

SILVER VALLEY

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Silver Valley
Book One

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To 14 year old Arabella—you actually did it.

This is for you.

PROLOGUE

“No, DON’T! Please, don’t do this!”
Three royal guards, sheathed in their silver uniforms, haul a young girl into a cell made of metal and rust. Tears leak down her cheeks as one of them yanks her forward by her hair.

“Quiet, child! Or you’ll die like your father,” he tells her.

Her shoulders shake harder at his words.

The girl’s arms are covered in scratches and her blue eyes swim with tears. She knows that it’s over—her life and everything she’s worked for.

Centuries ago, an alien species descended peacefully upon Terra, forming a well-concealed alliance with the government of the United Kingdom. Here in space, standing upon what used to be foreign terrain, the girl can’t even begin to comprehend what Terra has become.

And yet, her life has been sacrificed for Terra.

She is going to die.

The cell door slams shut. She throws herself against it, dragging her nails between the bars. Her hair clings to her sweaty brow as she sobs.

She had been helping her father to unlock the mystery of the

Terran princess, who would ascend the throne and restore balance and peace to their planet. But it was treason.

She knew this.

She should have expected her life to end this way.

The guard now locking her cell had just killed her father. His blade is still covered in blood, drying at the edges.

“Let me out, I can help. Please, I know where she is! She’s still a three-year-old girl, but I swear to god she can save Umbra one day.”

The guards remain silent, withdrawing from the girl.

She pulls her hands back, shoulders bunched as she wraps her arms around them. They aren’t listening to her. Nausea rolls in her stomach and she resists the urge to throw up her latest meal.

For years, her father had told her not to tell anyone what they knew. For years, they had snuck around the Silver Kingdom like rats and thieves. But they never thought they were doing anything less than what was required for their planet.

If they didn’t do it, who would?

“Help me. Please, help me,” the girl continues to beg.

But no courtier or Elder wants anything to do with Terra. Not even their guards.

Terra is so far away—situated in an entirely different corner of the universe, accessible only through a periodic black hole. But their ties to Terra run deep. This planet is, after all, known as Terra’s shadow—a refined, superior replica.

Footsteps ring outside the cell, and the girl takes a step backwards into the dark.

The girl had a small blade on her moments before. A dainty little thing. But the guards took it from her, and when she instinctively reaches for it in her pocket, her hands grasp nothing.

The guards smirk at her.

Their visitor has come.

The girl takes a few steps back from the door, dirt kicking up around her feet as she eases into the darkness of her grimy prison cell. The face of an Elder emerges behind the bars in front of her. He

looks young, but his cool blue eyes are ancient and calculating. The lights above him reflect against his blond hair, making him look like a fallen angel.

She wipes the tears from her face, letting the panels of light from behind him hit her eyes as she asks, “So... how will you kill me? Blade or Silver Magic?”

She tries to look him in the eye. But nothing can stop her from trembling.

The Elder smiles. “I hear you have some magic of your own, child.”

She touches the silver stone hanging around her neck—the one her father had given her. Hearing him say it makes her heart sink. No one should know about her stone.

“I can only use the electricity of the planet. I’m not in tune with it. Does that matter?” she remarks angrily, forgetting all the defences she learnt from her father.

“Yes, I believe it matters very much.”

He gestures to a guard to open the door and steps inside, his silver hair shining blue in the lights reflecting through the bars.

“There’s a space shuttle taking some prisoners and civilians to the island. I can get you on it, take you to Terra, on my head be it. But I’ll need you to use that stone of yours before embarking. Just one charm I’m sure you’ve heard of. Only then will I introduce you to my team. I believe you already know Liaison Stone?”

“I’ve met him,” she says gingerly. “But why are you helping me?”

She sheds no more tears, leaning towards the man instead as her hands grasp the bars. She can hardly breathe.

“My dear, surely you agree the planet needs saving?”

“But you’re one of them. Why would you ship me off to Terra? You’re an Elder.”

“And you’re a Common. Surely, we can be more than our names. Or would you prefer your father die in vain?” he asks empathetically.

She glares at him. But when he offers her his hand, she takes it.

On his head be it.

PART ONE

THE FOREST



Sometimes I don't think there's such a thing as choice.

The café door shuts behind me and the chime sings throughout the small place.

I woke early this morning, watching the stars fade with the night to grab some peace. Space is vast and cold, unlike the claustrophobic heat in Sydney.

And it's not even 7am yet.

"Coffee, Savannah?" the red-headed waitress, Emily, asks. Her hand is poised over her small notepad.

"Double shot."

Amused, she shakes her head as she leans over her notepad.

I used to come to the *Coffee Corner* with Jasmine Spark, but she left Sydney what seems like decades ago in pursuit of a family business deal on a small island.

Today is the day I'm finally following her.

Again, not my choice.

Emily hands me my usual order, with an extra kick of caffeine. The cup burns my fingers as I take it to the bench at the side of the café.

Today is the last day I'll see her, but she doesn't know it yet.

I wait for my coffee to cool, but it still burns my fingers by the time she sits next to me. We spend every morning together. This is our routine.

"When does school go back again? I'm growing tired of the holiday season."

I take a long drag of my coffee. It scalds my throat.

"Not sure," I reply. "I'm not continuing year 12 in Sydney."

"Oh?" Her eyebrows rise.

We never talk about anything personal.

But today is different.

I rap my fingers against the bench under me.

Cars zip by outside, casting shadows over the café. Soon, I'll be among them. I can't say I'm miserable at the thought of seeing Jasmine again, but doing so feels awfully like running away.

"I'm leaving the city," I tell her. "And I probably won't be coming back."

She flicks her pen against her leg as she studies me.

I slouch against the wall, feeling the rough wood against my skin. I wish I got more sleep last night. The starlight woke me again, the constellations swimming beyond my window.

My mother used to point the stars out to me, trying to bond with me before leaving on some grand adventure. The memories are bitter. She told me tales of what it would be like to travel among the stars, always running, always in pursuit of adventure. As if it would help clarify why she left.

It never did.

And this time, I'm the one leaving. It feels wrong.

"When are you going?" Emily asks.

"In three hours."

The words sink like a stone in my stomach.

“That’s... soon.”

I lower my coffee onto the bench. My eyes dart around the café, landing on anything besides Emily’s red hair and wide eyes.

But I feel her gaze on my face like a torch.

“It is.”

We both don’t know what else to say, so I take a large pull from my coffee.

I’ve never had many friends, but she might have been one.

I hold my breath before I turn to face her.

“Can I get some cookies for the drive?”

She nods. I watch her get up and weave around tables. The other staff members watch us. I know them all by name.

But I’ve never been the best at making friends.

My truest and only friend has always been, and probably always will be, Jasmine Spark. Her friendship was easy, because it was already decided for me before we were born. Our fathers worked at the same newspaper company. Then they had a daughter in the same year. The rest is history. We practically grew up together.

But they left the city a year ago, and now my father, the ever-faithful servant, follows in pursuit of them.

I wonder how much of that was his choice, too.

When Emily returns, her fingers clasped around a brown bag, I suddenly want to flee the café—a place that once felt like a sanctuary to me in this chaotic city. I abandon my half-drunk coffee on the bench as I stand.

“Well,” I mumble, “I should probably go home. My dad should be packing the last of our boxes in the car by now.”

I glance through the window at the commuters ghosting past the café with their heads lowered and coffees in their hands.

The sun has risen. The stars have fled the sky.

I smile at the waitress as she hands me the cookies.

“I’ll miss you, Savannah,” she declares.

I plant my palm against the cool glass door. I'll miss her too.
...I think.

My grey eyes blink back at me in the glass door's reflection as I
push it open.

I can only hope Silver Valley has good coffee.



The forest opens for us, and I feel insubstantial.

I haven't breathed properly since I left the city, and each time our car hits a pothole, my breath hitches.

My father drives a small car, sleek and silver, made for navigating the city. Here in the forest, the trees gleam off the bright surface, mud splattering the clean underside of the car.

My 13-year-old brother, Mason, grabs the back of my seat and exhales. I turn to face him, but it isn't me his wide eyes are focused on.

"Can you see it?" he asks me. "In the distance?"

All I see are trees.

Brown trunks, their roots cracking through the gravel and making the car jolt. And lots of leaves. Leaves everywhere—on shrubs, fallen on moss, and arching into the sky.

They say Silver Valley is nothing but forest. They say the beaches

are cold and fog hangs in the air. Your fingers always feel numb, even through your gloves.

And by ‘they’, I mean my best friend Jasmine.

My fingers shake against the phone in my hand. My ear is hot from having it pressed against my face for the last hour.

On the other end, my best friend is explaining what Silver Valley is like, oblivious that I haven’t been listening.

“—Only two more hours. It feels so long. I really want to take you stand-up paddle boarding. Do you think you could stomach it in this cold? Oh, the waves down at the bay are so flat—”

“Dammit!” my father curses as the car strikes another pothole.

I gasp, head slamming into the window.

My brother falls back from my seat.

“For the love of...” I scramble for my fallen phone.

“Careful, Dad, pothole,” Mason warns.

The car swerves around a bend, and my stomach lurches. I’m used to a world of concrete and metal and straight roads. This road is something else entirely.

I sink into my seat and stare at the sky. I rest my phone away from my ear, and on the other end, Jasmine is still chattering. It doesn’t take much from me to keep the conversation going.

My father glances over sympathetically and I smile reassuringly.

But it isn’t the pothole that’s bothering him.

Moving homes hurts him. More than it hurts me. We’re doing this without my mother—my selfish, abandoning mother, who probably never even loved him. I want to slap my father, tell him that leaving is a good thing. But slapping people isn’t exactly how you console them.

Instead, I reach over the gearshift and brush my fingers against his arm.

He purses his lips when he looks at me.

I swallow and pull my arm back.

“—And you and I are so pale. Silver Valley is void of sun, but

surely we can lather up in oils and *force* the sun to tan us... are you still there?"

I squish the phone against my face and turn back to the window.

"Yes. Sorry. I got attacked by a window."

She misses a beat before answering. "You what now?"

From the back of the car, Mason is snickering at me.

I keep my gaze locked out the window, at the cliff edge by the side of the road, flummoxed by the trees. A storm of white birds roams across the sky, chasing the sun in the distance. The clouds move above them, swirling, trying to scare them away.

The sombre weather scares me more than the birds.

Mason grabs the back of my headrest again.

And finally, I see what he is pointing at.

"There, look!"

He presses his small face up against the window, blue eyes gleaming the same colour as the blooming strip of water on the horizon.

"Jasmine, we're getting close to the ocean," I say into my phone.

Mason leans around the edge of my seat. "Jasmine, we're close!"

I yank the phone away from him.

In the distance, the ocean glimmers like a mirage. He keeps trying to point it out to me, as if I hadn't already seen it. As if Jasmine can.

I lock my gaze on it and try my best to pay attention.

"How long?" Jasmine pipes.

I can hear something tapping from the other end, as if her leg is bouncing in anticipation.

"Definitely less than two hours," I answer.

I swear I can hear her smiling on the other end.

I rearrange myself between the bags cluttered by my feet, pulling my legs up on my seat. My father pulls the car down the steep mountain and the ocean grows even grander before us.

My heart expands as it comes closer.

“I want to show you the town when you arrive. It’s so adorably quaint, you’ll love it,” Jasmine says.

I can’t imagine Jasmine living in a quaint town.

Jasmine Spark belonged in the city. The city bustle was frantic, and I found it best to keep my head low, whereas Jasmine pranced around like a wild stallion.

I’ve never seen her afraid of anything.

Except the day she left me. That day, fear flooded her eyes.

I smile into the phone. “I can’t wait.”

“I can’t either.”

At times, I wonder why Jasmine Spark ever left. She abandoned me like it was her mission. Like she knew, one day, I would follow.

For the life of me, I never understood.

Silver Valley is a reasonably self-sufficient town, and Jasmine’s father resigned from his work at the press in the city to start the *Silver Gazette*, a newspaper on the island. It connected the people with the world, as well as basking its citizens in tales about their small island. It seems odd, as there isn’t much money in starting a local rag on a small island, but our fathers were adamant to pursue it.

Ethan Spark founded the business, but he expanded the concept with my father every morning over coffee.

It shouldn’t have been a surprise that my father would follow him to Silver Valley eventually.

And yet, it was.

But not for Jasmine. A part of me believes she had a hand in the planning all along.

“Okay, so, I have a proposition for you,” she declares.

I gnaw on my lip. “Yes?”

“Eli’s a friend of mine. He’s in my classes. I know that you’re home-schooling for your final year but hear me out—wouldn’t it be nice to meet some new people? Eli is throwing a party tonight as a start of term celebration. His father owns all the real estate in the

valley, and he practically lives in a manor house. Please, please tell me you'll come with me."

The line falls flat as she holds her breath.

I haven't been to a party since Jasmine left last summer.

"I don't know, Jasmine..."

"It'll be fun!"

I slouch in my seat. Outside, the road begins to decline, pulling me towards my fate in the valley. No one can say no to Jasmine.

Especially not me.

"I'll think about it."

She exhales. "Better than nothing."

I roll my eyes. My friendship with Jasmine feeds us both—my blood sings for her adventurous spirit and wild ideas, whereas my practicality keeps her grounded. That's the beauty of moving to Silver Valley—being near Jasmine makes me feel alive. The yearning for her daring lifestyle sets my soul on fire.

"Let's explore the valley first. I'll show you all my favourite nooks, and then we can go from there," she continues.

She doesn't phrase it as a question. Jasmine Spark doesn't ask for permission, she just makes the decision herself and sometimes gives you the benefit of leeway.

I try not to laugh at the familiarity.

"I gather you have drinks lined up and an outfit prepared for me already?"

"Yup. All you need to do is get dressed. Easy-peasy."

Heat roars in my veins. Without my friend, I'd felt half asleep.

I smile against the phone. "Miss Jasmine Spark, everyone. Always prepared."

"Does this mean you'll come?"

I shake my head and try not to laugh. My father sees me sitting low in the chair and glances over for too long. Through the window, I hear the calls of seagulls.

"You already know my answer."

“Hallelujah. Oh my, I’m so excited. I have so much planned before the rain season starts again. I hope Mark realises I’m going to have you booked out for the next few weeks.” I hear the smile in her voice. I can almost picture her, sprawled across her bed with her phone pressed up against her round face, blue eyes wide with joy.

“I’m pretty sure he figured that out before you did,” I say.

Her laughter is short and sweet.

I rise in my seat and glance through the window. The trees make way for the water, and beyond lies infinite ocean.

Somewhere out there, we will find Silver Valley.

The car’s engine quiets, and I utter a quick goodbye into my phone.

Jasmine sighs. “Okay, but message me when you’re nearly here. I’m so bored. I’ve been sitting here waiting for you since daybreak.”

“Glad to know I’m just someone to talk to when you’re bored,” I laugh. “See you soon.”

I hang up before she has the chance to complain.

Mason jiggles his leg up and down and pushes on the back of my seat as my father leaves the car, wandering towards the docks ahead of us. Dad lowers his glasses and glances at my brother.

“Stay,” he tells him. “I won’t be long.”

Mason reaches over the console and watches him walk away under the cloak of clouds. The water glistens around the large dock, waiting for a ferry to sail towards us, and my brother stares at it longingly.

“I wonder how the beaches look. Don’t you wonder, Savannah? And the forest, did you know most of it was left alone for preservation? How cool is that! The forest will be so much better than what we saw just then on the road. Our house is right near the forest and the beach—it’s all walking distance. Aren’t you excited?”

I pick at a frayed piece of fabric on my shirt.

“I guess so.”

“What if mum comes to visit us here? Do you think she would like it?”

I watch the water lap at the dock, slapping against the rocks. In

moments like these where my brother's innocent optimism cracks through his features, I forget that he's no longer a child. I gnaw on my lip; the memories of cooking my baby brother dinner and singing him to sleep batter against my skull, just like the waves before me.

My eyes drift up along the water, stroking the area where the sky meets the sea. It's hard to imagine such a place exists.

It's exactly the type of place my mother would have run off to.

Remote. Surrounded by sky. Far from the city.

"I think she would like it very much," I tell him.

But she won't come.

There is no way in hell I would let her.

"Look at this." He shows me his phone, zooming in on a map with his fingers.

Silver Valley is a small town situated in a dip between two small mountains on the island. The island is small, and apart from the town and surrounding farms, it's entirely uninhabited.

Mason points to the beach on his map.

"They have cafes and restaurants all along the bay. It's like a small promenade, but it doesn't look as coastal as most beach towns," Mason tells me. His eyes grow hazy with contemplation. "Imagine having my birthday party down there. You can help me plan it?"

I try to ignore the feeling of my gut dropping at the hopeful look on his face. He abandoned all his friends in the city weeks before his birthday. Who's to say he'll make any friends to celebrate with him in time?

I run my fingers through his dark hair, pushing his head back into his seat. "Of course I will. But these townspeople need to visit a real beach one day. One with lots of sun and ice cream."

Mason snorts.

I vow to be there for him on his birthday.

I will make it special, even if no one else can.

Not my mother. Nor the friends we left behind. *Me*.

That's the way it has always been and always will be. It wouldn't

surprise me if my father ends up spending all his time at work on the island—struggling to pay our bills just like he had in Sydney. Just like he always will.

Mason smiles to himself, oblivious to the turmoil in my mind. He takes after my mother in that sense, eyes always on the future, not the past. Always desperate for the next grand adventure.

Out on the dock, my father wanders back towards the car. Mason darts upright in his seat again and watches him.

Dad's grinning at us, tickets in his hands. Pretending to be happy. But there is no mistaking it. Even *he* is a little excited.

Mason's hope is infectious.

This change is good for my father.

He will see his friend again, oversee his own newspaper business, and create a new life without the pain my mother brought him.

And maybe a small part of him is starting to recover from that.

Mason leans over the console again, grasping for the tickets that my father passes over to me. I bat him away and hold them in a stack against the dashboard.

The top one glows under a small ray of sun parting through the clouds.

February 6th, Silver Valley, one-way, admits one adult.

Suddenly, my chest constricts and flutters.

"You guys ready?" I ask them, bouncing my knees against my seat. They turn to look at me.

"Yes," Mason exclaims, eyes sparkling.

"You have no idea." My father beams, his eyes brighter than I've ever seen them.

This time, I don't stop the smile from surfacing on my face.

Maybe there is such a thing as choice after all.

To keep reading, Silver Valley is available on all major online retailers, as well as digital download on Amazon, and signed copies available on www.arabellarosier.com