

Fire suddenly erupted in front of them, behind them, all around them at once. The float bed, the spilled paint, the piles of garment bags and materials waiting to be cut—everything ignited into giant, licking flames. In a blink it was the biggest fire Noa had ever seen: huge, everywhere, everything.

Olivia screeched; Miles and Callum forgot each other, twisting madly in the enormous rage of flames. Noa clutched Callum's arm as a ball of fire shot right at her head, like it wanted to devour her; its spray of sparks burned her face and lit her ponytail, which Callum quickly suffocated. Then the fire seemed to roar, and the entire room choked so thick with heat and smoke no one could see or touch anything.

Noa heard a terrible thump from Miles' direction. Her heart lurched, she dropped Callum's arm and sprang toward Miles, but the truck bed had become a burning pyre she couldn't scale.

"Miles, I heard him fall!" she called at Callum. He nodded immediately, used his height to leap onto the float's scalding frame. "He's conscious, just passed out!" Callum shouted across.

"Wheezing, though!" "His asthma!" Noa cried, her fear multiplying. From the other end of the float, Olivia screamed in an unholy register, followed by a sickening crunch. Noa whipped around, couldn't even see her friend.

"Olivia! Olivia, if you can hear me, I'm going to get to you!"

"Noa, no!" Callum yelled from behind her in the flames. "Get out! The exit's the other way! I'll carry Miles!"

"I can't leave Olivia!" Noa cried back, trying fruitlessly to fight forward. Balls of fire kept forming from somewhere, zooming at her head and spraying her with burning sparks when she ducked. She made enough headway to shield her eyes momentarily and see Olivia unconscious on the ground, a huge gash across her forehead, seeping blood.

"She's hurt!" Noa yelled. "She's hurt badly!" "Noa, get *out*!" Callum

screamed wildly.

“Go around and heal her!” Noa pleaded, knowing only she and Callum were conscious now. “Use your gift, Callum! Heal her now!” Tears stung her eyes but turned instantly to smoke. She could barely make out Callum coming from behind Olivia on the other side. He seemed to mouth something, but Noa couldn’t hear him; her vision was blacking out as between them, the float combusted into a giant wall of flame.

Noa waited, listened, prayed, but still didn’t hear Olivia’s voice. But she finally heard *his*:

“I don’t have the Light!” He was calling it, over and over.

“Take mine!” Noa cried immediately. She forced herself forward a few more steps, reached as far as she could go. “Reach across and take it!”

“Noa, no!” “Do it!” she commanded. Callum pushed his way toward her, screaming out in pain—from the flames or her command, she wasn’t sure. As he got close enough to reach to touch her, one of the Neverland mountains fell between them, flushing them back in a sea of red.

“Callum, please! Don’t let her die!” Noa shrieked, hot spray in her eyes. She heard him scream as he reached his hand into the fiery debris, stretching his fingers as far as they would go—and finally, finally they touched.

Nothing happened.

“What’s wrong?” Noa cried. They were touching; Olivia was dying; and nothing was happening!

“Noa, the talisman!”

Noa grabbed at her wrist, fumbled with the chain—but it was hot, too hot, she couldn’t get it with one hand. While she tried, the rest of the mountain range collapsed, and Callum wailed as he lurched his burning arm free.

“Callum!” Noa cried, knowing now it was impossible. She couldn’t get the bracelet off, he couldn’t get to her, Olivia was hurt, Miles left behind . . . Noa alone could reach the exit and she couldn’t move, think, breathe. She fell to the floor, coughing, retching—and saw across to Callum’s crouching shape. He was kneeling by the lump that had been Olivia, a bright white light flying between them.

“Light . . .” she murmured, not understanding. Then she saw: It was Miles, unconscious Miles. Callum had brought Miles: his body, too, was heaped there. Callum was drawing Light from *him*. Olivia lay at his other side, gash still gushing, face ice white and pale.

“*Thank you,*” Noa tried to yell.

“Please, Noa, get out!” Callum called. But if she left, how would the three of them get out? Even Callum couldn’t carry both, if he could even reach the door.

“Come with me!” Noa cried, forcing her voice to work though she could no longer see him. She didn’t hear an answer, the fire roared, and she felt her heart implode. “Callum!” Tears blinded her, she tried to get to the exit, bring back help, but now it was too late. The explosion had blocked her in.

“Help!” she screamed blindly. “Someone help us!”