



I WILL NOT LOSE HER

FRACTURE ME

A SHATTER ME
NOVELLA

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
TAHEREH MAFI

FRACTURE ME

T A H E R E H M A F I

HARPER

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ONE

“Addie? Addie, wake up. *Addie*—”

I roll over with a groan and stretch, rubbing both eyes with the heel of my hand. It’s too early for this shit.

“Addie—”

Still half asleep, I grab James by the collar and yank him down, shoving his head under the blanket. He shouts and I laugh, wrapping him up in the sheets until he can’t get out.

“Stoooooop iiiiiiit,” he whines, little fists pounding against the sheets.

“Addie, let me out—”

“Hey—how many times have I told you to stop calling me that?”

James tries to punch me through the blanket. I pick him up and flip him over in my arms and he screams, his legs kicking wildly.

“You’re so mean,” he cries, wriggling around in my grip. “If Kenji were here, he would never let y—”

At that, I freeze, and James can feel it. He goes quiet in my arms, and I let him go. He untangles himself from my sheets, and we stare at each other.

James blinks. His bottom lip trembles and he bites down on it. “Do you know if he’s okay?”

I shake my head.

Kenji is still in the medical wing. No one knows for sure what happened yet, but people have been talking. Whispering.

I look toward the wall. James is still speaking, but I’m too distracted to pay attention.

It’s hard for me to believe Juliette could hurt anyone like that.

“Everyone says he’s gone,” James is saying now.

This, I catch.

“What?” I turn back, alarmed. “How?”

James shrugs. “I don’t know. They said he broke out of his room.”

“What are you talking about? How could he break out of his room—?”

James shrugs again. “I don’t think he wanted to be here anymore.”

“But—what?” I screw up my face, confused. “Does that mean he’s feeling better? Did someone tell you he was feeling better?”

James frowns. “Did you want him to feel better? I thought you didn’t like him.”

I sigh. Run a hand through the back of my hair. “Of course I like him. I know we don’t always get along, but it’s really close quarters in here, and he’s always got so many damn opinions—”

James shoots me a strange look. “So . . . you don’t want to kill him? You’re always saying you want to kill him.”

“I’m not serious when I say stuff like that.” I try not to roll my eyes. “He and I have been friends for a long time. I’m actually worried about him.”

“Okay,” James says carefully. “You’re weird, Addie.”

I can’t help but laugh a little. “Why am I weird? And hey, stop calling me Addie—you know how much I hate that—”

“Yeah, and I still don’t know why.” He cuts me off. “Mom always used to call you Addie—”

“Well Mom’s dead, isn’t she?” My voice has gone hard. My hands are clenched. And when I see the look on James’s face, I’m instantly sorry for being so harsh. I release my fists. Take a deep breath.

James swallows hard. “Sorry,” he says quietly.

I nod, look away. “Yeah. Me too.” I pull a shirt on over my head. “So Kenji’s gone then, huh? I can’t believe he’d just leave like that.”

“Why would Kenji be gone?” James asks. “I thought you said you didn’t even know if he w—”

“But I thought *you* said—”

We stop. Stare at each other.

James is the first to speak. “I said *Warner* is gone. Everyone is saying he escaped last night.”

Just the sound of his name and I’m already pissed off. “Stay here,” I say, pointing at James and grabbing my boots.

“But—”

“Don’t move until I get back!” I shout before bolting out the door.

That bastard. I can’t believe this.

I’m pounding on Castle’s door when Ian spots me on his way down the hall.

“He’s not in there,” Ian says, still walking.

I catch his arm. “Is it true? Did Warner really get out?”

Ian sighs. Shoves his hands into his pockets. Finally, he nods.

I want to put my fist through the wall.

“I gotta go suit up,” Ian says, breaking away. “And you should, too. We’re heading out after breakfast.”

“Are you serious?” I say. “We’re still heading out to fight—even with all this shit going on?”

“Of course we are,” Ian snaps at me. “You know we can’t wait any longer. The supreme isn’t going to reschedule his plans to launch an attack on the civilians. It’s too late to back out now.”

“But what about Warner?” I demand. “We’re not going to try and find him?”

“Maybe.” Ian shrugs. “See if you can find him on the battlefield.”

“Jesus.” I’m so filled with rage I can hardly see straight. “I could kill Castle for letting this happen—for being so goddamn soft with him—”

“Rein it in, man.” Ian cuts me off. “We’ve got other problems. And hey”—he grabs my shoulder, looks me in the eye—“you’re not the only one who’s pissed at Castle. But now’s not the time.”

I shake him off, shoot him a dark look, and charge back down the hall.

James has all sorts of questions when I get back, but I’m still so angry I’m not ready to deal with him. It doesn’t seem to matter; James is stubborn as hell. I’m strapping on holsters and locking my weapons into place and he won’t back down.

“But then what did he say?” James is asking. “After you said we should find Warner?”

I adjust my pants, tighten the laces on my boots.

James taps my arm. “Adam.” He taps my arm again. “Did he know where Castle was?” Another tap. “Did he say what time you guys had to leave today?” More tapping. “Adam when are y—”

I pick him up and he squeaks; I place him in a far corner of the room.

“*Addie—*”

I throw a blanket over his head.

James shouts and struggles with the blanket until he manages to pull it off and throw it down. He’s red in the face and his fists are clenched and he’s finally mad.

I start laughing. I can't help it.

James is so frustrated he has to spit the words out when he speaks. "Kenji said that I have as much right to know what's happening down here as everyone else. Kenji never gets mad when I ask questions. He never ignores me. He's never mean to me, and you're being m-mean to me, and I don't like it when you l-laugh at me—"

James's voice breaks, and it's only then that I look up. I notice the tears streaked across his cheeks.

"Hey," I say, meeting him across the room. "Hey, hey." I grip his shoulders, drop to one knee. "What's going on? Why the tears? What happened?"

"You're leaving." James hiccups.

"Aw, c'mon," I sigh. "You knew I was leaving, remember? Remember when we talked about this?"

"You're going to die." Another hiccup.

I raise an eyebrow at him. "I didn't know you could tell the future."

"Addie—"

"Hey—"

"I don't call you Addie in front of anyone else!" James says, protesting before I have a chance to. "I don't know why it makes you so mad. You said you loved it when Mom called you Addie. Why can't I?"

I sigh again as I get to my feet, mussing his hair on my way up. James makes a strangled sound and jerks away. "What's the problem?" I ask. I pull up my pants leg to attach a semiautomatic to the holster underneath. "I've been a soldier for a long time now. You've always known the risks. What's different all of a sudden?"

James is quiet long enough for me to notice. I look up.

"I want to come with you," he says, wiping his nose with a shaky hand. "I want to fight, too."

My body goes rigid. "We're not having that conversation again."

"But Kenji said—"

"I don't give a rat's ass what Kenji said! You are a ten-year-old *child*," I say. "You are not fighting in any war. Not walking onto any battlefield. Do you understand me?"

James stares at me.

"I said, *Do you understand me?*" I walk right up to him, grab his arms.

James flinches a little. “Yes,” he whispers.

“Yes, *what?*”

“Yes, sir,” he says, staring at the ground now.

I’m breathing so hard my chest is heaving. “Never again,” I say quietly now. “We are never having this conversation. Not ever again.”

“Okay, Addie.”

I swallow hard.

“I’m sorry, Addie.”

“Get your shoes on.” I stare at the wall. “It’s time for breakfast.”

TWO

“Hi.”

Juliette is standing next to my table, staring at me like she might be nervous. Like we’ve never done this before.

“Hey,” I say.

Just seeing her face still makes my chest ache, but the truth is, I have no idea what’s going on between us anymore. I promised her I would find a way through this—and I’ve been training like hell, I really have—but after last night, I’m not gonna lie: I’m a little freaked out. Touching her is more serious than I ever thought it was.

She could’ve killed Kenji. I’m still not sure she hasn’t.

But even after all this, I still want a future with her. I want to know that one day we’ll be able to settle somewhere safe and be together in peace. I’m not ready to give up on that dream yet. I’m not ready to give up on us.

I nod at an empty seat. “You want to sit down?”

She does.

We sit in silence a little while, her poking at her food, me at mine. We usually eat the same thing every morning: a spoonful of rice, a bowl of vegetable broth, a chunk of rock-hard bread, and, on good days, a little cup of pudding. It’s not amazing, but it gets the job done, and we’re usually grateful for it. But today neither one of us seems to have an appetite.

Or a voice.

I sigh and look away. I don’t know why it’s so hard to talk to her this morning—maybe it’s the lack of Kenji—but things feel different between us lately. I want to be with her so badly, but being with her has never felt more dangerous than it does now. Every day we feel further apart. And sometimes I think the harder I try to hold on, the more she tries to break away.

I wish James would hurry up and grab his breakfast. Having him here might make this easier. I sit up and look around the room, only to spot him talking with a group of his friends. I try to wave him over, but he’s laughing at something and doesn’t even notice me. The kid is kind of amazing. He’s

such a social guy—and so popular around here—that sometimes I wonder where he got it from. In many ways he’s the exact opposite of me. He likes to let a lot of people in; I like to keep most people out.

Juliette’s the only real exception to that rule.

I look back at her and notice the red rims around her eyes as they dart across the dining hall. She looks both wide awake and crazy tired and she can’t seem to sit still; her foot is tapping fast under the table and her hands are trembling a little.

“Hey are you okay?” I ask.

“Yes, absolutely,” she says too quickly. But she’s shaking her head.

“Did you, um, get enough sleep last night?”

“Yes,” she says, repeating the word a few times. She does that occasionally—repeats the same word over and over again. I’m not sure she’s even aware of it.

“Did you sleep well?” she asks. Her fingers drum against the table, then against her arms. She keeps glancing around the room. She doesn’t even wait for me to respond before she says, “Have you heard anything about Kenji yet?”

That’s when I understand.

Of course she’s not okay. Of course she didn’t get any sleep last night. Last night she almost killed one of her closest friends. She’d just started trusting herself and not being afraid of herself; now she’s back to where she started. Shit. I’m already sorry I even brought it up.

“No, not yet.” I cringe. “But,” I say, hoping to change the subject, “I have heard that people are pretty pissed at Castle about what happened with Warner.” I clear my throat. “Did you hear about him breaking out of here?”

Juliette drops her spoon.

It clatters to the floor and she doesn’t seem to notice. “Yes,” she says quietly. She’s blinking at her water cup, holding her napkin in her hands, folding and refolding it. “People were talking about it in the halls. Do they know how he escaped?”

“I don’t think so.” I frown at her.

“Oh.” She says that a few times, too.

She sounds strange. Scared, even. Juliette has always been a little different from everyone else—she was like a crazed, skittish kitten when I first saw her in that cell—but she’d been getting a lot better over the last

few months. Once she finally started trusting me, things changed. She evolved. She started talking (and eating) more and even got a little cocky. I loved seeing her come back to life. I loved being with her, watching her find herself.

I think this experience with Kenji really set her back.

I can tell she's only halfway here, because her eyes are unfocused and her hands are moving mechanically. She does this a lot. It's like sometimes she just disappears, retreats into a corner of her brain and stays there awhile, thinking about something she'll never talk about. She's acting a lot like her old self right now, and right now she's eating the cold rice on her plate one grain at a time, counting each bite under her breath.

I'm about to try speaking to her again when James finally comes back to the table. I stand up immediately, grateful for the opportunity to shake off the awkward. "Hey buddy—why don't we go have a proper good-bye?"

"Oh," James says, sliding his tray onto the table. "Okay, sure." He glances at me before glancing at Juliette, who's now chewing a grain of rice very carefully.

"Hi," he says to her.

Juliette blinks a few times, her face breaking into a wide smile the moment she notices him. It changes her, those smiles. And those are the moments that kill me a little.

"Hi," she says, so happy so suddenly you'd think James had hung the moon for her. "How are you? Did you sleep well? Would you like to sit down? I was just having some rice; would you like some rice?"

James is already blushing. He'd probably eat his own hair if she asked him to. I roll my eyes and drag him away, telling Juliette we'll be right back.

She nods. I look over my shoulder as we walk away and notice that she doesn't seem to mind sitting alone for a little while. She stabs at something on her plate and misses, and that's the last I see of her before we turn the corner.