, thinking something was behind her, jumped out of fear.

“Barkon!” Savvi moved away from Keely, as though she were some kind of monster. “Why is she here? She’s not a black band!”

This is when Keely realized that she was the source of this man’s fear.

“Calm down Savvi” Barkon reassured from his seat. “Dragon here is Henry’s ‘special guest.’ That’s the only reason her band isn’t black yet she’s sitting here where only black bands should be.”

“Dragon?” Savvi said noting the name. “You’re name matches your sword. That’s awesome!”

Keely once again smiled.

“But Barkon, a colored band in black base. I mean if she tries anything...”

“Quit you’re worrying. There’s only one of her.”

“Yeah, but…”

“This is why you need to get out more. Build up your courage. With an attitude like this, you wouldn’t last long in the war… Well, maybe as an Orange.”

“Eh he he he.” Savvi laughed sarcastically while making a face at Barkon.

Keely giggled at Savvi’s action. Even though he was a man, he had a boyish face that made him more like a child. And he was actually afraid of her. A black band, the scum of Wig-Or-Log, was scared of the presence of a grey band. It made Keely wonder again about how she had classified black bands. She pictured them all as evil people who were selfish and only couldn’t follow the rules of Wig because they didn’t feel like doing so. She figured all black bands were like… Brute, or maybe even worse. But…

“The name’s Savvi.” Savvi said, interrupting her thoughts. “Sorry if I seem a little jumpy, but I’m not one known for my courage. Could be because I’ve never been in a battle. Never been in the war actually.”

“Never?” Keely asked. “Were you a grey band?”

“No.” Savvi said with a smile. He then sat next to Keely. “No, I wish I could be a grey band. But, I’ve never been in the war because I ran away from the Center.”

“What!” Keely said incredibly shocked. Savvi was not surprised Keely couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Keely had only been there as a baby, but she knew what everyone else said. The Center was a labyrinth of caves. There were areas that kids visited everyday, and yet some were hidden. No one ever saw the areas where Discretes or Officials were training. In fact, people said that you didn’t even see all the kids there. You only saw a general number that the Discretes let you see.

“How did you know where the exit was?” Keely said excited.

“Oh right, you’re a Grey. Only in the Center, what, a couple of weeks maybe? Well, the interesting thing is, we in the Center all know generally where the exit is. We don’t know the exact vicinity, but we know that ‘if we make a left at said cave’ we’ll be heading toward it. Most students are so scared of the Discretes that they don’t dare go anywhere near the exit, but sometimes you get a couple of cocky ones who feel they can make it. But the Discretes always catch them before they do.”

“So how did you escape? Did you outsmart the Discretes?”

“Are you hearing yourself? Outsmart the Discretes? If there’s a human alive that can do that I would like to meet him. No, I just had help from someone. I don’t know where he is now and if you ask me I couldn’t tell you his name, but he helped us escape.”

“Us?” Keely asked.

“Uh, me.” Savvi corrected. “Getting my memories mixed up. But anyway, I got out of the Center and entered Wig-Or-Log. But as soon as I did, my band turned black. Immediately, I thought to turn around and apologize to the Discretes, but then I remembered… these were the Discretes. Their job was to kill black bands, not listen to their stories. So, with only a couple of months left before my 16 birthday, I went out into the world, scared of pretty much everyone since I knew I was a criminal. I’ve been fending for myself ever since.”

“But if you escaped, that means you know where the Center is!”

Savvi shook his head as though he were unsure and nervous. “Well… yeah. I guess I have some general direction. But I’m not sure I’d be able to find it. It was a long time ago and I wasn’t familiar with the layout of the land.”

There was a slight pause as Savvi continued to reminisce. The black band looked up into the sky. The stars reflected in his eyes. His fingers moved back and forth around each other, as one often does when filled with anticipation.

“I thought I’d go out and be this cool fighter who left the Center earlier than anyone else. But the realization of turning into a black band didn’t hit me until it was too late. For years I was alone in Wig-Or-Log until I finally came across this place. Now, I may not be a Great One, but atleast I’m living some kind of life.”

“I’m amazed.” Keely said.

“Yeah, I know. Leaving the Center early has never been heard of.”

“No, I mean. I’m amazed that you’ve survived all this time as a black band. You’ve got to be atleast twenty-something, and yet you’ve been a black band since you were fifteen. And what’s really surprising is that you, nor Henry, seem to be really bad guys, just someone who broke a rule. I’ve heard people who broken the rules of Wig before and yet they seem to get away with it.enrHeh”

“That’s what happens. You may not be black banded the first, or second time you break a rule. But it is the punishment of breaking the rules. It only takes one time.”

The volume of Savvi’s voice increased. His face turned as he directed his comment toward Barkon.

“Isn’t that right Barkon?”

Barkon looked at Savvi. He knew that Savvi knew he did not like to discuss things with outsiders. But, Barkon also had a hard time resisting the temptation to warn someone.

“Yes.” He said. “All of us here are examples of that.”

“Really?” Keely asked with the fascination of a child. “How did you become-“

Just then, Barkon gave Keely a look that reminded her why she had not been talking to him. The stare said to her “Finish that sentence, and I will kill you.” She stopped talking and looked down, intimidated more than she had ever been in her life.

“I was once a Gold.” Barkon began speaking. Keely was surprised that he was actually answering her question. “A Leader too. I wasn’t a Great One or anything, but I got the job done. I followed orders and gave them out. I was passionate about winning the war. And it was my passion that lead to my greatest mistake.”

There was a pause as Barkon remembered the story.

“Have you ever seen a Green?” he finally asked.

The question had been directed at Keely. It seemed sort of random to her, but she answered anyway by shaking her head “no”.

“I have.” Barkon said looking down. “Or, I least I think I have. I don’t know anymore. But I was so sure I saw them. It was ten years ago. After doing some patrol I thought I saw out in the distance, near a rock formation in the middle of the forest, five of them as me and some others passed by it. Naturally, seeing an enemy so close, I felt something had to be done. So I told my superiors hoping they’d form some kind of grand plan to get them. Instead, they scoffed at it. Said that there was no proof I had really seen the Greens, and that even if I had, the Greens weren’t really a threat to us. I had been told no before, anybody who has trained in the Center has, so it wasn’t the first time my idea was rejected. Still, I don’t know why but I didn’t listen. I felt that the Greens were preparing something… something big that would give them a huge advantage over the rest of the world who so ignorantly ignored them for these past twenty years. I had no proof of this of course, just this feeling in my gut. It was the first time I felt so emotional about something. So, against their wishes, I took a party with me to find those Greens. Still I knew the reputations that Greens had. In order to make things fair, I brought along with me 99 of Gold’s best people to hunt down those five.”

“Of course,” Savvi contributed, “99 against five is a clear violation of the rules of Wig. All fights must be on equal terms. You can outmatch an opponent, but not to such an extreme.” Savvi had a serious look on his face, as though Barkon’s story was effecting him personally.

“I didn’t think there was anyway the Discretes could find out. And honestly, I was half expecting to find nothing when I got there.”

There was now a long pause. Keely’s anxiety couldn’t take it anymore. It gained control of her mouth and she found herself speaking.

“And? Did you find them.”

“We found them.” Barkon said. “But we never saw them.”

Another pause. Keely’s ears picked up the sound of the wind blowing somewhere out in the distance, but she didn’t care about that. This was an incredibly interesting story.

“We came to the small rocky site.” Barkon finally spoke. “It looked a lot like this one does from the outside. All of us at once came. If we were going to spot a Green, we would make sure he would be outmatched. Eventually, we came to the entrance of a cave. We thought for sure they had gone there. We did our best to pile inside, but the cave was deep and we hadn’t brought any lanterns. The deeper we went, the more we realized we would have to return to base. I didn’t want to seeing as how I had broken the rules of Wig, but we were really left with no choice. But… when we exited that cave. Something happened.”

Another pause.

“As soon as we came out of that cave, we found… I don’t know what they were. Some kind of orbs made out of metal. They were about the size of a toy. They couldn’t fit easily in a normal person’s hand, but you could still hold them. Mine, however, could hold one since I have big hands. I never got the chance to hold one though. The orbs were passed around through the group to see if anyone knew what they were. I was at the edge of the group, anxious to get out of there seeing as how the only thing we found were toys. One of the Nears, a female, brought one of the orbs toward me to see if I knew what it was. Suddenly, the orb started… glowing”

Barkon noted Keely’s face as he said this.

“I know, it sounds crazy, but I know I saw some kind of light come from it. After that, all I remember is a white light. A very bright light. And a numbing feeling throughout my entire body. I know I was hit on the back of the head because I woke up with a headache. I found myself a couple of meters away from the cave and made my way back. I’m not sure how long I had been out, but what I saw when I woke up. Everyone, all of my men, had been killed. It was a massacre like I had never seen before. Their bodies were scattered about, not only on the ground, but in the trees as well. Every body also had torch marks on it. I had torch marks on me too, but for some reason survived. The scary part though, was that none of the land had been changed. It was like whoever had attacked us had never been there. The only evidence was the dead bodies scattered everywhere. Not even they’re orbs were left.”

“But… how?” Keely asked.

“I don’t know.” Barkon said. “The best thing I could assume is that the Greens used those glowing orbs to distract us. Once we were caught up in them, they ambushed us. Those guys knew we were coming long before we even got there. And as for the burnt marks, my best guess is that they must have lit their impact arrows on fire or something. Only a Green would think to do something like that.”

“Is that possible?” Keely said. “You said the area wasn’t damaged. Could people shoot arrows lit on fire and not burn down the area?”

“If they hit every shot they can. And then collect every arrow before they had time to do any damage.” Savvi said.

There was then another grave silence. The Greens disappeared long before Keely had been born, so she didn’t really know much about them. It sunk into Keely how dangerous they really were. A massive attack that left no witnesses or evidence! And what were those… glowing orbs?

“So anyway.” Barkon continued. “After I observed the area, I realized that my band had turned black. My superiors must have realized what I had done and told the Discretes. I became so scared of being discovered by them, I completely abandoned the idea of finding the Greens. I wandered away from the area and eventually made my way here.”

Barkon looked at Keely. His face became serious once again.

“And that is why you have to be careful. Break one rule, and you could end up endangering the lives of everyone around you. I wish I could get Henry to understand that, but he’s just so thick headed.”

“Can you blame him?” Savvi said. “His brother loves him so much that he can’t bring himself to hurt the kid.”

“If you ask me, he doesn’t love him enough.”

“Oh not you too, I thought you didn’t believe that.”

“I don’t believe he hates him like everyone else thinks, I just believe that if he truly loved him, he would show him a little pain so that he knows what could happen if he failed.”

“Hates him?” Keely asked, trying to keep up with what had become and inside conversation.

“Some people here in black base thinks Bro hates Henry, but those who actually pay attention, like me and Barkon, know otherwise.” Savvi explained.

“Why would he hate his little brother?”

“They think he holds a grudge.” Barkon responded.

“Uh…” Savvi realized. “Should we really tell their private matters?”

“I’m not doing any favors for that little brat.” Barkon said. “He brought the girl here, I’ll tell her whatever I want. If Bro has a problem with it, he should deal with his brother’s disobedience more.”

Savvi gave a nervous laugh. “You hear that Barkon? That’s the sound of pettiness getting to you.”

“Whatever.” Barkon said shrugging off the obvious warning. His attention was now back on Keely “Unlike me and mister whiny pants here, Henry and Bro were both born black bands.”

“Rare, but it happens” Savvi said, adding what little he could in between pauses.

“Before Bro took over, the leader of black base was his father. A man named Waltou. Bro gets his strategies from his father. Waltou eventually met a woman, Henry and Bro’s mom, and they had children. First was Bro. Then, many years later, they had Henry. Henry got his escape skills from his mother as it is believed she could escape from anything. With them having kids, the first of black base came into play. I think Bro said he remembered about ten people. However, like many black bands groups back then, this group didn’t last long. One day, Waltou went out with his wife and Bro. He returned to what was once black band base to find that it had been decimated. The Discretes came in, killed everybody, and took Henry away. Waltou, his wife and Bro, following their trail as best as they could, caught up with the Discretes. The couple formed a plan to get their son back. Waltou would distract the Discretes, while his wife went to get their child. Waltou’s wife, however, did not like it.”

“Love can do that to a person.” Savvi slipped in.

“She figured she had a better chance of getting away from the Discretes. Waltou,of course, did not want to put her in danger. He insisted that he be the one to do the distracting. When he wasn’t looking though, his wife attacked him from behind. She told Bro that when his father woke up, they should get Henry and run. And then, she disappeared. Of course, she went ahead and made the Discretes chase her, however, Bro couldn’t get his dad to wake up. And so, he went, grabbed the baby Henry himself, and ran back into hiding.”

“And the mom?” Keely asked, once again caught up in the story.

Barkon and Savvi looked at each other.

“When Bro got back, his dad finally came to. Though he was happy to see Henry, the two heard a loud, female scream. After that, Bro never saw his mom again. It was... pretty clear that she found the one thing she couldn’t escape from.”

Keely put her hands over her mouth. She was on the brink of crying.

“You hear that Barkon?” Savvi said giving Barkon a stern look. “That is the sound of unnecessary sadness.”

“The girl wanted to know.” Barkon said uncaring. “If she couldn’t handle it, that’s not my fault. Anyway, that’s why some people think Bro hates Henry. Henry was the reason Bro lost him mom.”

“Well, that’s not the only reason.” Savvi corrected. “There’s also those nasty looks that Bro gives Henry when Henry isn’t looking. But I just think it’s because he wants Henry to get his act together.”

“Like I said, if he wanted what was best for the kid, he wouldn’t baby him so much.”

“Can you blame him?” Savvi asked. “First his mom died, then his dad. He probably won’t lay a hand on his brother out some kinda of phobia.”

In the midst of these two conversing, Keely had been taking it all in. The information came into her brain with ease as she began to sort through it. But... something wasn’t right. Keely tears stopped forming as a realization came to her head. Something about the story she had just heard didn’t add up. But she wasn’t sure what. These people had no reason to lie to her... other than they were black bands. But still, that wasn’t it. What was this detail she was missing?”

“Dragon!” A voice called out. Keely, Savvi and Barkon looked up to see Henry rushing down the layers of the territory.

“You hear that?” Savvi asked. “That is the sound of Bro giving into Henry, yet again.”

“Dragon!” Henry called again now on the first floor of the territory. He was kind of running kind of walking as he came. His arms had rolled up papers inside of them. They were a kind of manila color, like the color of maps. On his face was an excited smile.

“Keep it down!” Barkon ordered. Henry did not even acknowledge him. He half ran half walked up to Keely breathing slightly heavily.

“Why are you so happy?” Keely asked. “Is you’re brother going to help us?”

“No.” Henry replied. “He says he can’t spare to leave black base just for people he doesn’t know. He also said he isn’t ordering anyone else to do it.”

Keely face lost the hopeful smile it had gained.

“Wait for it.” Barkon said.

“But,” Henry continued. “It turns out we have an emergency plan on how to get everyone out of a Gold base. Brothamo went over it with me. He gave me permission to get materials from the storage and he told me to go over the plan with Savvi before I leave.”

“Of course he did.” Savvi sighed. “Let me see your charts.” He took one of the maps from Henty. Looking at it, he could see someone had already written on it.

“Approaching from the back... Bro remembered.” Savvi looked at Henry with interesting eyes and a smile. “And you’re willing to go through all this, my one time master plan, for... who was it again.”

“This girl’s friends.” Henry said. “Some guy named Baas, and a couple more.”

“Baas?” Savvi asked.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

“No... uh... nothing. The name just sounded familiar.” Savvi turned his attention back to the maps.

“Well Henry, so long as you keep in mind the simplicity of the human psyche and combining it with incognito stealth and remember the limitations of your own...” Savvi stopped himself. Henry and Keely were staring at him like they didn’t know what he was saying.

“Uh... stick to the plan and don’t mess up. Let me go over it one more time to make sure you get it.”

As the three got into Savvi’s plans, Barkon made his way up to the top floor. There, Brothamo was watching.

“You really letting him do this?” Barkon asked him.

“Yes.” Brothamo said simply. He did not take his eyes off of his brother. “Let me guess, you’re upset about it.”

“Of course I’m upset, I just don’t get you. I realize he’s your brother, but show a little backbone to him. If anyone else had done what he did…”

“The girl would be dead and he would be punished.” Brothamo finished “You’re right. You don’t get it, and you probably never will.”

Barkon shook his head and left Brothamo there still staring down. The leader of black base stood there and watched as the three below went over their plan. He knew that they would be leaving tomorrow. Part of him knew he needed Henry to come back safely. Yet there was another part of him, one he tried to keep buried deep inside himself that hoped he didn’t.

Chapter 75 End