

CHAPTER FIFTY FORTY

ABOUT A QUARTER MILE AWAY TO MY RIGHT, THE TAXIING jet was just about to reach the end of the runway, where it would turn around and accelerate down the length of the runway and take off.

"No! Wait!" I screamed. "I'm coming!"

And I pushed for the aircraft, my legs and lungs already burning. My heart was nearly pounding out of my chest, and I pumped my arms like my life depended on it, which I was pretty sure it did.

The jet reached the end and circled around until the left side faced me, but it was still far from me. It paused there, not moving.

Was Tony waiting for me? Were Eddy and Lexie on board?

I slowed to a fast jog, relieved.

I would get there, make sure my brother and sister

were on it, and then we could go. Tony said he'd wait for the first explosion. And that hadn't—

BOOM!

The ground shuddered beneath my feet and I stumbled and tripped, falling onto the hot tarmac. I got to my feet, my knees skinned and bloody.

The jet had started to roll.

As fast as I could run, I headed straight for it, wincing at the pain in my knees. I aimed for the front of it, trying to cut off some distance. The smell of jet fuel made me want to gag, and the roar of the jet deafened me.

Just as I got closer, the jet passed me.

Tony was leaving without me.

I slowed to a jog, not wanting to give up. But there was nothing left to do.

It was over. Done.

Then, suddenly, the door opened and Eddy's head popped out. "Run!" He screamed something else, along with Tony's name, and the jet slowed slightly. The speed was not yet so fast that I didn't have a chance to catch it, so I mustered up every ounce of energy I had and gave chase.

My lungs threatened to burst as I pumped my arms, running faster than I ever thought possible. Eddy was lying on his belly and reached out to me with both his arms. "Grab hold!"

I had to sprint even faster to get ahead of the wing, and then I lunged, reaching with my right hand. Eddy grabbed my hand, then clutched my arm with his other hand, so he had me with both. My left hand still held the

gene gun, which I heaved over Eddy's head before grabbing onto the side of the door.

"Hold on!" Eddy yelled as the jet increased in speed.

"Don't let go!" I screamed. My legs could no longer keep up so I curled them up using my abs, pulling myself off the runway, but putting more strain on my grip on the door.

And Eddy's hold on me.

His face inches from mine. I was all sweaty, and my hand and arm began slipping from his grip. "Don't let me go!" I screamed. "Eddy!"

And then we were speeding down the runway, heading to take off as I still hung halfway out.

Over the roar of the jet, I heard another explosion and felt the jet tremble, then another.

From the cockpit, Tony yelled, "We're not gonna make it!"

Eddy grimaced, his face red with exertion as he struggled to hold on to me. But I felt my own grip on the door failing, my legs were too heavy to keep holding up like that, and Eddy's hands began to slip.

I grunted, trying to hold on. But I couldn't any longer and I started falling—

Then Lexie was there, kneeling, half on top of Eddy, yanking on my other arm with a strength I never knew she had. I was almost in, on top of her and Eddy, part of my legs still dangling outside the door.

But none of us had leverage inside the jet, and with Lexie's added weight, I felt us start to edge our way out

the door. My upper half was barely inside the door, and the metal legs of the front seat were just out of my reach. I strained for them with my fingertips, as my brother and sister did everything they could to hang on to me and keep us all from sliding out the door.

My fingers reached out. *Come on!*

Just as Lexie screamed, "I can't hold on!" the front of the jet began to lift, sliding us back far enough so I could grab the metal leg. I pulled with everything I had left, dragging myself all the way in, where I fell on my side on the floor. Lexie and Eddy scrambled backward to safety; then Eddy reached out and shoved the lever for the door, which closed as the jet left the ground.

Eddy and Lexie collapsed beside me, and the three of us lay there, chests heaving. We heard a series of booms, all rocking the jet, causing enough turbulence that we had to grab on to the legs of the seats.

Tony yelled, "You all in?"

"Yeah," yelled Eddy.

The jet shuddered.

"Better buckle up!" Tony yelled.

I crawled up into the seat by the window, Lexie beside me, and Eddy across the aisle. I doubled over, trying to catch my breath as I strapped myself in. Tony slowly circled back around to head east. I looked out the window.

The entire island was ablaze, explosions still bursting. Even if the scientists had tried to leave, it was obvious that none had made it.

Lexie put her hand on my leg and I turned to face her.

Tears streaked down her red face. "When Dad didn't come home, it was my idea to meet you at the jet. I thought we were leaving you. Why weren't you with Tony?"

I managed a bit of a smile. "I wanted to make sure you and Eddy weren't at the house."

"You were worried about leaving us?"

I nodded.

She leaned her head on my shoulder and sighed. "Neither one of us are."

"Are what?" I asked.

"Monsters," she said. "Neither one of us are monsters."

Eddy reached across the aisle with his hand. I grabbed it and held on. He was crying, too.

Lexie sandwiched our hands between both of hers.

She said, "It's over."

Yeah. Finally, it was.

Leaving my hand where it was, holding on to my twin's, both snug in our older sister's embrace, I turned once more to the window. My knees stung, my legs and arms felt like I'd run a marathon, and I was still panting. My own eyes filled with tears as I watched the island, in flames, recede from my view, until there was nothing below but blue, blue water. Lexie's head was still on my shoulder, so I leaned my head on hers, closed my eyes, and let Tony fly us home.