

## Virus

By Anna Controne

“Dad? Daad? DAD COME HERE! LOOK!” yelled small, 12-year-old me. We were at our campsite in Senegal, Africa. My parents were both biologists, and spent half of their lives traveling the world to collect different organisms to study and bring back to their lab in America. You would think that as the most successful biologists of our time, they would be able to settle down and let people do the work for them. Nope. Not Richard and Kate Thomas. Before my brother and I were born, they usually moved around every month or so, but ever since I came along, we have only moved 5 times. Next week, we were moving back to our house in New York, so my dad was packing but being the softie he was, came over to see what I was looking at.

“Look!” I said in a hushed voice, scared I might scare off what I had found. My dirt encrusted finger was pointed at a green and black stone. It looked as if it had been bought in a museum gift shop and someone had just left it. I reached to pick it up but my dad quickly stopped me. My dad was the kind of guy who was always happy. If everyone else around him was feeling like shit, he would always be there to put a smile on his face. He also was one to encourage curiosity, which was why I was concerned when he said-

“Let’s leave this here, Hazell.” He said, covering the rock with dirt quickly and whisking me away. I drew my eyebrows together in confusion. Dad usually loved it when I made a “discovery”, but he seemed nervous. On edge. Mother did, too. She sat with my 9 year old brother, Caleb, collecting sticks for a fort he was going to make. They both had a strange expression on their faces that I couldn’t recognize. At one point, a twig snapped near by, which turned out to only be a dead limb falling from one of the

towering trees, but either way they both stood up quickly, shooting a look at each other. This went on all the way through dinner that night.

“So, Hazell, did you get any packing done today?” My mother asked, even though it was obvious she knew the answer by the way she raised her eyebrow and pinched her lips together.

“I, um, I got my books put into a box..” I replied sheepishly, offering a small, innocent smile to see if I could pull off my brother’s way of getting out of trouble.

My mother sighed, shaking her head. “Well, I expect you to have everything packed by tomorrow. Caleb got everything done today, and he is younger than you!” Ouch. It always stings when you got compared to your 9-year old genius of a brother. Caleb shot a smug look over at me and I sent a scowl back, earning me a warning look from my father. I sighed and scooted my chair back, taking my plate to the sink and rinsing it off before heading to my room.

When in my room, I took out my “Geologist Journal” and wrote down what the stone had looked like. Once done, I looked the rock up but couldn’t find anything. I sighed, flopping back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. It was already dark out, and my parents were most likely asleep by then. Maybe if I took a flashlight and went quietly- NO! Self control. *Have self control, Hazell.* I turned off my light and got under the mosquito nets and sheets, closing my eyes.

That self control lasted for about 10 minutes before bubbling out of me, causing my feet to touch the floor and carry me to my dresser where I took out the flashlight. I opened my window and looked for a way to get down without dying. There was a wide tree branch about five feet below my window that I could jump to. I did just that, making my way down the tree, finally landing on the soft dirt below. The light of my flashlight flickered and I hit it a few times before it started working properly again. I crept as slowly as possible to the area where I had been earlier today and found the small patch of earth that had been dug up that afternoon. Sweeping the dirt my father had packed back over it, I began to feel a buzzing sensation in my fingers that I was using to dig. I pulled my hand back quickly, inspecting it. As I was

doing so, a small light caught my eye. Under the surface of the loose dirt, a dark blue glow shone threw the cracks. I quickly brushed away the rest of the dirt to find the stone. To my astonishment, the green sections on the stone were lit up, eliminating any need for my flashlight. Reaching down cautiously, I picked up the stone. It felt warm in my hand, and I turned it over a couple times. I stood up, putting the stone in my overall front pocket, located on my torso. Just as I was bending down to pick up my flashlight, I heard loud voices coming from inside my house. I looked up and saw lights on inside the house and an unfamiliar van parked in front. I ran to the front door, skidded to a stop, and found myself staring at a horrifying image. There, on their knees, were my father, mother, and brother. There were about 12 or so men standing around them, holding guns and dressed in all black. Their faces were covered, so I couldn't identify who it was, not that I would be able to even if I had seen them. One of the men grabbed me and shoved me down next to my father. My mother screamed, trying to reach me, but the closest man hit her with the butt of his gun, causing her to clutch her head in agony.

It all happened so fast that I didn't even have time to process it. It started with my father calmly talking to the men, but you could tell it only made the men angrier. Finally, the largest of the men came forward and held the barrel of the gun up against my father's head. My mother screamed again, but it all the noise seemed distant to me. All I could hear were the sirens wailing down the street towards us. I thought that we were saved...until the men heard it too. They started yelling at each other, and then a gun went off. Then a second. Then another. And another. And then darkness.

*Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.* The sound pulsed throughout my head, starting off softly, then gradually growing louder. I felt my chest rise and fall. *I was alive?* I took another deep breath, making sure that it was real. Then, I wiggled my toes. Yep, they worked. Then my fingers, and they moved as well. I was about to open my eyes when I felt a hand on my arm. My eyes shot open and I slapped the hand away. The beeping sound instantly increased in tempo, and a small woman dressed in a white lab coat, stood back, holding the spot where I had slapped her.

“Hello, Hazell.” She said, smiling. I felt uncomfortable. How did this woman know me? Was I supposed to know her? And where was I? Where was my fam-

“Where are my parents? And my brother?” I asked, sitting upright as the question finally crossed my mind. She pressed a button on the wall calmly and then turned back to me.

“That doesn’t matter right now, Hazell. We need to run some tests before we can explain anything else.”

Tests? What was I? A lab experiment? My heart rate started to speed up and I looked around the room. There were no windows, except a glass wall looking out at an empty white corridor. The room I was in was all white as well, the only thing colorful was the stuff in the IV they were giving me.

Instinctively, I pulled it out and took out the oxygen tube that was in my nose. The woman turned back and checked something off on a chart.

“I wouldn’t advise doing that.” She said, still looking at her clipboard, not looking in my general direction whatsoever. I ignored her comment, since obviously, she wasn’t going to give me answers. I got up out of the bed, my legs constantly feeling wobbly. I clutched the bed railing to keep myself upright and that’s when I noticed what was on my arm. It looked like the pattern of the circuits in a motherboard, starting at my middle finger and running all the way up to my shoulder. It was red and almost looked as the color was pulsing.

“W-what is this?” I ask in a shaky voice, looking away from my arm and up at the woman.

“Again, all questions shall be answered at the end of our tests.” She states, in an annoyingly proper fashion. I turn my hand over and over a few more times before looking down at my legs. There, on the outer side of my leg starting at my knee and running up past my waistline was the same markings. At this point I began to lose patience.

“Hey, tell me what the hell is happening to me..” I demand right as two men enter the room, wearing all white. Shocking.

“Ah, hello gentlemen. Would you be so kind to escort our guest to the testing room, please?” Annoying short lady, asked. The men nodded, not speaking a word before walking towards me. That’s when I saw a flash of a memory...the men in black...my parents...the gunshots...

I gasp and backup, not noticing the warm feeling running up my arms and the side of my legs. The men slowed down for a second, studying me before continuing to walk towards me. I felt myself run into the wall, nowhere else to go. That’s when I began to panic. My heart rate sped up and the room seemed to dim slightly, casting a blue haze. I felt a tingling sensation running up through the marks on my skin and looked down to see them glowing, just like the stone did...

As I was remembering the stone, the beeping from one of the machines started to go haywire. The machine itself started shaking violently before malfunctioning and causing sparks to fly up all over the room. The woman in white covered her face with the clipboard and picked up a phone, speaking frantically into it. I looked back at the men who now were coming at me full speed. I felt my eyes being drawn to the phone. I looked at it for a few seconds and then out of nowhere, it shot up in flames too, right in the lady's hand. She shrieked, instantly dropping it and clutching her hand. Her eyes met mine and we stared at each other for a moment before she hit another button and the entire room filled with red flashing light. Then, my ear’s were filled with the sound of a computerized voice, announcing something over the loudspeakers.

*“Attention all units. There is an aggravated subject in sector 4’s main hallway. Proceed with caution. Attent-”*

The voice died off as I squeezed my eyes shut and covered my ears, melting to the floor. It wasn’t only that I was hearing the voice with my ears, it was like the voice was INSIDE my head. As if I was the speaker. Before I could do anything else, everything went black. Again.

I was running. Running as fast as I could along a long wire glowing dark blue. The world around me looked like a dome and small sparks of electricity went off all around. It wasn't like I was being chased, but more that I was running free. The wire would bend and catch me if I slipped, and I felt safe. Then I woke up. And I did not feel safe.

*Tap, tap, tap.* Another mindless sound that caused me to wake up. Again, I sat bolt upright, only to find myself in a small cell. It was made of glass and the room around of it was dark. Basically it was like something you would see in a James Bond movie.

"Ah. You're up." A husky voice said from the shadows. I jumped at the sudden sound then turned in the other direction and discovered where the tapping was coming from. A teenage boy around my age stood at the glass, tapping it. When he saw me, he stopped and took a few steps back, almost as if he was afraid to stand near me.

"Where the hell am I?" I demanded, staring at the boy. He was very fidgety. His eyes darted back and forth between me and other places in the dark room and he was constantly playing with the hem of his...wait. What was he wearing? I blinked. He was wearing a white and yellow suit, that looked like something out of the old comic books my dad gave me when I was 9.

"What are you wearing?" I asked slowly, a confused expression plastered on my face. The boy opened his mouth to speak when a woman's voice came from the opposite side of the glass cell.

"So curious, aren't you?" She asked, and stepped into the light. I turned to look at her, and when I did, I instantly felt a sense of relief. She was a lean woman who wore a grey bodysuit and had soft, beautiful green eyes. "I am Rose." She said, and I walked towards her.

"Where am I? What is happening?" I asked in a small voice.

"I can't tell you your location for confidential issues, but I can sorta answer the second question.