



IMPOSTORS

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

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KILLER

We're about to die. Probably.

Our best hope is the pulse knife in my hand. It trembles softly, like a bird. That's how my head trainer, Naya, says to hold it.

Gently, careful not to crush it.

Firmly, so it doesn't fly away.

The thing is, my pulse knife really *wants* to fly. It's military grade. Smart as a crow, unruly as a young hawk. Loves a good fight.

It's going to get one. The assassin, twenty meters away, is spraying gunfire from the stage where my sister just gave her first public speech. Her audience, the dignitaries of Shreve, are strewn around the room—dead, faking death, or cowering. Security drones and hovercams are scattered on the floor, knocked out by some kind of jammer.

My sister's huddled next to me, gripping my free hand in both of hers. Her fingernails are deep in my skin.

We're behind a tipped-over table. It's a slab of vat-grown oak, five centimeters thick, but the assassin's got a barrage pistol. We might as well be hiding in a rosebush.

But at least no one can see us together.

We're fifteen years old.

This is the first time anyone's tried to kill us.

My heart is beating slantways, but I'm remembering to breathe. There's something ecstatic about the training kicking in.

Finally, I'm doing what I was born to do.

I'm saving my sister.

The comms are down, but Naya's voice is in my head from a thousand training sessions—*Can you protect Rafia?*

Not unless I take out this attacker.

Then do it.

"Stay here," I say.

Rafi looks up at me. She has a cut above her eye—from the splinters flying everywhere. She keeps touching it in wonder. Her teachers never make her bleed.

She's twenty-six minutes older than me. That's why she gives the speeches and I train with knives.

"Don't leave me, Frey," she whispers.

"I'm always with you." This is what I murmur from the bed beside hers, when she's having nightmares. "Now let go of my hand, Rafi."

She looks into my eyes, finds that unbroken trust we share.

As she lets go, the assassin lets loose again, a roar like the air itself is shredding. But he's spraying randomly, confused. Our father was supposed to be here, and only canceled at the last minute.

Maybe the assassin isn't even thinking about Rafi. He certainly doesn't know about me, my eight years of combat training. My pulse knife.

I make my move.