

# 11. Redemption

## One Hour Until Dawn

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### Kapitel 2: 2A Talk to Hannah

The moment he heard the scratching of sharp claws crushing pebbles together, he presses his back against the wall behind him. He is staring into the darkness with his cramped hands digging into the ground beside him. The sudden movement of those white dots has startled him, pushing him now into a motionless state. A cold breeze blows in his face, bringing a shiver down his spine when the words just come out of his mouth.

"Han, it's me. Josh." His voice seems higher in his ears, but for some reason he is grinning.

Her hands scrape across the floor coming to halt beside him. Although he can't see anything he can feel her quick movements as if her body forcefully convulses the air.

Slowly he moves his head in the direction to where he believes to sense his sister; or rather what once has been a member of his family. Immediately he was greeted by those white dots he had lost sight of only seconds ago. It was a lot easier to keep their gaze when they were far away, hovering above him, but now they're separated by a few inches only. They are so close that Josh can see what once had been Hannah's beautiful brown eyes. There still are the dark freckles around her pupil like a shadow of her past self covered with a white veil. He cannot help but hold his breath and watch her eyes coming closer, reminding him so much of those cold, dead eyes from his nightmares like irony incarnated. For months they are staring at him, judging him, accusing him of being a failure and tormenting his being. He thought they would go when he had brought everyone together, but now he has learned that his nightmares had always been there; living down here.

*"Where are you, Josh?"* The mocking continues even now.

Her foul breath runs like a warm breeze over his cheeks as she finally stops moving forward, but inhaling deeply causing the air around her to vibrate as if she is trying to catch his scent. All this time he has not been daring to blink, but a stinging pain in his eyes reminds him to wet them. It only takes a second, but when he opens his eyes, hers are gone. Stones are toppling from above like raindrops making muffled sounds when they're falling on him when suddenly it's quiet.

He remains motionless for a few more heartbeats, but starts to nibble his lip where already is a wound, making the injury bigger. Somewhere water is dripping; something he hasn't noticed before, but now every drop seems to get louder than the previous one. He can't bear hearing the repetitious bubbling so he moves his hands across the earthly ground back and forth to cover the annoyance with his scratching.

"How are you? How are you? How are you, today?" While sweeping for movements, he starts singing with a faint voice in a simple melody to himself. He repeats it over and over again, until he is calmer and until he is sure that really no one is here anymore.

After a while with only his own chant in his ear, he examines his freezing feet and carefully pulls them closer. The wet and heavy cloths tighten around his legs and knees making him shiver, but he doesn't stop singing for fear of drifting away.

Right now he is roughly of sound mind thanks to the calming effect of his hands moving across the ground. He knows for sure that this is real. The dirt is real as is the pain from his various scratches all over his body and the burning in his limbs caused by the cold of the water.

"I trust you. I trust you." New words replace the childish questions in his chant when he remembers the tattoo on the arm of the monster. He only got a glimpse of the full body before he got captured. It wasn't the first time for him seeing something strange, so he immediately doubted his mind at the sight of this large skeleton like thing with too many thin but razor sharp teeth. He still would think of it as a figment of his imagination, if he wouldn't have seen the tattoo on the arm. He trusts his friends not to go that far just to prank him. If he therefore can trust them and if he can in addition believe his own train of thoughts, only one assumption is left. This thing is real as well and it once was Hannah.

Despite all the pain flashing through his body at every movement he suddenly feels happy. He found his sister and she is still alive.

"I'm here!" he cries into the darkness. "Your brother! I'm here, Hannah!" He starts shivering everywhere and he can't control his hands anymore. All he wants to do is standing up again, but every time he tries his legs just give in unable to keep him up. After several attempts, he is now on all fours breathing heavily.

"I'm coming." Unsteadily he manages to pull up his right leg without falling over, giving him enough momentum to finally pull himself up. The sudden movement makes him dizzy so he closes his eyes and just waits till the unpleasant feeling fades away.

Standing up was a lot more exhausting this time as it has been only a few minutes ago. Slowly but surely his adrenaline level is falling, he realizes. Without the chemical mix in his body, moving will be difficult. Not that he would be fond of having any chemical potpourri in his body. Not anymore. Although right now he would prefer the natural mix flowing through his veins than nothing at all.

He gives himself a few moments to regain some strength while remaining on the same spot. All this time he waits for something, or someone, to come, but all he could hear then was his own breath and these damn water drops somewhere in the dark. To get rid of the shaking he shakes his hands and when he is sure of not falling down

again he does the same with his legs.

"I trust you. I trust you," he keeps repeating to himself so that he won't forget the reality. Besides, he rather hears himself talking than something else. As if this thought was a reminder the silence suddenly gets pierced.

*"Jooosh. How are you today?"* The voices are singing one and the same verse as he did; they even use the same melody. Josh doesn't have the wish to answer and continues shaking his limbs. He can't afford to lose reality again. Rather than talking to the voices he recites the same three words like a broken record when in addition to the singing the voices start laughing. They're the laughs of children.

*"Come with us, Josh. Don't stand there."* Although he doesn't want to react in any form, his head nevertheless searches for the origin of the noise. The laughter seems to come from everywhere. Even from behind him. A ridiculous thought since there is a solid wall of rocks. In denial, he closes his eyes and inhales deeply with his head hanging down.

*"Are you sad? Watch something with us, won't you?"* Such an odd request, Josh remarks to himself, although it kindles a nostalgic feeling in his chest. Hannah loved watching TV when she was younger. He remembers to keep her from watching the movies their dad made, so instead he watched dreadful cartoons such as the one about the inner world of a computer system. He always had given in and watched with her because it made her happy.

A tender whisper escapes his mouth without his notice. "We d-don't have a TV."

As soon as the last syllable is out the darkness gets driven away by a white flash of light dazzling him and making him blind. He cries out in surprise and because of the sudden sting in his eyes which have become light-sensitive after all this time in the dark.

*"You have to try **harder!**"* The children have stopped with their laughing and now begin yelling instead. Although the voices are louder he can't hear them as clearly as before as if they're calling while being behind a glass.

Still blind from the light, he reaches out with one hand while the other lies over his eyes to cover them. His dirt and earth stricken fingers connect with an unusual smooth material which feels warm under his touch. Driven by curiosity he carefully opens his eyes, pinching them against the light to see what is right before him. His hand floats in the air seemingly touching nothing, but he definitely feels something under his palm.

In order to test the material he puts his other hand on it as well. He frowns at the various scratches and cuts all over his hands which are sticky with dried blood, but he quickly calls his attention back to the mysterious thing in front of him. As he leans against the invisible wall something clashed at it with a bump on the level of his eyes making him stumble back nearly giving him a heart attack. He catches his breath when he sees what clings at the back of the wall of glass. It's Hannah; the way she should look like. Her glasses are broken and she has some scratches on her face, but other than this she looks fine: healthy. She mirrors his previous pose with both hands at the wall looking him in the eyes. He moves forward to cover hers with his.

"I t-try. I. I tried. I did my b-best, sis," he react to the demand that was hanging in the air for quite some time. She looks so fragile, he notices. He should have protected her. When he is about to open his mouth again Hannah, who was standing like a statue, starts moving. She swings her head around until her glasses fall off before she arches her back. Josh doesn't know what's wrong when he realizes that she is not moving, but her body is changing.

The fingers grow larger till her hand is twice the size of Josh's. He hears loud cracks as if someone breaks big piles of wood in half with brute force and the ripping of clothes.

"No. No. No. No. GO AWAY!"

Her limbs grow in lengths and her hair is falling down one strand after another. Some strands get tangled up in the needlelike teeth sticking out of her dislocated jaw, making it look as if devoured an animal neck and crop. Like a zipper her growing teeth rip her mouth open making her bleed until her lips become one large gap. Her eyes are losing their shine until they are two white, dead globes in the middle of a distorted face. It's the face he briefly saw just before he was brought here. All he can do now is watching the image of his sister become the monster where he stands.

*"Your efforts are not **enough**,"* she speaks with her inhuman mouth, her voice being higher reminding Josh of a tinnitus.

She presses with her body against the glass which immediately gets cracks under her claws.

*"It was never enough. You're a failure, Josh."*

Merciless she brings her now skeletal body closer to the glass making the breaches grow larger until she can fit her thin claw-like nails through them.

He hears a long high pitched tinnitus which changes to a cry of a woman. There is no escape since the glass is not only in front him being the only thing which separates him from Hannah but it's also surrounding him. All he can do is watch wide-eyes how Hannah breaks through the wall.

*"You don't deserve it. You don't deserve **anything**."*

"Shut the fuck up!" In an attempt of blocking her out he covers his ears, but it was no use. He can still hear every word, every new crack in the glass.

*"I needed you and you weren't there. Where were you? Where have you been when I needed you most? You're a failure."* Once started the high voice just would shut up.

*"I was alone, Josh. I was alone for weeks and you weren't there."*

He knows what it's like to be alone. The thought of his own sister living the hell he does for years is almost too much to bear.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Again he feels like vomiting causing him to produce more saliva. The words are driveled with a mouth full of water because he can't swallow fast enough. The blood running through his ears gets louder until it becomes a high pitched tone of its own. He can't hear anything anymore besides this agonizing tone.

Hannah tears her mouth wide open when the glass begins to shatter under her weight. Yet instead of lashing forward to attack him she draws back leaving him. The radiant light slowly vanishes, leaving him once again in the dark.

*"What will you do, Josh?"* Hannah's voice oozes through the gap in the glass reaching his ear. *"Will you be a failure?"*

"I tried, Hannah!" Once again he feels as if he needs to apologize but he gets interrupted by a scream loud enough to make the glass collapse once and for all.

"Hannah?" he calls for his sister. It was her scream he is sure of it. "What should I do? What should I do?" He moves around in order to find a way out when his eyes finally see some light. This must be the way Hannah went.

"What should I do? Hannah!"

1. **"Stay here."**
2. **"Go after Hannah."**