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Revived

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EGMONT

Our story began over a century ago, when seventeen-year-old Egmont Harald Petersen found a coin in the street. He was on his way to buy a flyswatter, a small hand-operated printing machine that he then set up in his tiny apartment.

The coin brought him such good luck that today Egmont has offices in over 30 countries around the world. And that lucky coin is still kept at the company's head offices in Denmark.

For Noah . . .

You're always standing beside me,

holding my hand.

ONE

I'm flattened and thrashing on the sun-warmed track next to the football field, lying on what looks like asphalt but what I realise, now that I'm down here, is actually that fake spongy stuff. It reeks like it was just installed. There's a woman kneeling beside my right shoulder, shouting into a cellphone.

'Her name is Daisy . . . uh . . .' Sharply, she sucks in her breath. 'I don't know her last name!' she cries.

For a split second, I don't know, either.

'Appleby,' another teacher shouts.

'Appleby,' the first repeats to the 911 dispatcher. 'It looks like she's having an allergic reaction to something.'

Bee, I try to say, but there's no air. No word.

My jerking limbs are like venomous snakes to the students forming a circle around me: the kids jump back in fear. I gasp with my entire body but only one rationed breath comes through. I know it's one of my last.

When my P.E. teacher told us to jog the outdoor track to warm up for volleyball, I was excited about the fresh air. Maybe I'd get a

little color in my cheeks. But then a fuzzy yellow-and-black menace wanted to join me, and decided that maybe he'd invite a few friends, too. I hit number one on my speed dial the second I felt the familiar pinch of the first bee sting; I only hope Mason makes it in time.

A wave of calm begins to creep through my body: I know it won't be long now. Everything, forehead to toenails, relaxes. When the threat of getting kicked disappears, the crowd tightens around me. My eyes bounce off face after face hovering above me. They're all strangers; high school just started yesterday, and no one I know from junior high is in my P.E. class.

Most of them look terrified. A few girls are crying. The principal shows up and tries to contain the crowd, but they're like magnets, drawn in by the thrill of someone else's misfortune.

'Move back,' he shouts. 'Move back so the paramedics will be able to get through!'

But no one listens. No one moves back. Instead, without knowing it, they form a blockade between me and help.

I lock eyes with a pretty, dark-skinned girl whose locker is near mine. She seems friendly enough to be the last person I see. She's not crying, but the look on her face is pure distress. Maybe we would've been friends.

I stare at the girl and she stares at me until my eyelids fall.

The crowd gasps.

'Oh my god!'

'Do something!'

'Help her!' a guy's voice pleads.

I hear sirens approaching. Tennis shoe-clad feet thunder away from me, presumably to wave in the paramedics. I wonder whether it's Mason and Cassie or the real ones.

My arms go completely limp.

'Daisy, hold on!' shouts a girl. I like to think it was my almost friend, but I don't open my eyes to see for sure. Instead, my mind goes blank. None of the sounds are clear enough to hear any more. The world fades to nothing, and before I have the chance to think another thought . . .

I'm dead.

TWO

'Do you have everything you need?' Mason whispers through the darkness as we walk briskly to the waiting SUV. It's the middle of the night in Frozen Hills, Michigan, and we're minutes from our next move.

'Yes,' I say, confident that I've left nothing behind but furniture and off-season clothing. I've been through this before: I know the drill.

'Let me take that,' Mason says, pointing to the suitcase I'm dragging behind me on the cobblestone walkway. I let him because I feel a little wonky from the procedure. Not quite myself yet. Mason grabs the bag and what was bricks to me is feathers to him: he tosses it on top of the other suitcases in the back and soundlessly shuts the vehicle doors.

I climb into the back seat. From the front, Cassie turns to acknowledge me momentarily before going back to her work. She's still sporting a fake paramedic outfit, but she's thrown a faded grey sweatshirt over the top and removed her wig. Her strawberry-blonde hair is pulled back in a taut, efficient ponytail. She pushes her

rimless glasses, which make her look older, up higher on her nose as she reads something from her government-issue supercomputer disguised as a smartphone.

I watch Mason head back inside for the final sweep, then admire the outside of the house I've gotten used to over the past three years. A two-story red-brick house with black shutters that was built when people still used the telegraph: it has its own creaks and character and I'm going to miss it. Moments from goodbye for good, I realise that this house was probably my favorite. Then again, maybe the next one will be even better.

I think about how I'll design my new bedroom until I see low headlights approaching. I get a charge when the black sedan pulls up and two men in dark outfits get out; it's always sort of thrilling to see the clean-up crew arrive. Though they've probably never been here before, they walk through the low black iron gate and up the porch steps without hesitation. Mason comes out just as one of the agents reaches for the front door handle. The men pass without speaking, giving one another nothing but quick chin dips.

I watch the door close behind the agents. Like an owl in the night, I search wide-eyed for movement inside the house, but the windows stay dark; the night stays still. Unless you catch them going in, you can't tell they're there. Ninja stealth in black chinos and fleece jackets, they'll erase traces of me and my faux family and leave the house so authentically bare that the real-estate agent who comes to

sell it will never for a minute think it was inhabited by anyone other than a nice young couple and their ill-fated teen.

After they fix the house, the team will infiltrate the neighborhood long enough to put minds at rest, seeding gossip about the sad family returning to Arizona or Georgia or Maine to deal with the loss. The rumors are always started by the unrecognisable guy at the gas station or the mousy girl using the computer at the library.

The agents – the *Disciples* – are trained as doctors, scientists, watchers and bodyguards, but I've always thought most of them could make it in Hollywood, too.

Mason, in his recurring role as Loving Father, finally climbs into the driver's seat. In worn jeans, loafers, and a cozy brown sweater, with his tired green eyes and messy dark (but prematurely graying) hair, he fits the role he's played for eleven years now.

'Where are we going?' Mason asks Cassie. Cassie doesn't look up from her tiny computer when she replies in her Southern-accented voice.

'Nebraska,' she says. 'Omaha.'

Mason nods once and puts the SUV in reverse. I check my former home once more for signs that there are government agents inside: no luck. Then I exhale the day and the town away and stuff a pillow between my head and the cool window, and by the time we're down the driveway and turning off of our street, I'm asleep.

* * *

When I open my eyes, it's light outside. Bright light. The kind that makes me want to throw a rock at the sun. I have a crick in my neck and my mouth feels like I ate salty cotton balls. I look at Mason in the rear-view mirror; he feels my stare and speaks.

'Hi there,' he says. I can't tell whether he's looking at me or the road because he's wearing dark sunglasses.

'Hi,' I grumble.

'How do you feel?' he asks.

'Headache,' I answer.

'That's normal,' he says.

'I know.'

'Water,' Cassie says, offering me a bottle without looking my way. I take it and gulp down half in two seconds, then look out the window to the unidentifiable landscape zooming by at seventy-five miles per hour.

'Where are we?' I ask.

'Illinois,' Mason replies.

'ILLINOIS?!'

Cassie jumps a little but still doesn't look back at me. I take a deep breath, which for some reason makes me yawn loudly. I rub the sleep from my eyes and in a more measured tone ask, 'How long was I asleep?' Mason glances at Cassie and then checks the clock.

'I'd say you were probably out about eight hours,' Mason says as plainly as if he's giving me a weather report.

'*Eight* hours? How is that possible?'

'They added a calming agent to it . . . to smooth the rough edges,' Mason says.

I nod, still feeling woozy.

'Maybe they need to tone it down,' I say. 'Unless they're going for a knockout.'

'I'll make a note,' Cassie says, her eyes still glued to her tiny phone screen. In private, Cassie is free to be her workaholic robot self. I roll my eyes at her but, of course, she doesn't notice.

'What's our new last name going to be?' I ask. With every new town comes a new last name; first names stay the same to avoid confusion.

'West,' Mason says.

'Huh,' I answer, rolling it around in my brain. Daisy West. Definitely more interesting than Daisy Johnson from Palmdale, but maybe a little too cute. Though not nearly as bad as Daisy Diamond from Ridgeland.

'I think I liked Appleby best,' I conclude aloud.

'You were more used to it,' Mason replies. 'West is fine.'

Shrugging, I consider my options for passing the time.

'I wish we could fly,' I murmur to myself, but Mason hears me.

'That would be nice,' he agrees. Unfortunately, our fourth passenger, Revive – the top secret drug that brings people back from the dead – makes that impossible. The drug is too precious to check

in to the hold and too secret to carry on. So every time we move, we have to drive; every time we drive, I'm at a loss about what to do. I wish I could read, but it makes me carsick, and since we left so suddenly, my iPod isn't charged. Eventually I settle on counting mile markers until I think I might pee my pants. I ask Mason to pull over at a diner, then, considering it's almost noon and all, we decide to eat, too.

After visiting the surprisingly inoffensive bathroom, I join Mason and Cassie at a booth in the back. They're sitting across from each other but aren't speaking; they look like a typical married couple. I make a split-second decision and scoot in next to Cassie, opting to pretend to be a mama's girl. Cassie looks up at me and smiles warmly.

We're in public now, so she's human.

'You're the spitting image of your mom,' the waitress says to me when she comes to take our order. We've heard it before, but it's a false comparison. Cassie's brand of blonde is straight with reddish tones, while mine is wavy and so dirty blonde it's essentially light brown. Cassie's eyes are round and dark blue like the ocean, whereas mine are lighter than the sky at noon, wide set and smaller. She's nearly six feet tall, and I'm five foot six; she's curvy, and I can wear jeans from the boys' department.

But what makes the 'look-alike' comment even more absurd is the fact that Cassie's only thirteen years older than me.

And yet, we play the part.

'Thank you!' Cassie says, one hand to her chest like she's beyond flattered.

'Uh, yeah, thanks,' I mutter, hoping that I come off as a typical teen who doesn't care to look like her mother. In truth, despite the fact that she barely has a personality, Cassie's pretty. I'm fine with people saying I look like her.

'You're most welcome,' Hello, my name is Bess replies. 'Now, what can I bring you?'

I order a veggie burger and a chocolate shake; Mason orders coffee and a Spanish omelet; and Cassie orders a hard-boiled egg, dry wheat toast and sliced melon on the side.

Bess writes in her notepad and leaves. Then, almost too soon for it to be made to order, the food rides in on Bess's wide arms. Quickly, she sets down plates, fills coffee cups and pulls ketchup out of her apron pocket.

'Need anything else?' she asks. Three head shakes and she's gone.

We eat in silence, me downing my lunch as if I've never tasted food before, then wondering if the scientists at the big lab added a metabolism booster to Revive in addition to the calming agent. Knowing it's silly, I don't ask Mason about it. But I can't help but notice that Mason's and Cassie's plates are still half full when mine is all but licked clean. And really, who knows what the newer iterations of the drug have in them?

'So, why Omaha?' I ask as Mason takes a bite of his omelet. I watch his jaw muscles flex as he chews slowly, deliberately. After he swallows, he speaks.

'It's one of his favorite cities,' he says.

Mason means the Revive project mastermind. Basically invisible and in control of a program that brings people back from the dead, he's earned the nickname 'God'.

'Why?' I ask.

'Because it's moderate, I suppose. Not too small or too big. Rarely in the news. Friendly. Reasonably gentrified. You know what that means, right?'

I roll my eyes at him.

'So, all in all, it should be a good cover. Assuming . . .'

'Assuming what?' I ask.

Mason checks the tables around us, then answers in a low tone. 'Assuming nothing *else* happens.'

'I didn't mean to do it, you know,' I say quietly.

'You never do,' Mason says, holding my gaze. 'But you didn't have your EpiPen, either.'

'I forgot it,' I say quickly.

It's a lie.

In truth, I spent way too long deciding what to wear, leaving only five minutes to arrange my hair into something resembling a style. I left for school in a rush, remembering the EpiPen, which probably

would have saved my life, halfway down the block. I wasn't so late that I couldn't have gone back, but for some reason I didn't.

Having been trained to know when people are lying, Mason narrows his eyes at me. I assume Cassie's doing the same, but I don't look at her to find out. For a moment I think Mason's going to call me on it, but thankfully he moves on.

'Daisy, I think you should know that we nearly couldn't bring you back this time,' he says so quietly it's almost like he's breathing the words. His bluntness, I'm used to – Mason treats me like a partner, not a daughter – but I'm surprised by the idea of permanent death.

'Was it a bad vial?' I ask.

'No, it was fine,' Mason says. 'It was . . . you.'

'He almost called time of death,' Cassie interjects. Stunned, I look at her, then back at Mason.

'Seriously?' I ask.

'It was very stressful,' Mason says. There's a flicker of something like worry in his green eyes, and then it's gone.

I think for a moment before coming to what I consider to be a pretty rational conclusion: 'But it did work, so everything's fine.'

'But it might not be next time,' he says. 'I'm merely advising you to take precautions. Don't you remember Chase?'

My stomach sinks as an old memory sets in: seven years after the bus crash that started it all, Chase Rogers died again, for seemingly no reason. He was Revived repeatedly, but – Mason told me – he

seemed to have developed an immunity to the drug. Then he died for good.

'I'm not like him,' I say quietly. Bess comes and sets down the check, which silences us for a few minutes.

'I'm not like him,' I say again when the coast is clear.

Mason looks deep into my eyes. 'I hope not. Just be more careful, all right?'

'All right,' I agree.

Another family sits at the booth directly behind us, so the conversation is over, for now at least.

'Are my gorgeous ladies finished eating?' Mason asks loudly enough for others to hear. The mom at the table behind us sighs. Mason can be charming when he wants to.

I look down at my plate, which has discarded raw onions, wilted lettuce, and a quarter of a pickle left on it.

'Uh . . . yeah,' I say in my best disinterested-teenager voice.

'I sure am,' Cassie says, patting her flat stomach. 'I'm stuffed to the gills.'

'Great,' Mason says. 'Then let's clear out.'

We walk up to the front counter. As we wait for Mason to pay, Cassie fixes a stray piece of my long hair in that absentmindedly automatic mom-ish way. She looks at me with love; I roll my eyes and brush her hand away.

After Mason leaves a five on the table for Bess, he opens the OUT

door, causing the bells on top to jingle, and holds it for his wife and daughter. In the parking lot, when we're still visible to the other diners, I stare at the ground and walk three steps behind my parents while they hold hands and Cassie laughs at nothing.

Then we get in the SUV and drive away.