

Shooting Star



by Riveka Thevendran

“This is a bad idea!”

I pointed my middle and index fingers towards the right of us, where there was a tall, wide cupboard. I looked back at Liv with my eyebrows raised and tried not to sigh as she stared at me blankly.

I mimicked climbing into it within the limited space I had under the medium-sized office desk that once belonged to my father.

I took a deep breath through my nose before turning to face her fully.

“Stop acting like you’re in a Mission Impossible movie and tell me what you want me to do,” she deadpanned.

“Be quiet, Liv!” I whisper-shouted, my fists clenching as the fear of being caught consumed me.

“If we were gonna be caught we would’ve been a while ago.”

“That doesn’t mea—”

“Daddy’s office is soundproof, genius!” she cut me off.

I blinked before nodding my head, my anxiety easing somewhat.

“Climb into the cupboard and wait for me to come back.”

“No.”

“Liv.” I sighed.

“I want to help you! We’re a team, remember?” she insisted.

“It’s too dangerous for both of us to go in together. We’ll be caught within seconds.”

“What if you don’t come back?” she asked, her voice barely loud enough for me to hear.

I kissed her forehead, my heart breaking as her eyes filled with tears.

“Then you head to Northbury. It’s a straight walk from here and you have enough food to last the trip.”

I watched as the tears spilled from her eyes and I hugged her tightly.

“It’s okay, you’ll be okay...”

“Please come back, Ace!”

“I’ll try, I promise!” I reached up and grabbed the small digital clock on the desk before handing it to her. “Ten minutes, then you leave.”

She continued to glare at me so I glared back, shoving the clock into her hands.

“Olivia.”

She huffed before walking towards the cupboard and climbing in. We made eye contact just before she closed the door and I mouthed the words ‘I love you’, wondering if it was the last time I’d be able to say it. Tearfully, she mouthed it back and shut the door.

I closed my eyes and focused on slowing down my rapid heartbeat to a steady rhythm before standing up.

It felt weird, sneaking around a house I grew up in with the fear of dying at the back of my mind. I hadn’t been back in this house since that fateful night that changed everything.

We lived on the outskirts of our small town, Windstor Haven, since Mama preferred nature over people. My father worked more than he breathed, if that was even possible, so it worked out favourably.

It was a typical ‘Movie Night Sunday’ as Mama called it, but also Liv’s ninth birthday so my father was home. She had baked a cake for the occasion. I had just taken a large bite out of my Oreo cheesecake when a bright light flashed across the room, followed by a thunderous crash that made the electricity go out.

“Ace?” Mama screeched. I scrambled towards the sound of her voice as my eyes adjusted to the darkness. “Here, take Olivia and go to your room. Don’t leave until I come get you, understand?”

Before I could protest, she handed a sobbing Liv to me. I wrapped my arms around her and lifted her up as she snuggled into my neck.

“Understand?” she repeated sternly. I nodded and promptly left the living room, despite every nerve in my body screaming at me to stay by my mom’s side and protect her.

“Honey, take your gun with you. Just to be safe!” I forced my legs to keep moving towards my room at the back of our house, blocking out Mama’s words and praying it was just a lightning strike.

I headed straight towards the small couch at the corner of my room and pulled Liv onto my lap.

“Shh, it’s okay! I’m sure lightning just struck one of the towers. It’ll be okay soon.”

“Promise?”

“Cross my heart!” She smiled as I wiped her cheeks and pinched them, making her swat at me as I laughed.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunshots sounded from outside, making us both jump. I was about to stand up and investigate when Mama came running into my room, a shotgun in her hand and tears running down her cheeks.

“Get up, come on!”

I stood up with Liv in my arms and ran up to her.

“Ma—”

“Through Papa’s office and out the back, hurry!”

“What—”

“Listen to me, Ace, we don’t have time!”

My stomach twisted as my mother shoved me into my father’s office, more tears flowing out of her hazel eyes.

“Your Papa and I love you both so much. Don’t you ever forget that!”

The front door slammed open and I flinched. The wall separating the kitchen and the living room blocked my view, and I couldn’t see who was in there.

Mama’s eyes hardened as she looked at me, before cocking the shotgun.

“Take care of your sister. I love you!” were Mama’s last words before she ran from the room, the sounds of gunshots reverberating throughout the entire house. Tears blurred my vision as I ran to the back door. I kept running as my mother’s screams filled the night. I kept run-

ning even when her screams cut off abruptly. I kept running as the house I grew up in faded into nothingness and I couldn't take another step forward.

The next day, a Code Red was sent out to the country, stating that we were under a worldwide alien invasion. Two days later, all of our technological devices stopped working, making us unable to contact anyone for help.

A few days later, we found a group of survivors in the forest about twenty miles from our house as Windstor Haven was taken over completely by the invaders.

Adrian was the unofficial leader of the group, followed by Raine, his right hand man, and two other stragglers we picked up along the way. Raine had a radio that he always messed around with, the only thing that worked, but it was useless as we heard nothing but static. That all changed one day when we were roasting a lamb on a fire.

"Calling all survivors. I don't know if anyone can hear me, but The Listeners have taken over most of the small towns in Rotherham..."

'The Listeners', that's what we called them. Their hearing is so sharp, they can hear anything from miles away, the sounds of our hearts beating and the rush of the blood in our veins, stopped only by soundproofed areas. The humanoid creatures, two to three times our size, spoke in a different language and for some reason, avoided the forest.

We followed the broadcasting channel for days as we received tips and tricks on how to avoid them. We learned their strengths based on real life encounters of other survivors.

Then, the broadcast's message changed one day.

"There is a safe haven in Northbury! If anyone can hear me, head to Northbury, walk through the forest. There's a dock—"

Adrian threw the radio at a tree trunk, smashing it beyond repair.

"There's no such thing as a safe haven. We stick together and stay here and we'll be safe. Is that understood?"

Nobody replied for a minute before he repeated his question, this time yelling it out in rage. Liv shuffled closer to me as we all nodded in agreement. His eyes caught her movement and he winked at her before walking over to us. She grimaced before quickly schooling her features to appear unbothered. He sat on my right as Liv ate her dinner quietly on my left, her eyes trained on the fire in front of us.

"You've grown up quite nicely, haven't you? How old are you now? Thirteen?"

"She's ten." I answered through clenched teeth. He glanced at me before eyeing her up and down, making my patience run thin. If he wasn't providing us with protection and food, he would be sporting a black eye and a few broken ribs right about now.

"We'll head to bed now. Thank you for the dinner, Sir."

He looked annoyed, but grunted, acknowledging my thanks. I took Liv's hand and walked towards a medium-sized tent that we called home.

“You okay?”

“With my big brother here to protect me? Of course!” She teased as she wrapped her arms around my waist and squeezed, making me chuckle.

I kissed her forehead and vowed to never let anything harm her as long as I was alive.

That night whilst everyone slept, we ran.

Liv didn't question me and I was grateful for that. If there was a safe haven, I was going to get us there. Considering the looks Adrian kept throwing my baby sister, this wasn't it. I was quite muscled and toned for a twenty-year-old, but there was no way I could take on all four of them.

Unfortunately, my old house was the closest thing to civilisation and I knew I had an old radio sitting patiently on my dresser. I needed more information before I blindly charged into Northbury.

And that's how I ended up sneaking into my former bedroom while my sister hunkered down in a cupboard in the other room. I slowly cracked the door open and tiptoed towards my bedroom. I peeked my head around the corner of the wall that blocked my living room to see if anything was there. I made sure to focus on my heart rate to keep it steady; one advantage we had was that The Listeners had a heartbeat as well, so as long as I remained calm, I could fit in with the rest of them if any still remained here. When the coast was clear, I took long, soundless steps to my door before slipping through it undetected. I smiled when I saw the radio and grabbed it, when I heard a scuffle outside of my bedroom. I froze as all of my muscles clenched in place. I listened intently, not daring to make a sound.

It sounded like two Listeners were arguing in my living room. I walked noiselessly towards my door and cracked it slightly open.

Of all the ways I could die, I choose curiosity.

A Listener three times my size was held up by its neck by another Listener that was four times its size. The larger one snarled and seemed intent on crushing the smaller creature. The one being held up glanced at me before looking back at what I assume is its superior. I closed the door slowly. I scrunched my eyes shut and told myself the opening was too small for it to have seen me and backed away from the door as they continued yelling at each other, their voices loud enough to block the sound of my movements.

I wondered if Liv had left. If I made it out alive, it'd be hell tracking her. I heard the front door open and slam shut and assumed the Listeners had left; better to give it another few minutes before I attempted my escape. Just as I was getting ready to leave, the door to my room opened and the smaller Listener slipped in, closing the door behind it. I kept my expression neutral and prayed my heartbeat would comply, not that it mattered now, but maybe it would think I was part of the home decor. I stayed absolutely still, my eyes unblinking and my breaths as shallow and short as I've trained them to be.

It crept towards me, a predator stalking its prey. I looked right into its milky green eyes as they seemed to taunt me. I watched as its lips grew wider, giving me a front row seat to the deadly incisors in its mouth as it reached me. To my horror, two of its upper canines grew longer and sharper and it leaned down towards my neck, inhaling deeply.

I was about to push it away when the sharp fangs punctured my neck. I clutched my radio in a death grip as I gasped involuntarily. The expected pain was only there for a second before a warm feeling spread all over my body.

I've heard about this from the radio broadcasts; they mark you and this gives them control over your body and mind. Fear spiked through my entire being as it licked the wound clean.

Nice to meet you, Ace. I'm Kor'iel. We don't have much time, so I'll make this quick. You need to leave.

I was too shocked to focus on the alien voice in my head. It's letting me leave? It moved back from me and stepped to the side, tilting its head to the door.

Ghen's going to come back soon and I won't be able to help you.

I thought of Mama; history was repeating itself. Its expression softened into what I assumed was pity, and I glared at it.

However, I wasn't one to court death, so I took its advice and hurried to my father's office. I ran to the cupboard and yanked it open as Liv squeaked in surprise.

I pulled her to her feet and dragged her out the back door, making sure to check if anything was around before I ran from my home for the second time.

What we have is a connection to one another, I cannot control your body or your mind. It allows me to communicate with you. We are not all here to conquer and kill, some of us are forced to. I hope you join our rebellion and fight alongside us. It would benefit your species in the end. The majority of us simply wish to live in peace.

I didn't trust a single word, but I also knew it being choked against a wall by its own kind was no show they put on for me. I had a lot of thinking to do, but for now, I needed to focus on getting Liv and I to Northbury, and hopefully find someone to talk this out to without getting shot in the face.

Hope bloomed in my chest.

Can we truly attain peace and freedom? Is there really a rebellion out there? Will this hell finally end?

Is it already beginning to?

It's probably brainwashing me.

I'm not.