WORLD BURN DOWN

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Barrington Stoke

This is for you

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CHAPTER 1

The Kidnapping

With a violent crack, the front door jumped on its hinges. Then came two more blows and the door's wooden panels started to splinter.

Carlos watched it happen from the living room, his horror keeping him rooted to the spot. Someone was breaking into the apartment.

What the ...? Carlos thought.

His first instinct was to run to his bedroom window and climb out. But this wasn't his

ground-floor apartment in the heart of Manaus. Here he was ten storeys up in a tower block on the outskirts of the city. There was only the shantytown and the rainforest below.

Mum's work took her deep into the Amazon and just now she was doing even longer hours, with all the wildfires burning. So Mum's boss had let her rent this dump of a place for a month so she could get back to Carlos after her shift more easily.

The door shuddered again from another blow.

I've got to call the police, thought Carlos. He jerked into life and started hunting about for his mobile. He ran to his room. Frantically, he searched the mess on the floor, on the bed, trying to find his phone. *Come on, come on …*

Carlos felt a spike of anger that Mum wasn't here. He had hardly seen her over the last three days. He'd been stuck alone in the

hot apartment, miles away from all his friends and bored out of his mind while stink and smoke blew in from this trashy neighbourhood. This was all Mum's fault. Mum and her dumb, stupid job.

"Don't go out by yourself," she'd told Carlos, "and you don't open that door for anyone but me! You hear me?"

All Carlos could hear now was the door giving way. It wouldn't stay standing much longer.

Feeling sick, Carlos ran to the built-in wardrobe in Mum's room and hid inside. The only outfit with any bulk or cover was Mum's spare uniform. Khaki top, stab vest, trousers, backpack and cap – this was the clothing of Captain Monica Feliz of the Special Forces Group of IBAMA, Brazil's environment agency.

Carlos shut his eyes. *While you're out protecting the Amazon, Mum, who's protecting me?* he thought.

The pounding at the door stopped. Sweating and shaking, Carlos felt his heart pound as a key slid into the lock. He heard the mechanism turn and the door swung open, squealing like a dying beast.

Why break the door down if you had the key all along? thought Carlos. For a short stupid second he thought it might be Mum. And yet he knew the heavy steps on the wooden floor weren't hers. Carlos was so scared he couldn't open his eyes, couldn't stop shaking.

I should've hidden near the front door so I could've dodged outside, he thought. Instead Carlos was shivering in the hot dark of the wardrobe, his eyes tightly shut, listening to the intruder thump around the apartment.

What had they come here for?

It had to be something to do with Mum's work. Carlos knew that what Mum did was dangerous – she had the scars to prove it and enemies that could fill a prison. One of them must have come here to—

"FOUND YOU!" the intruder yelled as the wardrobe door was yanked open.

Carlos opened his eyes to find a man in a black ski mask standing over him.

"You're coming with me," the man said.

Feeling desperate and terrified, Carlos tried to push past the man, but a big hand closed on the back of his neck. He felt thick cotton wool pushed into his face and smelt the sharp tang of chemicals.

Carlos closed his eyes.

They didn't open again for a long time.