

Riley

By Gaige Broughton

His finger travels across the metal desk making shapes and scribbles. The metal is cold and smooth. He's surrounded by white padded walls. The room holds a bed, a desk, a toilet sink combo, and a boy wearing white pajama-like clothes. A knock comes from the metal door. A nurse walks in holding a tray.

"Okay, Riley, it's time for your medicine," the nurse says.

Riley stops drawing and looks up at the nurse, "Do I have to?"

She places the tray on Riley's metal desk and picks up a syringe.

"You know I have to give this to you, I do it every day."

"Oh alright." He holds out his arm and watches as the needle sticks. The purple and pink splotches on his arm look like modern art, and his arm the canvas.

"What are these for?" he asks pointing at three glass bowls on the tray.

The glass bowls have four symmetrical gems in the rim of each and have a decorative design. Each dish has different colored gemstones for what's inside; Brown for a pile of gravel, dark blue for water, and light blue for nothing.

"Since it's your twelfth birthday, we have a little game for you to play." The nurse finishes up with the syringe and smiles at him.

"You play the game just by placing your hand over the bowl and concentrating."

"It's not another test is it?"

"No, not at all. It's just that turning twelve can be an exceptional day." She holds her smile to assure him that there are no tricks.

He cautiously places a hand over the empty bowl. Nothing happens. Riley looks to the nurse.

"Try the other two."

The one filled with water also does nothing. Riley becomes confused.

"I'm sure the last one will do something." She purses her lips.

Riley places his hand over the pile of gravel. The gravel begins to move. Riley's eyes widen. Taking a closer look, he tries to concentrate harder. The gravel starts to twist around on its own.

"Fantastic," she says with a smile. "Since today is a special day, how about we give you a larger room."

The nurse places everything back onto the tray and carries it out of the room.

"Someone will be here to move you." She walks out of the room.

Moments later the metal door opens back up. A guard walks in.

"Looks like you're getting a new room, boy."

Riley looks up at the burly man.

"Grab your stuff and follow me."

Carrying his toothbrush and toothpaste, Riley follows the guard through a corridor he's never seen before. A sign on the wall says "Section B."

"There's your room," the guard says while pointing his baton at an open door.

The room is similar to his old place. White padded walls and concrete floors, the only difference is that this room is slightly larger. It covers his basic needs, a hard bed to sleep on, a metal desk to sit at, and a bathroom to use.

"Let's move it along, it's, and I've got something I want to take care of." He knocks on the door frame with the baton. "Don't make me wait."

Riley walks with the guard down to the cafeteria. Lots of other kids were in line to get lunch, and a couple of the metal benches have already become occupied.

"Fresh meat," the guard says.

Riley makes his way to the lunch line. Most of the kids seem older than him. He stands out, not just in age, but in clothing as well. Everyone around him wears brown pajama sets instead of white. One color does stand out from the brown to him. A girl with vibrant red hair sits alone at one of the benches.

After getting a tray packed with mystery food, he decides to go sit at this girl's table.

"Uh-h, hi," he says.

"Hey," the girl says back. She picks at the muck in her tray.

"My name's Riley, what's your name?"

"Jenny."

He sets his tray down and sits at the table. He picks up a fork and stabs into the muck.

"So-"

"Sorry kid, but I'm going to have to take your new friend here for a little bit," the guard says while grabbing Jenny's arm.

She pulls her arm away from him.

"Don't you start fightin' me now."

She gets up and leaves with the guard.

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Jenny's cold slop sits at the table as Riley finishes his last bite. The taste is bland like plain rice. Jenny and the guard come walking back. Her cheeks are red, tears run down her face.

Her hair is tangled and messy.

A dark red stain in her brown pants.

Riley stands up. Other children keep to themselves as the guard whistles. He escorts Jenny back to her seat, where she sits and holds her head low. Riley looks up at the guard. The guard gives a smug smile at him. He pushes the guard, but it does nothing.

"Don't pester me, kid, or I'll give you the same gift I gave her."

Riley continues to punch and kick at him. He releases all of his anger onto the guard, but he is too weak to do anything.

"It sounds like we need to have a little chat boy." The guard grabs the boy.

He drags Riley out of the cafeteria and down the hall to a janitor's closet. Incapable of fighting any longer he stares at the cafeteria where the other kids continue to ignore what is going on. The guard forces him to stand up.

"Now if you want the special pants your friend has, you're going to have to take them off."

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The guard throws Riley onto the cafeteria floor.

"Does anybody else need to be taught a lesson? Anybody? Anyone thinks they can challenge me?"

Riley tries to get up, but the guard places his boot on his back.

"No? That's what I thought." The guard leans on Riley.

Riley feels his body being crushed under the boot. Keeping his fingers on the floor, Riley raises the palm of his hand. He focuses on the ground below his hand.

"If anyone of you little dirtbags tries to mess with me again you'll get more than a new pair of pants."

A small mound forms under Riley's hand.

"Alright. Lunchtime is over, get back to your cells."

Riley places all of his concentration into the solid ball and pulls from the ground. The concrete ball flies up into the guard's face. The guard falls back. With the boot off Riley's back, he quickly gets up.

"You little fucker." The guard covers his face as blood drips onto his uniform.

Riley looks down at his hand. Jenny grabs his shoulder.

"We have to get out of here," Jenny says.

"Down Section A there's a window. I used to stare out of it during free time."

"Perfect."

Alarms go off throughout the building. Riley and Jessica run down each corridor and find Section A's gate. Riley puts his hands on the lock and concentrates. The metal warps, and he opens the gate.

"Get back here," the guard says while running towards them. He pulls out a gun and shoots at the kids. The shot hits the closing metal gate causing a blast of ice to form around the impact.

"Let's go." Jenny pulls on Riley's arm.

They make it to Riley's old corridor. The clean white hallways that he remembers are now stained with red splatter and filled with lifeless bodies.

"There." He points to the window towards the end of the hallway.

"What's that?" Jenny asks as she turns her head to an open doorway.

They find a small, crying child tied and gagged in one of the rooms.

"Sh-sh. Everything is going to be okay, little buddy," Riley says.

He unties the child. A muffled noise comes from the gagged child.

"What is it?" He looks behind him to find the guard holding Jenny hostage with the freeze gun.

"I told you not to mess with me, boy."

"Let her go. She didn't do anything."

The child gets under the bed to hide.

"You made quite the show today, boy," the guard says as he points the gun at Riley, "but I think playtime is over."

The guard shoots the freeze gun. Riley's entire body becomes frozen with a coat of ice around him.

"No." Jenny tries to run to him, but she is held back by the guard.

"Come on out here little kid, you wouldn't want anything to happen to this nice young lady, now would you?"

"No, don't come out from under there."

The guard puts the gun in Jenny's face.

"You shut your mouth."

The child makes his way out from under the bed and looks up at the frozen statue in the room.

"Now you be a good little kid and hold still." The guard aims his gun at the child.

"No." Jenny tries to squirm out of the guard's grasps, but it's too late.

"How's about we give these statues a show, girly."

Tears fall from Jenny's eyes. She tries to struggle, but she can't break free. She closes her eyes and focuses. She uses her anger and sadness to concentrate. Her hair begins to glow, and it burst into flames, scorching the guard's face. She escapes and kicks the guard causing him to fall. The gun slides across the room. She grabs the weapon and aims at the guard, her hair going back to its natural state.

"How?" the guard says as Jenny shoots the gun.

She runs over to Riley and the child. "Please don't be dead."

She places her hands on the statues and tries to focus everything into the tips of her fingers. A warmth flows from her hands and melts the ice. She moves her hands around their bodies and melts the ice evenly.

"No. No, no, no."

She moves both of their bodies to the bed. Their chest lay still. Jenny sits on the mattress for a moment to gather her thoughts. Riley takes a deep breath.

"Jenny, what happened?"

"There's no time, we need to get out of here."

Riley picks up the child and follows her to the hallway. She shoots the glass with the freeze gun and breaks it with her elbow. She climbs out the window and drops to the ground

from the second story. Riley tosses the child to Jenny and drops down. They see a small town on the horizon of the desert.