

Cut Lines

By Rayanne Haines

“You have to cut sideways—like this.” Isla held Amira’s hand and guided the blade. “But fish are better.”

“Because they don’t smell like blood?”

“Right. They don’t smell like blood.”

“I’m tired. Couldn’t we do this later?”

“We have to do it now, before they catch the scent on the air.”

“I know, but I hurt.”

“Doesn’t matter. Finish up so we can load and leave.”

“How much further?”

“About a hundred kilometers. We’ll have a roof, access to water, even a toilet. We keep walking. We don’t slow down.”

“I’m covered in blood. They’re going to smell me.”

“Rub yourself with grass or wipe down with mud. Don’t act like a baby. There wasn’t that much blood. Besides, I had my hands in most of it.”

“I’m going to bruise. I don’t think I’ll be able to keep up the same pace.” Amira scooped the mud at her feet. Rubbed it onto her legs and abdomen and lower.

“That’s why we have to cut the meat quickly and get out of here.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Jesus, Amira, I’m not starting a fire. There’s blood everywhere. We need to move, cross our tracks, find shelter somewhere else.”

“Won’t they smell the blood from somewhere else?”

“Not if you wipe yourself down and wear padding.”

“I wish we had water.”

“We’ll have plenty of water at the cabin.”

“How do you know they haven’t taken the it?”

“I just do, okay.”

“Sounds lonely.”

“If you’d rather stick around here until it happens again go for it. I’m not letting it happen to me.” Isla shoved the blankets and towels to the bottom of her knapsack. Next, she placed an extra cotton shirt. It was green and the buttons were missing but she’d had it since the beginning. Grey sweats went on top of that. Then the bag holding her toothbrush and last bits of floss. She hoarded that stuff like gold. Finally, her extra knife and her thesaurus. She didn’t know why she kept it. But it mattered. “Are you done yet?”

Amira held up the rabbit carcass to inspect it for left over flesh. “I think I got it all.”

“Good. Wrap the meat. Toss the carcass.”

“I’m sad.”

“Don’t be sad. It wasn’t anything.”

“It could have been something.”

“Well it wasn’t. It wasn’t a rabbit, or a deer, or a fish. Or even a kid.”

Amira shifted her eyes down. “It wasn’t anything yet.”

“That’s right. It wasn’t anything yet. And it won’t be the first time it happens.”

“How many kids have you lost?”

“Six. Now stand up. Time to move.”

“Because they’re coming?”

“Yes, Amira, they’re coming.” Isla reached out and held the young woman’s face in her hands.

“We don’t want them to find us when you’re healing.”

Amira hung her head. “I’m not as strong as you. It’s why they caught me.”

“They catch all of us at one point or another. We might be smarter and quicker. Doesn’t matter if they hunt in packs. That’s why we leave no sign.”

Amira crouched low. “How many kids do you think the breeding program made this year?”

“Maybe half a dozen.”

“Maybe if I make one, it’ll get easier.”

“It doesn’t get easier. If you make one it proves your viable, and they’ll be at you even more.”

Isla surveyed their makeshift camp. “Where’s your knife?”

“With the meat in the pack.”

Isla shook her head and routed around the knapsack until she found the knife. Handed it back to Amira. “Keep it on you at all times. This blade is your tool for everything. Eating. Cutting. Killing—everything. Got it?”

“Got it. Sorry.” Amira looked at her hands. “Did you bury it?”

Isla sighed. “Yes, I buried it. Stop thinking about it. It doesn’t matter anymore.”

She stuffed Amira’s blood stained pants back in the pack, added more fresh moss on top of them, and the last of the dried fruit. Even though Isla already lost six, they’d keep trying to breed her. Amira was sixteen and naive. She didn’t fully understand yet.

“You ready?”

“I’m ready. Should we pray for it?”

“It won’t make a difference.” She reached down and pulled Amira to a stand, placed the pack on the girls back, and secured everything in place.

“I know, but it would have been something, if it survived. Maybe that matters?”

“It doesn’t,” she said, already walking.

“Maybe it should.” Amira dropped the pack off her shoulders and waited.

“What are you doing? We have to go.”

“Can I have your thesaurus?”

“No. Maybe. Why?”

Amira shrugged, her face older by the second. Losing a life will do that to you, Isla thought.

“Because, we have time to say a prayer,” Amira said. “And I need just the right words for our salvation.”