

12:03 P.M.

DIANA

– CHAPTER 13 –

WHY DID EVERYTHING HURT?

Smoke. She smelled smoke.

Diana struggled to lift her head and open her eyes. Small bursts of light danced in front of her. The lights faded, and all she could see were dark and hazy shadows.

Where was she?

Then she remembered the scraping of metal and falling bricks, and her heart slammed hard in her chest.

The explosion. She'd been in the yearbook office on the third floor. And then there was an explosion, and she was still in the school. *No.* This wasn't happening. She had to get out of here. She had to find her bag and get out of here now.

Diana pushed herself up, got a foot off the floor, and smacked into something hard and cold above her. *Oh, God.*

She raised herself up again and used her back to lift whatever it was with as much force as she could. *Move. Please, God.* Whatever it was above her had to move. Her heart

DIANA

pounded harder as she pushed against it over and over again. Only it wasn't budging. Why couldn't she push it out of the way?

Move! She shoved one more time, but it didn't give. Not at all. Not even an inch. She was trapped.

TAD

– CHAPTER 14 –

TAD DUCKED HIS HEAD back under the table that he'd dived under the minute the building had begun to shake and the sprinklers had started pouring water. The table had shuddered as pieces of ceiling crashed on top of it, but it was still standing. He was intact. Unlike parts of the room he could see that had been wrecked by the explosion.

An explosion. Something that should exist only in movies and on the news. And here he was in the middle of it. Frankie was probably in the building somewhere trying to get out, if he hadn't done so already. Or maybe he wasn't as lucky as Tad had been, and the ceiling or something else had fallen on top of him.

Tad closed his eyes and took a deep breath as his heart pounded hard and fast and loud and . . . *No panicking.* Panicking was how the people in the movies ended up getting themselves killed. He wasn't going to go down in this building while cowering under a science table. No way, no how. He just had to stop freaking out and figure out what to do next.

CAS

– CHAPTER 15 –

FIRE ALARM.

The sound pounded in her temples. *Bwoop. Bwoop.* Everything was ringing.

That was wrong.

Cas shouldn't be hearing anything anymore. This was all supposed to be over. But her shoulder and cheek hurt. Something hard was digging into her side. Something heavy was pushing down onto her back, and the fire alarm was screaming.

And she smelled smoke.

Cas opened her eyes and closed them again as she coughed.

Dust. There was lots of dust in her eyes and burning her throat. Fear punched through the confusion, making it harder to think. She couldn't think, because nothing made sense. Everything was wrong.

She closed her eyes, then snapped them open again.

The gun. Where was the gun?

12:06 P.M.

DIANA

– CHAPTER 16 –

DIANA LOWERED HERSELF back to the ground and took a deep breath to calm herself but coughed instead. Dust and smoke filled her mouth. She coughed harder as she rolled onto her right side so she could see if there was a way out in that direction.

Nothing. She was blocked by twisted metal. The left was almost as bad. Light shone through some of the debris, but none of the openings was big enough for her to shove herself through. If she tried moving anything, it would probably shift other wreckage. The metal thing wedged above her could come crashing down and . . .

No. She wasn't going to think about that. Thinking about that wasn't going to help her out of this. She felt around for the backpack she'd had with her. Nothing. It was gone.

She couldn't do anything about the bag. She had to focus and try to find a way out of here.

She couldn't go up. She couldn't roll to either side. That meant she had to move forward or back.

TIME BOMB

Coughing, she squinted into the dimness in front of her, then looked behind. It was brighter that way. Light was good, right? Light meant a way out.

Z

— CHAPTER 17 —

THE SOUND HIT HIM FIRST. The wailing, high-pitched beeping.

Z's heart raced.

His mouth went dry.

A denial sprang to his lips as he jerked his head up and opened his eyes.

Where was he?

He'd expected to see nurses rushing in to answer the alarm. But he wasn't in the hospital. His mother was gone. The siren wasn't for her.

Desks.

Dust.

He squinted and pushed himself up to his knees. A chunk of something fell off his back as he looked up into the bright blue sky. He was at the school, and he shouldn't be able to see the sky.

That's when he remembered.

TIME BOMB

“Kaitlin!” He scrambled to his feet and shoved aside a desk. Where was she? “Kaitlin?”

Maybe she ran out. Maybe . . .

He saw Kaitlin’s hair first. Then he saw the massive gray-and-black steel air conditioner that had crashed through the roof and onto her.

12:08 P.M.

DIANA

– CHAPTER 18 –

THE SPACE WAS too tight for Diana to get on her hands and knees. The best she could do was raise herself up onto her elbows and wiggle backwards inch by annoyingly and terrifyingly small inch.

Something hard jabbed into her elbow. She yelped and forced herself to keep going, because staying here wasn't an option. Not unless she wanted to die.

"I'm not going to die," she said, coughing as she scooted backwards again. She bit back a whimper as something tore through her jeans and into her flesh. *Don't think about it. Just keep going and get out of this.*

Her head spun as she tried to decide how far she'd come. A foot. Maybe a bit more, and that had taken forever. Or maybe it just felt that way. Her heart raced as she gulped in air and coughed from the dust and smoke. She shouldn't have been here. She should have said *Screw it* when Mrs. Kennedy told her to finish up what she was doing.

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Diana looked over her shoulder. The light was brighter. She was going to get out of here.

She moved faster, pushing with her arms and wiggling back with her hips. The ground beneath her slanted a bit. That made it easier. *Come on. A little farther.* The light was closer. Just a few more shifts, and she'd be free.

She shoved herself back again, and something cracked. Loud. The ground beneath her shuddered and tilted, and then she started to slide.

Metal groaned.

Tile and debris and shards of metal scraped her arms as she desperately reached for something to grab on to. Anything. There had to be something to grab. She wasn't going to—

Her hand cracked against something hard. Pain shot up her arm. She screamed. Then she couldn't breathe, because suddenly, there was nothing beneath her legs. She was going to fall. *Oh, God.*

"Help!" she yelled as her searching fingers wrapped around something cold and hard—a desk leg. She jolted to a stop and struggled to keep her hold. The weight of her legs pulled at her, threatening to make her lose her grip, which was slick with sweat and probably blood. This was bad.

"Help!"

Diana struggled to hold on while moving her other arm to grab hold as well. *Got it.* She felt a surge of triumph that faded as she tried to pull herself up and barely moved an inch. *Come on, Diana. You can do it.*

TIME BOMB

Metal groaned again.

The desk leg she was holding moved. Everything around her was moving, and now there was enough light that she could see the large metal filing cabinet looming above her head.

The desk leg trembled. She kept her grip, barely, as it jolted to a stop, but other desks around it were moving, and the cabinet above started to tilt.

“Help me!”

The cabinet was going to come down. She was going to be crushed.

Everything creaked and moaned and shuddered, and she did the only thing she could do to keep from dying as the metal cabinet started to fall. Diana closed her eyes, and, feeling the scream build in her throat, she let go.

TAD

– CHAPTER 19 –

“HELLO?” TAD YELLED, hoping there was someone around to hear him. “I’m stuck in here!” He listened hard for a response. Any response. The smell of smoke was growing stronger. *Holy hell.*

“Hello” he yelled again. “Anyone out there?”

No one yelled back. All he could hear was that idiotic fire alarm. As if everyone trapped in this hole didn’t know they were in trouble.

“Hello!” Still no answer.

The fire alarm stopped screaming.

That should be a good sign, right? He tried to tell himself that someone who knew what they were doing had shut it off.

Only the quiet made it all worse. Now he could hear his breathing coming fast and shallow and the dripping of water from above. The water was no longer pouring out. Just drip, drip, dripping. The sound of each drop made him clench his teeth.

And the smell of smoke was getting stronger.

TIME BOMB

He listened harder for the sound of voices. Nothing. Just water and a creaking sound of something metal swaying somewhere. The same kind of creaking noise his swing set used to make.

Creak. Creak. Drip. Drip. Creak. Creak. Drip. Drip. This was all like something out of a slasher flick. And in those movies, the guy in the Goodwill dress shoes and screwed-up fancy tux always died.

“Be calm. Be cool,” Tad said aloud, because it was better hearing his own voice than the dripping and creaking and the creepy silence. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

Something smashed on top of the table he was crouched beneath, and Tad scrambled out from under it. *Time to get out of here.*

Tad pushed himself to his feet and wiped his wet, dirty hands on his legs. The crisp crease of the rented tux pants seemed stranger than the broken room.

He looked toward the window. Maybe he could see if the Mustang was out there and if Frankie was trapped in this mess with him. If so . . .

The floor groaned. A section near the window cracked. Yeah—looking for the Mustang would have to wait. He had to get out of this room first.

He spun and looked around for the exit. There were broken tables and tiles and random stuff piled in front of the closed door.

Tad held his breath with the first few steps, waiting to fall

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TAD

through the floor at any minute. But it held. By the time he reached the area near the door and started climbing over the broken tables and chairs, he was feeling more confident. He was getting out of this mess.

Tad turned the door handle and pushed. The door opened three inches, then came to an abrupt stop.

Damn. Something must be blocking it.

Well, if football taught him anything, it was how to hit something hard. He set his feet, took a deep breath, rammed the door with his shoulder, and fell face first into the door frame when the door moved.

CAS

— CHAPTER 20 —

Ow. CAS CRACKED HER ANKLE on something buried in the rubble as she looked for whatever had made the sound she had just heard.

“Hello?” Was it just a falling piece of tile, or was someone there?

The school had been mostly empty when she had climbed the stairs to the third floor that morning. There had been three or four people on the second floor. A guy had been arguing with someone in a room near the stairs on this floor. Maybe it was one of them she was hearing.

She went still. There was the sound again. A chirping ring that was almost impossible to hear under the screaming of the fire alarm.

It was her phone.

She spotted her bag peeking out from under an overturned chair and scrambled to get to it.

She smacked her knee and bit back a yelp as she stumbled

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over the debris and reached for her bag. *Got it.* She yanked it toward her and almost lost her balance again when it snagged on a bent desk leg.

Cas tugged the strap and pushed at the desk. It was stuck. *Really?* Cas pulled harder on the desk, lost her grip, and fell backwards.

She shrieked as she crashed into the broken tile and boards, pulling the desk she'd been trying to move with her.

Finally, everything stilled and her bag was free.

Gulping back tears, she picked up the bag and spotted the glint of metal beneath it. Heart racing, she squatted down and grabbed the gun. The one that had been in her hands when the world blacked out. Shoving it into her bag, she heard the chirping sound again. Cas dug into the side pocket and was relieved to find her phone. She hadn't lost it or the gun. And her mother was calling.

"Mom?" she yelled as the fire alarm continued to shriek.

"Cas? Where are you? Are you outside the school?"

"I'm in the art room." Or what was left of it. She looked at the desks and broken ceiling boards that she would have to move in order to get out.

"Where is the art room?" her mother asked. When Cas didn't answer right away, her mother shouted, "Cassandra? Are you there? Where is the art room?"

"The third floor."

"Oh, my God. Oh, Cas. There was a bomb. They said on

TIME BOMB

the news someone put bombs in the school and is setting them off.”

A bomb. A bomb exploded.

“It’s going to be all right, honey,” her mother sobbed. “Honest. I’m coming. I’m coming and I’m going to get you out of there and it’s going to be all right.”

All right? This was about as far from all right as she could get. And it wasn’t going to be all right. When was her mother going to understand that? Cas shoved a piece of tile out of her path to the door with her free hand but couldn’t budge the next board. She needed both hands.

“Mom—”

“I’ll call your father. He’ll know what to do. Your father always knows what to do.”

“Mom.”

“The firefighters are on their way. The news said first responders are coming from all over. It sounds like there is some sort of issue about whether they can enter the building, but they train for this—”

“Mom—”

“Don’t panic and be careful. You’ll get out. Look for a door or a window or—”

“Mom!” she yelled. Finally her mother went silent. “Listen to me. I have to use both hands to move the stuff that’s blocking the door so I can get out. So I have to hang up now.”

“No. Cas. No. Just put the phone down so I can hear what’s happening. Please. I have to hear that you’re okay. You can’t

hang up on me, because I have to know. I don't think I could handle not knowing."

Horns honked on her mother's side of the call. Her mother yelled at some other driver to stay in their lane. *Oh, God.* Her mother was going to crash her car if she stayed on the line, and Cas was going to go nuts if she had to keep listening to her mother tell her it was going to be okay. It wasn't going to be okay!

Her mother's panic was making all of this worse. Cas looked down at the gun in her hand as her mother yammered about firefighters and police officers and some friend of Dad's who worked in the mayor's office. And Cas started to giggle through her tears. Nothing about this was funny, but it was. Because there was smoke and her ankle throbbed and she was trapped on the third floor of a bombed building and whatever phone call Dad made to the mayor's office wasn't going to help.

"Mom. I have to save my battery, and you have to drive home. Tell everyone . . ." she took a deep breath as the fire alarm suddenly stopped screaming. The smell of smoke was stronger. Sweat was dripping down her leg. So was blood. She pictured her little sister and the kitten she made Cas admire a dozen times, and the bubble of amusement popped. "Tell everyone I love them. Okay?"

Before her mother could respond, Cas hung up.

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