

The Greenhouse

The white lights break through the night's dark shadow. The radio is silent, except for some quiet static. The moon shines down from above, illuminating the tips of the sand dunes ahead. I quietly shift in my seat as the van rolls over a large bump in the unpaved road. The sand dunes grow taller as we enter the remote desert.

“Are you ready, Braelyn?”

My head darts up from its low hanging position. I sigh.

“Yes,” I reply. I try to smile, but the grimness of this mission weighs too heavily for me to express any happiness. Instead, I take out a small, crinkled paper with the description of our mission and read it for the umpteenth time. The van jolts to a stop, launching my head forward. I shut my eyes for a second and then quickly unbuckle the seatbelt. My partner in crime, Nayten, grabs her messenger bag, and I stuff the description into the side pocket of my black coat. The driver turns to face us, his eyes hiding behind his thick sunglasses.

“This is the destination. How long do you estimate you will be gone for?” I look down at my watch and squint to read it in the dim moonlight. It vaguely reads 1:12 a.m. I look up.

“Four in the morning.” Nayten nods along with my estimate.

“You have three hours then, girls. You better hurry. I'll meet you back here,” he tells us. We quickly nod and silently sprint out the open side door. The cool air chills my skin as we run. The large, circular moon brightens our sandy path through the desert. I check the map on my watch. It currently reads that we are 15 minutes from our destination. I sigh as sand and dust fly into my lungs. Nayten stops and looks back at me.

“How many more minutes?” She inquires. I stop and read her the number. She nods and we continue on into our mission. This is only the beginning.

Fifteen minutes later, we arrive at the facility. Nayten and I duck down behind a small group of cacti about 16 yards away from the eerie looking building. My heart instantly starts beating faster and faster as the reality of the situation sinks in. I’m like any normal fourteen year old. Except I was chosen by the government for a top secret mission to hack into the computer system run by an even more top secret group called the Greenhouse. The Greenhouse has a facility here in the middle of desert where they keep track of world weather patterns sub rosa. They recently started installing strange structures under the oceans that even the most talented of code breakers can’t get into. The thing is, no one knows why they are doing this or who is in charge of any of it. The general public is constantly getting cryptic messages from them about how they will use the information to change the world. Three years ago, Nayten was able to trace one of the messages back to this base in the desert and she alerted the government about it. A few people have been to the base before us trying to figure out what they are doing. They sent back reports of the activity. Although, no one has ever made it back. Alive, at least.

One of them was my sister, May. She had beautiful, bright ice blue eyes. She went missing on one of these missions. She was the one who discovered that they were tracking world weather patterns. May left a lot of warnings about the people running the facility. Her last message was that they were attacking her with strange inventions and then her communication device went offline. Yet, we still don’t have any answers as to why they are so persistent in their attempts to “change the world.” That’s where I come in. I’m pretty much an expert on computer coding and systems and the government thought I’d be perfect for the job. So now, after months of intense training, here I am.

My breath comes in shallow gasps and lines of perspiration drip down the sides of my face, even though the air is chilled. Nayten watches the facility through her night vision goggles. I wait in anticipation as she scans the area. She looks over at me.

“Braelyn, if you don’t think you can continue, you can head back,” she says. As much as I would love that, I know that I was chosen for a reason. I take a deep breath.

“No, I can do this. I think,” I reply.

Nayten’s eyes linger on me for a little bit before she returns back to scanning the area. The wind picks up and whistles through my ears.

“Braelyn. It’s go time.”

I shut my eyes. My life flashes through my eyes. All of my memories with my family. By myself and with my close friends. I know this is important. So I stand up and very reluctantly, nod my head. Nayten takes off at a sprint, just like we planned. I use my watch to access the Greenhouse base barriers. After a couple minutes of quick computing, I’m able to deactivate the invisible wall surrounding the base. I see Nayten sprinting towards the facility. According to our plan, she is supposed to make sure the coast is clear. Then once she communicates that she is through, I follow and try to access their systems and download them onto a flash drive. If all goes well, we should both return mostly undetected with new information. I rock back on my heels in the dark sand, the stars glinting from above.

May once told me before she left on her mission to this very place, “If you think something is hard, you’re probably just overthinking it.” I quietly repeat the words to myself. Suddenly, I feel a two-beat pulse on my wrist. The indicator that Nayten got through. I start at a nervous run towards the intimidating building. I slow down as I reach the entrance. Huge, dark doors loom before me and there is no evidence of human presence. I silently creep through the

automatic doors and down into a dark corridor. A dim light flickers above me and my feet gently echo. My heart slams against my chest and I bite down on my lip. I double check the blueprints for the base and quickly find my way into the computer system room. Nayten is nowhere in sight. Carefully, I shut the door behind me and race over to the first monitor I find.

The screen glows to life as I press the keys. *WELCOME, MAYREN* it reads. I click on the profile for Mayren, who I assume would be the person in charge of the computer systems. I spend about 10 minutes trying to access the files in Mayren's account. Finally, I get through and see a file marked *UNDERWATER BASE BLUEPRINTS AND PLANS*. I eagerly click on it and start reading the blueprints for the strange underwater structure. I also see a subfile marked *DESCRIPTION*. Curious, I click on it. In bold letters I read: **They won't see it coming. The warming of this doomed planet will kill us all. They are too dumb to realize that they are thieves of their own lives. Why not speed up the process?** *That's strange. Why would they try speeding up global warming?*

Of course, the planet is at risk for an early death due to our lack of protecting its environment, but their plans still confuse me. After I take a second to process the information, I reach into my side pocket and shove the flash drive into the side of the electronic device. It starts to download the file when I feel another two-beat pulse on my wrist. I check my watch. It's a message from Nayten. It reads: *Come now*. Her terse message worries me and I look over at the computer. It still has 30 percent left of the file to download. I decide it can't wait any longer. I pull the flash drive out and zip it back up. I shut down the monitor and use Nayten's location tracking to help me find my way to her.

I arrive outside where the watch shows Nayten's last known location. I don't see anything except rows of sand dunes and the occasional cactus. I walk around the perimeter of the building and then I hear a high pitched scream.

"BRAELYN!" My heart freezes as I hear Nayten's voice. I follow her strained voice until I see her in the distance. A strange figure takes a long glowing rod and is beating her down. Another is using a taser of some sort and asking her questions. "How did you get in here? Where is your partner?" A huge group of them huddle around her as she struggles to stand and I dart over to hide behind a large metal can. I consider my options and, as I stand, my foot catches on something and I fall forward, knocking the metal can down.

It clatters to the ground, producing an extremely loud bang. Everyone stops and turns to look at me. Nayten looks up helplessly as one of the figures covers her mouth. I shudder at the sight of all of them. I remember May's words to me. *You're just overthinking. You're just overthinking.* I tell myself. Slowly, I walk forward. I stand my ground and say, "Who are you? Why are you doing this?" I point over to Nayten. "And what is your mission? What are you trying to accomplish here?" One of the figures steps forward, a black hood covering its face. I try to back away, but I bump into something. No, someone. Whoever it is grabs my hands and holds me fast, so I can't escape. My heart slams against me and I barely can breathe. I take a small, shaky breath. The hooded figure walks closer, reaching a hand up to slowly remove the hood. What I see shocks me. I fall back against the person holding me. All I can see before I start to pass out is bright, ice blue eyes.