

Sierra was bleeding from her shoulder as she staggered across the woods. Her blood stained hand rested on a tree as she stopped walking to take a breath. She was attacked by a pack of saber-toothed wolves. These creatures, not creatures but mutants, did not exist when she was little. She doesn't know how they got here and why. But that doesn't matter now. She only needed to stay alive. Today was not a good day. She'd slipped from her usual vigilance. She wasn't going to let that happen again. In the fight that had taken place she'd snagged one of the mutants that would make a good dinner. She took a teeny tiny delight in the fact that *she* wasn't the dinner. This wasn't a moment for a victory dance however. She had to build another shelter, her current shed has been spotted, and the mutants would come back for her tomorrow, probably with a bigger pack. She had to flee soon.

Sierra has been running for most of her life. Her parents disappeared when she was 6, that was 11 years ago. That was when everything went wrong, buildings collapsed in a fiery smoke, cars overturned, trains derailed, and people fled. She recalls that day very clearly. One moment she was in her room snuggled up to her teddy bear reading her favorite colorful book, *Tarzan* and the next, her parents were dragging her out of her room. They didn't say why. They loaded her up in the family car and drove out, their neighbors were doing the same.

"Mom? Dad? What is happening?"

"Nothing darling...it's just...well, we have to go away now for a little while. We're not safe here" replied her mom.

"Why?" Sierra asked.

"Don't worry baby, we'll answer all your questions soon, but for now your mom and I need to be on the lookout. You just read your little book there for now ok, Pooh Bear?"

Sierra realized she was still holding on to her copy of *Tarzan*. She was scared and confused but she complied and continued reading her book.

Several hours later, the family was still driving northbound on 101. All of a sudden the cars started to slow down and came to a dead stop. Horns started going off but soon were replaced with people's screams.

"Mom? Dad? What's going on?"

"Nothing Sierra, stay in your seat!" came her dad's reply.

From the backseat she saw that two huge military helicopters were hovering above the traffic and some armed men were rappelling down from them. There were also armed motorists weaving through traffic coming in their direction. It seemed like the armed men didn't want anyone to move.

Sierra's parents looked at each other for a moment and then Sierra's dad turned the car a sharp left and made his way out of the traffic by ramming several cars out of his way. He drove the car straight into the woods of Forks, WA. Two armed motorists had seen the commotion and soon were tailing Sierra's family's car. Her dad tried as best as he could to outmaneuver the motorists but they had the upper hand. Sierra's dad found a trail and sped through it and for a few moments the motorists weren't right behind them. He slammed on the brakes and turned towards Sierra "Get out! Run!"

"Wha.."

"Get out now, Sierra! Run and don't look back!" Shouted her dad his face grief stricken.

"Run mija, run..." her mom said in tears.

Sierra opened the door and ran. As soon as she was out of the car her dad started it up and fled. The

motorists were soon behind the car again. That was the last time she ever saw her parents. All she had now was the *Tarzan* book, she'd ran out with it unknowingly.

Sierra got the bleeding to stop, on a second look, it wasn't that bad. She cleaned it up with creek water patched it up with some vines. Eleven years on her own had made her a wilderness expert. She finished tending to her wound, picked up her hunting gear and went in search of a camping ground.

Later that night, Sierra started a small fire and did her nightly ritual, reading *Tarzan*. She'd memorized the whole book from cover to cover a while ago but she still read it every night. It was her only tie to the past.

She woke up surrounded by wolves. There were a dozen of them and they looked more vicious than any she had encountered before. Fight or flight? *Flight*, she couldn't fight all at the same time. Sierra picked up her hunting gear lightning quick, shot one of the mutants with an arrow to make a path for herself, and ran. Half an hour later there were only three mutants giving chase, she'd emptied her quiver into the rest. Another half hour later she could finally stop running. She collapsed against a tree and put her face in her hands. This was her life, day to day. Running from place to place, constantly in danger. When the pain in her sides had subsided and her breathing was normal again she got up and took a look at her surroundings. With alarm she realized that, while zigzagging across the forest running from the mutants, she'd come closer to the edge of the forest than she's ever had before. For the past eleven years something inside her had told her not to leave the woods. She contemplated leaving but not for long. She wouldn't leave.

She needed rest so she climbed a wide branched tree and fell asleep.

She heard them this time, they were about two hundred yards away and there were a lot more of them. She picked up her bow, empty quiver, and satchel and bolted from the tree. They followed. She ran faster than she had ever before, right to the edge of the forest. She made it out of the forest into a big empty street. Still running, she turned to glance back at her pursuers. She didn't see the street sign that had been knocked over when she tripped on it and fell. She tried to get up but only managed to stumble and fall again. With horror she realized that she was going to be eaten by the mutants. She turned towards the forest but the mutants weren't coming her way. Instead they stayed behind the edge of the forest and let out their high pitched whines. They wouldn't leave the forest, she realized.

It's been three days since Sierra left the forest. She'd been following the road she escaped on and now was in the ruins of a city. She gathered from several rusted signs that she was in Seattle. Some buildings were collapsed. Some had chunks missing and some overgrown with moss and vines. The streets were littered with charred and rusted cars. There were no signs of human occupation.

And then she found the building. Miraculously this building seemed untouched, all the glasses were intact. Its geometry was unlike anything she has ever imagined or seen. She went to the big double doors and from the faded white sign on them she found out that this was the Central Library. She lit up. This place had books, and it was practically untouched. For the past 11 years all she's had was one book. This place had tons. She tried the double doors and they glided open. She stepped in and was overwhelmed by the vastness of the place. She ran to the nearest shelf grabbed a book and then another, and then three more. She was ecstatic. She started running through the shelves, laughing, crying, and jumping. And then she ran into him.

Her hands went to her quiver automatically but she came up with nothing. He cowered behind a large book. He was the first human she had ever seen in years. She lowered her bow. He lowered his

book. They stood staring at each other for what seemed like a long time.

“Hi, I’m Luke.” He spoke up first.

She stared at him blank faced.

“Hello...do you speak English?...do you speak at all?”

She still stared. He looked disappointed.

“Sierra” she said pointing at herself.

Luke and Sierra talked for hours. She was so happy she was talking to anyone at all and so was Luke.

Luke turned out to be her age. His parents had told him to hide in the library when everything went wrong eleven years ago. He never left except when he went on a monthly supply run. He’d read every book on survival. He’d managed to supply himself with electricity with the resources he found in the library basement and the books he read. He was smart. Sierra felt a pang of jealousy thinking about how his life had been a lot more comfortable compared to hers. But she didn’t let it bother her much. Luke had offered to let her stay with him, even to share his canned goods and most importantly, to read any book she desired.

Thus she started to live at the library. Instead of her running and sleeping and running again, her life now was filled with reading and learning. But one thing neither of them knew was what had caused the world to go upside down. They talked and read together. He took her on supply runs, they scavenged stores that had long been abandoned. She didn’t have to kill her food anymore. Life was relatively better for Sierra. Three months passed.

Sierra woke up to hooting noises. At first she thought she was imagining it but Luke must have heard it too because he came running to where she slept on the fifth floor.

“There are people on the third floor,” Luke said.

“What?”

“There are people downstairs, at least forty of them.”

Sierra got up quick and grabbed her bow and arrows. She’d taken new ones from an outdoors store not too far from the library. She and Luke went to the fourth floor to get a better look at the intruders.

The intruders were still hooting and cheering. Then they went silent.

“Ladies and gentlemen” said a voice. The way everyone fell silent one could tell he was the man in charge.

“I have decided” the voice continued “this is where we will have the party!”

More hooting and cheering erupted.

“And” went the voice again “after the party we’re going to have a GIANT bonfire! Have you ever seen fire kindled by ten stories full of books?”

“NO” the group answered collectively.

“You will soon!” the leader exclaimed

“Dominic!Dominic!Dominic!” The people began to chant their leader’s name.

Squatted in the corner of the glass corridor on the fourth floor Sierra and Luke heard everything that was said. They looked at each other as if to ask what they should do.

“Hey! I see people!” One of the intruders yelled.

Sierra and Luke ran, they knew the library well. However, they were outnumbered and somewhere on the seventh floor the intruders finally caught up with them. They tackled them, ten of them at once. They took Sierra’s weapon away and took them downstairs to where Dominic, their leader, and a few others were

waiting.

“Why did you run?” Dominic asked. He wore a bemused look but his eyes were dark, and dangerous.

“You were going to burn the library.” Luke answered. He was a bit shaken, even though he’d read a lot about survival, he wasn’t used to confrontation.

“And what is the library to you?” Dominic asked.

“Home.” It was Sierra who replied.

“Is that so?” Dominic continued “Well I’m sorry to inform you, but my people here deserve a good party. And what’s a party without a bonfire?”

“You simply can’t” Luke stammered “think about the repercussions, you’re destroying centuries worth of knowledge and civilization..”

Dominic stared for a while and simply said “So?”

“We can’t let you do this!” Sierra yelled.

“And what are you going to do, Princess? Read us to death? We’ve got an army and all you have is your books. Books can’t save you and you can’t save them.”

Luke tried to reason with him but Dominic cut him off. “You can either come with us and live a life of partying, taking what you want, destroying what you don’t like or you can stay here with your books and burn.”

Luke didn’t say anything. Sierra lunged for her bow and arrows. Someone hit her on the head. Luke jumped after her attacker and got knocked out himself.

When they gained consciousness, Luke and Sierra were tied together, back to back in the middle of the third floor lobby. The intruders were already setting up for their big party. They had emptied some shelves and set them up like benches. They also had brought in some crates full of bottles. Sierra assumed they were full of alcohol. When Dominic saw that they were awake he came to them. Stooping down he said “You know, it doesn’t have to end like this. The offer still stands. You can join us.”

Luke didn’t say a word, Sierra spat on the floor.

“Fair enough,” said Dominic. “I’m a man of my word and tonight you’ll burn down with your precious books.” He walked away to oversee the party preparations.

“Luke, what are we going to do?” Sierra asked.

“I’m working on it.” Luke answered. After a while he said “I got it!”

He let her in on the plan. She listened carefully.

“Are you sure you’re up for this?” Luke asked. “Yes” came Sierra’s reply.

“Dominic, I want to talk. I’ve changed my mind!” Luke yelled out. Dominic came over smiling.

“What made you change your mind?” he asked Luke.

“I just realized...books are boring!” Luke said with a smile. Dominic patted him on the shoulder and turned towards Sierra.

“And what about you, Princess?” Dominic asked.

She just let out an angry grunt in reply.

Darkness came. The party started. Luke struggled to keep his mind clear, people just kept offering him drinks. They got rowdy if he refused. His plan depended on him staying focused.

“Heeey, Domminic..Hi” he slurred. “I haave a gifft for yooou!”

“What is it Luke?” Dominic asked.

“It’ssss a little wittle party favor. It’ss in the conferenssse room.”

Dominic and a few other guys went to the conference room with him. From a file cabinet, Luke produced a plastic bag full of white tablets.

“Thesse arre parrrty pillss.” Luke said waving the plastic bag around. “Therre’ss enough heere for everyone!”

“What do they do?” Dominic asked.

“They make you dance” Luke said all smiles.

“Would you mind if you take the first one then?” Dominic asked.

“Myy. Pleasssure.” Luke took one pill and popped it in his mouth. He opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue to show them he’d swallowed it. Satisfied, Dominic started passing around the plastic bag and as soon as they were distracted, Luke quickly opened the second drawer, took out a small package and a pocket knife and quickly put them in his pocket. Luke led Dominic and the others downstairs to where the party was picking up momentum. Luke paused by Sierra and started yelling.

“Heyy, You!...I nevver liked you.” He said swaying from all the alcohol. “Youuu know whyy I nevver liked youu?” Luke said walking close to Sierra “Becausse you’re ssuch a bittch!” He lunged towards her as if to attack her but tripped on his own feet and fell behind her back where her hands were tied. But before Dominic and a couple other guys came to pick him up he slipped the pocket knife into her tied hands.

He laughed hysterically. Dominic ushered him to the benches.

“Easy there buddy, easy” said Dominic. “Somebody get this guy more vodka”

The party went on, everyone was up and swaying. Someone was playing makeshift drums. Everyone was waiting for Luke’s drugs to kick in. And then Luke collapsed, Dominic looked at him with suspicion. He looked at his gang and one by one each of them slumped to the floor. He knew he shouldn’t have trusted Luke, from the corner of his eye he saw Sierra stand up, no longer tied up. His visions blurred and he too collapsed.

Sierra searched Luke’s pockets and took out the package. Without hesitating she took out the needle and injected it into Luke’s neck. Luke jumped awake. He’d given everyone, including himself a highly sedative sleeping pill. He had put the reverser into his pocket. It was all part of the plan.

“Let’s get to work” Luke said, rubbing his head.

“Are you sure it’s going to start up?” Sierra asked. “It hasn’t been used in years.”

“Let’s hope” said Luke and turned the key. The school bus that had been in the library parking lot for eleven years sputtered to life. Luke and Sierra had dragged the unconscious bodies Dominic and his gang into the bus and now they were taking them out for a little drive.

The next day Sierra and Luke were driving the empty bus.

“Where do we go now?” asked Sierra.

“We go north. I heard a couple of Dominic’s guys talking about a big wall up north. That’s where we’re going, and with a little luck we might find some answers about what happened.”

Sierra wasn't happy about the idea. Her parents had told her to run. But she couldn't run forever. She had her bow and arrows, *Tarzan*, and now Luke. She decided, she was going to get answers.

Dominic and his gang woke up in a forest to the sound of high pitched Barks. They were surrounded by dozens and dozens of creatures with long sharp fangs protruding out of their mouths.

"Shit," said Dominic.