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## Maze runner book free

Storyline: If you're not afraid, you're not human. When Thomas wakes up in the elevator, all he can remember is his name. He's surrounded by strangers, guys whose memories are gone too. Nice to meet you, Shank. Welcome to glade. Outside the towering stone walls surrounding the Glade there is an unlimited and ever-changing labyrinth. It's the only way out, and no one's ever been alive. Everything's going to change. Then comes a girl. The first girl in history. And the message he sends is terrifying. Remember. Survive. Run. CaPítulo 1 Began his new life standing, surrounded by cold darkness and stale and dusty air. Metallic ground against metal; a trembling shudder shook the ground beneath him. He fell into sudden motion and groping back on his hands and feet, drops of sweat on his forehead despite the fresh air. His back struck a wall of carbide; slid along her until she struck the corner of the room. Sinking to the ground, he raised his legs against his body, hoping that his eyes would soon adjust to darkness. With another jolt, the room shook upwards like an old elevator in a mine shaft. Hard sounds of chains and pulleys, such as the operation of an old steel factory, echoed through the room, bouncing off the walls with a hollow, shy whining. The unsuming elevator swayed back and forth as it ascended, turning the child's stomach sour with nausea; a smell like burnt oil invaded his senses, making him feel worse. I wanted to cry, but no tears came; could only sit there, alone, waiting. My name is Thomas, he thought. That... that was the only thing he could remember from his life. I didn't understand how this could be possible. His mind worked flawlessly, trying to calculate his environment and situation. Knowledge flooded your thoughts, facts and images, memories and details of the world and how it works. He imagined snow in the trees, running down a leafy road, eating a hamburger, moon throwing a pale glow into a grassy meadow, swimming in a lake, a busy town square with hundreds of boisterous people on his business. And yet he did not know where he was coming from, nor how he had entered the dark elevator, nor who his parents were. I didn't even know his last name. The images of people shone in his mind, but there was no recognition, their faces were replaced by haunted spots of color. I couldn't think of a person I knew, or remember a single conversation. The room continued its ascent, swaying; Thomas became immune to the incessant noise of the chains that pulled him up. It's been a long time. The minutes stretched in hours, though it was impossible to know for sure every second seemed like an eternity. Lol He was smarter than that. Trusting his instincts, he knew he had been moving for about half an hour. Interestingly, he felt that his fear was taken away like a swarm of caught in the wind, replaced by intense curiosity. I wanted to know where I was and what was going on. With a groan and then a clonk, the lifting room stopped; the sudden change shook Thomas from his crowded position and threw him across the hard floor. As he stood up, he felt the room swaying less and less until he finally complained. Everything fell silent. It's been a minute. Two. He looked in all directions, but only saw the darkness; felt along the walls again, looking for a way out. But there was nothing, just the cool metal. He complained of frustration; his echo was amplified by air, like the haunted groan of death. He vanished, and the silence returned. He screamed, asked for help, knocked on the walls with his fists. Nothing. Thomas recoiled into the corner once more, bent his arms and shuddered, and fear returned. He felt a worrying shudder in his chest, as if his heart wanted to escape, fleeing his body. Someone... Help... me! he cried; every word ripped off his raw throat. A loud noise sounded above him and sucked into a surprised breath as he looked up. A straight line of light appeared through the ceiling of the room, and Thomas watched as it expanded. A heavy grid sound revealed double sliding doors that open forced. After so much time in the dark, the light stabbed his eyes; looked the other way, covering his face with both hands. He heard noises above—voices—and fear squeezed his chest. Look at that stem. How old are you? Looks like a turn on a T-shirt. You're the klunk, face of. Man, it smells like feet down there! I hope you enjoyed the one-way trip, Greenie. There's no return ticket, brother. Thomas was struck by a wave of confusion, full of panic. The voices were strange, I tessé with echo; some of the words were completely foreign, others felt familiar. He gave her eyes to adjust as she squinted to the light and those who spoke. At first I could only see changing shadows, but soon they became the shapes of the bodies, the people crouched over the hole in the ceiling, looking at it, pointing. And then, as if a camera lens had sharpened its focus, the faces cleared. They were boys, all of them, some young, some older. Thomas didn't know what he expected, but seeing those faces baffled him. They were just teenagers. Children. Part of his fear melted, but not enough to soothe his racing heart. Someone lowered a rope from above, the end of it tied to a large loop. Thomas hesitated, then got in with his right foot and grabbed the rope while lying down to the sky. His hands stretched down, a bunch of hands, grabbing him by his clothes, pulling him up. The world seemed to spin, a fog of faces and color and light. A storm of emotion ripped off his bowel, twisted and threw; I wanted to scream, cry, vomit. The chorus of voices had become silent, silent, someone spoke as he was thrown over the sharp edge of the dark box. And Thomas knew he'd never forget the words. Nice to meet you, Shank, the boy said. Welcome to glade. CHAPTER 2 Friendly hands did not stop around him until Thomas stood up straight and brushed the dust off his shirt and pants. Still dazzled by the light, he staggered a little. He was consumed by curiosity, but still felt too sick to look closely at his surroundings. His new teammates said nothing as he turned his head, trying to accept everything. As he turned in a slow circle, the other children mocked and looked; some reached out and pricked it with one finger. There had to be at least fifty of them, with stained and sudorosa clothes as if they had been working hard, all shapes and sizes and breeds, their hair of different lengths. Thomas suddenly felt dizzy, his eyes blinking between the boys and the strange place he had found himself in. They were in a large courtyard several times the size of a football field, surrounded by four huge walls made of grey stone and covered with stains with thick ivy. The walls had to be hundreds of feet high and formed a perfect square around them, each side being divided in the exact middle by an opening as high as the walls themselves that, as Thomas could see, led to passages and long corridors beyond. Look at the Greenbean, said a scraped voice; Thomas couldn't see who he was coming from. it's going to break his neck by going through the new excavations. Several boys laughed. Close the hole, Gally, a deeper voice replied, Thomas focused on the dozens of strangers around him. I knew I had to look out of this, I felt like I'd been drugged. A tall boy with blond hair and a square jaw smelled, his face devoid of expression. A short, plump boy would fret back and forth on his feet, looking at Thomas with wide eyes. A thick, heavily muscular Asian boy folded his arms while studying Thomas, with his shirt sleeves pressed rolled up to show off his biceps. A dark-skinned boy frowned, the same one who had welcomed him. Countless others stared. Where am I? Thomas asked, surprised to hear his voice for the first time in his salvageable memory. It didn't sound very good, higher than he would have imagined. Nowhere good. This came from the dark-skinned boy. Just lose weight well and quietly. What Guardian is he going to get, someone shouted from the back of the crowd. I told you, face of, a raucous voice answered. He's crooked, so he'll be a Slopper, no doubt. The boy laughed as if he had said the funniest thing ever. Thomas once again felt a pressing pain of hear so many words and phrases that didn't make sense. Cane. Shell. Guardian. Slopper. They came out of the children's mouths, so naturally it seemed strange to him not Understand. It was as if his memory loss had stolen a piece of his language, he was disorienting. Different emotions fought for dominance in his mind and heart. Confusion. Curiosity. Panic. Fear. But through all this was the dark feeling of absolute hopelessness, as the world had ended for him, he had been erased from his memory and replaced by something horrible. He wanted to run away and hide from these people. The striped-voiced boy was talking, even do that, bet my liver on it. Thomas still couldn't see his face. I said close the holes! cried the dark boy. Keep inging and the next break will be cut in half! That must be his leader, Thomas realized. Hating how everyone looked at him, he concentrated on studying the place the boy had called the Glade. The floor of the courtyard looked like it was made of huge blocks of stone, many of them cracked and full of long herbs and herbs. A strange ruined wooden building near one of the corners of the square was largely contrasted with the grey stone. A few trees surrounded him, his roots like twisted hands digging on the ground of the rock in search of food. Another corner of the complex had gardens, from where Thomas stood recognized corn, tomato plants, fruit trees. Across the yard from there were wooden pens holding sheep and pigs and cows. A large grove filled the final corner; the nearest seemed crippled and close to death. The top of the sky was cloudless and blue, but Thomas could not see any sign of the sun despite the brightness of the day. The shadows that Thomas did not reveal the time or direction, but could be early in the morning or afternoon. As he breathed deeply, trying to calm his nerves, a mixture of smells bombarded him. Newly converted into land, manure, pine, something rotten and something sweet. Somehow I knew these were the smells of a farm. Thomas looked at his captors, feeling uncomfortable but desperate to ask questions. Captors, he thought. Then why did that word make me go into my head? He scanned their faces, taking in every expression, judging them. A child's eyes, glowed with hate, stopped him. He seemed so angry that Thomas would not have been surprised if the boy approached him with a knife. He had black hair, and when they made eye contact, the boy shook his head and turned, walking towards a greasy iron pole with a wooden bench next to him. A multicolored flag hung limping at the top of the post, windless to reveal its pattern. Shaken, Thomas looked at the boy's back until he turned and sat down. Thomas quickly looked the other way. Suddenly, the leader of the group—perhaps seventeen—took a step forward. He wore normal clothes: black, jeans, tennis shoes, a digital clock. For some reason, the clothes here surprised Thomas; it seemed that everyone should wear something more threatening, like prison attire. Prison. dark-skinned boy had short hair, his clean face shaved. But apart from the permanent scouring, there was nothing scary about him at all. It's a long story, shank, the boy said. Piece by piece, you'll learn—I'll take you to the Tour tomorrow. Until then ... just don't break anything. He reached out to him. The name is Alby. He waited, clearly wanting to shake hands. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12 \_Com \*\*\* Page 2 Thomas refused. An instinct took hold of his actions and without saying anything walked away from Alby and walked to a nearby tree, where he crouched down to sit on his back against the rough bark. Panic swelled inside him once more, almost too much to bear. But he took a deep breath and forced himself to try to accept the situation. Just go with him, he thought. You won't find out anything if you give in to fear. Then tell me, Thomas shouted, struggling to keep his voice handy and trouble-free. Tell me the long story. Alby looked at the closest friends to him, rolling his eyes, and Thomas studied the crowd again. His original estimate had been close: there were probably fifty-sixty of them, from mid-year-olds to young adults like Alby, who seemed to be one of the oldest. At the time, Thomas realized a sickly fuss that he had no idea how old he was. His heart sank into thought, he was so lost that he didn't even know his own age. Seriously, he said, giving up the show of courage. Where am I? Alby approached him and sat cross-legged; the crowd of children followed and packed from behind. The heads appeared here and there, the children bowed in all directions to get a better look. If you're not afraid, Alby said, you're not human. Act differently and I'd kick you off the cliff because it would mean you're a psychopath. The cliff? Thomas asked, blood draining from his face. Shuck it, Alby said, rubbing his eyes, There's no way to start these conversations, Alby said, rubbing his eyes, There's no way to start these conversations, you know what I mean? We don't kill offspring like you here, I promise. Just try to keep them from killing you, survive, whatever. He paused, and Thomas realized that his face must have bleached further when he heard that last part. Man, Alby said, then ran his hands on his short hair as he let out a long sigh. I'm not good at this, you've been the first Greenbean since Nick was killed. Thomas' eyes widened, and another boy approached and played slap Alby in the head. Waiting for the bloody Tour, Alby, he said, in a thick voice with a strange accent. The child is going to have a heart attack, nothing has been heard yet. He leaned over and reached out to Thomas. Name is Newt, Greenie, and we'd all be very happy if you were to forgive our new brain torsion leader here. Thomas reached out and shook his hand boy -- seemed much nicer than that Newt was taller than Alby too, but he seemed to be a younger year. Her hair was blond and cut long, cascading over her T-shirt. Veins stuck in his muscular arms. Pipe, face, Alby growled, pulling Newt down to sit next to him. At least he can understand half my words. There were a few scattered laughs, and then they all gathered behind Alby and Newt, packing even tighter, waiting to hear what they said. Alby extended his arms, his palms up. This place is called the Glade, okay? It's where we live, where we eat, where we sleep, we call ourselves the Gladers. Who sent me here? Thomas demanded, fear finally giving way to anger. But Alby's hand soared before he could finish, grabbing Thomas by the shirt as he leaned forward on his knees. Get up, stem, get up! Alby stood up, pulling Thomas with him. Thomas finally put his feet under him, frightened again. They leaned against the tree, trying to get away from Alby, who stood right in his face. No interruptions, boy! Alby screamed. Whacker, if we told you everything, you'd die on the spot, right after you threw your pants off. Baggers would drag you, and you're not good for us then, are you? I don't even know what you're talking about, Thomas said slowly, surprised at how firm his voice sounded. Newt held out his hand and grabbed Alby by the shoulders. Alby, leave some. You're hurting more than helping, you know? Alby let Thomas' shirt go and stepped back, his chest agitated with breaths. I don't have time to be nice, Greenbean. The old life is over, the new life has begun. Learn the rules fast, listen, don't talk. Do you understand me? Thomas looked at Newt, hoping for help. Everything within him fell apart and hurt; the tears that had not yet come burned his eyes. Newt nodded with the asinitution. Greenie, you understand, don't you? He nodded at her again. Thomas smoked, he wanted to hit someone. But he just said, yes. Well that, Alby said. First day. That's what it's like for you today, shank. The night will come, the runners will be back soon. The Box was late today, it doesn't have time for the Tour. Tomorrow morning, right after the awakening. He turned to Newt. Get him a bed, make him sleep. Well that, Newt said. Alby's eyes returned to Thomas, narrowing. A few weeks, you'll be happy, stem. You'll be happy and help. None of us knew Jack the first day, neither did you. The new life begins tomorrow. Alby turned and headed through the crowd, and then headed to the sloping wooden building in the corner. Most of the children then walked away, each giving Thomas a persistent look before leaving, bent his arms, closed his eyes, took a deep breath. The emptiness ate inside, quickly replaced by a sadness that ached his heart. It was all too Was that him? What was this place? Was it some kind of prison? If so, why had he been sent here and for how long? The language was strange, and none of the boys seemed to care if he lived or died. Tears threatened again to fill his eyes, but he refused to let them come. What did I do. Whispered, doesn't really mean anyone hears it. Why did they send me here? Newt clapped him on the shoulder. Greenie, what you feel, we've all felt it. We've all had the first day, get out of that dark box. Things are wrong, they are, and they'll get a lot worse for you soon, that's the truth. But along the way, you'll be fighting for real and good. I can say you're not a. Is this a prison? Thomas asked; excavated in the darkness from his thoughts, trying to find a crack in his past. Done asked four questions, didn't he? Newt replied. There are no good answers for you, not yet, anyway. You better shut up now, accept the change, tomorrow comes tomorrow. Thomas said nothing, his head sank, his eyes staring at the cracked, rocky terrain. A line of small leafy herbs ran along the edge of one of the stone blocks, small yellow flowers peeking through as if looking for the sun, disappeared for a long time behind the huge walls of the Glade. Chuck will be a good choice for you, Newt said. Wee little fat stem, but good sap when everything is said and done. Stay here, I'll be back. Newt had barely finished his sentence when a sudden, piercing cry broke through the air. Tall and raucous, the barely human cry resented through the stone courtyard: each child in sight turned to look towards the fountain. Thomas felt his blood turn to the icy salabro when he realized that the horrible sound came from the wooden building. Even Newt had jumped as if surprised, his forehead wrinkling in concern. Shuck it, he said. Can't Med-jacks handle that kid for ten minutes without needing my help? He shook his head and slightly kicked Thomas in the foot. Find Chuckie, tell him he's in charge of your sleeping arrangements. And then he turned and headed towards the building, running. Thomas slid down the rough face of the tree until he sat on the ground again, and shrunk against the bark and closed his eyes, wishing he could wake up from this terrible and terrible dream. Chapter 3 Thomas sat there for several moments, too overwhelmed to move. He finally forced himself to look at the emaciated building. A group of boys peeped outside, anxiously looking at the upper windows as if waiting for a horrible beast to jump into an explosion of glass and wood. A metallic click sound of the branches above got his attention, made him look up; flash of silvery red light caught his eye just before disappearing around the trunk on the other side. He stood up and walked walked the tree, lowering its neck for a sign of what it had heard, but only saw bare, gray, brown branches, which forked like skeleton fingers, and looked just as alive. That was one of those beetle blades, someone said. Thomas turned to his right to see a child standing nearby, short and plump, looking at him. He was young, probably the youngest of all in the group he had seen so far, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old. His brown hair hung over his ears and neck, scraping the top of his shoulders. The blue eyes shone through a pitiful, sagging, red face. Thomas nodded with the intion of him. A beetle what? Beetle leaf, said the



boy, pointing to the top of the tree. It won't hurt you unless you're stupid enough to touch one of them. He paused. Shank. He didn't sound comfortable saying the last word, as if he hadn't caught Glade's slang. Another cry, this long, nervous one, ripped out the air and Thomas's heart wobbled. Fear was like the icy dew on his skin. What's going on there? he asked, pointing to the building. I don't know, the fat man replied; his voice still bore the high tone of childhood. Ben's there, sicker than a dog. He got caught. Them? Thomas didn't like the malicious way the boy had said the word. Yes. Who are you? I'd better hope you never find out, the kid replied, looking too comfortable for the situation. He reached out. My name is Chuck. I was the Greenbean until you showed up. Is this my guide to tonight? Thomas thought. He could not shake his extreme discomfort, and now the annoyance slid on too. Nothing made sense; His head hurt. Why does everyone call me Greenbean? he asked, shaking Chuck's hand quickly, and then letting go. Because you're the new rookie. Chuck pointed to Thomas and laughed. Another cry came from the house, a sound like a hungry animal being tortured. How can you be laughing? Thomas asked, horrified by the noise. Looks like someone's dying in there. It's going to be okay. Nobody dies if they come back in time to get the serum. It's all or nothing. Dead or undead. It just hurts a lot. This gave Thomas a break. What hurts a lot? Chuck's eyes wandered like he wasn't sure what to say, um, being stuck with the Grieviers. The afflicted? Thomas was just getting confused more and more. Chopped. Grieviers. Words had a strong weight of fear for them, and all of a sudden I wasn't so sure I wanted to know what Chuck was talking about. Chuck shrugged, then looked the other way, his eyes rolling. P/S: Copyright -&gt;Novel122 \_Com \*\*\* Page 3 Thomas sighed in frustration and leaned against the tree. You seem to barely know more than I do, he said, but I knew it wasn't true. Your loss of it was strange. him he remembered the workings of the world, but emptied of details, faces, names. Like a book completely intact but one word is missing in every dozen, so it's a miserable and confusing reading. I didn't even know his age. Chuck, how ... old man, do you think I am? The boy scanned it up and down. I'd say you're sixteen. And in case you ask yourself, five feet nine ... brown hair. Oh, and ugly as the liver fried on a stick. He snort a laugh. Thomas was so dazed that he had barely heard the last part. Was he sixteen? He felt a lot older than that. Are you serious? He paused for words. How... I didn't even know what to ask. Do not worry. You'll be devastated for a few days, but then you'll get used to this place. Have. We live here, this is it. Better than living in a lot of klunk. He sned his eyes, perhaps anticipating Thomas's question. Tonton is another word for poop. Poop makes a crooked sound when it falls into our pots of urine. Thomas looked at Chuck, unable to believe he was having this conversation. That's good, that's all I could handle. He stood up and walked past Chuck to the old building; hut was a better word for the place. It seemed three or four stories high and about to fall at any time: a crazy variety of logs and boards and thick twine and windows seemingly randomly joined, the huge ivy stone walls that rise behind it. As he crossed the yard, the distinctive smell of wood and some kind of meat cooking caused his stomach to complain. Knowing now that he was just a sick kid screaming made Thomas feel better. Until he thought about what had caused it ... what's your name? Chuck asked from behind, running to catch up. Your name? You haven't told us yet, and I know you remember so much. Thomas. The same thing was hardly heard: his thoughts had turned in a new direction. If Chuck was right, he had just discovered a bond with the rest of the boys. A pattern common to your memory leaks. Everyone remembered their names. Why not his parents' names? Why not a friend's name? Why not his last names? Nice to meet you, Thomas, Chuck said. Don't worry, I'll take care of you. I've been here a whole month, and I know the place inside and out. You can count on Chuck, okay? Thomas had almost reached the front door of the hut and the small group of boys gathered there when he was struck by a sudden and surprise rage fever. He turned to Chuck. You can't even tell me anything. I wouldn't call it to take care of me. He turned to the door, intending to enter to find some answers. Where this sudden courage and determination came from, I had no idea. Chuck shrugged Nothing I say will do you any good, he said. I'm basically still a rookie, too. But He may be your friend—I don't need friends, Thomas interrupted. He had reached the door, an ugly sun-faded wooden snout, and opened it to see several stoic-faced boys standing at the foot of a crooked staircase, twisted and angled steps and railings in all directions. Dark wallpaper covered the walls of the lobby and hallway, half of it taking off. The only decorations in sight were a dusty vase on a three-legged table and a black-and-white image of an ancient woman dressed in an old-fashioned white dress. It reminded Thomas of a haunted house in a movie or something. There were even wooden planks missing from the floor. The place reeked of dust and fungi, a great contrast to the pleasant smells of the outside. Flashing fluorescent lights shone from the ceiling. I hadn't thought about it yet, but I had to wonder where the electricity was coming from in a place like the Glade. He stared at the old lady in the picture. Had I lived here once? Did you take care of these people? Hey, look, it's the Greenbean, one of the older boys yelled. With one star, Thomas realized that he was the kind of black hair that had given him the look of death before. He looked like he was fifteen years old or so tall and skinny. His nose was the size of a small fist and resembled a deformed potato. This stem probably locked his pants when he heard old baby Benny scream like a girl. Do you need a new diaper, faze off? My name is Thomas. He had to get away from this guy. Without saying another word, he made the stairs, just because they were close, just because he had no idea what to do or say. But the bulky stood before him, holding one hand up. Wait there, Greenie. He shook his thumb in the direction of the upper floor. Novices are not allowed to see someone who has been ... Taken. Newt and Alby won't allow it. What's your problem? Thomas asked, trying to keep fear out of his voice, trying not to think what the child had meant by taken. I don't even know where I am. All I want is some help. Listen to me, Greenbean. The guy wrinkled his face, bent his arms. I've seen you before. Something's weird about you showing up here, and I'm going to find out what. A heat surge was pulsed through Thomas' veins. I've never seen you before in my life. I have no idea who you are, and I wouldn't care less, he spat. But actually, how would I know? And how could this boy remember? The bulky mocked, a brief burst of laughter mixed with a snort full of phlegm. Then his face became serious, his eyebrows tilted inwards. I... I saw you, stem. Not too many in these parts can say they have been stung. He's off the stairs. I got it. I know what old benny's going through. I've been there. And you during the Change. He came over and poked Thomas in the chest. And I his first Frypan meal that Benny's going to say he's seen you, too. Thomas refused to break eye contact, but decided not to say anything. Panic ate it one more time. Would things ever stop getting worse? Grievier's got you wet, said the boy through a mockery. A little scared now? You don't want to get stung, do you? There was that word again. Chopped. Thomas tried not to think about it and climbed the stairs, from where the sick child's groans echoed through the building. If Newt went up there, then I want to talk to him. The boy said nothing, looked at Thomas for several seconds. Then he shook his head. You know what? You're right, Tommy, I shouldn't be so mean to rookies. Go upstairs and I'm sure Alby and Newt will let you know. Seriously, go ahead. I am sorry. He slapped Thomas's shoulder slightly, then stepped back, gesturing up the stairs. But Thomas knew the boy was up to something. Losing parts of your memory didn't make you an idiot. What's your name? Thomas asked, stagnant by time as he tried to decide whether to go up after all. Gally. And don't let anyone fool you. I'm the real leader here, not the two idiots upstairs. Me. You can call me Captain Gally if you want. He smiled for the first time; his teeth matched his disgusting nose. Two or three were missing, and not one came close to anything close to white. His breath escaped long enough for Thomas to take a breath, reminding him of a horrible memory that was out of reach. He turned his stomach. All right, he said, so fed up with the guy he wanted to scream, he punched him in the face.

Captain Gally is. He exaggerated a greeting, feeling an adrenaline rush, as he knew he had just crossed a line. A few snickers escaped from the crowd, and Gally looked around, his face bright red. He looked back at Thomas, hatred coming up his forehead and wrinkling his monstrous nose. Just go up the stairs, Gally said. And stay away from me, little slinthead. He pointed again, but didn't take Thomas' eyes off. Very good Thomas looked around once more, embarrassed, confused, angry. He felt the heat of blood on his face. No one made a move to prevent him from doing what Gally asked him to do, except Chuck, who was at the front door, moving his head. You're not supposed to, the younger boy said. You're a rookie, you can't go up there. Go away. Gally said with a mockery. Up. Thomas regretted coming in in the first place, but he wanted to talk to that guy from Newt. He started the stairs. Each step groaned and creaked under his weight; could have stopped for fear of falling through the old wood if he wasn't leaving such an awkward situation underneath. Upstairs he went, winking at every chipped sound. The stairs reached a turned left, then came across a corridor leading to several rooms. Only one door had a light coming through the crack at the bottom. The change! Gally screamed from below. Look forward to it, you face! As if the taunts gave Thomas a sudden burst of courage, he approached the illuminated door, ignoring the crunchy floors and laughter below, ignoring the avalanche of words he did not understand, suppressing the terrible feelings they induced. He crouched down, turned the brass handle, and opened the door. Inside the room, Newt and Alby crouched on someone lying on a bed. Thomas leaned over to see what the fuss was about, but when he had a clear view of the patient's condition, his heart cooled. He had to fight the bile that slit his throat. The look was quick, only a few seconds, but it was enough to haunt him forever. A twisted, pale figure writhing in agony, bare and horrible breast. Right, tight strings of sickly green veins in the child's body nets and limbs, such as ropes under his or her skin. The purple bruises covered the child, red hives, bloody scratches. His bloodshot eyes bulge, throwing from side to side. The image had already burned in Thomas' mind before Alby jumped, blocking his eyesight, but not the moans and screams, pushing Thomas out of the room, and then closing the door behind them. What are you doing up here, Greenie! Alby cried, her lips tense with anger, eyes in the fire. Thomas felt help. I... Uh... wants some answers, murmured, but could not put any force in his words, felt that he surrendered inside. What was wrong with that boy? Thomas crouched against the railing in the hallway and looked at the ground, I'm not sure what to do next. Get your runteecups down those stairs, right now, Alby ordered. Chuck will help you. If I see you again before tomorrow morning, you won't make it to another alive. I'll throw you off the cliff myself, you know what I mean? Thomas was humiliated and scared. I felt like he'd shrunk to the size of a small rat. Without saying a word, he pushed past Alby and headed through the crunchy steps, going as fast as he dared. Ignoring the open glances of everyone at the bottom, especially Gally, he came out the door, pulling Chuck by the arm as he did so. P/S: Copyright -&gt;Novel122 \_Com \*\*\* Page 4 Thomas hated these people. I hated them all. Except Chuck. Get me away from these guys, Thomas said. He realized Chuck could be his only friend in the world. You got it, Chuck replied, with his voice chipping machine, as if he were delighted to be needed. But first we should get you some food from Frypan. I don't know if I can eat again. Not after that I had just seen. Chuck nodded. Yes, you will. I'll see you in the same tree as before. Ten minutes. Thomas was more than happy to walk away from the house, and headed back toward the tree. Tree. I just knew what it was like to be alive here for a short time and he already wanted it to end. He wished everyone could remember something about his previous life. Nothing. His mother, his dad, a friend, his school, a hobby. A girl. He blinked hard several times, trying to get the image of what he had just seen in the hut out of his mind. The Change. Gally had called it the Change. It's not cold, but Thomas shuddered once more. Chapter 4 Thomas leaned on the tree while waiting for Chuck. He scanned the Glade complex, this new nightmare place where he seemed destined to live. The shadows of the walls had lengthened considerably, already crawling on the sides of the ivy-covered stone faces on the other side. At least this helped Thomas know the directions: the wooden building crouched in the northwest corner, enclosed in a dark patch of shade, the tree grove in the southwest. The farm area, where some workers were still picking up their way through the fields, stretched throughout the northeast glade neighborhood. The animals were in the southeast corner, nesting and singing and playing. In the exact middle of the yard, the hole still in the Box was open, as if inviting him to jump again and return home. Near the hole, perhaps just a few feet south, there was a squat building made of rough concrete blocks, a menacer of iron gates, its only entrance, there were no windows. A large round handle resembling a steel steering wheel marked the only way to open the door, just like something inside a submarine. Despite not having had just seen, Thomas did not know which one he felt most curious to know what was inside. The four large openings in the middle of the Glade's main walls when Chuck arrived, a couple of sandwiches cradled in his arms, along with apples and two cups of water metal. The sense of relief that flooded through Thomas surprised him. He was not completely alone in this place. Frypan wasn't too happy that I invaded his kitchen before dinner time. Chuck said, sitting by the tree, making a move for Thomas to do the same. He did, grabbed the sandwich, but hesitated. Soon, however, his hunger won and took a great bite. The wonderful flavors of ham, cheese and mayonnaise filled his mouth. Ah, man, murmured Thomas through a bite. I was starving. I told you. Chuck got into his own sandwich. After another couple of bites, Thomas finally asked the question that had been bothering him. What's wrong with that ben? He doesn't even look human anymore. Chuck looked at the house. I don't know, he murmured absently. I didn't see it. Thomas could tell the I was being less than honest, but decided not to push him. Well, you don't want to see him, believe me. He continued to eat, eating in the apples while studying the huge breaks on the walls. Although it was hard to know where he was sitting, there was something strange about the stone edges of the exits to the outer corridors. He felt an uncomfortable sense of vertigo staring at the imposing walls, as if he were floating over them instead of sitting at his base. What's out there? he asked, finally breaking the silence. Is this part of a huge castle or something? Chuck hesitated. I seemed awkward. Um, I've never been out of the Glade. Thomas stopped. You're hiding something, he finally responded, finishing his last bite and having a long drink of water. The frustration at not getting answers from anyone was starting to grind their nerves. It only got worse to think that even if I got answers, I wouldn't know if I'd be getting the truth. Why are they so secretive? That's the way it is. Things are really weird around here, and most of us don't know everything. Half everything. It bothered Thomas that Chuck didn't care what he just said. That he seemed indifferent to his life being taken away. What was wrong with these people? Thomas stood up and began to walk towards the eastern opening. Well, no one said I couldn't look around. I needed to learn something or I was going to lose my mind. Hold on! Chuck cried, running to catch up. Be careful, those puppies are about to close. It already sounded breathless. Close? Thomas repeated. What are you talking about? The doors, stem. Doors? I don't see any doors. Thomas knew Chuck wasn't just making things up, he knew he was missing something obvious. He fretted and realized that he had slowed down his pace, no longer so eager to reach the walls. What's the name of those big openings? Chuck pointed to the hugely high holes in the walls. They were only thirty feet away now. I would call them large openings, Thomas said, trying to counteract his discomfort with sarcasm and disappointed that it didn't work. Well, it's doors. And they close every night. Thomas stopped, thinking Chuck should have said something wrong. He looked up, looked from side to side, examined the huge stone s handles as the uncomfortable sensation blossomed into fear. What do you mean, they close? Just see for yourself in a minute. The Runners will be back soon; then those big walls are going to move until the gaps are closed. You're in your head, Thomas murmured. He couldn't see how the mammoth walls could be mobile, he felt so sure about it that he relaxed, thinking Chuck was just playing a trick on him. They came to the division that led out to more stone paths. Thomas was warm, his mind emptying with thought as he saw it all firsthand. This is called the East Gate, Chuck said, as if proudly revealing a work of art he had created. Thomas barely heard it, surprised by how much bigger he was up close. At least twenty feet wide, the break in the wall went all the way to the top, far above. The edges that bordered the vast opening were smooth, except for a strange and repetitive pattern on both sides. On the left side of the East Gate, deep holes several centimeters in diameter and spaced one foot away got bored on the rock, starting near the ground and continuing all the way up. On the right side of the door, long standing rods stood out from the edge of the wall, also several inches in diameter, in the same pattern as the holes in front of them on the other side. The purpose was obvious. Are you kidding me? Thomas asked, fear pounding back into his gut. Weren't you playing with me? Do the walls really move? What else would I have meant? Thomas struggled to wrap his mind around the possibility. I don't know. I thought there was a door that closed or a little mini-wall that slid out of the big one. How could these walls move? They're huge, and they seem to have been here for a thousand years. And the idea of those walls closing it and trapping inside this place they called the Glade was frankly terrifying. Chuck raised his arms, clearly frustrated. I don't know, they just move. It makes a big grinding noise. The same is true in the Maze: those walls also change every night. Thomas, his attention suddenly broke down by a new detail, turned to the younger boy. What did you just say? Huh? You just called it a labyrinth, you said. The same thing happens in the maze: Chuck's face red. I'm done with you. I'm done. He went back to the tree they had just left. Thomas ignored him, more interested than ever outside the Glade. A labyrinth? In front of him, through the East Gate, he could make passages that drove left, right and straight. And the walls of the corridors were similar to those surrounding the Glade, the floor made of the same huge stone blocks as in the courtyard. The ivy looked even thicker out there. In the distance, more breaks in the walls led to other roads, and further down, perhaps a hundred meters away, the straight passage reached a dead end. It looks like a labyrinth, Thomas whispered, almost laughing at himself. As if things hadn't gotten stranger. They had cleared his memory and put it into a gigantic labyrinth. It was so crazy that it really seemed funny. His heart skipped a heartbeat when a appeared unexpectedly around a corner ahead, entering the main passage of one of the branches to the running towards him and the Glade. Covered in sweat, red-faced, with his clothes attached to his body, the boy did not slow down, barely looking at Thomas as he passed by. He headed directly to the squat concrete building near the Box. Thomas turned as he passed, his eyes riveted to the exhausted corridor, not knowing why this new development surprised him so much. Why wouldn't people go out looking in the labyrinth? Then he realized that others were entering through Glade's remaining three openings, all of them running and looking as uneven as the guy who had just been dragged by him. There couldn't be much good in the labyrinth if these guys came back looking so tired and worn out. He observed, curiously, as they gathered at the great iron gate of the small building: one of the boys turned the handle of the rusty wheel, growling with effort. Chuck had said something about the runners before. What had they been doing out there? The big door finally opened, and with a deafening squeal of metal against the metal, the boys opened it wide. They disappeared inside, pulling him closed behind them with a strong clunk. Thomas stared, his mind waving to find any possible explanation for what he had just witnessed. Nothing developed, but something about that creepy old building gave him goose bumps, a disturbing shiver. Someone pulled his sleeve, breaking it from his thoughts; Chuck was back. Before Thomas had a chance to think, the questions ran out of his mouth. Who are those guys and what were they doing? What's in that building? He turned around and pointed to the East Gate. And why do you live inside a labyrinth? He felt a noisy pressure of uncertainty, causing his head to splinter with pain. I'm not saying another word, Chuck replied, a new authority filling his voice. I think you should go to bed early, you'll need to sleep. Ah, he stopped, lifted a finger, pricked his right ear, is about to happen. P/S: Copyright -&gt;Novel122 \_Com \*\*\* Page 5 What? Thomas asked, thinking it was a little strange that Chuck suddenly acted like an adult instead of the child desperate for a friend who had been alone moments earlier. A strong boom exploded through the air, making Thomas jump. It was followed by a horrible creaking, grinding sound. He stumbled back, fell to the ground. It felt as if the whole earth was shaking; looked around, panicked. The walls were closing. The walls were closing, trapping him inside the Glade. A feeling of claustrophobia suffocated him, compressed his lungs, as if the water filled his cavities. Calm down, Greenie, Chuck shouted from the noise. It's just the walls! Thomas barely heard it, fascinated, too shaken by the closing of the doors. He stood up and took a few trembling steps back for a better view, finding it hard to believe what his eyes see. The huge stone wall to the right of them seemed to challenge all known laws of physics as it glided along the ground, throwing sparks and dust as it moved, rock against rock. The crunchy sound shook his bones. Thomas realized that only that wall was moving, addressing his neighbor on the left, ready to seal with his protruding rods sliding into the holes drilled through it. He looked round at the other openings. He felt his head spin faster than his body, and his stomach turned dizzy. On all four sides of the Glade, only the right walls moved, to the left, closing the door gap. Impossible, he thought. How can they do that? He fought against the urge to run around, glide past the rock-moving s handles before they close, flee the Glade. Common sense won: the labyrinth had even more unknowns than its situation inside. He tried to imagine in his mind how the structure of everything worked. Huge stone walls, hundreds of feet high, moving like sliding glass doors, an image of his past life that shone through his thoughts. He tried to capture the memory, cling to it, complete the image with faces, names, a place, but vanished into darkness. A pang of sadness punctured through his other swirling emotions. He watched as the right wall reached the end of his journey, his cranks found his mark and entered without fail. An echo boom rumbled through the Glade as the four gates were sealed for the night. Thomas felt one last moment of fear, a quick out of fear through his body, and then disappeared. A surprising sense of calm relieved the nerves; let out a long sigh of relief. Wow, he said, feeling silly in such a monumental euphemism. There's nothing, as Alby would say, Chuck murmured. You got used to it after a while. Thomas looked around once more, feeling the place completely different now that all the walls were solid without exit. He tried to imagine the purpose of such a thing, and did not know what conjecture was worse: that they were being sealed or that they were being protected from something out there. The idea ended his brief moment of calm, waving in his mind a million possibilities of what he could live in the outer labyrinth, all of them terrifying. Fear grabbed him once more. Come on, Chuck said, pulling Thomas' sleeve a second time. Trust me, when the night strikes, you want to be in bed. Thomas knew he had no choice. He did his best to suppress everything he felt and followed. CaPITULO 5 They ended up near the back of the Homestead, which was what Chuck called the sloping wooden structure and windows, in a dark shadow the building and the stone wall behind it. Where are we going? Thomas asked, still feeling the weight of seeing those walls nearby, near, about labyrinth, confusion, fear. He told himself to stop or he'd go crazy. Trying to capture a sense of normalcy, he made a weak attempt at a joke. If you're looking for a good night kiss, forget it. Chuck didn't miss a hit. Shut up and stay close. Thomas let out a big breath and shrugged before following the younger boy down the back of the building. They passed on their toes until they encountered a dusty little winding, a soft beam of light shining on the stone and ivy. Thomas heard someone moving inside. The bathroom, Chuck whispered. So? A thread of restlessn sewn along Thomas' skin. I love doing this to people. It gives me great pleasure before I go to bed. Do what? Something told Thomas Chuck he wasn't doing anything good. Maybe I should—Shut your mouth and look. Chuck quietly approached a large wooden box that sat just below the window. He crouched down so that his head would be placed just below where the person inside could see him. Then he rose with his hand and slightly struck the glass. This is stupid, Thomas whispered. There couldn't be a worse time to play a joke: Newt or Alby could be there. I don't want to get in trouble, I just got here! Chuck suppressed a laugh by putting his hand on his mouth. Ignoring Thomas, he raised his hand and touched the window again. A shadow crossed the light; then the window slid open. Thomas jumped to hide, pressing himself against the back of the building as hard as he could. I couldn't believe he'd been tricked into making a joke out of someone. The viewing angle from the window protected him for the time being, but he knew that he and Chuck would be seen if whoever was there pushed his head out to get a better look. Who's that? cried the bath boy, his voice scraped and bound with anger. Thomas had to hold on to a sigh when he realized it was Gally, he already knew that voice. Without warning, Chuck suddenly slept his head towards the window and screamed at the top of his lungs. A heavy accident from the inside revealed that the trick had worked, and the litany of affidavits that followed made them know that Gally was not too happy with it. Thomas was struck with a strange mixture of horror and shame. I'm going to kill you, you face! Gally screamed, but Chuck was already out of the box and running towards the open Glade. Thomas froze when he heard Gally open the door inside and run out of the bathroom. Thomas eventually came out of his sun and left after his new friend—and unique. He had just turned around the corner when Gally came out screaming at Homestead, looking like a ferocious beast at large. He immediately pointed to Thomas. Come here! Thomas' heart sank into surrender. Everything seemed to indicate that there was a get a fist in the face. It wasn't me, I swear, he said, though while he was there, he sizing the child and realizing he shouldn't be so terrified after all. Gally wasn't that big, Thomas could take him if he had to. Wasn't that you? Gally growled. He huddled Thomas slowly and stopped right in front of him. So how do you know there was something you didn't do? Thomas didn't say anything. I was definitely uncomfortable, but not as scared as a few moments before. I'm not a dong, Greenie, Gally spat. I saw Chuck's fat face in the window. He pointed again, this time right on Thomas' chest. But you'd better decide quickly who you love like your friends and enemies, you hear me? One more trick like that, I don't care if it's your seafood food or not—there'll be blood spilled. Do you understand, rookie? But before Thomas could answer Gally, he had already turned to get away. Thomas just wanted this episode to end. I'm sorry, he murmured, winking at how stupid it sounded. I know you, Gally added without looking back, I saw you at the Change, and I'm going to find out who you are. Thomas saw the bully disappear back into the Homestead. I couldn't remember much, but something told him I'd never liked someone so strong. He was surprised at how much he really hated the guy. I really hated him. Chuck was seen standing there again, looking at the ground, clearly embarrassed. Thanks a lot, buddy. I'm sorry, if I'd known it was Gally, I never would have. I swear. Surprising to himself, Thomas laughed. An hour ago, he thought he'd never hear a sound like that again. Chuck looked closely at Thomas and gradually broke into an awkward smile. What? Thomas shook his head. Don't regret it. The... He deserved it, and I don't even know what a scion is. That was unbelievable. He felt so much better. A couple of hours later, Thomas was lying in a soft sleeping bag next to Chuck on a grassy bed near the gardens. It was a large lawn that I hadn't noticed before, and many of the group chose as its place to sleep. Thomas thought it was strange, but apparently there wasn't enough room inside the Farm. At least it was hot. Which made him wonder about the millionth time they were. His mind had a hard time capturing place names, or remembering countries or rulers, how the world was organized. And none of the Glade boys had a clue, at least, that they weren't sharing if they did. He kept quiet for longer, staring at the stars and listening to the gentle murmurs of various conversations moving through the Glade. The dream felt miles away, and could not shake the despair and hopelessness that passed through his body and mind, the temporary joy of Chuck's trick in it's been a long time since it vanished. It had been an endless and strange day. It was so ... Strange. He remembered many small things about life: eating, clothing, studying, touching, general images of the composition of the world. But any detail that would fill in the image to create a true and complete memory had been somehow erased. It was like looking at an image through a foot of murky water. More than anything else, perhaps, it felt ... Sad. Chuck interrupted his thoughts. Well, Greenie, you survived the first day. No doubt. Not now, Chuck. I meant. I'm not in the mood. Chuck got up to lean on an elbow, looking at Thomas. You'll learn a lot in the next few days, you'll start getting used to things. Well what? Um, yes, well that, I guess. Where did all these weird words and phrases come from, anyway? It looked like they had taken another language and merged it with theirs. Chuck felt again with a heavy blow. I don't know, I've only been here a month, remember? Thomas wondered about Chuck, if he knew more than he let go. He was a peculiar, funny boy, and he seemed innocent, but who was he going to say? It was really as mysterious as everything else in the Glade. A few minutes passed, and Thomas felt that the long day would eventually catch up with him, the main edge of sleep crossing his mind. But, as a fist had put it in his brain and let him go, a thought came to mind. One I didn't expect, and I wasn't sure where it came from. Suddenly, the Glade, the walls, the labyrinth, everything seemed ... Family. Comfortable. A warm calm spread through his chest, and for the first time since he had found himself there, he did not feel that the Glade was the worst place in the universe. He stood still, felt his eyes widen, his breathing stopped for a long time. What just happened? Thought. What's changed? Ironically, the feeling that things would be fine bothered him. P/S: Copyright -&gt;Novel122 \_Com \*\*\* Page 6 I didn't quite understand how, I knew what I had to do. The feeling—the epiphany—was strange, strange, and familiar at the same time. But it felt ... Right. I want to be one of those guys out there. He said out loud, not knowing if Chuck was still awake. Inside the labyrinth. Huh, it was Chuck's answer. Thomas could hear a little more in his voice. Runners, Thomas said, wishing he knew where this came from. Whatever they're doing out there, I want to get in. You don't even know what they're talking about, Chuck complained, and he turned. Go to bed. Thomas felt a new wave of confidence, even though he didn't really know what he was talking about. I want to be a runner. Chuck nodded and got up on his elbow. You can forget that the little right thought. Thomas wondered about Chuck's reaction, but to move on. Don't try—Thomas. Rookie. My friend. Never mind. I'll tell Alby tomorrow. A runner. Thomas thought. I don't even know what that means. Have I gone completely crazy? Chuck went to bed with a laugh. You're a piece of klunk. Go to bed. But Thomas couldn't quit. Something out there, it looks familiar. Go... For... Sleep. Then he struck Thomas: he felt that several pieces of a puzzle had come together. He didn't know what the definitive image would be, but his next words almost felt as if they came from someone else. Chuck. I... I think I've been here before. He heard his friend sit down, he heard the breath intake. But Thomas turned around and refused to say another word, worried that he would ruin this new sense of being encouraged, eradicating the calm calm that filled his heart. The dream came much more easily than I expected. CaPITULO 6 Someone shook Thomas. His eyes opened to see a face too close looking at him, everything around him was still seen in the darkness of the early morning. He opened his mouth to speak, but a cold hand squeezed it, grabbing it closed. Panic burned until he saw who it was. Shh, Greenie. You don't want to be waking up Chuckie now, do you? It was Newt, the guy who seemed to be second in command; the air reeked of his morning breath. Although Thomas was surprised, any alarm melted immediately. I couldn't help but be curious, wondering what this guy wanted with him. Thomas nodded, doing his best to say yes with his eyes, until Newt finally took his hand off, and then leaned on his heels. Come on, Greenie, the tall kid whispered while he was standing. He crouched down and helped Thomas stand up, which was so strong that he felt he could rip Thomas' arm off. Any persistent mist of sleep had already disappeared from Thomas' mind. All right, he said simply, ready to go. I knew I had to keep some suspicion, with no reason to trust anyone yet, but curiosity won. He quickly bent over and slid into his shoes. Where are we going? Just follow me. And stay close. They made their way through the herd of sleeping bodies, Thomas almost stumbled several times. He stepped on someone's hand, earning a loud cry of pain in return, and then punching the calf. I'm sorry, he whispered, ignoring a dirty look at Newt. Once they left the grassy area and stepped on the hard grey stone on the patio floor, Newt broke into a race, heading for the western wall. Thomas hesitated at first, wondering why he had to run, but he got out quickly and continued at the same pace. The light was dim, but any obstruction loomed like darker shadows and he was able to make his way along, him he when Newt did, right next to the huge wall that rises above them like a skyscraper, another random image floating in the murky pool of his memory is erased. Thomas noticed small red lights flashing here and there along the face of the wall, moving, stopping, turning off and lighting. What are those, he whispered as loudly as he dared, wondering if his voice sounded as trembling as he felt. The twinkling red glow of the lights held a warning current. Newt was a couple of feet away in front of the thick ivy curtain on the wall. When you need to know, you'll know, Greenie. Well, it's a little stupid to send me to a place where nothing makes sense and not answer my questions. Thomas stopped, surprised at himself. Shank, he added, throwing as much sarcasm as he could into the syllroom. Newt burst into a laugh, but quickly cut him off. I like you, Greenie. Now shut up and let me show you something. Newt stepped forward and dug his hands into the thick ivy, scattering several vines away from the wall to reveal an icy window, a square about two feet wide. It was dark at the time, as if it had been painted black. What are we looking for? Thomas whispered. Keep your panties, boy. One is going to come along very soon. A minute passed, then two. Several more. Thomas was restless standing, wondering how Newt could be there, perfectly patient and still, looking at nothing but darkness. Then it changed. The flashes of a creepy light shone through the window, threw a faltering spectrum of colors on Newt's body and face, as if he were by an illuminated pool. Thomas grew perfectly still, squinting, trying to figure out what was on the other side. A light lump grew in his throat. What is that? Thought. Outside is the labyrinth. Whispered Newt, his eyes wide open as if he were in a trance. Everything we do, all our lives, Greenie, revolves around the Labyrinth. Every second of every day of love we spend in honor of the Labyrinth, trying to solve something he hasn't shown us has a bloody solution, you know? And we want to show you why you shouldn't mess with him. Show him why the walls close every night. Show him why never, ever find his ass out there. Newt stepped back, still clinging to ivy vines. He gestured for Thomas to take his place and look out the window. Thomas did so, leaning forward until his nose touched the cold surface of the glass. It took him a second for his eyes to focus on the moving object on the other side, look beyond dirt and dust and see what Newt wanted him to see. And when he did, he felt his breath recover in his throat, as if an icy wind had blown and freeze solid air. A large, bulbous creature the size of a cow but no distinct twisted shape and vetoed along the ground in the outer aisle, that's what the opposite wall, then jumped into the thick glass window with a heavy blow. Thomas screamed before he could stop, walked away from the window, but things bounced back, leaving the glass intact. Thomas sucked two huge breaths and bent down once more. It was too dark to deliver clearly, but the strange lights shone from an unknown source, revealing blurs of silver beads and shiny flesh. Evil instrument-tipped appendages eded out of his body like arms: a saw blade, a set of scissors, long rods whose purpose could only be guessed. The creature was a horrible mixture of animals and machines, and seemed to realize that it was being observed, it seemed to know what was inside the walls of the Glade, seemed to want to enter and delight in human flesh. Thomas felt an icy horror flower on his chest, expanded like a tumor, making it difficult to breathe. Even with memory cleaning, he felt confident that he had never seen anything so horrible. He took a step back, the courage he had felt the night before melted. What's that thing? he asked. Something trembled in his bowels, and wondered if he would ever be able to eat again. Grieviers, we call them, Newt replied. Nasty bugger, huh? Be glad the Grieviers only go out at night. Be grateful for these walls. Thomas swallowed, wondering how he could get out. His desire to become a runner had taken a big hit. But I had to. Somehow I knew I had to. It was a strange thing to feel, especially after what I had just seen. Newt looked at the missing window. Now you know what lurks in the labyrinth, my friend. Now you know this isn't the time for jokes. You've been sent to Glade, Greenie, and we hope you survive and help us do what we've been sent here. And what is that? Thomas asked, though he was terrified to hear the answer. Newt turned to look him dead in the eye. The first traces of dawn had slipped over them, and Thomas could see every detail of Newt's face, his tight skin, his wrinkled forehead. Find our way out, Greenie, Newt said. Solve the maze and find your way home. A couple of hours later, the doors reopen, rumbling and complaining and shaking the ground until they finished, Thomas sat at a worn and sloping picnic table outside the Homestead. All I could think about was the Grieviers, what their purpose might be, what they did there during the night. What it would be like to be attacked by something so terrible. He tried to get the image out of his head, move on to something else. The Runners. They had left without saying a word to anyone, screwing the Labyrinth at full speed and disappearing into the corners. He imagined them in his while picking up his eggs and bacon with a fork, not talking to anyone, not even Chuck, who ate quietly by his side. The poor guy had himself trying to start a conversation with Thomas, who had refused to answer. All I wanted was for him to leave him alone. I just didn't get it; his brain was overloading trying to calculate the impossibility of the situation. How could a maze, with walls so huge and tall, be so big that dozens of children hadn't been able to solve it after who knew how long to try? How could such a structure exist? And more importantly, why? What could be the purpose of such a thing? Why was everyone there? How long have you been there? Trying to avoid it, his mind kept wandering back to the image of the vicious Griever. His ghost horror seemed to jump towards him every time he blinked or rubbed his eyes. Thomas knew he was an intelligent boy, somehow he felt it in his bones. But none of this place made sense. Except for one thing. He was supposed to be a runner. Why did you feel so strong? Now, after seeing what lived in the labyrinth? A touch on his shoulder shook him from his thoughts; looked up to see Alby standing behind him, his arms folded. Don't you look fresh? Alby said. Get a nice view through the window this morning? Thomas stood up, waiting for the time for the answers to come, or perhaps waiting for a distraction from his gloomy thoughts. Enough to make me want to learn about this place, he said, hoping to avoid provoking the temperament I'd seen this guy call the day before. Alby nodded with the nod. Me and you, stem. The Tour begins now. He started moving, but then stopped, holding a finger. No questions until the end, you know what I mean? There's no time for the jaw with you all day. P/S: Copyright -&gt;Novel122 \_Com \*\*\* Page 7 But ... Thomas stopped when Alby's eyebrows soared. Why did the guy have to be such an idiot? But tell me everything. I had decided the night before not to tell anyone how strangely familiar the place looked, the strange feeling that he had been there before, that he could remember things about it. Sharing that seemed like a very bad idea. I'll tell you what I want to tell you, Greenie. Let's go. Can I go? Chuck asked from the table. Alby crouched down and adjusted the boy's ear. Oh! Chuck screamed. Don't you have a job, asshole? Alby asked. Lots of sloppin' do? Chuck rolled his eyes, and then he looked at Thomas. Enjoy. I'm going to try. Suddenly he felt sorry for Chuck, he wanted people to treat the child better. But there was nothing I could do about it, it was time to go. He left with Alby, hoping that the Tour had officially begun. CaPitulo 7 They started in the Box, which was closed at this time: double metal doors lying on the ground, covered with faded and cracked. The day had been considerably illuminated, the shadows stretching in the opposite direction of what Thomas Thomas seen yesterday. I hadn't seen the sun yet, but it looked like it was about to burst over the eastern wall at any moment. Alby pointed it at the gates. This is the Box. Once a month, we have a rookie like you, it never fails. Once a week, we get supplies, clothes, some food. It doesn't take much, more or less to run in the Glade. Thomas nodded, his whole body stinging with a desire to ask questions. I need some tape to put over my mouth, he thought. We don't know jack about the box, you know what I mean? Alby continued. Where it came from, how it gets here, who's in charge. The offspring who sent us here haven't told us anything. We have all the electricity we need, we grow and we collect most of our food, we get clothes and stuff like that. He tried to send a slinthead Greenie back to the Box once, the thing wouldn't move until we pulled him out. Thomas wondered what was under the doors when the box was not there, but held his tongue. He felt a mixture of emotions—curiosity, frustration, amazement—with the persistent horror of seeing the Griever that morning. Alby kept talking, not bothering to look Thomas in the eye. Glade is cut into four sections. He raised his fingers as he counted the next four words. Gardens, Blood House, Homestead, Deadheads. Do you understand that? Thomas hesitated, then shook his head, confused. Alby's eyelids fluttered briefly as he continued; looked like he could think of a thousand things he'd rather be doing at the time. He pointed to the northeast corner, where the fields and fruit trees were located. Gardens, where we grow crops. Water is pumped through pipes in the ground, always has been, or we would have starved to death a long time ago. It never rains here. Never. He pointed to the southeast corner, animal pens and barn. House of Blood, where we raise and sacrifice animals. He pointed to the sorry houses. Homestead, the stupid place is twice as big as when the first one of us came here because we keep adding in them when they send us wood and klunk. It's not pretty, but it works. Most of us sleep outside anyway. Thomas felt dizzy. So many questions splintered his mind that he couldn't keep them straight. Alby pointed to the southwest corner, the forest area in front of several trees and sick banks. Call that the Deadheads. The cemetery is back in that corner, in the thickest forest. There's not much else. You can go there and sit and rest, hang out, whatever. He cleared his throat, as if he wanted to change subjects. You'll spend the next two weeks working one day each for our different work keepers, until we know what you're up to. Slopper, Bricknick, Bagger, Trach-hoe, something will stick, always Let's go. Alby walked to the South Gate, located between what he had called the Deadheads and the House of Blood. Thomas Thomas wrinkling the nose upwards in the sudden smell of dirt and manure coming from animal pens. Cemetery? Thought. Why do they need a cemetery in a place full of teenagers? That bothered him even more than not knowing some of the words Alby said—words like Slopper and Bagger—that didn't sound so good. He came as close to interrupting Alby as he had done until now, but he shut his mouth. Frustrated, he turned his attention to the corrals in the Blood House area. Several cows nibbled and chewed a vagus full of greenish hay. The pigs were associated in a muddy well, a tail that occasionally flashed the only sign that they were alive. Another feather had sheep, and there were chicken coops and turkey cages too. The workers complained about the area, as if they'd spent their whole lives on a farm. Why do I remember these animals? Thomas wondered. None of them seemed new or interesting: I knew what they were called, what they normally ate, what they looked like. Why were things like this still lodged in his memory, but not where he'd seen animals before, or with whom? His memory loss was disconcerting in its complexity. Alby pointed to the large barn in the back corner, his red paint faded to an opaque rust color. Back there is where the Slicers work. Unpleasant things, that. Disgusting. If you like blood, you can be a cutter. Thomas shook his head. Slicer didn't sound good at all. As they walked, he turned his attention to the other side of the Glade, the section Alby had called the Deadheads. The trees became thicker and denser the further back in the corner they went, the more vivid and full of leaves. The dark shadows filled the depths of the wooded area, despite the time of day. Thomas looked up, squinting to see that the sun was finally visible, though it looked strange, more orange than it should be. I realized that this was another example of the strange selective memory in his mind. He turned his gaze to the Deadheads, a brilliant record that still floated in his vision. Blinking to clear him, he suddenly caught the red lights again, blinking and sliding deep into the darkness of the forest. What are those things? wondered, irritated that Alby had not answered him before. The secret was very annoying. Alby stopped walking, and Thomas was surprised to see that they had reached the south gate; the two walls that enter entered the exit stood on them. The thick grey stone steeds were cracked and covered in ivy, as old as anything Thomas could imagine. He crouched down his neck to see the top of the walls far above; his mind spun with the strange feeling that he was looking down, not up. He staggered back a astonished once again by the structure of his new home, and eventually returned his attention to Alby, who had his back on the way out. There's the Labyrinth outside. Alby hit a thumb on his shoulder, and then stopped. Thomas looked in that direction, direction, the hollow in the walls that served as an exit from the Glade. The corridors out there were very similar to the ones I had seen from the window by the East Gate earlier that morning. This thought gave him a chill, made him wonder if a Griever could come carrying towards them at any time. He took a step back before he realized what he was doing. Calm down, he reprimanded, embarrassed. Alby continued. Two years, I've been here. No one's been here any longer. The few before me are already dead. Thomas felt his eyes widen, his heart racing. We've been trying to figure this out for two years, there's no luck. Shuckin's walks move at night as much as these doors. Assigning it is not easy, it is not easy in any way. He nodded towards the blocked concrete building where the corridors had disappeared the night before. Another stab wound of pain sliced through Thomas' head, there were too many things to calculate at once. Have you been here two years? The walls moved into the labyrinth? How many had died? He stepped forward, wanting to see the Labyrinth for himself, as if the answers were printed on the walls. Alby reached out and pushed Thomas into the chest, sent him stumbling back. You don't have to go out there, stem. Thomas had to suppress his pride. Why not? You think I sent you to Newt before the meeting just for kicks? Freak, that's rule number one, the only one you'll ever be forgiven for breaking. No one, no one, allowed in the Maze except the Runners. Break that rule, and if you don't get killed by the Grieviers, well kill you yourselves, you know what I mean? Thomas nodded, complaining inside, sure Alby was exaggerating. Waiting for it to be. Either way, if I had had any doubts about what I had told Chuck the night before, he had now completely disappeared. I wanted to be a runner. He'd be a runner. Deep down I knew I had to go out into the labyrinth. Despite all that he had learned and witnessed firsthand, he called him as much as hunger or thirst. A movement on the left wall of the South Gate caught his attention. Surprised, he reacted quickly, looking just in time to see a flash of silver. A patch of ivy shuddered when the thing disappeared into it. Thomas pointed it at the wall. What was that? he asked before it could be closed again. Alby said nothing. He questioned until the end, stem. How many times do I have to tell you to get out of here? He paused, and then he said a sigh. The blades of the beetle, that's how the Creators look at us. It was cut out by a booming loud alarm, sounding from all over the place. Thomas grabbed his hands to his ears, looking for a sound that could be heard above the noise. He stopped. Alby didn't seem to hear the alarm either. He stopped. The alarm didn't seem to hear the alarm either. He stopped. The alarm didn't seem to hear the alarm either. He stopped. The alarm didn't seem



screamed in frustration, but kept quiet. He decided to have Chuck tell you later, whether the guy wanted to or not. Alby and Newt had reached the crowd and pushed the front, standing on the doors leading to the Box. Everyone calmed down, and for the first time, Thomas noticed the teeth and noises of the upstream elevator, reminding him of his own nightmare trip the day before. Sadness gripped him, almost as if he were reliving those few dreadful minutes of waking up in the dark to the by heart. Memory. I felt sorry for who this new child was, going through the same things. A dull boom announced that the strange elevator had arrived. Thomas observed in advance how Newt and Alby took positions on opposite sides of the shaft doors, a crack dividing the metal square right in the middle. The simple hook handles were attached on both sides, and together they separated them. With a metal scratch the doors opened, and a breath of dust from the surrounding stone rose in the air. The complete silence was established upon the Gladers. As Newt bent over to better see the box, the faint bleeding of a goat in the distance echoed through the yard. Thomas leaned forward as far as he could, hoping to take a look at the newcomer. With a sudden tug, Newt pushed himself back into an upright position, his face scrambled in confusion. Holy..., he breathed, looking around at nothing in particular. At the time, Alby had also had a good look, with a similar reaction. No way, he murmured, almost in a trance. A chorus of questions filled the air as everyone began to push forward to take a look at the small opening. What do you see down there? Thomas wondered. What do you see? He felt a quiet scared spary part, similar to what he had experienced that morning as he approached the window to see the Griever. Hold! Alby screamed, silencing everyone. Hold! Well, what's the matter, someone answered. Alby stood up. Two rookies in two days, he said, almost in a whisper. Now this. Two years, nothing different, now this. Then, for some reason, he looked directly at Thomas. What's going on here, Greenie? Thomas looked back, confused, his face turned bright red, his gut squeezing. How am I supposed to know? Why don't you tell us what he is down there, Alby? Gally called. There were more murmurs and another wave forward. You offspring shut up! Alby screamed. Tell them, Newt. Newt looked down at the box once more, and then confronted the crowd, gravely. She's a girl, said each. Everyone started talking at once; Thomas only caught pieces here and there. A girl? I have! I have! What's she like? How old are you? Thomas was drowning in a sea of confusion. A girl? I hadn't even thought why the Glade only had boys, no girls. I hadn't even had a chance to realize it, really. Who's she? wondered. Newt shut them up again. That's not the bloody hair, he said, and then pointed down at the Box. I think she's dead. A couple of guys grabbed some ropes made of ivy vines and put Alby and Newt in the box so they could get the girl's body back. A reserved shock mood had come upon most Gladers, who grinding with solemn faces, kicking loose rocks and not saying much at all. All one dared to admit that they could not wait to see the girl, but Thomas assumed that they were all as curious as he was. Gally was one of the boys clinging to the ropes, ready to raise it, Alby and Newt out of the box. Thomas looked at him closely. His eyes were tied with something dark, almost a sick fascination. A flash that made Thomas suddenly more afraid of him than he had been minutes before. From the depths of the axis came Alby's voice screaming that they were ready, and Gally and a couple of others began pulling the rope. A few growls later and the girl's lifeless body was dragged out, through the edge of the door and to one of the stone blocks that make up the Glade floor. Everyone ran immediately forward, forming a crowd full around them, a palpable emotion floating in the air. But Thomas was left behind. The creepy silence gave him the chills, as if they had opened a newly placed tomb. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_ Com \*\*\* Page 9 Despite his own curiosity, Thomas did not bother to try to force his way through a glance, the bodies were too tight together. But he had seen her before she was blocked. She was thin, but not too small. Maybe five feet and a half feet tall, as far as I could tell. He looked like he could be fifteen or sixteen, and his hair was tar black. But what had really stood out to him was his skin: pale, pearl-white. Newt and Alby came out of the box after her, then forced their way through the girl's lifeless body, the crowd re-forming behind to separate them from Thomas' sight. Just a few seconds later, the group broke up again, and Newt was aiming directly at Thomas. Greenie, come here, he said, didn't bother to be polite about it. Thomas' heart leapt into his throat; his hands began to sweat. What did they want him for? Things get worse and worse. He forced himself to walk forward, trying to look innocent without acting like someone who was guilty who was trying to act innocent. Calm down, he said to himself. You've done nothing wrong. But he had a strange feeling that maybe he had without realizing it. The boys who lined the road to Newt and the girl watched him as he passed by, as if he were responsible for all the labyrinth disorder and the Glade and the Grieviers. Thomas refused to make eye contact with any of them, afraid of looking guilty. He approached Newt and Alby, who knelt next to the girl. Thomas, unintentionally knowing his eyes, concentrated on the girl; despite her paleness, she was very pretty. More than pretty. Beautiful. Silky hair, flawless skin, perfect lips, long legs. It made him sick to think of a dead girl like that, but he couldn't look on the other side. It won't be like that for long, he thought with a strange twist on his stomach. He'll rot soon. he was was to have such morbid thinking. You know this girl, shank? Alby asked, ringing marked. Thomas was surprised by the question. Do you know her? Of course I don't know her. I don't know anybody. Except for you. That's not ..., Alby started, and then he stopped with a frustrated sigh. I mean, does she look familiar at all? Any kind of feeling you've seen before? Lot Nothing. Thomas moved, looked down at his feet, and then back to the girl. Alby's forehead wrinkled. Are you sure? He didn't seem to believe a word Thomas said, he seemed almost angry. What do you think I had to do with this? Thomas thought. He knew Alby's glow evenly and responded in the only way he knew how. Yes. Why? Shuck it. Alby murmured, looking down at the girl. It can't be a coincidence. Two days, two Greenies, one alive, one dead. Then Alby's words began to make sense and panic erupted in Thomas. You don't think ... He couldn't even finish the sentence. Lose weight, Greenie, Newt said. We're not saying you killed the girl. Thomas' mind was spinning. He was sure he had never seen her before, but then the slightest hint of doubt crept into his mind. I swear it doesn't look familiar at all, he said anyway. I've had enough accusations. Are you—Before Newt could finish, the girl shot hesk in a seated position. As they sucked a great breath, her eyes opened and blinked, looking around at the crowd around her. Alby screamed and fell backwards. Newt gasped and jumped, stumbling away from her. Thomas did not move, his gaze closed to the girl, frozen by fear. The fiery blue eyes threw themselves back and forth as he breathed deeply. His pink lips trembled as he muttered something over and over again, indecipherable. Then he spoke a phrase: his voice hollow and haunted, but clear. Everything's going to change. Thomas looked in amazement as her eyes rolled on her head and she fell back to the ground. His right fist fired into the air as he landed, remaining stiff after he stood still, pointing toward the sky. Holding in his hand was a piece of paper. Thomas tried to swallow, but his mouth was too dry. Newt ran forward and crumbed his fingers, grabbing the paper. With his trembling hand he unfolded, then fell to his knees, spreading the note on the ground. Thomas moved behind him to take a look. Scribbled through the paper in thick black letters were five words: She is the last. Never. CAPITULO 9 A strange moment of complete silence hanging over the Glade. It was as if a supernatural wind had swept the place and sucked all the sound. Newt had read the message aloud to those who could not see the but instead of bursting into confusion, all the Gladers were stunned. Thomas would have waited for screams and Arguments. But no one said a word; all eyes were glued to the girl, now lying there as if he were asleep, his chest rising and falling with shallow breaths. Contrary to her original conclusion, she was very much alive. Newt stood up, and Thomas expected an explanation, a voice of reason, a calming presence. But all he did was wrinkle the note in his fist, the veins coming out of his skin as he squeezed it, and Thomas' heart sank. I wasn't sure why, but the situation bothered him very much. Alby cut off his hands around his mouth. Med-jacks! Thomas wondered what that word meant—he knew he'd heard it before—but then he was abruptly set aside. Two older boys made their way through the crowd: one was tall with a hum cut, with the nose the size of a fat lemon. The other was short and actually had gray hair that already conquered black on the sides of his head. Thomas could only hope they did it all. So what do we do with her? asked the highest, in his voice much louder than Thomas expected. How am I supposed to know? Alby said. You two offspring are the Med-jacks, disbelieve him. Med-jacks, Thomas repeated in his head, a light that goes out. They must be the closest thing to doctors. The short one was already on the ground, kneeling next to the girl, feeling for her pulse and leaning over to hear her heartbeat. Who said Clint had first shot her, shouted someone from the crowd. There were several bars of laughter. I'm next! How can they joke? Thomas thought. The girl's half dead. He felt bad inside. Alby's eyes narrowed; his mouth threw himself into a tight smile that did not seem to have anything to do with humor. If anyone touches this girl, Alby said, you're going to spend the night sleeping with the Grieviers in the Labyrinth. Banished, no questions asked. He paused, spinning in a slow circle as if he wanted each person to see his face. No one better than touching her! Nobody! It was the first time Thomas liked to hear something come out of Alby's mouth. The short guy who had been referred to as Med-jack (Clint, if the viewer had been correct) stood up for his exam. She seems fine. Breathe well, normal heartbeat. It's a little slow, though. His guess is as good as mine, but I'd say he's in a coma. Jeff, let's take her to the house. Her partner, Jeff, came over to grab her by the arms as Clint seized her feet. Thomas wanted to be able to do more than look; with every second that passed, he doubted more and more that what he had said before was true. She looked familiar; felt a connection to her, though it was impossible to grasp in her mind. The idea made him nervous, and he looked round, as if someone had heard Thomas. On the count of three, Jeff, the highest Med-jack, was saying, saying, high frame looking ridiculous folded in half, like a prayerless mantis. One... Two... Three! They lifted it with a quick pull, almost threw it into the air—obviously it was much lighter than you thought—and Thomas was almost yelling at them to be more careful. I guess we'll have to see what he's doing, Jeff told no one in particular. We can feed his soup still if he doesn't wake up soon. Just take a closer look at her, Newt said. It must be something special about her or they wouldn't have sent her here. Thomas' gut tightened. I knew he and the girl were connected somehow. They had come a separate day, she looked familiar, he had a consumerist impulse to become a runner despite learning so many terrible things.... What did all this mean? Alby bent over to look her in the face once more before she was taken away. Put her next to Ben's room, and watch her day and night. Nothing better than to happen without me knowing. I don't care if he talks in his sleep or takes a twist, come tell me. Yes, Jeff murmured; then he and Clint went to the Homestead, the girl's body bouncing as they went, and the other Gladers finally began to talk about it, spreading as the theories sprouted through the air. Thomas saw all this in silent contemplation. This strange connection I felt wasn't yours alone. The not-so-veiled accusations that were thrown at him just a few minutes earlier showed that others suspected something, too, but what? He was already completely confused, being blamed for things only he felt well aware. As if reading his thoughts, Alby approached and grabbed him by the shoulder. You've never seen her before? he asked. Thomas hesitated before answering. No... no, not that I remember. He hoped his trembling voice would not betray his doubts. What if I met her in any way? What would that mean? Are you sure? Newt opened up, standing right behind Alby. I... No, I don't think so. Why are you roasting me like that? All Thomas wanted then was for the night to fall, so that he could be alone, go to sleep. Alby shook his head, and then returned to Newt, releasing his grip on Thomas' shoulder. Something's shattered. Call a meeting. He said it quietly that Thomas didn't think anyone else would hear, but it sounded sinister. Then the leader and Newt left, and Thomas was relieved to see Chuck come his way. Chuck, what's a meeting? He seemed proud to know the answer. It's when the Guardians meet, they only call one with something weird or terrible happens. Well, I guess today it fits very well into both categories. Thomas' stomach rumbled, interrupting his thoughts. I didn't finish my breakfast, can we get something somewhere? I'm starving. Chuck looked at him, his eyebrows raised. Seeing that Wig cut made you hungry? You must be more psychopathic than I thought. Thomas sighed. Just get me some food. The kitchen was small but had everything you need to make a hearty meal. A large oven, a microwave, a dishwasher, a couple of tables. He looked old and careless, but sane. Seeing gadgets and family design made Thomas feel as if the memories—real, solid memories—were right on the edge of his mind. But again, the essential parts were missing: names, faces, places, events. She was crazy. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_ Com \*\*\* Page 10 Take a seat, Chuck said. I'll get you something, but I swear it's the last time. Be glad Frypan isn't around here, he hates it when he had his fridge. Thomas was relieved that they were alone. While Chuck was playing with plates and stuff from the fridge, Thomas pulled a wooden chair out of a small plastic table and sat down. This is crazy? How can this really be? Someone sent us here. Someone evil, Chuck stopped. Stop complaining. Just turn it on and don't think about it. Oh, yes, right. Thomas looked out a window. This seemed like a good time to mention one of the million-dollar questions bouncing through his brain. So where does the electricity come from? Who cares? I'll take it. What a surprise, Thomas thought. There's no answer, Chuck brought two plates of sandwiches and carrots to the table. The bread was thick and white, the carrots a bright, bright orange. Thomas' stomach begged him to hurry; picked up his sandwich and started devouring it. Oh, man, he murmured with his mouth full. At least the food is good. Thomas was able to eat the rest of his food without saying another word from Chuck. And he was lucky that the boy didn't feel like talking, because despite the complete rarity of everything that had happened within the known reach of Thomas' Memory, he felt calm again. His full stomach, his energy replenished, his mind grateful for a few moments of silence, decided that from then on he would stop complaining and take care of things. After his last bite, Thomas sat in his chair. Then Chuck, he said as he wiped his mouth with a napkin. What do I have to do to become a runner? That's not it again. Chuck looked up from his plate, where he had been picking up the crumbs. He let out a low burp that made Thomas shrink. Alby said I'd start my tests soon with the different Guardians. So when do I get a chance with the Runners? Thomas waited patiently to get some real information from Chuck. Chuck rolled his eyes dramatically, leaving no doubt how stupid an idea he thought it would be. They should be back in a few hours. Why don't you ask them? Thomas ignored sarcasm, digging more. What do you do when you come back every night? What about the concrete building? Concrete? They meet just as they come back, before they forget anything. Maps? Thomas was confused. But if you're trying to map, don't you have paper to write while you're out there? Maps. This intrigued him more than anything he had heard in a long time. It was the first thing that suggested a possible solution to his situation. Of course they do, but there are still things they need to talk about, discuss and analyze and everything that can be done. Besides, the kid rolled his eyes, they spend most of their time running, not writing. That's why they're called Runners. Thomas thought of the Runners and the maps. Could the Labyrinth really be so huge that even after two years they hadn't yet found a way out? It seemed impossible. But then, he remembered what Alby said about the moving walls. What if they were all condemned to live here until they died? Condemned. The word made him feel an avalanche of panic, and the spark of hope of food had brought him clad in a silent hiss. Chuck, what if we're all criminals? I mean, what if we're murderers or something? Huh? Chuck looked at him like he was crazy. Where did that happy thought come from? Think about it. Our memories are erased. We live inside a place that seems to have no way out, surrounded by bloodthirsty monster hunters. Doesn't that sound like prison to you? As he said out loud, it sounded increasingly possible. Nausea penetrated his chest. I'm probably twelve years old, man. Chuck pointed to his chest. At most, thirteen. You really think I did something that would send me to prison for the rest of my life? I don't care what you did or didn't do. Either way, you've been sent to a prison. Does this look like a vacation to you? Oh, man, Thomas thought. Please, let me be wrong. Chuck thought for a moment. I don't know. It's better than—Yes, I know, living in a bunch of Klunk. Thomas stood up and pushed his chair back under the table. He liked Chuck, but trying to have a smart conversation with him was impossible. Not to mention frustrating and irritating. Go make yourself another sandwich, I'll explore. I'll see you tonight. He came out of the kitchen and got into the yard before Chuck could offer to join him. The Glade had returned to business as usual: people working at work, box doors closed, the sun shining. Any sign of a crazy girl with notes of doom was gone. Having interrupted his trip, he decided to take a walk on the Glade on his own and get a better look and feel for the place. He headed to the northeast corner, towards the large rows of tall green corn stems that seemed ready to harvest. There were also other things: tomatoes, lettuce, peas, much more than Thomas did not recognize. He took a breathe, love the fresh whining of dirt and plant growth. I was almost certain that the smell would bring back some kind of pleasant memory, but nothing came. As he approached, he saw that several boys were uncaring and picking up in the small fields. One greeted him with a smile. A real smile. Maybe this place isn't so bad after all, Thomas thought. Not everyone here could be idiots. He took a deep breath of the pleasant air and pulled out of his thoughts, there was much more he wanted to see. The next was the southeast corner, where they were reluctantly built on several cows, goats, sheep and pigs. No horses, though. That sucks. Thomas thought. Pilots would definitely be faster than runners. As he approached, he thought he should have dealt with animals in his life before glade. His smell, his sound, seemed very familiar to him. The smell was not as pleasant as the crops, but still, he imagined it could have been much worse. As he explored the area, he became increasingly realized how well the Gladers kept the place, how clean it was. He was impressed by how organized they should be, how hard they should work. I could only imagine how horrible a place like this could be if everyone was lazy and stupid. Finally, he reached the southwest neighborhood, near the forest. He approached the few skeletal trees in front of the denser forests when he was surprised by a motion blur at his feet, followed by a hasty set of applauded sounds. He looked down just in time to see the sun flashing something metallic, a toy rat, running past him and into the little forest. The thing was already ten feet away when he realized it wasn't a rat at all, it was more like a lizard, with at least six legs sneaking the long silver torso. A sheet of beetle. That's how they look at us, Alby said. He caught a flash of red light sweeping the ground in front of the creature as if it came from his eyes. Logic told him it had to be his mind playing tricks on him, but he swore he saw the word WICKED scribbled on his rounded back in large green letters. Something so strange had to be investigated. Thomas ran after the spy running, and within seconds he entered the thick corns of trees and the world darkened. CaPítulo 10 I couldn't believe how fast the light disappeared. Since the Glade, the forest didn't look that big, maybe a couple of acres. However, the trees were tall with sturdy trunks, packed tightly together, the canopy above thick with leaves. The air around him had a greenish tone, off, as if there were only several minutes left of twilight in the day. It was somehow beautiful and creepy, all at once. Moving as fast as Thomas crashed through the heavy foliage, thin branches slapping in his face. He crouched down to avoid a low limb, almost falling. Extending your hand, hand, clinging to a branch and turned forward to regain balance. A thick bed of leaves and fallen branches creaking beneath it. Meanwhile, his eyes remained riveted on the blade of the beetle that was associated through the forest floor. Deeper was, its red light shining brighter as the environment darkened. Thomas had loaded thirty or forty feet into the forest, dodging and crouching down and losing ground with every second, when the beetle leapt over a particularly large tree and slipped its trunk. But by the time Thomas reached the tree, any sign of the creature was gone. It had disappeared deep into the foliage, almost as if it had never existed. I'd lost the. Shuck it, whispered Thomas, almost as a joke. Almost. Oddly enough, the word felt natural on his lips, as if he were already transforming into a Glader. A twig broke somewhere to his right and shook his head in that direction. He complained breathing, he listened. Another snap, this time stronger, almost as if someone had broken a stick on their knee. Who's there? Thomas screamed, a little afraid shooting across his shoulders. His voice bounced in the canopy of the leaves above him, echoing through the air. He remained frozen, rooted to the place while everyone shut up, except for the hissing of a few birds in the distance. But no one answered his call. He didn't hear any more sounds from that direction either. Without really thinking, Thomas turned to the noise he had heard. Not bothering to hide their progress, he pushed the branches away as he walked, letting them whip their position again as it passed. He sned his eyes, gave him the will to work in the growing darkness, wishing to have a flashlight. He thought of the lanterns and his memory. Again, he recalled something tangible from his past, but could not assign it to any specific time or place, he could not associate it with any other person or event. Frustrating. Anyone there?, asked again, feeling a little calmer as the noise had not been repeated. It was probably just an animal, maybe another beetle leap. Just in case, he yelled, it's me, Thomas. The new guy. Well, the second newest guy. He winked and shook his head, hoping that now that there was no one there. He sounded like a complete idiot. Again, there's no answer. He stepped around a large oak tree and stopped short. An icy shiver ran down his back. He had arrived at the cemetery. The clearing was small, perhaps thirty square feet, and covered with a thick layer of leafy undergrowth growing near the ground. Thomas could see several awkwardly prepared wooden crosses peeking through this growth, his horizontal pieces against the vertical ones with a scyded twine. The markers of the tomb had been painted white, but by someone in an obvious hurry: the gelling balloons covered them and the bare wooden stripes were shown through. The names had been carved into the wood. Thomas Thomas up, hesitantly, to the nearest and knelt down to take a look. The light was so dull now that it almost felt as if he were looking through the black mist. Even the birds had calmed down, as if they had gone to bed at night, and the sound of insects was barely noticeable, or at least much less than normal. For the first time, Thomas realized how wet he was in the woods, the wet air already coated sweat on his forehead, the back of his hands. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_ Com \*\*\* Page 11 Leaned closer to the first cross. It looked fresh and bore the name Stephen, the extra small n right on the edge because the carver hadn't fully estimated how much space he would need. Stephen, Thomas thought, feeling an unexpected but separate pain. What's your story? Chuck bothers you to death? He stood up and approached another cross, this almost completely covered with weeds, the ground company at his base. Whoever he was, he must have been one of the first to die, because his grave looked the oldest. My name is George. Thomas looked around and saw that there were a dozen other graves more or less. A couple of them seemed to be as fresh as the first one I had examined. A silver flash caught his eye. It was different from the beetle that had taken him into the woods, but just as strange. It moved through the markers until it reached a tomb covered with a plastic sheet or dirty glass, its edges thinned with dirt. He snouted his eyes, trying to figure out what was on the other side, then gasped when he went into focus. It was a window to another tomb, one that had the dusty remains of a rotten body. Completely sloped, Thomas leaned closer to look better anyway, curious. The tomb was smaller than usual, only the upper half of the deceased person lay inside. He remembered Chuck's story about the boy who had tried to rapel through the dark hole in the Box after he descended, only to be cut in two for something cutting through the air. The words were engraved on the glass; Thomas could barely read them: This in half-stem be a warning to all: You cannot escape through the hole in the box. Thomas felt the strange urge to laugh, seemed too ridiculous to be true. But he was also displeased with himself for being so shallow and gloomy. Shaking his head, he had set aside to read more names of the dead when another twig broke, this time right in front of him, just behind the trees on the other side of the cemetery. Then another crack. Then another one. Closer and closer. And the darkness was thick. Who's out there, he called, in a trembling, hollow voice, sounded as if he were talking of an isolated tunnel. Seriously, this is stupid. He hated admitting to himself how terrified he was. Instead of responding, the person remained all pretence of stealth and began to run, crashing across the forest line around cleaning up cemetery, circling to the place where Thomas was. He froze, panicked, seized it. Now, just a few feet away, the visitor grew stronger and stronger until Thomas caught a shady view of a skinny boy limping throughout a strange race. Who he—The child broke into the trees before Thomas could finish. He only saw a flash of pale skin and huge eyes—the enchanted image of an apparition—and screamed, tried to run, but it was too late. The figure leapt into the air and was on top of him, banging on his shoulders, grabbing him with strong hands. Thomas crashed to the ground; felt a grave marker dig on his back before it broke in two, burning a deep scratch along his flesh. He pushed and hit his attacker, a relentless mix of skin and bones that were peeing on him as he tried to win the purchase. It looked like a monster, a horror of a nightmare, but Thomas knew it had to be a Glader, someone who had completely lost his mind. He heard the teeth breaking and closing, a dreadful clack, clack, clack. Then he felt the pain dagger as the child's mouth found a home, bitten deep in Thomas' shoulder. Thomas screamed, pain like an adrenaline rush through his blood. He planted the palms of his hands against his attacker's chest and pushed, straightening his arms until his muscles tightened against the figure fighting over him. Finally the child fell backwards; an acute crack filled the air as another grave marker met his death. Thomas withheld in his hands and feet, sucking on the breaths of air, and got his first good look at the crazy attacker. He was the sick kid. It was Ben. CaPítulo 11 It looked as if Ben had recovered only a little since Thomas had seen him at the Homestead. He wore nothing but shorts, his whiter-than-white skin stretching through his bones like a sheet wrapped tightly around a bunch of sticks. The string veins ran along his body, pressing and green, but less pronounced than the day before. His bloodshot eyes fell on Thomas as if he were watching his next meal. Ben crouched down, ready to jump for another attack. At some point a knife had made an appearance, clutching in his right hand. Thomas was full of a strange fear, disbelief that this was happening at all. Ben! Thomas looked into the voice, surprised to see Alby standing on the edge of the cemetery, a mere ghost in the fading light. The relief flooded Thomas' body—Alby held a large bow, an arrow tied to kill, pointed directly at Ben. Ben, Alby repeated. Stop right now, or you're not going to see tomorrow. Thomas looked at who looked shrewdly at Alby, with his tongue daring between his lips to wet them. What could be wrong with that boy? Thomas thought. The boy had become a monster. Why? If you kill me, Ben shouted, spit flying out of his mouth, far enough away to hit in the face, you'll get the wrong guy. He broke his eyes again on Thomas. It's the stem you want to kill. His voice was full of madness. Don't be stupid, Ben, Alby said, with a quiet voice as he kept pointing the arrow. Thomas just arrived, there's nothing to worry about. You're still bothering about change. You should never have come out of your bed. He's not one of us! Ben screamed. I saw it, it's... it's bad. We have to kill him! Let me gut him! Thomas took an involuntary step backwards, horrified by what Ben had said. What did you mean I'd seen him? Why did you think Thomas was bad? Alby hadn't moved his gun an inch, still pointing at Ben. You let me and the Guardians find out, face of. His hands were perfectly fine as he held the bow, almost as if he had rested it against a branch to support him. Right now, back up your scrawny ass and get to the farm. He'll want to take us home, Ben said. He'll want to get us out of the labyrinth. We'd better jump off the cliff! It better rip our guts out of each other! What are you talking about, Thomas started. Shut the up! Ben screamed. Close your ugly, treacherous face! Ben, Alby said calmly. I'm going to count to three. It's bad, bad, bad... Ben was whispering now, almost singing. He swayed from side to side, changing the knife from hand to hand, his eyes glued to Thomas. One. Bad, bad, bad, bad... Ben smiled; his teeth seemed to shine, greenish in pale light. Thomas wanted to look the other way, get out of there. But he could not move; I was too hypnotized, too scared. Two. Alby's voice was louder, full of warning. Ben, Thomas said, trying to make sense of everything. I'm not... I don't even know what Ben, Ben shouted, a gurgling strangled with madness, and jumped into the air, cutting with his sword. Three! Alby screamed. There was the sound of the click clack. The creoh of an object cutting through the air. The sick, wet blow of her finding a home. Ben's head broke violently to the left, twisting his body until he landed in his stomach, his feet pointing at Thomas. He didn't make it. Thomas leapt at his feet and stumbled forward. The long axis of the arrow jammed from Ben's cheek, blood surprisingly less than Thomas expected, but it filtered out anyway. Black in the dark, like oil. The only move was Ben's right little finger, shaking. Thomas fought the urge to throw up. Ben was dead for him? Was it your fault? Come on, Alby said. Baggers will take care of him tomorrow. What just happened here? Thomas thought, the world leaning around him as he looked at the lifeless body. What have I done to this boy? He looked up, wanting answers, but Alby was already gone, a branch the only sign that had been there in the first place. Thomas squeezed his eyes against the blinding light of the sun as he left the forest. He was limping, his ankle screaming in pain, though he had no memory of hurting him. He held a hand carefully over the area where he had been bitten; the other grabbed his stomach as if that would prevent what Thomas now felt was inevitable barter. The image of Ben's dead appeared in his mind, cocked at an unnatural angle, blood running down the axis of the world as he picked up, dropped, splashed on the ground... The image of her was the drop that filled the glass. The fate of his knees next to one of the twisted trees on the outskirts of the forest and vomited, assuming as he coughed and spat down every last bit of the acidic and unpleasant bile in his stomach. His whole body was shaking, and it looked like he would never end. And then, as if his brain made fun of him, as if his mind had made fun of him, as if his body had made fun of him, as if his soul had made fun of him, as if his... it could only get better. That night, Thomas lay looking at the shimmering sky, wondering if he would go back every time he closed his eyes. Ben's monstrous image leaping over him, the boy's face, put in madness, filled his mind. Eyes open or not, I could swear I kept hearing the wet blow of the arrow hitting Ben's cheek. Thomas knew he'd never forget those terrible minutes in the cemetery. Say something, Chuck said for the fifth time since they put up their sleeping bags. No, Thomas replied, just as he had done before. Everybody knows what happened. It happened once or twice, a stem bitten by Griever, turned and attacked someone. Don't think you're special. For the first time, Thomas thought Chuck's personality had gone from being slightly irritating to intolerable. Chuck, be glad you don't have Alby's bow right now. I'm just playing, shut up. Chuck. Go to bed. Thomas couldn't handle it at the time. Eventually, his buddy fell asleep, and based on the roar of snoring through the Glade, just like everyone else. Hours later, deep in the night, Thomas remained the only awake. He wanted to cry, but he didn't. I wanted to find Alby and hit him, for no reason, but he didn't. I wanted to scream and kick and spit and open the box and jump into the dark below. But he didn't. He closed his eyes and forced thoughts and dark images and at some point fell asleep. Chuck had to get Thomas out of his sleeping bag in the morning, drag him into the showers and drag him to the dressing rooms. All the time, Thomas felt mad and indifferent, his head sore, with his body wanting to sleep Breakfast was blurry, blurry, an hour after it was over, Thomas could not remember what he had eaten. He was so tired that his brain felt like someone had come in and stapled it in his skull in a dozen places. Heartburn devastated his chest. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_ Com \*\*\* Page 12 But as far as I could say, naps frowned on Glade's gigantic working farm. He stood with Newt in front of the Blood House barn, preparing for his first training session with a Custodian. Despite the hard morning, he was actually excited to learn more, and for the chance to have his mind on Ben and the cemetery. Cows encouraged, sheep bled, pigs squealed around them. Somewhere nearby, a dog barked, causing Thomas to wait for Frypan not to bring new meaning to the word hot dog. Hot dog, he thought. When was the last time I had a hot dog? Who did I eat it with? Tommy, are you listening to me? Thomas came out of his stun and focused on Newt, who had been talking about who knew how long; Thomas hadn't heard a word. Yes, I'm sorry. I couldn't sleep last night. Newt tried a pathetic smile. I can't blame you there. You went through the doorbowl, you did. He probably thinks I'm a sloppy shank to get you ready to work your ass today after an episode like that. Thomas shrugged. Work is probably the best I could do. Anything to get my mind out of it. Newt nodded, and his smile became more genuine. You're as smart as you look, Tommy. That's one of the reasons we run this place all nice and busy as. You get lazy, you get sad. Start giving up. Plain and simple. Thomas nodded with asgnia, absently kicking a loose rock through the glade's dusty, cracked stone floor. What's the last one of that girl yesterday? If anything had penetrated the mist of her long morning, it had been thoughts of her. I wanted to know more about her, understand the strange connection I felt with her. Still in a coma, sleeping. Med-jacks are spoon-feeding him any soup Frypan can cook, checking his vitals and things like that. She seems fine, only dead to the world for now. That was just weird. If it hadn't been for the whole Ben-in-the-graveyard incident, Thomas was sure she would have been all she thought last night. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to sleep for a completely different reason. I wanted to know who she was and if I really knew her in any way. Yes, Newt said. Weird is a word as good as any other, I'm spect. Thomas looked over Newt's shoulder in the faded red barn, pushing his thoughts The girl aside. So, what's the first thing? Milk cows or sacrifice some poor pigs? Newt laughed, a sound that Thomas realized he hadn't heard much since he had arrived. We always get the rookies started with the Slices. Don't worry, cutting Frypan's vitallias is nothing more than a The cutters do anything and everything that goes with the beasts. Too bad I can't remember my whole life. Maybe I love killing animals. I was joking, but Newt didn't seem to make it. Newt nodded toward the barn. Oh, you'll know well by the time the sun goes down tonight. We're going to meet Winston, he's the Keeper. Winston was a boy covered in acne, short but muscular, and he seemed too much to Thomas the Custodian. Maybe they sent him here because he was a serial killer, he thought. Winston showed Thomas during the first hour, pointing out which feathers had which animals, where the chicken crows and turkeys were, what went to where the barn was. The dog, an annoying black lab called Bark, quickly carried Thomas, dangling at his feet throughout the tour. Wondering where the dog came from, Thomas asked Winston, who said Bark had always been there. Luckily, he seemed to have received his name as a joke, because he was pretty quiet. The second hour was spent working with farm animals: feeding, cleaning, fixing a fence, scaring Klunk. Klunk. Thomas found himself using the terms Glader more and more. The third hour was the hardest for Thomas. He had to watch Winston sacrifice a pig and began preparing his many parts for lunch in the future. Thomas swore two things to himself as he walked away for lunch. First of all, his career would not be with animals; second, I would never eat anything that came out of a pig again. Winston had said that he would continue alone, that he would stay in the House of Blood, which was fine with Thomas. As I walked to the East Gate, I couldn't help but imagine Winston in a dark corner of the barn, gninking at ran pork feet. The guy gave him the panties. Thomas was passing the box when he was surprised to see someone enter the Glade from the Maze, through the West Gate, to his left, an Asian boy with strong arms and short black hair, who looked a little older than Thomas. The runner stopped three steps, then bent over and put his hands on his knees, panting to breathe. It looked like he had just run twenty miles, his face red, his skin covered in sweat, his clothes soaked. Thomas stared, was curious, had not yet seen a finalist up close or talk to one. In addition, based on the last few days, the Runner was home early. Thomas stepped forward, eager to meet with him and ask questions. But before he could form a phrase, the boy collapsed to the ground. Chapter 12 Thomas did not move for a few seconds. The boy lay in a wrinkled heap, barely moving, but Thomas was frozen by indecision, fearful of getting involved. What if something was wrong with this guy? What if been ... chopped? What if, Thomas got out of it, the broker obviously needed help. Alby! he cried. Newt! Somebody get them! Thomas ran to the older boy and knelt beside him. Side. I agree? The runner's head rested on his outstretched arms as he gasped, his chest agitated. I was conscious, but Thomas had never seen anyone so exhausted. I'm... well, he said between his breaths, and then looked up. Who are you, the knco? I'm new! Here it came to Thomas then that the Runners were in the Maze during the day and had not witnessed any of the recent first-hand events. Did this guy know about the girl? Probably someone had told him. I'm Thomas, I've only been here a couple of days. The runner pushed himself up in a seated position, his black hair matted to his skull with sweat. Oh, yes, Thomas, he complained. Rookie. You and the girl. Alby ran then, clearly annoyed. What are you doing back, Minho? What happened? Calm your wad, Alby, replied the runner, who seems to gain strength in the second. Make yourself useful and get me some water. I left my backpack somewhere. But Alby didn't move. He kicked Minho in the leg, too hard to play. What happened? I can barely speak, you face Minho screamed, his voice raw. Get me some water! Alby looked at Thomas, who was surprised to see the slightest hint of a flashing smile on his face before disappearing into a scowl. Minho's the only one off who can talk to me like that without having his ass thrown off the cliff. Then, further surprising Thomas, Alby turned and fled, presumably to get some water to Minho. Thomas turned to Minho. He lets you send him? Minho shrugged, then wiped fresh beads of sweat from his forehead. Are you afraid of that pip-chick? Dude, you got a lot to learn. Crazy rookies. The rebuke hurt Thomas much more than he should, considering he had met this three-minute guy. Isn't he the leader? Leader? Minho barked a growl that was probably supposed to be a laugh. Yes, call him a leader all you want. Maybe we should call him the President. No, no, Admiral Alby. Here you go. He rubbed his eyes, mocking himself as he did so. Thomas didn't know what to do with the conversation, it was hard to know when Minho was joking. So who's the leader if he's not? Greenie, shut up before you get more confused. Minho sighed as if he were bored, then murmured, almost to himself. Why do they always come here asking stupid questions? It's really annoying. What do you expect us to do? Thomas felt a blush of anger. Like you were different when you first came, he meant. Do as you're told, keep your mouth shut. That's what I expect. Minho had first looked him in the face with that last sentence, and Thomas backed a few inches before he could stop. He realized immediately that he had just made a mistake, could not let this guy talk to him like that. He pushed himself back on his knees, so he was looking down at the older boy. Yes, I'm sure that's exactly what you did as a rookie. Minho looked at Thomas carefully. Then, again looking directly into his eyes, he said, I was one of the first Gladers, slinthead. Close the hole until you know what you're talking about. Thomas, now a little scared of the guy, but mostly fed up with his attitude, moved to get up. Minho's hand broke and grabbed him by the arm. Dude, sit down. I'm just playing with your head. It's too much fun, you'll see when the next rookie ... He's gone, a perplexed look wrinkling his eyebrows. I guess there won't be another rookie, huh? Thomas relaxed, returned to a seated position, surprised at how easy he had been put back to ease. He thought of the girl and the note that said it was the last one. Guess not. Minho sneered his eyes a little, as if he were studying Thomas. You saw the girl, didn't you? Everybody says you probably know her or something. Thomas felt defensive. I saw her. It really doesn't look familiar. He felt immediately guilty about lying, even if it was just a little lie. She hot? Thomas paused, having not thought of her that way as he had frightened and delivered the note and his line: everything will change. But she remembered how beautiful she was. Yes, I guess it's sexy. Minho leaned back until he lay flat, his eyes closed. Yes, I suppose. If you have something for the girls in a coma, don't you? He made fun of it again. Right. Thomas was having the best time figuring out whether he liked Minho or not, his personality seemed to change every minute. After a long pause, Thomas decided to take a chance. So... he asked cautiously, did you find anything today? Minho's eyes widened; focused on Thomas. You know what, Greenie? Usually that's the dumbest thing to face that you could ask a runner for. He closed his eyes again. But not today. What do you mean? Thomas dared to wait for information. An answer, he thought. Please, just give me an answer! Wait till the elegant admiral comes back. I don't like to say things twice. Besides, I might not want you to hear it anyway. Thomas sighed. I wasn't at least surprised by the no answer. Well, at least tell me why you look so tired. Don't you run around every day? P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_ Com \*\*\* Page 13 Minho groaned as he got up and crossed his legs beneath him. Yes, Greenie, balance every day. Let's just say I got a little excited and ran faster to get my bee back here. Why? Thomas desperately wanted to hear what happened in the Labyrinth. Minho raised his hands. Uncle. I told you. Patience. Wait for General Alby. Something his voice diminished the blow, and Thomas made his decision. He liked Minho. Okay, I'm going to shut up. Just make sure Alby lets me hear the news, too. Minho studied it for a second. All right, Greenie. You, boss. Alby approached a moment later with a large plastic cup full of water and handed it over to Minho, who tore the whole thing without stopping once to breathe. Well, Alby said, with him. What happened? Minho raised his eyebrows and nodded toward Thomas. All right, Alby replied. I don't care what this scion hears. Just talk! Thomas sat silently in anticipation as Minho struggled to get up, winking with every move, all his behavior screaming exhausting. The corridor balanced against the wall, gave them both a cold look. I found a dead one. Huh? Alby asked. A dead man what? Minho smiled. A dead Griever. Chapter 13 Thomas was fascinated by the mention of a Griever. The nasty creature was terrifying to think of, but wondered why finding a dead woman was so important. Has it never happened before? Alby looked like someone had just told him he could grow wings and fly. It's not a good time for jokes, he said. Look, Minho answered, I wouldn't believe if I were you either. But believe me, I did. Big nasty fat one. It's definitely never happened before, Thomas thought. You found a dead Griever, Alby repeated. Yes, Alby, Minho said, his words were fraught with annoyance. A couple of miles from here, near the cliff. Alby looked towards the labyrinth, and then talp to Minho. Well... why didn't you bring him back with you? Minho laughed again, a half grumpy, half laughed. Have you been drinking Frypan's hot sauce? Those things must weigh half a ton, man. Besides, I wouldn't touch one if you gave me a free trip out of this place. Alby insisted on the questions. What did it look like? Did the metal tips come in or out of his body? He moved at all, was his skin still wet? Thomas was full of questions: metal spikes? Wet skin? What the hell in the world, but he held his tongue, not wanting to remind them that he was there. And maybe they should talk in private. Lose weight, man, Minho said. You have to see for yourself. Is... Strange. Weird? Alby seemed confused. Dude, I'm exhausted, hungry and sick with sunshine. But if you want to transport it right now, we could probably get there and back before the walls close. Alby looked at his watch. Better wait till wake up tomorrow. The smartest thing you've said in a week. Minho stopped leaning on the wall, punched Alby in the arm, and then began walking towards the Homestead with a slight limp. He spoke on his shoulder as he walked away, it seemed that his whole body was suffering. I should go back there, but it. I'm going to eat of Frypan's nasty casserole. Thomas felt a wash of disappointment. He had to admit that Minho looked like he deserved a break and a bite to eat, but he wanted to learn more. Then Alby turned to Thomas, surprising him. If you know something and you're not ticing me... Thomas was sick of being accused of knowing things. Wasn't that the problem in the first place? I didn't know anything. He looked the boy in the face and asked, Why do you hate me so much? The look that took hold of Alby's face was indescribable: partial confusion, part anger, part shock. Do you hate yourself? You haven't learned anything since you showed up in that box. This has nothing to do with any hate or taste, love or friends or anything. All we care about is surviving. Let go of your side and start using that brain if you have one. Thomas felt he had been slapped. But why do you keep accusing—Because it can't be a coincidence, pig's head! If you come here, we bring a rookie girl the next day, a crazy note, Ben trying to bite you, Grieviers dead. Something's going on and I'm not going to rest until I find out. I don't know anything, Alby. It felt good to put some warmth into his words. I don't even know where he was three days ago, let alone why this guy from Minho would find a dead thing called Griever. So away back off! Alby leaned slightly back, looked absent at Thomas for several seconds. Then he said, Lose weight, Greenie. Grow up and start thinking. It has nothing to do with accusing anyone of anything. But if you remember anything, if anything looks familiar, you'd better start talking. Promise. Not until I have a solid memory, Thomas thought. Not unless you want to share. Yes, I suppose, but—Just promise me! Thomas stopped, fed up with Alby and his attitude. Whatever, he finally said. I promise. In that Alby he turned and walked away, without saying another word. Thomas found a tree in Deadheads, one of the most pleasant on the edge of the forest with lots of shade. I was afraid to work with Winston the Butcher again and knew he needed lunch, but he didn't want to be around anyone as long as he could get away with it. Leaning back against the thick trunk, he wanted a breeze, but did not get it. He had felt his eyelids fall off when Chuck ruined his peace and quiet. Thomas! Thomas! cried the boy as he ran towards him, pumping his arms, his face illuminated with emotion. Thomas rubbed his eyes and groaned: I didn't want anything in the world more than half an hour's nap. It wasn't until Chuck stopped in front of him, panting to catch his breath, that he finally looked up. What? Words slowly fell from Chuck, among his gasps to breathe. Ben... Ben... It's not... Dead. All signs of catapulted fatigue System. He jumped up to stand nose to nose with Chuck. What? The... He's not dead. Baggers were looking for him... arrow lost his brain ... Med-jacks patched it. Thomas turned around to look into the woods where the sick boy had attacked him just the night before. You gotta be kidding me. I saw him... wasn't he dead? Thomas did not know how he felt most strongly: confusion, relief, fear of being attacked again. Well, so did I, Chuck said. He's locked in the Slammer, a huge bandage covering half his head. Thomas turned to face Chuck again. The Slammer? What do you mean? The Slammer. It's our jail on the north side of La Homestead. Chuck pointed in that direction. They threw it away so fast that the Med-jacks had to fix it there. Thomas rubbed his eyes. The blame consumed him when he realized how he really felt: he had been relieved that Ben was dead, that he didn't have to worry about facing him again. So, what are you going to do with him? I already had a Meeting of the Guardians this morning, made a unanimous decision because of the sounds of it. Looks like Ben's going to wish that arrow had found a home inside his brain after all. Thomas squinted, confused by what Chuck had said. What are you talking about? He's being banished. Tonight, for trying to



now! Alby screamed. Ben's head broke backwards as he was shaken forward, the Guardians pushing the pole toward the Labyrinth outside the Glade. A cry of strangulation erupted from Ben's throat, louder than the sounds of the closing door. He fell to his knees, only to be shaken back to his feet by the Keeper in front, a thick guy with black hair and a growl in his face. No! Ben screamed, spat flying out of his mouth as he struck around, breaking his neck with his hands. But the Combined Force of the Guardians was too much, forcing the condemned boy closer and closer to the edge of the Glade, just as the right wall was almost there. No, he screamed again, and then again. He tried to plant his feet on the threshold, but it lasted only a fraction of a second; the pole sent him to the labyrinth with a fuss. He was soon completely four feet outside the Glade, shaking his body from side to side as he tried to escape from his neck. The walls of the door were just seconds away from closed sealing. With one last violent effort, Ben was eventually able to twist his neck in the leather circle so that his whole body turned to the Gladers. Thomas could not believe that he was still looking at a human being: madness in Ben's eyes, phlegm flying from his mouth, pale skin stretched tense through his veins and bones. He looked as alien as anything Thomas could imagine. Hold! Alby screamed. Ben then shouted, without pause, such a piercing sound that Thomas covered his ears. It was a beastly, lunatic cry, probably shattering the boy's vocal cords. In the last second, the Front Guardian somehow loosened the larger post of the piece attached to Ben and threw him back into the Glade, leaving the child to exile. Ben's last cries were cut off when the closed with a terrible boom. Thomas squeezed his eyes and was surprised to feel tears dripping down his cheeks. CAPITULO 15 For the second night in row, Thomas went to bed with the haunted image of Ben's face burned in his mind, tormenting him. How different would things be right now if it wasn't for that boy? Thomas could almost convince himself that he would be completely happy, happy and excited to learn his new life, aiming at his goal of being a runner. Almost. Deep down I knew Ben was just a part of his many problems. But now he was gone, banished to the world of the Grievers, taken wherever they took his prey, a victim of what was done there. Although he had many reasons to despise Ben, he mostly felt sorry for him. Thomas could not imagine going out that way, but based on Ben's last moments, psychotically beating and spitting and screaming, he no longer doubted the importance of the Glade rule that no one should enter the Maze except runners, and then only during the day. Somehow Ben had already been stung once, which meant he knew better than someone exactly what awaited him. That poor guy, he thought. That poor, poor guy. Thomas shuddered and turned by his side. The more I thought about it, being a runner didn't sound like a great idea. But, inexplicably, he still called him. The next morning, the sunrise had barely touched the sky before glade's work sounds awakened Thomas from the deepest sleep since he had arrived. He sat down, rubbing his eyes, trying to shake the heavy stun. As he surrendered, he lay down, hoping no one would bother him. It didn't last a minute. Someone touched his shoulder and opened his eyes to see Newt staring at him. Now what? Thought. Get up, you idiot. Yes, good morning to you too. What time is it? Seven o'clock, Greenie, said Newt with a mocking smile. I thought I'd let you sleep after such a rough couple of days. Thomas stood in a seated position, hating that he could not stay there for a few more hours. Sleep? What are you, a bunch of farmers? Farmers, how did you remember them so much? Once again his memory cleansing baffled him. Uh... Yes, now that you mention it. Newt crouched down next to Thomas and bent his legs below himself. He sat silently for a few moments, looking at all the busy ones who begin to whip the Glade. I'm going to put you with the Track-hoes today, Greenie. Let's see if that suits his fantasy without cutting bloody piglets and so on. Thomas was sick of being treated like a baby. Aren't you supposed to stop calling me that? What, bloody piglets? Thomas forced a laugh and shook his head. No, Greenie. I'm not the new rookie anymore, am I? The girl in a coma is. Call her Greenie, my name is Thomas. The girl's thoughts crashed around her mind, reminded her of the connection she felt. A sadness took hold in him, as if to miss her, wanted to see her. See. doesn't make sense, he thought. I don't even know his name. Newt leaned back, his eyebrows raised. Burn me, you grew some good-sized eggs overnight, didn't you? Thomas ignored him and moved on. What is a track-hoe? It's what we call the boys working their asses in the Gardens, lilling, weeding, planting and such a thing. Thomas nodded with the nod in that direction. Who's the Keeper? Zart. Good guy, as long as you don't get discouraged at work, that's it. He's the big guy in front of me last night Thomas didn't say anything to that, hoping that he might somehow spend all day not talking about Ben and the banishment. The guy just made him sick and felt guilty, so he moved on to something else. Why did you come to wake me up? What, I don't like to see my face first thing in the wake? Not especially. So—But before he could finish his sentence, the roar of the walls that open for the day cut him. He looked towards the east gate, almost waiting to see Ben standing there on the other side. Instead, he saw Minho stretching. Then Thomas looked as he approached and picked something up. It was the section of the post with the leather collar attached to it. Minho seemed not to think about it, throwing it at one of the other runners, who went and put him back in the tool castle near the Gardens. Thomas went back to Newt, confused. How could Minho act so indifferent about it? He only saw three banishments, Tommy. As unpleasant as the one that looked at you last night. But every time they bother, the Grievers leave the necklace on our doorstep. He gives me the willies like nothing else. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_Com \*\*\* Page 15 Thomas had to agree. What do you do with people when they catch you? Did you really want to know? Newt shrugged, his indifference is not very convincing. Chances are I didn't want to talk about it. Tell me about the runners, Thomas said all of a sudden. Words seemed to appear out of nowhere. But he stood still, despite a strange impulse to apologize and change the subject; I wanted to know everything about them. Even after what I had seen last night, even after witnessing the Duel through the window, I wanted to know. The pull to know was strong, and he didn't quite understand why. Becoming a runner felt like something he was born to do. Newt had stopped, looking confused. The runners? Why? I'm just wondering. Newt gave him a suspicious look. Best of the best, those guys. It has to be. It's all up to them. He took a loose rock and threw it away, seeing it absent as it bounced to a halt. Why aren't you one? Newt's gaze turned to Thomas, sharply. It was until I hurt my leg a few months ago. It hasn't been the same since. He crouched down and rubbed his right ankle absent, brief look of pain shining on his face. The look made Thomas think it was more of memory, not of any real physical pain he still felt. How did you do that? Thomas asked, thinking that the more he could make Newt talk, the more he would learn. Running away from the Cursed, what else? I almost got it. He paused. It still gives me the chills thinking I could have gone through the change. The Change. It was the only subject Thomas thought could lead him to answers more than anything else. What's that, anyway? What's changing? They all become psychopaths like Ben and start trying to kill people? Ben was much worse than most. But I thought you wanted to talk about the runners. Newt's tone warned that the conversation about Change was over. This made Thomas even more curious, though he was fine returning to the Runners theme. Okay, I'm listening. Like I said, the best of the best. So, what are you doing? Try everyone to see how fast they are? Newt gave Thomas a dislikd look, and then groaned. Show me some intelligence, Greenie, Tommy, whatever you want. How fast you can run is only part of it. A very small part, actually. This piqued Thomas' interest. What do you mean? When I say the best of the best, I mean everything. To survive the maze, you have to be smart, fast, strong. You have to be a decision maker, know the right amount of risk to take. He can't be reckless, he can't be shy, either. Newt straightened his legs and leaned back into his hands. It's horrible out there, you know? I don't miss it. I thought the Grievers were only going out at night. Fate or not, Thomas didn't want to run into one of those things. Yes, usually. Then why is it so terrible out there? What else didn't you know? Newt sighed. Pressure. Stress. Different maze pattern every day, trying to imagine things in your mind, trying to get us out of here. Worried about the damn maps. The worst part is, you're always afraid you won't come back. A normal maze would be quite difficult, but when it changes every night, a couple of mental mistakes and you're spending the night with vicious beasts. There's no room or time for fools or brats. Thomas frowned, without quite understanding the impulse within him, ingesting him. Especially after last night. But I still felt it. I felt it all. Why all the interest? Newt asked. Thomas hesitated, thinking, frightened to say it aloud again. I want to be a runner. Newt turned and looked him in the eye. I haven't been here a week, stem. A little early for the wishes of death, don't you think? I'm serious. It hardly made sense even to Thomas, but he felt it deeply. In fact, the desire to become a runner was the only thing that propelled him, helping him accept his situation. Newt doesn't his gaze. Look. This is me. Never mind. No one has become a runner in its first month, let alone in its first week. I have a lot to do before I recommend you to the Keeper. Thomas stood up and began to fold his sleeping gear. Newt, I'm serious. I can't pull the herbs all day, I'll go crazy. I have no idea what I did before I was sent here in that metal box, but my instinct tells me that being a runner is what I'm supposed to do. I can do it. Newt was still sitting there, looking at Thomas, not offering to help. Nobody said you couldn't. But give him a break for now. Thomas felt a wave of impatience. But—Listen, trust me on this, Tommy. Start talking about this place about how you're too good to work as a peasant, how you're ready to be a runner, you'll make a lot of enemies. Let him go for now. Making enemies was the last thing Thomas wanted, but still. He decided on another address. Okay, I'm going to talk to Minho about it. Nice try, the shank that throws up. The Meeting chooses runners, and if you think I'm tough, they'd laugh in your face. As far as you know, I could be very good at it. It's a waste of time to keep me waiting. Newt stood up to join Thomas and hit a finger in the face. Listen to me, Greenie. Are you listening to everything nice and pretty? Thomas surprisingly didn't feel so intimidated. He rolled his eyes, but then nodded. You'd better stop this nonsense, before others find out about it. That's not how it works around here, and our whole existence depends on things working. He paused, but Thomas said nothing, fearing the conference he knew was coming. Order, Newt continued. Order. You say that damn word over and over in your head. The reason we're all sane around here is because we work our asses and keep order. The order is the reason we got Ben out, can't we have crazy people running around trying to kill people, now we can't? Order. The last thing we need is for you to screw it up. Thomas' stubbornness washes out. I knew it was time to shut up. That's all he said. Newt slapped him in the back. Let's make a deal. What? Thomas felt his hopes rise. Keep your mouth shut about it, and I'll put you on the list of potential apprentices as soon as you show some influence. Don't keep the trap closed, and I'll make sure you never see it. Deal? Thomas hated the thought of waiting, not knowing how long it could be. It's a stinking deal. Newt raised his eyebrows. Thomas finally nodded. Deal. Come on, let's get some food from Frypan. And I hope we don't drown. That morning, Thomas finally met the infamous Frypan, albeit only from a distance. The guy was too busy trying, give breakfast to an army of hungry Gladers. It could have been nothing more than that years old, but he had a beard and hair full of hair all over the rest of his body, as if each follicle was trying to escape the confines of his food-stained clothes. He didn't look like the most hygienic guy in the world to oversee the whole kitchen, Thomas thought. He made a mental note to beware of unpleasant black hairs in his meals. He and Newt had just joined Chuck for breakfast at a picnic table just outside the kitchen when a large group of Gladers got up and ran to the west gate, talking excited about something. What's going on? Thomas asked, surprising himself so indifferently he said so. New developments in the Glade had just been a part of life. Newt shrugged as he dug into his eggs. They're just seeing Minho and Alby, they're going to look at dead Griever. Hey, Chuck said. A small piece of bacon flew out of his mouth when he spoke. I have a question about that. Yes, Chuckie? Newt asked, a little sarcastically. And what's your question? Chuck seemed deeply into thought. Well, they found a dead Griever, didn't they? Yes, Newt replied. Thanks for that.ews. Chuck absently touched his fork against the table for a few seconds. Well, then, who killed stupidity? Excellent question, Thomas thought. He waited for Newt to respond, but nothing came. Obviously I had no idea. Chapter 16 Thomas spent the morning with the Garden Keeper, working his ass, as Newt would have said. Zart was the tall, blonde-haired boy who had slept at the front of the pole during Ben's banishment, and he didn't seem much, but he showed Thomas the ropes until he was able to start working on his own. Luckily, prunning from an apricot tree, planting pumpkin seeds and zucchini, collecting vegetables. He didn't like it, and mostly ignored the other kids who worked alongside him, but he didn't hate it as much as he had done for Winston at the Blood House. Thomas and Zart were swapping a long row of young corn when Thomas decided it was a good time to start asking questions. This Custodian seemed much more accessible. Then Zart, he said. The Keeper looked at him, and then resumed his work. The child had drooping eyes and long face, for some reason seemed pale as a humanly possible. Yes, Greenie, what do you want? How many Guardians in total were there? Thomas asked, trying to act casual. And what are the job options? Well, you have the Builders, the Sloggers, Baggers, Cooks, Map-makers, Med-jacks, Track-Hoes, Blood Housers. The Runners, of course. I don't know, a few more, maybe. More or less keep for me and my own stuff. Most of the words were but Thomas wondered about a couple of them. What is a Slogger? I knew that's what Chuck did, but the boy boy I wanted to talk about it. He refused to talk about it. That's what the offspring who can do anything else do. Clean the bathrooms, clean the showers, clean the kitchen, clean the house of blood after a massacre, everything. Spending a day with those idiots, who will cure any thought of going in that direction, I can tell you. Thomas felt a pang of guilt for Chuck, he felt sorry for the him. The boy tried so hard to be friends with everyone, but no one seemed to like him or even pay attention to him. Yes, he was a little excitable and spoke too much, but Thomas was happy enough to have him around. What about the Track-hoes? Thomas asked as he pulled out a large grass, lumps of earth swaying over the roots. Zart cleared his throat and continued to work as he answered. They're the ones who take care of all the heavy stuff for the Gardens. Trench and so on. During his spare time they do other things around the Glade. Actually, a lot of Gladers have more than one job. Does anyone tell you that too? P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_Com \*\*\* Page 16 Thomas ignored the question and moved on, determined to get as many answers as possible. What about the Baggers? I know you take care of the dead, but it can't happen that often, can you? Those are the creepy guys. They also act as guards and lice. Everybody likes to call them Baggers. Have fun that day, brother. He made fun of it, the first time Thomas heard him do it, there was something very nice about it. Thomas had more questions. Much more. Chuck and everyone else around the Glade never wanted to give him the answers to anything. And here was Zart, who seemed perfectly willing. But all of a sudden Thomas didn't feel like talking anymore. For some reason the girl had gotten back in her head, out of nowhere, and then Ben's thoughts, and then the dead Griever, which should have been a good thing, but everyone acted like anything but. His new life sucked. He breathed deeply and long. He just works, he thought. And he did. By the time the afternoon came, Thomas was ready to collapse due to exhaustion, all he crouched down and crawled on his knees on the ground were the holes. Blood House, Gardens. Two strikes. Runner, he thought when he went on break. Let me be a runner. Once again he thought how absurd it was that he loved him so much. But even though I didn't understand it, or where it came from, the desire was undeniable. Just as strong were the girl's thoughts, but she put them aside as much as possible. Tired and sore, he headed to the kitchen for an aperitif and some water. He could have eaten a full-rule meal despite having lunch only two hours earlier. Even the pig was starting to sound good again. He bit himself on an apple, and then piled himself on the ground to the Chuck's. Newt was also there, but he sat alone, ignoring everyone. His eyes were injected with blood, his wrinkled with heavy lines. Thomas saw Newt chew his nails, something he hadn't seen the older boy do before. Chuck noticed and asked the question that was in Thomas' mind. What's the matter with him, whispered the boy. Looks like he didn't it when you got out of the box. I don't know, Thomas replied. Why don't you go ask him. I can hear every bloody word they're saying. Newt called aloud. No wonder people hate sleeping next to you offspring. Thomas felt he had been caught stealing, but he was genuinely worried—Newt was one of the few people in the Glade he really liked. What's the matter? Chuck asked. No offense, but you look like a klunk. All the things you chered in the universe, he answered, and then he was silent as he looked into space for a long time. Thomas almost pushed him with another question, but Newt eventually continued. The girl from the Box. He keeps growling and saying all sorts of weird things, but he doesn't wake up. Medjacks is doing everything he can to feed her, but she's eating less every day. I'm telling you, something's really bad about all that damn thing Thomas looked down at his apple, and then he bit. Now he knew sour, he realized he was worried about the girl. Worried about her well-being. Like I know her. Newt let out a long sigh. Shuck. But that's not what really has me bothering me. So, what are you doing? Chuck asked. Thomas leaned forward, so he made curiosity that he was able to put the girl out of his mind. Newt's eyes narrowed as he looked towards one of the entrances to the labyrinth. Alby and Minho murmured. They should have come back hours ago. Before Thomas knew, he was back at work, lifting the herbs again, counting the minutes until he finished the Gardens. He looked constantly at the West Gate, looking for any sign of Alby and Minho, Newt's concern has been rubbed on him. Newt had said they should have come back at noon, just the right time for them to reach the dead Griever, explore for an hour or two, and then return. No wonder he looked so upset. When Chuck offered that maybe they were just exploring and having fun, Newt had given him such a hard look that Thomas thought Chuck might spontaneously comb his hair. I will never forget the next look that had passed through Newt's face. When Thomas asked him why Newt and some others not only entered the Maze and searched for his friends, Newt's expression had changed to absolute horror: his cheeks had shrunk in his face, becoming sallow and dark. Gradually it happened, and he had explained that sending search groups was forbidden, so that no more people would be lost, but there was no doubt of the fear that had crossed his face, was terrified of the labyrinth. What had happened to him out there, perhaps even related to his ankle injury, had been really horrible. Thomas tried not to think about it while refocusing on herbs. That dinner of the night turned out to be a grim affair, and had nothing to do with the food. Frypan and his cooks served a great meal of steak, mashed potatoes, green beans and hot rolls. Thomas was quickly learning that the jokes about Frypan's cooking were just that: jokes. Everyone swallowed their food and usually pleased more. But tonight, the Gladers ate like dead men resurrected for one last meal before being sent to live with the devil. The Runners had returned at their normal time, and Thomas had become increasingly upset as he watched Newt run from Door to Door as they entered the Glade, without bothering to hide his panic. But Alby and Minho never showed up. Newt forced the Gladers to go on and get something from Frypan's dinner, but insisted on being on call for the missing duo. No one said it, but Thomas knew it wouldn't be long before the doors closed. Thomas reluctantly followed orders like the rest of the boys and was sharing a picnic table on the south side of Homestead with Chuck and Winston. I'd only been able to eat a few bites when I couldn't take it anymore. I can't sit here while they're out there missing, he said as he dropped his fork on the plate. I'm going to see the doors with Newt. He stood up and went to look. No wonder Chuck was right behind him. They found Newt at the west gate, walking, running his hands through his hair. He looked up as Thomas and Chuck approached. Where are they? Newt said, his voice thin and tense. Thomas was moved that Newt cared as much about Alby and Minho as if they were his own relatives. Why don't we send a search party, he suggested again. It seemed so stupid to sit here and worry until they died when they could go out looking for them. Bloody he—Newt began before he stopped; closed his eyes for a second and took a deep breath. We can't. Not bad? Don't say it again. One hundred percent against the rules. Especially with the doors of the bugle about to close. But why? Thomas insisted, in disbelief at Newt's stubbornness. Don't the Grievers get them if they stay out there? Shouldn't we do something? Newt turned against him, his red red face, his eyes burning with fury. Close the hole, Greenie! he cried. It's not a week you've been here! You don't think I'd risk my life in a second to save those handles? No... I... I am sorry. I didn't mean ... Thomas didn't know what to say, he was just trying to help. Newt's face softened. You don't understand it yet, Tommy. Going out at night is begging for death. We'd be more lives. If those offspring don't come back... He paused, appearing hesitant to what everyone was thinking. They both took an oath, just like me. Just like everybody else. You too, when you go to your first meeting and you're elected by a custodian. Never go out at night. Whatever happens. Never. Thomas looked at Chuck, who looked as pale as Newt. Newt won't say, said the boy, so I will. If they're not back, it means they're dead. Minho is too smart to miss. Impossible. They're dead. Newt said nothing, and Chuck turned and walked to the Homestead, his head hanging low. Dead? Thomas thought. The situation had become so grave that he did not know how to react, he felt a vacuum well in his heart. The stem is right, Newt said solemnly. That's why we can't get out. We can't afford to do things worse than they already are. He put his hand on Thomas' shoulder, and then let him stand down beside him. Tears moistened Newt's eyes, and Thomas was sure that even inside the dark chamber of memories that were locked up, out of reach, he had never seen anyone so sad. The growing darkness of twilight was a perfect fit for how bleak things felt for Thomas. The doors close in two minutes, said Newt, such a succinct and final statement that he seemed to hang in the air like a burial sudary trapped in a puff of wind. Then he walked away, hunched over, calm. Thomas shook his head and looked back into the labyrinth. I hardly knew Alby and Minho. But his chest ached when he thought of them, killed by the hideous creature he had seen through the window his first morning at the Glade. A strong boom sounded from all directions, surprising Thomas out of his thoughts. Then came the creaking, grinding the sound of the stone against the stone. The doors were coming at night. The right wall rumbled on the floor, spitting dirt and rocks as it moved. The vertical row of cranks, so many that seemed to reach the sky far above, slid into their corresponding holes on the left wall, ready to seal until morning. Once again, Thomas looked in amazement at the huge moving wall, challenging any sense of physics. It seemed impossible. Then a flicker of movement to the left caught the eye. Something moved inside the labyrinth, down the long corridor in front of him. At first, a panic shot ran through him; stepped back, worried he might be a Griever. But then two forms took shape, stumbling along the alley towards the Gate. His eyes eventually focused through the initial blindness of fear, and he realized it was a yam, with one of Alby's arms covered by his shoulders, practically dragging the child along behind him. Minho looked up, saw Thomas, who knew that eyes must be bulging from his head. They got it! Minho shouted, his voice strangled and weak with exhaustion. Every step he took seemed to be his last. Thomas was so dazed by the turn of took a moment to act. Newt, he finally screamed, forcing his gaze away from Minho and Alby to face the other direction. They're coming! I can see them! He knew he had to meet the Maze and help, but the rule about not leaving the Glade was sealed to his mind. Newt had already returned to Homestead, but to Thomas' cry he immediately turned and broke into a stuttering race to the door. Thomas turned to look back into the labyrinth and fear washed through him. Alby had escaped Minho's clutches and fell to the ground. Thomas watched as Minho desperately tried to get him back on his feet, and then eventually surrendered, began dragging the child down the stone floor by the arms. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_Com \*\*\* Page 17 But they were still a hundred feet away. The right wall was closing quickly, appearing to accelerate his pace the more Thomas wanted it to slow down. There were only seconds left until they were completely close. They had no chance of getting there on time. There's no chance. Thomas looked at Newt again: limping as well as he could, he had only made half the way to Thomas. He looked back at the labyrinth, on the closing wall. Just a few more yards and that's it. Minho stumbled ahead, fell to the ground. They wouldn't make it. It got a while. That was it. Thomas heard Newt yell something behind him. Don't do it, Tommy! Don't do it! The rods on the right wall seemed to reach like arms stretched out for his home, grabbing those small holes that would serve as his resting place for the night. The creaking, the grinding sound of the doors filled the air, deafening. Five feet. Four feet. Three. Two. Thomas knew he had no choice. He moved. Go ahead. He pressed past the cranks at the last second and entered the labyrinth. The walls closed behind him, echoing his boom bouncing off the ivy-covered stone like crazy laughter. CAPITULO 17 For several seconds, Thomas felt that the world had frozen instead. A thick silence followed the roar of the Gate closing, and a veil of darkness seemed to cover the sky, as if even the sun had been frightened by what lurked in the labyrinth. Twilight had fallen, and the walls of the mammoth looked like huge tombstones in a cemetery infested with giant hesitations. Thomas leaned against the rough rock, overcome by disbelief at what he had just done. Full of terror at what the consequences might be. Then a high-pitched cry from Alby ahead broke Thomas' attention; Minho was moaning. Thomas walked away from the wall and ran towards the two Gladers. Minho had risen up and was standing once more, but he looked terrible, even in the pale light still available: sweaty, dirty, scratched, on the floor, looked worse, had torn clothes, arms covered in cuts and bruises. Thomas Thomas Had attacked Alby for a Griever? Greenie, Minho said, if you think it was brave to come here, Minho said. You're the most damned face there's ever been. You're as good as dead, just like us. Thomas felt his face warm up, he expected at least a little gratitude. I couldn't just sit here and leave them here. And what good are you with us? Minho rolled his eyes. Whatever, man. Break rule number one, kill yourself, whatever. You are welcome. I was just trying to help. Thomas wanted to kick him in the face. Minho forced a bitter laugh, and then knelt on the floor next to Alby. Thomas looked more closely at the collapsed boy and realized how bad things were. Alby looked at the brink of death. His usually dark skin was losing color quickly and his breaths were fast and shallow. Hopelessness rained on Thomas. What happened? he asked, trying to put aside his anger. I don't want to talk about it, Minho said as he checked Alby's pulse and leaned over to hear his chest. Let's say the Grievers can play very well. This statement took Thomas by surprise. So he was ... bitten? Stung, what is it? Are you going through change? You got a lot to learn, that's all Minho said. Thomas wanted to scream. I knew I had a lot to learn, that's why I was asking questions. He forced himself to say, I turn on how shallow and empty it sounded. Since we didn't come back before sunset, probably. I don't know how long it takes if you don't get the Serum. Of course, we'll be dead too, so don't cry for him. Yes, we'll all be fine and dead soon. Thomas could hardly process the meaning of the words. But fast enough, the terrible reality of the situation began to hit Thomas, and his entrails roiled. Are we really going to die? he asked, unable to accept it. You're telling me we don't stand a chance? None. Thomas was annoyed by Minho's constant negativity. Oh, come on, there's got to be something we can do. How many Grievers will come to us? He looked down the aisle that went deeper into the Labyrinth, as if waiting for the creatures to arrive then, summoned by the sound of his name. I don't know. A thought arose in Thomas' mind, giving him hope. But what about Ben? And Gally, and others who have been stung and survived? Minho looked at him with a look that said he was dumbier than the cow. Didn't you hear me? They came back before sunset, don't. I came back and got the serum. All of them. Thomas wondered about the mention of a serum, but had too many other questions to come out first. But I thought the Grievers only went out at night. So you went Cane. They always go out at night. That doesn't mean they never show up during the day. Thomas wouldn't let himself give in to Minho's hopelessness, he didn't want to give up and die yet. Has anyone ever been caught outside the walls at night and lived through it? Never. Thomas frowned, wishing he could find a small spark of hope. How many have died, then? Minho looked at the ground, crouching with an forearm on his knee. He was clearly exhausted, almost dazed. At least twelve. Haven't you been to the cemetery? Yes. That's how they died, he thought. Well, those are just the ones we found. There's more whose bodies never appeared. Minho pointed absently towards the sealed Glade. That damn cemetery is back in the woods for a reason. Nothing kills happy time more than being remembered from your massacre friends every day. Minho stood up and grabbed Alby's arms, then nodded to his feet. Get those stinking idiots. We have to get him to the door. Give them a body that's easy to find in the morning. Thomas couldn't believe how morbid a statement was. How can this be happening! he cried to the walls, spinning in a circle. He felt close to losing him once and for all. Stop crying. You should have followed the rules and stayed inside. Now come on, grab his legs. Guided by the growing cramps in his intestine, Thomas approached and lifted Alby's feet as he was told. They half carried, half dragging the body almost lifeless about a hundred feet from the vertical crack of the Gate, where Minho grabbed Alby against the wall in a semi-seated position. Alby's chest rose and fell with wrestling breaths, but his skin was drenched in sweat, it didn't seem to last much longer. There was he bitten? Thomas asked. Can you see it? They don't bite you. And no, you can't see it. They didn't bite the dozens all over his body. Minho bent his arms and leaned against the wall. 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searching, how do we find him so easily, look and ?! Minho seemed to feel his thoughts. Don't get excited, he said, barely able to get the words out. A few yards before the end of the hall, Minho stopped, holding his hand over Thomas' chest to make sure he stopped, too. Thomas slowed down, then approached where the labyrinth opened into the open sky. The sounds of the Afflicted rushing approached, but it had to do with it. In fact, they had reached an exit from the maze, but as Minho had said, it was nothing to get excited about. All Thomas could see in all directions, up and down, side by side, was empty air and fading stars. It was a strange and disturbing vision, as if standing on the edge of the universe, and for a brief moment he was overcome by vertigo, his knees weakened before he strengthened. Dawn was starting leave its mark, the sky seemed to have lightened consistently even at the last minute or so. Thomas looked in complete disbelief, not understanding how anything could be possible. Possible, it was as if someone had built the Labyrinth and then floated it into the sky to float there in the middle of nowhere for the rest of eternity. I don't get it, he whispered, not knowing if Minho could hear it. Be careful, the runner replied. You wouldn't be the first off the cliff. He grabbed Thomas' shoulder. Did you forget something? He nodded into the labyrinth. Thomas remembered hearing the word Cliff before, but could not place it at this time. Seeing the vast open sky in front of him and beneath him had put him in a kind of hypnotized stupor. He shook reality again and turned to face the approaching Grieviers. Now they were only dozens of meters away, a single file, loading with a vengeance, moving surprisingly fast. Everything clicked, then, even before Minho explained what they were going to do. These things can be vicious, Minho said, but they're silly as dirt. Stand here, near me, watching—Thomas cut it. I know. I'm ready. They covered their feet until they rose together in front of the delivery in the middle of the hall, in front of the Grieviers. His heels were just inches from the edge of the cliff behind them, nothing but air waiting after that. All they had left was courage. We have to be in sync! Minho screamed, almost drowned out by the sounds that were blowing from the smothering beaks rolling along the stone. On my mark! Why the Grieviers had lined up a single file was a mystery. Perhaps the labyrinth proved narrow enough for it to be uncomfortable for them to travel side by side. But one after the other, they rolled down the stone aisle, clicking and moaning and ready to kill. Tens of meters had become dozens of feet, and the monsters were just seconds away from crashing into the waiting boys. Really, Minho said consistently. Not yet... Not yet... Thomas hated every millisecond of waiting. I just wanted to close my eyes and never see another Griever again. Now, Minho yelled. Just as Griever's first arm spread to cut them off, Minho and Thomas dived in opposite directions, each facing one of the outer walls of the hallway. The tactic had worked for Thomas before, and judging by the horrible squeaky sound that escaped from the first Griever, it had worked again. The monster flew from the edge of the cliff. Interestingly, his battle cry split sharply instead of fading as he collapsed into the depths beyond. Thomas landed against the wall and turned just in time to see the second creature fall on the edge, unable to stop. The third planted a heavily spied arm on the stone, but his impulse was too much. The nervous squeal of cutting spine across the ground sent a shiver down Thomas' spine, though a second later the Griever fell into the abyss. Once again, neither nor they made a sound as they fell, as if they had disappeared rather than falling. The fourth and final approaching creature was able to stop in time, trembling on the very edge of the cliff, a spike and a claw holding it in place. Instinctively Thomas knew what to do. Looking at Minho, he nodded at the nod with the nod with the incoat of the incantation, and then turned. Both boys ran on the Griever and jumped their feet first against the creature, kicking in the last second with each a little waning force. They both connected, sending the last monster down to his death. Thomas quickly approached the edge of the abyss, sticking his head in to see the Fallen Grieviers. But impossibly, they were gone, not even a sign of them in the void that stretched beneath. Nothing. His mind could not process the idea of where he was driving the cliff or what had happened to the terrible creatures. His last ounce of strength disappeared, and he curled up in a ball on the ground. Then, finally, the tears came. Chapter 22 A half hour. Neither Thomas nor Minho had moved an inch. Thomas had finally stopped crying; couldn't help but wonder what Minho would think of him, or if he would tell others, calling him a. But there was not a shred of self-control in it, but I couldn't have avoided the tears, I knew it. Despite his lack of memory, he was sure he had just spent the most traumatic night of his life. And his sore hands and absolute exhaustion didn't help. He crawled to the edge of the cliff once more, stuck his head back in to get a better look now that the sunrise was in full force. The open sky in front of him was a deep purple, slowly fading into the bright blue of the day, with orange tints from the sun on a distant, flat horizon. He looked down, saw that the stone wall of the labyrinth headed towards the ground on a cliff until it disappeared into what was far, far below. But even with the ever-increasing light, I still couldn't say what was down there. It seemed as if the labyrinth was perched on a structure several miles above the ground. But that was impossible, he thought. No way. It has to be an illusion. He turned on his back, moaning in motion. Things seemed to hurt in him and inside him that he had never known existed before. At least the doors would open soon, and they could go back to glade. He looked at Minho, curled up against the hallway room. I can't believe we're still alive, he said. Minho said nothing, only nodded, his face devoid of expression. Are there any more of them? Did we just kill them all? Minho snored. Somehow we got to dawn, or we would have had ten more in butts in no time. He moved his body, winking at the wink and moaning. I can't believe it. Seriously. We've spent the whole night, they've never done it before. Thomas knew he should be proud, brave, something. But everything I felt tired and relieved. What did we do differently? I don't know. It's a little hard to ask a dead guy what he did wrong. Thomas could not help wondering how the Grieviers' angry cries had ended when he fell off the cliff, and how he had not been able to see them fall to death. There was something very strange and disturbing about it. Looks like they disappeared or something after they went to the limit. Yes, that was a little psychotic. A couple of Gladers had the theory that other things had disappeared, but we proved them wrong. Look. Thomas watched as Minho shook a rock over the cliff, then went on his way with his eyes. Down and down he went, leaving his sight until it became too small to see. He went back to Minho. How does that prove them wrong? Minho shrugged. Well, the rock didn't disappear, now, did it? So, what do you think happened? There was something significant here, Thomas could feel it. Minho shrugged again. Maybe they're magical. My head hurts too much to think about it. With a jolt, all thoughts of the cliff were forgotten. Thomas remembered Alby. We have to go back. Effort, forced himself to stand up. I have to get Alby off the wall. Seeing the look of confusion on Minho's face, he quickly explained what he had done with the ivy ropes. Minho looked down, his eyes dejected. There's no way he's still alive. Thomas refused to believe it. How do you know? Let's go. He started limping along the hall. Because no one has done it... He left, and Thomas knew what he was thinking. That's because they've always been killed by the Grieviers by the time you found them. Alby was just stuck with one of those needles, wasn't he? Minho stood up and joined Thomas on his slow ride back to the Glade. I don't know, I guess this has never happened before. Some guys have been stung by needles during the day. And those are the ones who got the serum and went through the Change. The poor offspring who got stuck in the Labyrinth all night were not found until later, days later, sometimes, if they do. And they were all killed in ways you don't want to hear about. Thomas shuddered at the thought. After what we just went through, I think I can imagine. Minho looked up, surprisingly transforming his face. I think you just found out. We made a mistake, well, I hope we made a mistake. Because no one who had been stung and had not returned at dusk has survived, we assumed that was the point of no return, when it is too late to get the serum. He seemed excited about his line of thought. They became another corner, Minho suddenly taking the lead. The boy's pace was frolicking, but Thomas stayed his heels, surprised by how familiar he felt with the usually even leaning in turns before Minho showed the way. Well, this serum, Thomas said. I've heard that a couple of times now. What is that? And where does it come from? Just what it sounds like, stem. It's a serum. The pain serum. Thomas forced a pathetic laugh. Just when I think I've learned all about this stupid place. Why is that your name? And why is Grieviers called Grieviers? Minho explained as they continued through the endless twists of the maze, none of them leading now. I don't know where we have the names, but the serum comes from the Creators, or that's what we call them, at least. It's with supplies in the box every week, it's always been. It's a medicine or antidote or something, already inside a medical syringe, ready to use. He made a demonstration of sticking a needle in his arm. Hit that on someone who's been stung and saves them. They go through the Change, which sucks, but after that, they heal. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_ Com \*\*\* Page 21 One minute or two passed silently while Thomas was processing the information; they did a couple more laps. He wondered about the Changes, and what it meant. And for some reason, I kept thinking about the girl. Strange, though, Minho finally continued. We've never talked about this before. If he's still alive, there's no reason to think that Alby can't be saved by the Serum. Somehow we got into our heads that once the doors closed, the story was over. I think you're rejecting me. The boys kept walking, Minho almost looked happy, but something was bothering Thomas. He had been avoiding it, denying himself. What if another Griever got Alby after he diverted the one chasing me? Minho looked at him, a blank expression on his face. We're going to hurry, that's all I'm saying. Thomas said, hoping that all that effort to save Alby wouldn't have been wasted. They tried to pick up the pace, but their bodies hurt too much and they settled back on a slow walk despite the urgency. The next time they rounded a corner, Thomas faltered, his heart leaping a beat when he saw the move forward. The relief took hold of him an instant later when he realized it was Newt and a group of Gladers. The west gate of the Glade stood above them and was open. They were back. At the boys' appearance, Newt lied to them. What happened? he asked; sounded almost angry. As in the bloody—We'll tell you later, Thomas interrupted. We have to save Alby. Newt's face turned white. What do you mean? He's alive? Just come here. Thomas turned right, snevering his neck to look high at the wall, looking along the thick vines until the place where Alby hung by his and legs far above them. Without saying anything, Thomas pointed out, daring not to be relieved yet. It was still there, and in one piece, but there were no signs of movement. Newt eventually saw his friend dangling in the ivy, and looked back at Thomas. If he had seemed surprised before, he now seemed completely bewildered. It's him... alive? Please let him be, Thomas thought. I don't know. That's when I left him there. When you left it... Newt shook his head. You and Minho get their asses inside, checked by the Med-Jacks. You look awful. I want the whole story when they're done and you're rested. Thomas wanted to wait and see if Alby was okay. He began to speak, but Minho grabbed him by the arm and forced him to walk towards the Glade. We need to sleep. And bandages. Now. And Thomas knew he was right. He relented, looking back at Alby, then followed Minho out and away from the Labyrinth. The ride back to the Glade and then to the Homestead seemed endless, a line of Gladers on both sides looking at them. Their faces showed total amazement, as if they were seeing two ghosts walking through a cemetery. Thomas knew it was because they had accomplished something never done before, but he was embarrassed by the attention. He almost stopped walking completely when he saw Gally forward, his arms folded and looking, but he kept moving. He took every ounce of his willpower, but looked directly into Gally's eyes, never breaking the contact. When he reached less than five feet, the other boy's gaze fell to the ground. It almost disturbed Thomas how good he felt. Almost. The next few minutes were blurry. Escorted to the house by a couple of Med-jacks, up the stairs, a glance through a door barely ajar of someone feeding the comatose girl in her bed—she felt an incredibly strong urge to go see her, to check her—in her own rooms, in bed, food, water, bandages. Pain. Finally, he was left alone, his head resting on the softer pillow that his limited memory might remember. But when he fell asleep, two things wouldn't go through his head. First, the word he had seen scribbled through the torso of both beetle blades (WICKED) ran through his thoughts over and over again. The second thing was the girl. Hours later, days for all he knew, Caw was awake, shaking him awake. Thomas had several seconds to orient himself and see straight. He focused on Chuck, he moaned. Let me sleep, stem. I thought you might want to know. Thomas rubbed his eyes and yawned. You know what? He looked at Chuck again, confused by his big smile. He's alive, he said. Alby's fine, the serum worked. Thomas' grogginess was instantly replaced by relief, and he was surprised at how much joy the information brought. But Chuck's next words made him reconsider. He just started the As if provoked by words, a bubble burst from a room down the hall. Chapter 23 Thomas wondered long and hard about Alby. It seemed like a victory to save his life, bring him back from a night in the labyrinth. But was it worth it? Now the boy was in a lot of pain, going through the same things as Ben. What if he became as psychotic as Ben? Worrying thoughts swirled everywhere. Twilight fell upon the Glade and Alby's cries continued to stalk the air. It was impossible to escape the terrible sound, even after Thomas finally talked about the Med-jacks to let him go: tired, sore, bandaged, but tired of his leaders' piercing and agonny wails. Newt had firmly refused when Thomas asked to see the person he had risked his life for. It'll only make things worse, he said, and he won't be inged. Thomas was too tired to fight. I had no idea it was possible to feel so exhausted, despite the few hours of sleep I had slept. It hurt him too much to do anything after that, and he had spent most of the day on a bench outside the Deadheads, wallowing in despair. The euphoria of his escape had quickly vanished, leaving him with pain and thoughts of his new life in the Glade. Each muscle ached; cuts and bruises covered him from head to toe. But even that wasn't as bad as the heavy emotional weight of what had happened the night before. It seemed as if all the realities of living there had finally settled in his mind, like hearing a final diagnosis of terminal cancer. How can anyone be happy in a life like this? Thought. So how can anyone be evil enough to do this to us? He understood more than ever the Gladers' passion for finding their way out of the Maze. It wasn't just a matter of escape. For the first time, he felt hungry to take revenge on the people responsible for sending him there. But those thoughts have just led to the hopelessness that had already filled it so many times. If Newt and the others hadn't been able to solve the Maze after two years of searching, it seemed impossible that there really could be a solution. The fact that the Gladers hadn't given up said more about these people than anything else. And now he was one of them. This is my life, he thought. Living in a giant labyrinth, surrounded by horrible beasts. Sadness filled it like a heavy poison. Alby's cries, now distant but still audible, only made it worse. I had to squeeze my hands in my ears every time I heard them. Eventually, the day drew to an end, and the sunset brought the now familiar grinding of the four doors closing for the night. Thomas had no memory of his life before the Box, but he was sure he had finished the worst twenty-four hours of his existence. Right after that, Chuck brought him dinner and a large glass of cold water. Thank you, Thomas Thomas feeling a burst of heat for the child. He took the meat and noodles out of the plate as fast as his sore arms could move. He needed this, he muttered through a big bite. He had a big drink of his drink, and then attacked the food again. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until he started eating. You're disgusting when you eat, Chuck said, sitting on the bench next to him. It's like watching a hungry pig eat his own turn. That's funny, Thomas said, sarcasm in his voice. You should go entertain the Grieviers, see if they laugh. A quick expression of pain shone in Chuck's face, making Thomas feel bad, but disappeared almost as quickly as he had appeared. That reminds me, you're the city talk. Thomas sat straighter, not sure how he felt about the news. What's that supposed to mean? Oh, wow, let me think. First, you go out into the labyrinth when you're not supposed to, at night. Then you become some kind of jungle guy, climbing vines and tying people up on the walls. Then you become one of the first people to survive an entire night out of the Glade, and to straighten everything you kill four Grieviers. I can't imagine what those offspring are talking about. A wave of pride filled Thomas' body, then slid. Thomas was sick from the happiness he had just felt. Alby was still in bed, screaming her head in pain, probably wishing she was dead. To trick them into going over the cliff was Minho's idea, not mine. Not according to him. He saw you do the waiting and diving thing, and then he had the idea to do the same at the Cliff. The 'waiting and diving thing? Thomas asked, rolling his eyes. Any idiot on the planet would have done that. Don't humbly put yourself in us, what you did is amazing. You and Minho, both of you. Thomas put the empty plate on the floor, suddenly angry. Then why do I feel so bad, Chuck? You want to answer that? Thomas looked up Chuck's face to get an answer, but apparently he didn't have one. The boy sat squeezing his hands as he leaned forward on his knees, dangling his head. Finally, half under his breath murmured: The same reason we all feel bad. They sat silently until, a few minutes later, Newt approached, appearing to die on two feet. He sat on the floor in front of them, as sad and worried as anyone could appear. Still, Thomas was glad to have him around. I think the worst part is over, Newt said. The bastard should be sleeping for a couple of days, and then waking up well. Maybe a little screaming once in a while. Thomas could not imagine how bad the whole ordeal must be, but the whole process of Change remained a far him. He turned to the older boy, doing everything he could to be casual. Newt, what's going on over there? There? I don't understand what this thing is about changing. Newt's response surprised Thomas. Do you think we do it, he spat, raising his arms, and then slapping them again on his knees. All we know is that if the Grieviers sting you with their nasty needles, you inject the Duel Serum or die. If you get the serum, then your body wigs and shakes and your skin bubbles and turns green and you throw up on yourself. Enough explanation for you there, Tommy? Thomas frowned. I didn't want to make Newt more upset than I already was, but I needed answers. Hey, I know it sucks to see your friend go through that, but I just want to know what's really going on up there. Why do you call it change? P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_ Com \*\*\* Page 22 Newt relaxed, seemed to shrink, even and sighed. It brings back memories. Only small fragments, but definitive memories from before you came to this horrible place. Anyone who passes it acts like a bloody psychopath when it's over, though he's usually not as bad as poor Ben. Anyway, it's like you get your old life back, just so you can take it back. Thomas' mind was stirring. Are you sure? he asked. Newt seemed confused. What do you mean? You sure about what? Are they changed because they want to go back to their old life, or is it because they're so depressed to realize that their old life was no better than what we have now? Newt looked at him for a second, then looked the other way, seemingly dead in thought. Shanks who have gone through him will never really talk about it. Get... Different. Unpleasant. There's a handful around the Glade, but I can't stand being around him. His voice was distant, his eyes had veered to a certain blank place in the forest. Thomas knew he was thinking about how Alby might never be the same again. Tell me about it, Chuck said. Gally is the worst of them all. Anything new in the girl? Thomas asked, changing the subject. I wasn't in the mood to talk about Gally. Besides, her thoughts came back to her. I saw the Med-jacks feeding her upstairs. No, Newt replied. Still in the coma of, or whatever. Every once in a while he mutters something, like he's dreaming. She takes the food, she seems fine. It's a little weird. A long pause followed, as if all three were trying to come up with an explanation for the girl. Thomas wondered again about his inexplicable sense of connection to her, though he had vanished a little, but that might have been because of everything else that occupied his thoughts. Newt finally broke the silence. Anyway, then find out what we're doing with Tommy here. Thomas slept with that, confused by the statement. Do with me? What are you talking about? Newt stood up, stretched Alby. I've turned this whole place upside down, you stem. Half the Gladers think you're God, the other half want to throw your ass out of the box hole. There's a lot to talk about. Like what? Thomas didn't know what was more disturbing: that people thought he was some kind of hero, or that some wished he didn't exist. Patience, Newt said. You'll find out after the illation. Morning? Why? Thomas didn't like the sound of this. I called a meeting. And you'll be there. You're the only annoying thing on the agenda. And with that, he turned and walked away, leaving Thomas to wonder why in the world a meeting was needed just to talk about him. Chapter 24 The next morning, Thomas found himself sitting in a chair, worried and anxious, sweating, in front of eleven other boys. They were sitting in chairs arranged in a semicircle around them. Once settled, he realized they were the Guardians, and to his chagrin that meant Gally was among them. A chair right in front of Thomas was empty, he didn't need to be told it was Alby's. They sat in a large farm room where Thomas hadn't been before. In addition to the chairs, there was no other furniture except a small table in the corner. The walls were made of wood, just like the floor, and it didn't look like anyone had tried to make the place look cozy. There were no windows; the room smelled of mold and old books. Thomas wasn't cold, but he was shaking anyway. At least he was relieved that Newt was there. He sat in the chair to the right of Alby's empty seat. Instead of our leader, sick in bed, I declare that this meeting began, he said, with a subtle roll of his eyes as if he hated anything approaching formality. As you all know, the last few days have been crazy, and quite seems to be focused on our Greenbean, Tommy, sitting before us. Thomas' face was red with shame. It's no longer the Greenie, Gally said, in the voice so low and cruel that it was almost comical. Now it's just a breaking of the rules. This began with a roar of murmurs and whispers, but Newt shut them up. Thomas suddenly wanted to be as far away from that room as possible. Gally, Newt said, try to maintain a little order, here. If you're going to babble your mouth every time I say something, you can go ahead and leave, because I'm not in a good mood. Thomas wished he could cheer that up. Gally bent his arms and leaned back in his chair, scouring on his face so forced that Thomas almost laughed aloud. I was having a hard time believing I'd been terrified of this guy a day earlier, he seemed silly, even pathetic now. Newt gave Gally a hard look, and then he continued. I'm glad we got that out of the way. Another roll of eyes. The where we are it's because almost every child in love with glade has approached me on the last day or two, either booing Thomas or begging him to take his hand in marriage. We have to decide what we're going to do with it. Gally leaned forward, but Newt cut it before he could say anything. You'll get your chance, Gally. One at a time. And Tommy, you can't say anything until we ask you to. Well what? He waited for a nod of consent from Thomas, who reluctantly gave it—and then pointed the boy in the far-right chair. Zart the Fart, you start. There were few laughs at Zart, the big, quiet guy watching the gardens, moved into his seat. He looked at Thomas more out of place than a carrot on a tomato plant. Well, Zart began, with bold eyes almost as if he were waiting for someone else to tell him what to say. I don't know. He broke one of our most important rules. We can't let people think it's okay. He paused and looked down at his hands, rubbing them together. But again, he's ... things changed. Now we know we can survive out there, and we can beat the Grieviers. Relief flooded Thomas. He had someone else on his side. He made a promise to himself to be very kind to Zart. Oh, give me a break, spurro Gally. I bet Minho's the one who really got rid of stupid things. Gally, choose your hole! Newt shouted, standing for the effect this time; again Thomas felt like clapping. I'm the chair right now, and if I hear one more word from you, I'm going to be fixing another Banish for your pitiful ass. Please, Gally whispered sarcastically, the ridiculous scold returning as he crouched back in his chair. Newt sat down and headed for Zart. Is that it? Any official recommendations? Zart shook his head. Very well. You're next, Frypan. The cook smiled through his beard and sat straighter. Shanks has more guts than I've fied from every pig and cow in the last year. He paused, as if waiting for a laugh, but none came. How stupid this is, it saves Alby's life, kills a couple of Grieviers, and we're sitting here and applying what to do with it. As Chuck would say, this is a lot of klunk. Thomas wanted to walk and shake Frypan's hand, he had just said exactly what Thomas himself had been thinking about all this. What are you recommending? Newt asked. Frypan folded his arms. Put him on the council and get him to train us in everything he did out there. Voices exploded from all directions, and Newt took half a minute to calm everyone down. Thomas ignored a wink; Frypan had gone too far with that recommendation, almost invalidating his well-stated view of all the mess. All right, returing it, he said did just that, scribbled on a notepad. Now everybody keep their bloodied mouths shut, I mean it. You know the rules, no idea is unacceptable, and everyone will have your opinion when we vote for it. He finished writing and pointed to the third member of the Council, a boy Thomas had not yet encountered with black hair and a freckly face. I don't really have an opinion, he said. What? Newt asked angrily. A lot of good he did to elect you to the Council, then. I'm sorry, honestly not. He shrugged. If anything, I agree with Frypan, I guess. Why punish a guy for saving someone's life? So you have an opinion, is that it? Newt insisted, pencil in hand. The boy nodded and Newt scribbled a note. Thomas was increasingly relieved, it seemed that most of the Guardians were there for him, not against him. However, he was having a hard time sitting there; desperately wanted to speak on his own behalf. But he forced himself to follow Newt's orders and remain silent. The next one was Winston covered in acne, Guardian of the House of Blood. I think he should be punished. No offense, Greenie, but Newt, you're the one who always talks about order. If we don't punish him, we'll set a bad example. He broke our number one rule. Well, Newt said, writing in his notebook. So you're recommending punishment. What kind? I think it should be put at the Slammer for a week with just bread and water, and we have to make sure everyone knows so they don't have any ideas. Gally applauded, winning a scowl from Newt. Thomas' heart felt a little. Two more Keepers spoke, one for Frypan's idea, one for Winston. So it was Newt's turn. I agree with all of you. He should be punished, but then we have to find a way to use it. I'll reserve my recommendation until I hear everyone. Following. Thomas hated all this talk about punishment, even more than he hated having to keep his mouth shut. But deep down he could not disagree, strange as it seemed after what he had achieved, he had broken an important rule. At the end of the line they left. Some thought he should be praised, others thought he should be punished. Or both. Thomas could barely hear more, anticipating the comments of the last two Guardians, Gally and Minho. The latter had not said a word since Thomas had entered the room, and sat there, collapsed in his chair, looked like he hadn't slept in a week. Gally was the first. I think I've made my opinions pretty clear. Great, Thomas thought. Then keep your mouth shut. Well that, Newt said with another roll of eyes. Come on, then, Minho. No! Gally screamed, causing a couple of Guardians to jump into their seats. I still want Something. Then say the bloody, Newt replied. It made Thomas feel a little better than the The President of the Council tossed Gally almost as much as he did. Although Thomas wasn't afraid of him anymore, he still hated the guy's guts. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_ Com \*\*\* Page 23 Just think about it, Gally started. This slinthead appears in the box, acting confused and frightened. A few days later, he is running through the Maze with Grieviers, acting as if he were in the place. Thomas shrunk into his chair, hoping others hadn't been thinking about it. Gally continued his dispossess. I think it was an act. How could he have done what he did after a few days? I'm not buying it. What are you trying to say, Gally? Newt asked. What if you have a blood spot? I think he's a spy for the people who put us here. Another fuss exploded in the room; Thomas could do nothing but shake his head, he just didn't understand how Gally could come up with all these ideas. Newt finally calmed everyone down again, but Gally wasn't done. We can't trust this stem, he went on. Day after he shows up, comes a psychopath, spitting that things are going to change, grabbing that weird note. We found a dead Griever. Thomas is conveniently in the Maze at night, and then tries to convince everyone that he is a hero. Well, neither Minho nor anyone saw him do anything in the vines. How do we know it was the Greenie who tied Alby there? Gally stopped; no one said a word for several seconds, and panic rose inside Thomas' chest. Could you believe what Gally was saying? He was eager to defend himself and almost broke his silence for the first time, but before he could speak, Gally was talking again. There's too many weird things going on, and it all started when this Greenie came showed up. And it turns out he's the first person to survive a night in the Maze. Something's not right, and until we find out, I officially recommend that we lock his ass in the Slammer for a month, and then have another checkup. More rumble erupted, and Newt wrote something in his notebook, shaking his head all the time, which gave Thomas a little hope. Finished, Captain Gally? Newt asked. Stop being such a smart aleck, Newt, he spat, his face red. I'm serious. How can we trust this offstick after less than a week? Stop voting for me before you think about what I'm saying. For the first time, Thomas felt a little empathy for Gally, he did have a point about how Newt was treating him. Gally was a custodian, after all. But I still hate him, Thomas thought. Well, Gally, Newt said. I am sorry. We hear you, and we'll all consider your damn recommendation. Are you done? Yes, I'm done. And I'm right. With no more words for Gally, Newt pointed to Minho. Go away last but not least. Thomas was euphoric that it was finally Minho's turn; I would surely defend him to the end. Minho quickly stood up, taking everyone off guard. I was there; I saw what this guy was doing: he stayed strong until I turned into a chicken wearing parties. Don't blaspheme ill to Gally, want to say my recommendation and end it. Thomas held his breath, wondering what he would say. Well that, Newt said. Tell us, then. Minho looked at Thomas. I nominate this stem to replace me as Custodian of the Homers. Chapter 24 Complete silence filled the room, as if the world had been frozen. All members of the Council looked at Minho. Thomas was stunned by the runner to say he had been looking. Gally finally broke the spell, standing up. That's ridiculous! Newt and pointed again at Minho, who had taken his seat again. He should be expelled from the Council for saying something so stupid. Any pity Thomas had felt for Gally, however remote, disappeared completely in that statement. Some Guardians seemed to agree with Minho's recommendation, some didn't. Others don't. Winston shook his head firmly, saying something Thomas could not understand. When everyone started talking at once, Thomas put his head in his hands to wait, terrified and astished at the same time. Why did Minho say that? It's got to be a joke, he thought. Newt said it takes forever just to become a runner. Let alone the custodian. He looked up, wishing he was a thousand miles away. Eventually, Newt lowered his notebook and came out of the semicircle, yelling at people to shut up. Thomas observed how at first no one seemed to hear or notice Newt at all. Gradually, however, the order was restored and everyone sat down. Shuck it, Newt said. I've never seen so many offspring acting like babies sucking tits. We may not see it, but around these parts we are adults. Act like one, or we'll dissolve this damn council and start from scratch. He walked from end to end of the curved row of keepers seated, looking each of them in the eyes as he spoke. Are we clear? Silence had swept through the group. Thomas expected more outbursts, but was surprised when everyone nodded with the nod of his consent, including Gally. Well, that. Newt returned to his chair and sat down, putting the pad on his lap. He scratched a few lines on the paper, and then looked at Minho. That's a pretty serious klunk, bro. I'm sorry, but you have to talk to move forward. Thomas couldn't help but feel anxious to hear the answer. Minho seemed exhausted, but began to defend his it's very easy for you offspring to sit here and talk about something they're stupid about. I'm the only runner in this group, and the only other one here it's even been in the maze is Newt. Gally intervened: Not if you count the time that—I don't! Minho screamed. And believe me, you or no one else has the slightest idea what it's like to be out there. The only reason you got stung is because you broke the same rule you blamed Thomas for. That's called hypocrisy, piece of—Enough, Newt said. Defend your proposal and do it. The tension was palpable; Thomas felt that the air in the room had turned into glass that could be broken at any moment. Both Gally and Minho looked like the tense, red skin on their faces was about to burst, but eventually they broke their eyes. Anyway, listen to me, Minho continued as he took his seat. I've never seen anything like it. He didn't panic. He didn't whine and cry, he never seemed scared. Dude, I've been here a few days. Think about what we're all like at first. Snuggle up in the corners, disoriented, crying every hour, trusting no one, refusing to do anything. We were all like this, for weeks or more than weeks, until we had no choice but to reject it and live. Minho stood up, pointed to Thomas. Just a few days after this guy shows up, he goes out to the Labyrinth to save two offspring he barely knows. All this fool about him breaking a rule is more than stupid. He hasn't gotten the rules yet. But a lot of people had told him what it is in the Labyrinth, especially at night. And he still went out there, just as the door was coming, he just worried that two people needed help. He took a deep breath, looking like gaining strength the more he talked. But that was just the beginning. After that, he saw me give up Alby, leave him for dead. And I was the veteran, the one who had all the experience and knowledge. So when Thomas saw me give up, I shouldn't have questioned him. But he did. Think about the willpower and strength it took him to push Alby down that wall, inch by inch. He's a psychopath. It's crazy. But that wasn't all. Then came the Grieviers. I told Thomas he had to split up and started the evasive maneuvers practiced, running in the patterns. Thomas, when he should have been wetting his pants, taken control, challenged all the laws of physics and gravity to take Alby to that wall, diverted the Grieviers away from him, beaten, found—We have the point, he broke Gally. Tommy here is a lucky stem. Minho rounded over it. No, it's not worth it, you don't understand! I've been here two years and I've never seen anything like it. For you to say anything... Minho stopped, rubbing his eyes, moaning in frustration. Thomas realized that his own mouth had widened. His emotions were scattered: the appreciation for Minho that would confront everyone in his name, disbelief at the continuous belligerence Gally, the fear of what the final decision Be. Gally, Minho said in a quieter voice, you're nothing but a seafood company that ever, not once, has asked to be a runner or tested for it. You have no right to talk about things you don't understand. So shut up. Gally stood up again, fussing. Say one more thing like that and I'll break your neck right here in front of everybody. Spit flew out of his mouth as he spoke. Minho laughed, then lifted the palm of his hand and pushed Gally in the face. Thomas half stood as he watched the Glader crash into his chair, tilting it backwards, cracking it into two pieces. Gally stretched across the ground, then hurried to stand up, struggling to put his hands and feet under him. Minho approached and trampled the bottom of his foot down on Gally's back, driving his fat body to the ground. Thomas stunned himself again in his seat, dazed. I swear, Gally, Minho said with a mockery, don't threaten me again. Don't talk to me again. Never. If you do, I'll break your neck, right after I'm done with your arms and legs. Newt and Winston were standing and grabbing Minho before Thomas knew what was going on. They took him away from Gally, who jumped, his face a reddish mask of rage. But he did not move towards Minho; stood there with his chest out, waving uneven breaths. Finally Gally walked away, half stumbling towards the exit behind him. His eyes threw themselves round the room, illuminated with a fiery hatred. Thomas had the sick idea that Gally looked like someone about to commit murder. He recoiled towards the door, approached behind him to grab the handle. Things are different now, he said, spitting on the floor. You shouldn't have done that, Minho. You shouldn't have done that. His manic gaze moved to Newt. I know you hate me, you've always hated me. You should be banished by your shameful inability to lead this group. You're embarrassing, and anyone who stays here isn't better. Things are going to change. This, I promise. Thomas' heart sank. As if things hadn't been awkward enough. Gally opened the door and went out into the hallway, but before anyone could react, he put his head back in the room. And you, he said, looking at Thomas, the Greenbean who thinks he's a God. Don't forget I've seen you before, I've been through Change. What these guys decide doesn't mean Jack. He paused, looking at every person in the room. When his malicious gaze fell on Thomas, he had one last thing to say. Whatever you came here for, I swear on my life I'm going to stop him. Kill him if I have to. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_ Com \*\*\* Page 24 Then he turned and left the room, banging on the door behind him. CAPITULO 26 Thomas sat down in his chair, a disease that grows in his stomach as infestation. He had gone through the full range of emotions in the short time since he arrived at Glade. Fear, loneliness, despair, sadness, even the slightest glimpse of joy. But this was something new: to hear a person say that he hates you enough to want to kill you. Gally's crazy, she said to herself. He's completely crazy. But thought only increased his concerns. Crazy people might be capable of anything. Council members stood or sat silently, apparently as surprised as Thomas by what they had just seen. Newt and Winston finally let Minho go; the three of them sullen walked to their chairs and sat down. He's finally struck forever, Minho said, almost in a whisper. Thomas couldn't tell if he wanted others to hear it. Well, you're not the bloody saint in the room, Newt said. What were you thinking? That was a little overboard, don't you think? Minho snatched his eyes and pulled his head back, as if he were baffled by Newt's question. Don't give me that crap. Each of you loved watching that idiot get his dues, and you know it. It's about time someone got up on their torsion. He's on the Council for a reason, Newt said. Dude, he threatened to break my neck and kill Thomas! The guy's mentally beaten up, and you'd better send someone right now to throw him at the Slammer. It's dangerous. Thomas could not have agreed more and once again almost broke his order to remain silent, but stopped. I didn't want to get into any more trouble than I already was, but I didn't know how much longer it could last. Maybe he had a good point, Winston said, almost too quietly. What? Minho asked, reflecting Thomas's thoughts exactly. Winston looked surprised by the recognition that he had said something. His eyes were cast around the room before he explained. Well... has gone through change—Griever stung him in the middle of the day just outside the West Gate. That means he has memories, and he said the Greenie looks familiar. Why would I make that up? Thomas thought of change, and the fact that he brought back memories. The idea hadn't occurred to him before, but would it be worth being stung by the Grieviers, going through that horrible process, just to remember something? He pictured Ben writhing in bed and remembered Alby's screams. No way, he thought. Winston, did you see what just happened? Frypan asked, looking incredulous. Gally's a psychopath. You can't put too much into his rambling nonsense. What, you think Thomas here is a griever in disguise? Council rules or without Council rules, Thomas had finally had enough. He could not remain silent for another second. Can I say something now? he asked, frustration raising the volume his voice. I'm sick of you talking about me. I'm not here. Newt looked at him and nodded with the asinitude. Go ahead. This damn meeting can't be much longer. Thomas quickly gathered his thoughts, clinging to the right words within the swirling cloud of frustration, confusion, and anger in his mind. I don't know why Gally hates me. I don't care. Sounds psychotic to me. As for who I really am, you all know as much as I do. But if I remember correctly, we're here because of what I did in the Labyrinth, not because some idiot thinks I'm evil. Someone made fun of him and Thomas stopped talking, hoping he'd noticed. Newt nodded with the asymptotic, looking satisfied. Well, that. Let's finish this meeting and worry about Gally later. We can't vote without all the members here, Winston insisted. Unless they're really sick, like Alby. For love, Winston, Newt replied. I'd say Gally's a little sick today, too, so we're still without him. Thomas, defend yourself and then we'll take the vote on what we should do with you. Thomas realized that his hands were placed on his fists on his lap. He relaxed them and wiped his sweaty palms on his pants. So it started, I'm not sure what I'd say before the words came out. I didn't do anything wrong. All I know is that I saw two people fighting to get into these walls and they couldn't do it. Ignoring that because of some stupid rule seemed selfish, cowardly, and ... Well, stupid. If you want to put me in jail for trying to save someone's life, go ahead. Next time I promise I'll point to them and laugh, then I'll go get some frypan's dinner. Thomas wasn't trying to be funny. I was astonished that all this could be a problem. This is my recommendation, Newt said. You broke our number one rule, so you got a day at the Slammer. That's your punishment. I also recommend that we choose you as a broker, from the date this meeting ends. You've shown more in one night than most apprentices in weeks. As for you being the keeper of insects, forget it. He looked at Minho. Gally was right about that count, stupid idea. The commentary hurt Thomas's feelings, though he could not disagree. He looked at Minho for his reaction. The Keeper did not seem surprised, but he argued anyway. Why? It's the best we've got, I swear. The Keeper must be the best. Well, Newt replied. If that's true, we'll make the change later. Give him a month and see if he can prove himself. Minho shrugged. Well, that. Thomas sighed silently in relief. He still wanted to be a runner, which surprised him, considering what had just happened in the Maze, but becoming the Custodian immediately sounded ridiculous. Newt looked around the room. Well, we had several so let's give it a Oh, come on, Frypan said. Just vote. I vote for you. Me too, Minho said. Everyone else spoke of his approval, filling Thomas with relief and a sense of pride. Winston was the only one who said no. Newt looked at him. We don't need your vote, but tell us what's going on in your brain. Winston looked at Thomas carefully, and then back to Newt. It's okay with me, but we shouldn't totally ignore what Gally said. I don't think he made it up. And it's true that since Thomas got here, everything has been cheeky and screwed. It's pretty fair, Newt said. Everyone thinks about it, maybe when we get bored and get bored we can have another meeting to talk about it. Well what? Winston nodded with the nod. Thomas complained about how invisible he had become. I love the way they're talking about me like I'm not here. Look, Tommy, Newt said. We just picked you as a broker. Stop crying and get out of here. Minho has a lot of training to give you. I hadn't hit Thomas until then. It was going to be a runner, explore the labyrinth. Nevertheless, he felt a shiver of emotion; I was sure they could avoid getting caught at night again. Maybe he'd had his only unlucky shift. What about my punishment? Tomorrow, Newt replied. Waking up to sunset. One day. Thomas thought. That won't be so bad. The meeting was dismissed and all except Newt and Minho left the room in a hurry. Newt had not moved from his chair, where he sat scoring notes. Well, that was a good time, he murmured. Minho approached and playfully punched Thomas in the arm. This is all Shank's fault. Thomas hit him back. Guardian? You want me to be Custodian? You're crazier than Frypan for a long shot. Minho faked an evil smile. It worked, didn't it? Aim high, hit low. Thank me later. Thomas couldn't help but smile at the Keeper's intelligent ways. A knock on the open door got his attention, turned to see who he was. Chuck stayed there, as if he had been chased by a Griever. Thomas felt the smile fade from his face. What's going on? Newt asked, standing up. The tone of his voice only increased Thomas' concern. Chuck twisted his hands. Med-jacks sent me. Why? I guess Alby's banging and acting like a madman, telling them he needs to talk to someone. Newt made it to the door, but Chuck raised his hand. Um... He doesn't love you. What do you mean? Chuck pointed to Thomas. Keep asking about him. CaPitulo 27 For the second time that day, Thomas was surprised at the silence. Well, come on, Newt told Thomas as he grabbed him by the arm, There's no way I'm going to go with you. Thomas followed him, with Chuck right behind, as he left the room and went down the aisle towards a narrow spiral staircase that he had not noticed before. Newt took the first step, then gave Chuck a cold glow. You. Stay. For once, Chuck just nodded and said nothing. Thomas thought something about Alby's behavior had the child's nerves on edge. Relax, Thomas told Chuck as Newt made his way up the stairs. I just got picked by a broker, so now they're friends with a stallion. I was trying to make a joke, trying to deny that I was terrified of seeing Alby. What if I made accusations like ben? Or worse? Yes, right, Chuck whispered, looking at the dazed wooden steps. With a shrug Thomas began to climb the stairs. Sweat furmored his palms, and he felt a drop drip down his sien. I didn't want to go up there. Newt, all gloomy and solemn, was waiting for Thomas at the top of the ladder. They were at the opposite end of the long, dark corridor from the usual staircase, which Thomas had climbed on his first day to see Ben. The memory made him dizzy; I expected Alby to be completely cured of the ordeal, so I don't he didn't have to witness something like that again: sick skin, veins, beating. But he expected the worst, and prepared himself. He followed Newt to the second door on the right and saw how the older boy called slightly; a groan sounded in response. Newt opened the door, the slight cracking once again reminding Thomas of some vague childhood memory of the haunted house films. There he was again, the slightest look at his past. I could remember movies, but not the faces of the actors or the ones I'd seen them with. I could remember theaters, but not like a specific one. It was impossible to explain how he felt, even to himself. Newt had entered the room and was asking Thomas to follow. As he entered, he prepared for the horror he might expect. But when his eyes were lifted, all he saw was a very weak-looking teenager lying on his bed, his eyes closed. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_ Com \*\*\* Page 25 Are you asleep? Thomas whispered, trying to avoid the real question that had arisen in his mind: He is not dead, is he? I don't know, Newt said quietly. He approached and sat in a wooden chair by the bed. Thomas sat on the other side. Alby, Newt whispered. Then stronger: Alby. Chuck said you wanted to talk to Tommy. Alby's eyes fluttered open, bloody orbs shining in the light. He looked at Newt, and then through Thomas. With a groan he moved into bed and sat down, with his back against his headboard. Yes, he murmured, a creaking scratch. Chuck said you were walking, acting crazy. Newt leaned forward. What's going on? Are you still sick? The following of Alby came out in a hiss, as if each of them took a week of his life. Life. ... it's going to change... The girl... Thomas... I saw them... His eyelids blinked closed, then opened again; sank back to a flat position in bed, looked at the ceiling. Don't feel so good. What do you mean, you saw, Newt began. I loved Thomas! Alby screamed, with a sudden burst of energy that Thomas would have thought impossible a few seconds earlier. I didn't ask about you, Newt! Thomas! I asked Thomas! Newt looked up, questioned Thomas with an increase in his eyebrows. Thomas shrugged, feeling sick for the second. What did Alby want for? Well, scaly grumpy. Newt said. He's here, talk



things over. Tomorrow, the Slammer. Then you're from Minho, and I want you to stay away from the other offspring for a while. You got it? Thomas was more than happy to force. Being alone mostly sounded like a great idea. Sounds beautiful. So Minho's going to train me? That's right, you're a runner now. Minho will teach you. The labyrinth, the maps, everything. A lot to learn. I hope you realize that. Thomas was surprised that the idea of re-entering the Labyrinth didn't scare him so much. He decided to do what Newt said, hoping he would keep his mind out of things. Further down, I hoped to get out of the Glade as much as possible. Avoiding other people was his new goal in life. The boys sat quietly, finishing their lunches, until Newt finally got to what he really wanted to talk about. Enlo waving his garbage on a ball, turned and looked directly at Thomas. Thomas, it started, I need you to accept something. We've heard it too many times now to deny it, and it's time to discuss it. Thomas knew what was coming, but he was surprised. I was afraid of words. Gally said so. Alby said so. Ben said it, continued Newt, the girl, after we took her out of the box, she said it. He paused, perhaps waiting for Thomas to ask what he meant. But Thomas already knew. Everyone said things were going to change. Newt looked the other way for a moment, and then turned. That's right. And Gally, Alby and Ben claim they saw in her memories after the Change, and from what I take into account, you weren't planting flowers and helping the old ladies across the street. According to Gally, there's something rotten enough about you that wants to kill you. Newt, I don't know—Thomas started, but Newt wouldn't let it end. I know you don't remember anything, Thomas! Stop saying that, don't say it again. None of us remember anything, and we're sick of you reminding us. The point is, there's something different about you, and it's time we found out. Thomas was overwhelmed by a wave of anger. Well, how do we do it? I want to know who I am as much as anyone else. Obviously, I need you to open your mind. Be honest if anything, anything at all, looks familiar. Nothing—Thomas started, but he stopped. So much had happened since he arrived, that he had almost forgotten how familiar the Glade had felt to him that first night, sleeping next to Chuck. How comfortable and at home he had felt. Far from the terror I should have experienced. I can see your wheels spinning, Newt said, quietly. Speaks. Thomas hesitated, frightened of the consequences of what he was about to say. But I was tired of keeping secrets. Well... I can't put my finger on anything specific. He spoke slowly, carefully. But I felt like I'd been here before when I first got here. He looked at Newt, hoping to see some kind of recognition in his eyes. Any other person going through that? But Newt's face was blank. He just rolled his eyes. Uh, no, Tommy. Most of us spent a week kkin's pants and bawlin'our eyes out. yes, well. Thomas stopped, upset and suddenly embarrassed. What did all this mean? Was he different from everyone else? Was something wrong? Everything seemed familiar, and I knew I wanted to be a runner. That's very interesting. Newt examined him for a second, without hiding his obvious suspicion. Well, keep looking for him. Strain your mind, spend your free time wandering your thoughts, and think of this place. Immerse yourself in your brain and look for it. Try it, for everyone's sake. I will. Thomas closed his eyes, began to search in the darkness of his mind. Not now, you dumb fool. Newt laughed. I just wanted to say do it from now on. Free time, meals, going to sleep at night, while walking, training, working. Tell me anything that looks remotely familiar. You got it? Yes, I do. Thomas could not help worrying that he had thrown some red flags for Newt, and that the older boy was hiding his concern. Well that, said Newt, who seems almost too nice. For starters, we'd better go see someone. Who? Thomas asked, but he knew the answer as soon as he spoke. Fear filled him again. The girl. I want to to look at her until your eyes bleed, to see if anything gets activated in that brain. Newt picked up his lunch trash and stood up. Then I want you to tell me every word Alby told you. Thomas sighed, and then stood up. Very well. I didn't know if I could tell the whole truth about Alby's accusations, not to mention how I felt about the girl. It looked like he hadn't finished keeping secrets after all. The boys walked back to the Homestead, where the girl still lay in a coma. Thomas could not quell his concern about what Newt was thinking. He had opened up, and he really liked Newt. If Newt turned against him now, Thomas didn't know if he could handle it. If all else fails, Newt said, interrupting Thomas' thoughts, we'll send you to the Grievors, get you stung so you can go through the Change. We need your memories. Thomas laughed sarcasticly at the idea, but Newt did not smile. The girl seemed to be sleeping peacefully, as if she were waking up at any moment. Thomas almost waited for the skeletal remnant of a person, someone on the brink of death. But his chest rose and fell with even breaths; his skin was full of color. One of the Med-jacks was there, the shortest—Thomas couldn't remember his name—throwing water into the comatose girl's mouth a few drips at a time. A plate and a bowl on the bedside table had the remains of their lunch: mashed potatoes and soup. They were doing everything they could to keep her alive and healthy. Hey, Clint, Newt said, sounding comfortable, as if he had come to visit us many times before. She surviving? Yes, Clint replied. She's fine, even though she talks in her dream all the time. We think he's going to get out of it soon. Thomas felt his hacks rise. For some reason, I had never considered the possibility of the girl waking up and being okay. That I could talk to people. I had no idea why that suddenly made him so nervous. Have you been retuy'down every word he says? Newt asked. Clint nodded with the asintitution. Most of it is impossible to understand. But yes, when we can. Newt was pointing at a notebook on the bedside table. Give me an example. Well, the same thing she said when we took her out of the box, about the things that change. Other things about the Creators and how 'everything has to end'. And, uh ... Clint looked at Thomas as if he did not want to continue in his company. All right, you can hear what I hear, Newt assured you. Well... I can't do it all, but .... Clint looked at Thomas again. She keeps saying her name over and over again. Thomas almost fell for this. Would the references to him never end? How did you meet this girl? It was like a cacking itch inside his skull that wouldn't go away. Thank you, Clint, said Newt in sounded to Thomas as an obvious dismissal. Get us a report on all that, okay? I will. The Med-jack nodded with the nod to both of them and left the room. He raises a chair, Newt said as he sat on the edge of the bed, Thomas, relieved that Newt had not yet burst into accusations, grabbed the one at the desk and placed it right next to where the girl's head lay. sat down, leaning forward to look at his face. Anything ringing a bell? Newt asked. Anything at all? Thomas did not answer, he kept looking, willing to break the memory barrier and look for this girl from her past. She thought of those brief moments when she opened her eyes right after being taken out of the Box. They had been blue, richer than the eyes of anyone else I could remember seeing before. He tried to imagine those eyes on her now as he looked at his sleeping face, merging the two images into his mind. Her black hair, her perfect white skin, her full lips... As he stared at her, he realized once again how beautiful she was. A stronger recognition tickled him briefly on the back of his mind: a flapping of wings in a dark corner, invisible but there anyway. It lasted only a moment before disappearing into the abyss of his other captured memories. But I'd felt something. I know her, she whispered, leaning back in her chair. It felt good to finally admit it out loud. Newt stood up. What? Who's she? I have no idea. But something happened to click. I know her from somewhere. Thomas rubbed his eyes, frustrated at not being able to solidify the bond. Well, keep thinking bloody, don't lose it. Focus. I'm trying, so shut up. Thomas closed his eyes, sought in the darkness of his thoughts, seeking his face in that void. Who was she? The irony of the question caught his eye: he didn't even know who he was. He leaned forward in his chair and took a deep breath, then looked at Newt, shaking his head in surrender. I just don't—Teresa. Thomas shook off the chair, hit him backwards, swung in a circle, looking. I'd heard ... what's going on? Newt asked. Did you remember anything? Thomas ignored him, looked around the room in confusion, knowing that he had heard a voice, and then back to the girl. I... He sat down, leaned forward, looking at the girl's face. Newt, did you just say something before I stood up? Lol Of course not. Oh. It's something I've always wanted to do. I do not know. Maybe it was in my head. I did it... does she say anything? She? Newt asked, his eyes lit up. Why is that? What did you hear? Thomas was afraid to admit it. I... I swear I heard a name. Teresa. Teresa? No, I didn't hear that. He must have jumped. your memory blocks! That's his name, Tommy. Teresa. It has to be. Thomas felt ... odd, a feeling, like something supernatural had just happened. Was... I swear I heard it. But in my mind, man. I can't explain it. Thomas. This time he jumped out of the chair and shuddered as far away from the bed as possible, hitting the lamp on the table; landed with the shock of broken glass. A voice. A girl's voice. Whisper, sweet, confident. I'd heard it. I knew I heard it. P/S: Copyright --&gt;Novel12\_\_Com \*\*\*

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