

# BEYOND THE BUNKER

*SAME PLACE, DIFFERENT WORLD*



*2021 APS WRITING COMP  
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# **PART I**

## **THE BUNKER**

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**DIRT. THAT IS ALL THESE TWIN CHILDREN COULD SEE 'TIL THEY WERE 14. YOU AND I ARE PROBABLY ALLOWED TO GO OUTSIDE WHENEVER WE WANT AND DO WHATEVER WE WANT, LIKE CLIMB TREES OR MAKE MUD PIES. WELL, NOT SERENA AND NATHAN. THEY WERE BORN IN THEIR UNDERGROUND BUNKER AND HAD NEVER SEEN THE OUTSIDE WORLD.**

**SERENA WAS TALL AND SKINNY WITH LONG, DARK HAIR AND BRIGHT, GREEN EYES. NATHAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS SHORTER AND A BIT**

PLUMPER. HIS MULLET-LIKE HAIRSTYLE MADE HIS DARK, BLUE EYES NEARLY UNNOTICEABLE.

"TELL US AGAIN ABOUT THE HIGH WORLD, DAD," SAID NATHAN, ONE NIGHT AS THE FAMILY SAT DOWN ON THE POLKA DOT MAT FOR A SUPPER OF CANNED CORN AND CHICKPEAS.

"WHAT IS YOUR LAST MEMORY OF UP THERE?"

THE CHILDREN'S FATHER, CALEB, WIPED HIS MOUTH. HE'D BARELY TOUCHED HIS DINNER. IN A TREMBLING VOICE HE BEGAN.

"W-WELL, UM, I REMEMBER, AH, EVERY ONE W-WAS IN M-MASKS..." HE PAUSED AND CONTINUED.

"WE WERE STUCK IN OUR HOUSES, NO ONE COULD COME OUT AND MY FAMILY AND YOUR MOTHER'S FAMILY WENT INTO THE BUNKER CAUSE WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SAFER..."

CALEB'S WIFE, YAH, GRABBED HIS HAND AND CALEB SQUEEZED IT TIGHT. YAH CONTINUED THE STORY.

"YOUR UNCLE, WANG, DECIDED TO GO LIVE WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND. WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE." YAH HAD A WAY OF SIGNALLING THAT THAT WAS THE END OF THAT CONVERSATION. "SO," SHE PIPED,

MUCH MORE ENERGETICALLY THAN BEFORE." BEDTIME!"

AS SERENA GOT INTO HER BRIGHT, BLUE SLEEPING BAG, SHE STARTED THINKING ABOUT HOW SHAKEN HER DAD LOOKED. MASKS. STUCK IN HOUSES. WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

"HEY NATHAN?" SERENA WHISPERED.

"YEAH?" HIS VOICE WHISPERED BACK IN THE DARK.

"I WONDER WHAT IT MEANS, ALL THE STUFF ABOUT THE HIGH WORLD, WAS THERE A TORNADO?"

"COME ON, SERENA, THERE ARE NO TORNADOS IN VICTORIA, OR

AUSTRALIA FOR THAT MATTER," WHISPERED NATHAN, STERNLY. THERE WAS SILENCE FOR WHAT FELT LIKE 10 MINUTES. BOTH KIDS MIND WHERE BUZZING. THAN IT HIT NATHAN. "WHAT IF IT WAS LIKE A DISEASE? THAT'S WHY EVERYONE WAS IN MASKS. TO STOP SOMETHING SPREADING. AND EVERYONE WAS STUCK IN THEIR HOUSES BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT EVERYONE TOGETHER. MAYBE THE DISEASE WAS SUPER CONTAGIOUS OR SOMETHING."

SERENA INTERRUPTED - "THAT'S WHY MUM AND DAD WENT INTO THE BUNKER. BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT CATCH IT!" SHE SAID, GASPING.

THIS THEORY MADE THEM SO EXCITED THAT THEY COULDN'T SIT STILL. AS YOU MIGHT HAVE GUESSED THESE TWINS LOVED MYSTERIES. THEY DECIDED TO CONFRONT THEIR PARENTS THE VERY NEXT DAY.

"MUM, DAD? WE HAVE A THEORY AND WE WANT TO KNOW IF IT'S TRUE," SAID SERENA THE NEXT DAY. IT WAS THE MORNING AND YAH WAS SERVING BREAKFAST. BAKED BEANS AND CANNED PINEAPPLE. SERENA NOTICED THAT HER MUM PUT NO PINEAPPLE ON HER OR CALEB'S PLATE AND WHEN SERENA OFFERED HER PINEAPPLE TO HER MUM, SHE SHOOK HER OFFER AWAY LIKE SHE HAD OFFERED TO LICK HER SHOE.



"GOOD MORNING SERENA,  
MORNING NATHAN," YAWNED THEIR  
DAD. "WHAT DID YOU WANT TO TELL  
US ABOUT?"

SERENA TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND  
BEGAN. "IS THE REASON YOU WENT  
INTO THE BUNKER BECAUSE OF SOME  
SORT OF DISEASE?"

YAH AND CALEB LOOKED AT EACH  
OTHER AND FELL SILENT.

"HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?" SAID  
CALEB IN BARELY MORE THAN A  
WHISPER.

"SO IT'S TRUE?! OUR THEORY IS  
TRUE THEN?" NATHAN ASKED,  
EXCITEDLY. "YES," YAH SAID,

SORROWFULLY. " THE DISEASE KILLED ANYONE WHO CAUGHT IT. WE WERE SCARED AND WENT INTO THE BUNKER WHERE WE GOT MARRIED, WATCHED OUR PARENTS DIE AND HAVE YOU KIDS. WE HAVE NEVER GOT WORD THAT IT WAS SAFE TO COME OUT. IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE WE WENT IN HERE." SHE FINISHED, GIVING THE TWINS THE LOOK THAT MADE THEM FEEL LIKE SHE WAS LOOKING INTO THEIR SOULS. SERENA REALISED THAT THEIR DAD HAD GONE OUT OF THE ROOM.

"M-MUM? WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEFORE IT ALL HAPPENED?" SHE ASKED. THEY ALL SAT DOWN ON THE RUG AND YAH BEGAN.

"WELL, WE LIVED ON A BIG FARM AND YOUR FATHER AND I WERE NEIGHBOURS. THE TREES WERE ALWAYS GREEN AND IT WAS ALWAYS SO BEAUTIFUL WITH LIFE. EVERY NIGHT WE WOULD GO PLAY IN THE WOODS AND WHAT A FUN TIME WE HAD..." SERENA COULD SEE HERSELF PLAYING NEXT TO THE THICK, GREEN TREES. SHE COULD SMELL THE WILD FLOWERS, THE TALL GRASS, THE SMELL OF A BIG, CRACKLING FIRE. SHE COULD FEEL THE BUMPY WOOD ON HER FINGERS. THE WAY THE LEAVES RUSTLED OVER HER FACE. THE TASTE OF WILD BERRIES IN HER MOUTH. THIS IS WHAT SHE WANTED HER LIFE TO BE LIKE.

FROM THAT MOMENT ON SERENA AND NATHAN WERE OBSESSED WITH EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE HIGH WORLD. EVERY NIGHT, FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS, SERENA AND NATHAN WERE ALWAYS VERY EAGER TO HEAR STORIES ABOUT WHAT YAH AND CALEB USED TO DO. AND IN ALL THAT TIME, THE TWINS GOT TO WORK ON THEIR FAVOURITE HOBBIES. IF YOU LOOKED IN SERENA'S SPECIAL WOODEN BOX, YOU WOULD FIND A VERY, BIG PILE OF PAPERS WITH LOTS OF TINY WORDS ON THEM AND A STUBBY SORT OF PENCIL THAT SHE HAD MADE HERSELF OUT OF CHARCOAL. BUT IF YOU LOOKED IN NATHAN'S YOU WOULD FIND NOTHING BUT 10 DIFFERENT BOOKS: 2 NOVELS THAT

SERENA WROTE HERSELF. AS THE YEARS WENT ON, THE TWINS BECAME OLDER BUT THAT DAY WHEN THEY FOUND OUT THE TRUTH WAS NEVER FORGOTTEN.

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"HAPPY 14<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY, SERENA!" SAID NATHAN, WITH A YAWN.

"HAPPY 14<sup>TH</sup> TO YOU TOO!" SMILED SERENA, WITH HER EYES STILL CLOSED.

"LOOK WHAT I GOT YOU!" SHOUTED NATHAN, HOLDING OUT A LITTLE

BRACELET MADE FROM ROOTS THAT HE HAD CRAFTED HIMSELF.

SERENA'S PRESENT FOR NATHAN WAS HER LATEST NOVEL CALLED "THE MONSTER'S LAIR". THE TWINS GOT DRESSED IN THEIR BEST CLOTHES - SERENA WORE HER STRIPED T-SHIRT AND JEANS AND NATHAN WORE HIS BIGGEST JUMPER WITH SOME BOXER SHORTS - AND WENT DOWN TO HAVE BREAKFAST AND GET SOME OF THAT BIRTHDAY LOVE.

BUT...

"WHERE ARE MUM AND DAD," SAID SERENA, "THEY'RE NEVER THE LAST ONES UP, LET ALONE ON THIS SPECIAL DAY."

NATHAN SIGHED. "THEY'RE PROBABLY HAVING A SLEEP IN. LET THEM SLEEP FOR ANOTHER HALF HOUR, THEN WE'LL CHECK ON THEM."

THE TWINS CLEANED UP A BIT AND WAITED. WHEN 20 MINUTES HAD PASSED, THEY DECIDED TO CHECK ON THEIR PARENTS ANYWAY.

WHEN THEY ENTERED, THEY SAW TWO BIG LUMPS IN BED. SERENA AND NATHAN YELLED AND CLAPPED BUT THEY DID NOT WAKE UP. SO, THE TWINS WENT UP TO THEIR BED AND GAVE YAH A NUDGE AND CALEB A SHAKE BUT THEY STILL DIDN'T STIR. LOOKING AT THEIR SOLEMN FACES, AND FEELING THEIR COLD BODIES,

SERENA SIGNALLED NATHAN TO LISTEN TO CALEB'S HEART AND SHE DID THE SAME WITH YAH.

FIVE SECONDS LATER, NATHAN STOOD UP VERY FAST, GLANCING AT SERENA AND THEN TO HIS PARENTS. THE HORRIBLE TRUTH WAS SINKING IN. HE STARTED EDGING AWAY SHAKING HIS HEAD IN DISBELIEF. HE TOOK ONE LAST DESPERATE LOOK AT HIS SOLEMN FACED PARENTS AND RAN.

SERENA WAS TRYING VERY HARD NOT TO LET HER TEARS POUR OUT BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. SHE SOBBED QUIETLY FOR FIVE MINUTES. THEN SHE THOUGHT: NO I'M GOING TO BE STRONG AND BE THE OLDER SISTER. THE 2-MINUTE OLDER SISTER. WE



ARE GOING TO FIGHT THIS. DON'T TURN AROUND. DON'T LOOK AT MY PALE, DEAD PARENTS. I AM GOING TO FIND MY BROTHER AND WE ARE GOING TO GET OUT OF HERE.

EVEN THOUGH SHE TOLD HERSELF NOT TO LOOK AT YAH AND CALEB, SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT KNEEL BY THEIR SIDE AND KISS THEM BOTH ON THE FOREHEAD. THEN SHE RAN OUT OF THE ROOM. SHE COULDN'T HELP TEARS RUNNING DOWN HER FACE.

TRYING TO THINK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE, SERENA STARTED A WILD SEARCH TO FIND HER BROTHER. IN HIS SLEEPING BAG? NO. IN A CABINET? NO. IN THE BATHROOM? NO. WHAT ABOUT IN THE SPARE

ROOM? SERENA WALKED DOWN THE DIRT HALL TO THE SPARE ROOM. IT WAS DARK INSIDE BUT SERENA HEARD HER BROTHER'S SNIFFLES AND KNEW HE WAS IN THERE.

"NATHAN?" SHE ASKED IN A TREMBLING VOICE. "IT'S OK. WE'RE GOING TO BE STRONG. I THINK THEY DIED FROM SCURVY. HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT THEY HAVEN'T REALLY BEEN EATING THE FRUIT BUT GIVING IT TO US?"

NATHAN DIDN'T ANSWER. SERENA GAVE HIM A HUG AND STARTED TALKING SERIOUSLY. "LISTEN, I KNOW IT'S HARD BUT RIGHT NOW WE NEED TO SURVIVE WITHOUT THEM. IF THERE WASN'T ENOUGH FOOD FOR ALL FOUR OF US, I DON'T

THINK THERE WILL STILL BE ENOUGH FOR US TWO. AND WE NEED SOMEONE TO LOOK AFTER US. UNCLE WANG, THE ONE MUM WAS TELLING US ABOUT, WE SHOULD GO TO HIM WHICH MEANS... GOING OUT THERE."

NATHAN LOOKED UP AT HER IN DESPAIR. "UP THERE? SERENA, I'M SCARED," HE MUMBLED, TEARS STILL POURING DOWN HIS FACE.

"ME TOO," SERENA ADMITTED, AS TEARS FELL DOWN HER FACE TOO. "BUT RIGHT NOW, WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR FEAR. RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE MY NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. THAT MEANS I WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET YOU SAFE. SO, GO

PACK YOUR BAG. ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, WE GET TO PLAY AND SEE ALL THAT MUM AND DAD SAW!!" SHE HELPED HIM UP AND THEY WENT TO THEIR ROOM, TRYING NOT TO LOOK IN THEIR PARENT'S ROOM. SERENA GOT HER HAND BAG (THAT SHE HAD MADE HERSELF) AND PUT IN THE FOLLOWING: A JUMPER, 3 PIECES OF PAPER AND HER PENCIL, HER PRECIOUS TOY MONKEY NAMED SMOKEY THAT HER MUM HAD GIVEN HER, HER WATER BOTTLE AND SOME BEEF JERKY, AS WELL AS HER SLEEPING BAG.

NATHAN BROUGHT THE SAME THING EXCEPT INSTEAD OF THE PAPER AND PENCIL, HE HAD TWO BOOKS AND

INSTEAD OF SMOKEY, HE BROUGHT HIS TOY ELEPHANT NAMED WILLOW.

SO, THE KIDS WERE PACKED. A LOT OF EMOTIONS WERE GOING THROUGH THEM RIGHT NOW: SADNESS ABOUT THEIR PARENTS, FEAR OF GOING UP, BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, EXCITEMENT ABOUT LEAVING THEIR BORING BUNKER. THE BUNKER THAT THEY WERE BORN IN AND HAD BEEN IN FOR 14 YEARS.

THEY WALKED OVER TO THE HATCH THAT WAS SO RUSTY FROM NOT BEING OPENED FOR SUCH A LONG TIME THAT THE TWINS WERE WORRIED THAT IT MIGHT NOT OPEN.

"READY?" ASKED NATHAN, IN A TREMBLING VOICE. SERENA LOOKED AT HIM AND GRABBED HIS HAND TIGHT.

"ONE SECOND," SAID SERENA. SHE BROKE FROM NATHAN AND SPRINTED BACK INTO HER PARENTS' ROOM. SHE LIFTED HER MOTHER'S SPECIAL LOCKET FROM YAH'S STIFF NECK.

"READY," SHE SAID, RETURNING, THE LOCKET HANGING OVER HER STRIPED T-SHIRT.

THEY CLIMBED THE LADDER AT THE TRAP DOOR AND, AFTER SOME STRONG PUSHING, IT OPENED.

# **PART II**

## **A NEW WORLD**

THE FIRST THING THAT THE TWINS REMEMBERED WAS SHUTTING THEIR EYES AS TIGHT AS THEY COULD BECAUSE OF THE LIGHT.

AFTER A FEW MINUTES, WHEN THEY HAD GOTTEN USED TO THE SUN, THEY STARTED LOOKING AROUND IN DISBELIEF. EVERYWHERE THEY LOOKED THERE WERE BUILDINGS, TALL AND SHINING, AND THEN THERE WERE CARS EVERYWHERE. NOW, YOU PROBABLY SEE THESE THINGS EVERY DAY. BUT NATHAN AND SERENA DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT A CAR WAS!



"WHOA!" EXCLAIMED NATHAN. SUDDENLY, THEY REALISED THAT THE OPENING OF THEIR BUNKER WAS ON A FOOTPATH AND THAT IF THEY DIDN'T GET OUT OF THE WAY, THEY WOULD GET TRAMPLED ON. THEY SCRAMBLED OUT OF THE TRAP DOOR AND KEPT STARING AT THE VIEW. BUT SERENA WAS CONFUSED. WHERE WAS THE FOREST? AND THE FARMS? ALL SHE COULD SEE WERE BUILDINGS. AND THE SMELL. IT DIDN'T SMELL LIKE WILD FLOWERS AND SWEET BERRIES AT ALL. IT SMELT LIKE EXHAUST AND GARBAGE. THE GROUND FELT LIKE HARD, COLD STONE. WHERE WERE THE TREES?

NATHAN SEEMED TO NOTICE THIS TOO, BECAUSE THE FIRST THING HE

SAID WAS: "THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE WORLD THAT MUM AND DAD TOLD US ABOUT."

THEN OUT OF THE CORNER OF HER EYE, SERENA SAW A GIRL WATCHING THEM. SHE TURNED TO LOOK AT HER. THE GIRL HAD GOLD, WISPY CURLS THAT WENT ALL THE WAY TO HER HIPS. SHE WORE A WHITE SHIRT, AS WELL AS LONG GREY PANTS THAT SWAYED AT HER ANKLES. SHE WAS HOLDING A LEATHER HANDBAG. AND THEN SERENA NOTICED HER LIPS. HER LIPS WERE BLOOD RED LIKE A ROSE AND SHE WAS WEARING GIANT HOOP EARRINGS. SHE ALSO HAD A MYSTERIOUSLY BIG, PINK HOLE ON HER NECK THAT LOOKED LIKE SOMEONE HAD CUT IT OUT.

THE GIRL LOOKED AWAY AS SOON AS SERENA LOOKED AROUND. BUT SERENA WASN'T GOING TO LET HER GET AWAY. "HEY YOU, THE ONE WITH THE GOLD HAIR, COME HERE," SHE SHOUTED.

THE GIRL LOOKED OVER, NERVOUSLY, AND POINTED TO HERSELF. SERENA NODDED AND THE GIRL SLOWLY WALKED OVER TO HER LIKE SERENA AND NATHAN WERE MONSTERS. FROM FAR AWAY, THE GIRL LOOKED LIKE A 12-YEAR-OLD BUT WHEN SHE CAME CLOSER IT LOOKED LIKE SHE WAS THEIR AGE.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT?" SHE ASKED, MORE BRAVELY.

NATHAN SPOKE FIRST, "WHY ARE YOU STARING AT US?" HE ASKED.

"WELL, WOULDN'T YOU BE STARING IF YOU SAW TWO TEENS COMING OUT OF THE GROUND?" SHE SAID, STERNLY. "WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING?"

SO, THE TWINS EXPLAINED HOW THEY HAD LIVED IN THE BUNKER THEIR WHOLE LIFE, HOW THEY HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THE VIRUS, HOW THEY CONFRONTED THEIR PARENTS, THAT TODAY WAS THEIR BIRTHDAY, AND HOW THEIR PARENTS WERE DEAD AND HOW THEY ARE OUT HERE TO FIND THEIR LONG-LOST UNCLE, HOWEVER, THEY DID NOT MENTION HIS NAME.

THE FIRST THING THE GIRL SAID WAS  
" I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR PARENTS  
AND HAPPY B-DAY! IS IT A QUEST?!  
OMG COUNT ME IN! COULD I HELP  
YOU? I LOVE ADVENTURES! MY  
NAMES JULIETTE, BUT YOU CAN CALL  
ME JULIE." SHE HELD OUT HER  
HAND.

"I'M SERENA AND THIS IS MY  
2-MINUTE YOUNGER BROTHER,  
NATHAN. AND SURE, YOU CAN HELP  
US. WE SORT OF NEED A GUIDE,"  
SAID SERENA, AS BOTH NATHAN AND  
HERSELF LOOKED AT JULIE'S HAND  
FOR A FEW SECONDS AND THEN  
JULIE GAVE A GIGGLE AND SAID "  
IT'S CALLED A HAND SHAKE. YOU'RE  
SUPPOSED TO SHAKE IT."

EMBARRASSED, THE TWINS SHOOK JULIE'S HAND.

"SO," BEGAN JULIE. "WHERE IS YOUR UNCLE?"

SERENA REALISED THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHERE UNCLE WANG WAS. THEN NATHAN REMEMBERED AN OLD NEWSPAPER CUTTING THAT HIS DAD HAD GIVEN HIM. HE READ IT OUT LOUD:

**VIRUS ESCAPES THE ASC LABROTARY!**

A VIRUS WAS LET OUT BY ONE OF THE ASC MEMBERS. IT IS EXTREMELY TOXIC. "I SAW HIM RUN OUT OF A BROKEN WINDOW AND SMASH THE SUBSTANCE ON THE GROUND," SAID THE AGENT OFFICER. "I STRONGLY SUGGEST WEARING MASKS." RESTRICTIONS WILL BE IN PLACE SOON.

ONCE NATHAN FINISHED READING, JULIE GASPED IN EXCITEMENT.

"MY DAD USED TO WORK AT THE ASC LAB. I KNOW WHERE IT IS! IT'S A BIT OF A LONG WALK, THOUGH. FOLLOW ME!"

HALF AN HOUR LATER, ONCE THE TEAM HAD STUMBLED THROUGH ALLEY WAYS, GIANT BUILDINGS AND A FEW OTHER EMPTY SITES, THEY STARTED GETTING VERY HUNGRY SINCE IT WAS AROUND LUNCH TIME.

"I WOULD KILL FOR SOME CANNED PINEAPPLE RIGHT NOW," SERENA EXCLAIMED IN HUNGER.

"CANNED PINEAPPLE? WHO EATS CANNED PINEAPPLE?" JULIE SAID. "PIZZA IS THE BOMB."

"WHAT THE WHAT IS PIZZA?" ASKED NATHAN AND SERENA TOGETHER BUT STOPPED AS SOON AS THEY SAW THE LOOK ON JULIE 'S FACE. IT WAS AS IF THEY HAD SAID SOMETHING SO INSULTING THAT SHE JUST WANTED TO DESTROY THE TWO OF THEM OFF THE FACE OF EARTH.

AFTER A LONG PAUSE, JULIE WHISPERED "HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THAT BUNKER? HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT PIZZA IS? DO YOU NEED A DOCTOR? IS THIS A JOKE?"



THE TWINS SHOOK THEIR HEADS.  
"NOPE," SAID NATHAN. "WHAT'S SO  
GREAT ABOUT THIS PIZZA THINGY  
ANYWAY?"

JULIE GASPED, GRABBED THE TWINS  
BY THE ARM AND DRAGGED THEM  
AWAY, GRUMBLING, "IT'S TIME FOR  
YOUR BIRTHDAY PRESENT."

IN WHAT FELT LIKE FIVE MINUTES,  
JULIE RELEASED SERENA AND  
NATHAN IN FRONT OF A SMALL  
RESTAURANT.

IN SMOKY RED LETTERS AT THE TOP  
OF THE BUILDING IT SAID, TOTO'S  
PIZZA.

"WAIT HERE," GRUMBLED JULIE, AS SHE WALKED INTO THE RESTAURANT.

SERENA AND NATHAN SAT ON THE CURB, WAITING. "WHAT A BIRTHDAY," SAID NATHAN. SERENA LOOKED AT HIM. HE WAS NOT SMILING. HE LOOKED VERY SAD. SERENA KNEW HE WAS TRYING TO HIDE HIS MISERY. SHE ALSO KNEW THAT SHE WAS DOING A BETTER JOB AT HIDING HERS THEN HE WAS AT HIDING HIS.

IT HAD STARTED RAINING AND THEY WERE GETTING SOAKED.

"YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE ARE YOU?" SAID A VOICE BEHIND THEM. THEY TURNED AROUND AND SAW A GIRL WITH STRAIT WHITE

HAIR CUT IN A BOB. IF YOU LOOKED CLOSE ENOUGH YOU'D SEE A BLOOD RED STRIKE THROUGH HER HAIR. SHE HAD GIANT SKULL EARRINGS AND A BIG BLACK JUMPSUIT. HER BELT WAS FULL OF WEAPONS. SHE DID NOT LOOK LIKE SOMEONE TO MESS WITH.

THE TWINS STOOD UP. "NO, WE AREN'T FROM HERE ACTUALLY, WE LIVED UNDERGROUND AND—" SERENA BEGAN, BUT THE GIRL CUT HER OFF.

"LIAR," SHE SAID WITH A SNEER.

"SHE IS NOT, YOU PUNK," SAID NATHAN, ANGRILY. "SHE IS THE MOST TRUTHFUL PERSON I HAVE EVER—"

BUT THE GIRL HAD SLAMMED HIM HARD INTO THE CONCRETE PATH AND HE LAY THERE, WITH RAIN POURING DOWN HIS FACE, TOO WEAK TO GET BACK UP.

"NATHAN?!", YELLED SERENA. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY BROTHER YOU LITTLE--"

BUT BEFORE SHE COULD FINISH, SHE WAS SLAMMED INTO THE WALL AND PINNED AGAINST IT BY THE GIRL WITH WHITE HAIR.

"LET ME TELL YOU A STORY," THE GIRL BEGAN WITH HER WICKED SMILE, PULLING A SHARP SHANK OUT OF HER BELT.

"ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A YOUNG ORPHAN WHO LIVED IN A GROUP HOME FULL OF HORRIBLE CHILDREN WHO WOULD DO ANYTHING TO HURT INNOCENTS," SHE SAID. "THE ORPHAN WAS ONE OF THEIR VICTIMS. HER EAR WAS NEVER THE SAME AGAIN."

SERENA NOTICED A HUGE CHUNK OF THE GIRL'S EAR GONE.

"SO," SHE CONTINUED WITH AN EVIL GRIN, "SHE BECAME A HORRIBLE CHILD WHO DESTROYED HER SCHOOLMATES, ESCAPED THE ORPHANAGE AND BECAME A REBEL WHO GAVE KIDS TWO OPTIONS: JOIN HER OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES.

YOU ARE ABOUT TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES."

THE GIRL RESTED THE SHANK ON SERENA'S FOREHEAD. "THIS MIGHT HURT," SHE HISSED.

BUT BEFORE SHE COULD CAUSE ANY PAIN, SERENA PULLED ALL HER STRENGTH AND KICKED THE GIRL RIGHT IN THE BELLY. THE GIRL JUMPED OFF SERENA AND DOUBLED DOWN, CLUTCHING HER TUMMY.

SERENA FELL AND HER BREATH ESCAPED HER. THE GIRL STOOD UP LOOKED ANGRIER THEN SERENA HAD EVER SEEN ANYONE. " I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO DO THIS BUT I'D SAY

GOODBYE TO LIGHT IF I WERE YOU," SHE HISSED.

BUT JUST BEFORE SHE ADVANCED ON THEM, THE RESTAURANT DOOR SWUNG OPEN AND JULIE APPEARED.

"WHAT'S ALL THE RACKET?" SHE SAID. THEN, SEEING THE GIRL, SHE GROWLED, "MAGMA!!!!"

MAGMA LOOKED OVER, GASPED AND GRINNED.

"JULIE!," SHE SAID IN A SING-SONG VOICE. "LONG-TIME NO SEE! FANCY SEEING YOU IN THIS PART OF TOWN. ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING WHAT HAPPENED LAST MONTH."

MAGMA LICKED HER LIPS AS IF JULIE WAS A CHOCOLATE PUDDING JUST WAITING TO BE EATEN. JULIE SUDDENLY LOOKED SCARED. MAGMA STARTED TO RUN AT HER AND WITH ALL HER MIGHT SHE TRIED TO STAB JULIE IN THE HEART BUT SHE STOPPED, LOOKED AT JULIE WITH A KILLER STARE, AND WALKED OVER TO SERENA.

MAGMA KNEELED NEXT TO SERENA AND WHISPERED IN HER EAR, "YOU MAY HAVE GOTTEN ON EASY NOW, BUT TRUST ME, I VOW THAT I WILL FIND YOU AND GIVE YOU AND YOUR BROTHER TROUBLE LIKE YOU COULD NEVER IMAGINE." SHE STOOD UP AND RAN AWAY.



SERENA STOOD UP AND RAN TO NATHAN'S SIDE. SERENA CHECKED HIS HEART AND WAS RELIEVED THAT HE WAS JUST KNOCKED OUT. SHE CALLED TO JULIE BUT SHE DIDN'T ANSWER. SERENA LOOKED OVER AT JULIE AND WAS SURPRISED TO SEE THAT A TEAR WAS ROLLING DOWN HER CHEEK. SHE STOOD UP AND SHOOK JULIE HARD ON THE SHOULDER AND SHE WOKE UP FROM HER TRANCE.

" WHERE IS SHE? WHERE DID MAGMA GO? SHE RAN AWAY DIDN'T SHE? WE NEED TO FIND-" SHE BEGAN BUT STOPPED AT THE LOOK ON SERENA'S FACE.

"WE NEED ANSWERS. NOW," HISSED SERENA.

JULIE NODDED, QUIETLY. THEY SAT NEXT TO NATHAN, AND SERENA BEGAN TO ASK QUESTIONS.

"WHO IS MAGMA AND WHAT WAS ALL THAT ABOUT? WHAT WAS MAGMA TALKING ABOUT? SOMETHING ABOUT LAST MONTH AND LONG-TIME NO SEE? HAS THERE BEEN AN ISSUE BETWEEN YOU AND MAGMA LAST MONTH? TELL ME."

JULIE BROUGHT HER HAND TO HER NECK WHERE HER PINK SCAR WAS. SHE TOOK A DEEP BREATH.

"I CAN'T TELL YOU ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED LAST MONTH BECAUSE I CAN'T FORGIVE MYSELF AND I CAN'T FORGIVE HER EITHER BUT I WILL TELL YOU SOME THINGS. YES, I'VE KNOWN MAGMA MY WHOLE LIFE. SHE IS ..." JULIE GULPED AND WIPED AWAY A FEW TEARS. " MY SISTER! WHEN SHE WAS A BABY I .... SOLD HER TO THE ORPHANAGE." JULIE STARTED TO SOB.

SO, THAT'S WHY MAGMA DIDN'T KILL JULIE. BECAUSE THEIR BOND WAS TOO STRONG. AND NO WONDER MAGMA DIDN'T HURT US. BECAUSE SHE WAS SCARED OF JULIE!

"WHAT'S GOING ON?" ASKED NATHAN SLEEPILY.

"NATHAN! THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE OKAY!" SHOUTED SERENA AND GAVE HIM A HUG. JULIE SMILED.

"COME ON, BRING IT IN!" NATHAN SAID TO JULIE AND SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT JUMP INTO NATHAN AND SERENA'S ARMS.

"SO, CAN WE TASTE THIS SO-CALLED PIZZA?" ASKED NATHAN, HUNGRILY.

JULIE HELD OUT THE BOX. THEY OPENED IT AND LOOKED INSIDE. IT WAS FULL OF COLOURS.

"WOAH!" THEY SAID.

"TRY IT!" SAID JULIE. THE TWINS  
TOOK A BITE. IN A MINUTE, THEY  
HAD EATEN THE WHOLE THING.  
"YUM!" "WOAH!" "DELICIOUS!"  
"MORE!"

"NO MORE," SAID JULIE. "WE HAVE  
TO GET MOVING BEFORE IT GETS  
DARK." SO, THEY KEPT MOVING.

AN HOUR LATER, THEY GOT TO THE  
LABORATORY.

"THE LAB HAS LOTS OF BOOBY  
TRAPS SO BE CAREFUL," EXPLAINED  
JULIE. "FOLLOW ME. ELECTRIC  
FENCE." JULIE TURNED OFF THE  
POWER AND THEY CLIMBED OVER THE  
FENCE.

"LASER BEAMS." THEY WORKED THEIR WAY THROUGH THE LASER BEAMS.

"SECURITY CARD." JULIE HACKED THE PROGRAM. THEY WERE IN.

"I'LL SHOW YOU MY DAD'S OFFICE," SAID JULIE. SHE LED THEM INTO A SMALL ROOM. "THIS IS A PICTURE OF MY DAD AND ME." JULIE SAID PROUDLY POINTING TO A PHOTO IN A FLORAL FRAME.

"WAIT A SEC," SAID SERENA, STARING AT THE PICTURE. HER HANDS WENT TO HER NECK WHERE HER MOTHER'S LOCKET HUNG. INSIDE, IT HAD A PICTURE OF HER MUM AND UNCLE WANG.

SHE HELD IT UP AGAINST THE  
PHOTOGRAPH.

THE MAN IN THE PHOTO FRAME WAS  
THE MAN IN THE LOCKET.

THEN THEY ALL KNEW.

SERENA AND NATHAN STARED AT  
JULIE, THEIR LONG, LOST COUSIN.

END OF BOOK ONE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR





Florence K. Ferla is an author of several stories: Killer Kittys, Flying High, My Blood-Stained Uncle etc. She was born in Sydney, Australia. She loves playing minecraft, cooking, sleeping and writing stories. She wrote this story based on Covid-19.