

“Each player tosses a small object inside one of the squares on the hopscotch grid, then hops from square to square, hopping over the square with their rock in it. Each player’s goal is to hop all the way down to the end and back without the other foot touching the ground.”

Hopscotch. The game every child played since they were old enough to be able to. Every single day every child had to throw the rock, watch it land in a square and then hop up and down the path without touching the ground or the square with the rock in it. Each day one person was assigned to redraw the game, in case it had faded overnight or got washed away by the rain. And then each child would play. On their tenth birthday they received their own rock, one that was special and unique to them even though they all looked the same to me. It infuriated me, watching each child do the same thing every morning before they properly started their day, watching each child cling to their rock like it was their most prized possession, as if it was the only beating organ keeping them alive.

Well, it was.

Lose that rock and you lose your life. That was one of the rules here. One of the five stupid rules that our leaders came up with. Rules that each child had to recite every night before going to bed. Hopscotch in the morning and rules at night. Everything you did between those two activities was up to you, so long as you obeyed the ones in charge. Follow the rules, keep your head down and don’t talk back. Live by these three things and they will leave you alone. Never give them a reason to retaliate.

I know the rules off by heart. I can recite them in my sleep and in twenty other languages. Of course, I can. Reciting them in English every night got boring after a while, so I found a way to change it up a little.

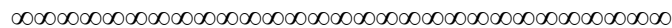
- 1 – Lose the rock and you lose your life
- 2 – Each family should consist of two parents, a man and a woman, and only two children
- 3 – Each new child born must be named according to the naming system
- 4 – Going outside the walls is strictly forbidden
- 5 – Never underestimate the government

That last one is my favourite. It's the only one that I can actually agree with. They call themselves The Allegiament, the dictatorship in charge of the entire city. They make the rules, they issue the punishments, they make all the decisions. Everyone who lives here fears them, especially the chief, Chief Gardner. He's my dad's best friend which doesn't exactly give me the advantages you would think. I was a troublesome child and the Chief likes to hold grudges, so I should try to stay as far away from him as possible, which is hard with his daughter being in my class at school.

And the fact that I enjoy messing with him.

School itself isn't so bad once you get used to the routine. I prefer it over having to stay at home all day. At least when I'm at school I can get outside and have temporary freedom for a few hours. I quite like the people too. Despite the circumstances we live in, nobody complains and everyone tries to make the best of the world we live in.

Everyone except me.



She slams her books down on my table making me jump up from my daydream.

“Oh would you wake up already?!”

I can recognise her voice from a mile away and on the inside, I'm rolling my eyes and planning fifty different ways to kill her but, on the outside, I give her the most sarcastic sweetest smile that I know will annoy her even more.

“Sorry Georgia but I felt your presence coming and the boredom immediately kicked in.”

She glares at me and flicks her long dark curly hair over her shoulder eyeing the streaks of pink in my blonde hair.

“How your dad allowed you to do that confuses me every day.”

“He didn't. But you know me, I do whatever I want whenever I want.”

She rolls her eyes and sits down in the chair next to me. “That is what I hate most about you.”

Georgia Gardner, the Chief's daughter, and my enemy since we were kids. There is no exact reason why we hate each other so much other than the fact that we both annoy each other to our limits. We have known each other from a young age, since we were five. Our dads working together called for endless playdates when we were younger where we would just sit in silence glaring at each other, but to this day I don't know why. It's just become second nature to me now to annoy and hate her and I have no doubt she feels the same way.

We are quite similar actually, in personality and appearance. We both have long curly hair, hers black and mine blonde and pink, we are both relatively tall and we are both pale. The only difference is our eyes, hers being dark blue like the bottom of the ocean and mine being a light hazelnut. We are two of the strongest minded girls in this city, coming from the families that we were born into, but Georgia will never go against the rules like I would. She's the perfect daughter as my dad always likes to point out.

Neither of us want to be sitting next to each other but the naming system doesn't allow us to be apart. Every new child born must be named alphabetically. The first child born in January starts with an A, the next child born a B, the next a C and so on until we reach Z when it restarts again. The government claims it's an easy way to track each person in the city. Just the right amount of A's, the right amount of B's, C's, D's. In school we are also seated alphabetically and with her being a G and me a H there was no escape from each other.

My name is Hope. Hope August. I know it's an awful name but I kind of like it. It gives a lot of meaning into my life. Hope, as in, I have hope that one day the walls will be taken down and I will finally be able to see what lives on the other side of us. The August is for the month, how the leaves change in the fall, they wither away and become dead, losing their orange and red glow and falling to the ground until they rise again. I hope our government will wither away, I hope they become dead and lose their power, lose their glow over us, I hope they fall to the ground and never rise again.

"Hope!" Georgia screams at me, shoving her hand over my mouth. "What are you saying! Keep your voice down or you'll be killed!"

I push her hand away and take a drink of water to get the taste of it away from me. I hadn't realized that I had been talking out loud and I look around panicked but luckily nobody seemed to have heard. I love to break the rules and I love to fight back and against them, but I am always careful because Georgia was right, I would be killed despite my status.

Speaking of status, there are two types of people living in this city. Those without government connections and those with government connections. Those without, live in small houses scattered across the city. They are the ones who must work for what they need. Every month the government evaluates each working person and how hard they have worked that month. If the government is happy with your standard of work you will be rewarded with food, clothes, better living conditions and potentially a promotion in your job if you truly impress them, but I have only ever seen that happen once, and the son of that family, my best friend, never talks about that reward.

Those with government connections live in the most modern building in this city. It towers over everything else and has everything you could wish for inside it, apartment blocks for living, a swimming pool, offices, a greenhouse on the roof, an endless supply of food, heating, a cinema room, games room, a room filled with weapons and armour - that only the soldiers have access to - a conference hall, a technology room that is beyond my comprehension and a basement that we recently turned into a morgue.

It's stupid the whole idea of it. All the money spent on keeping that place running could be used to improve our actual city. Every room on the inside looks spectacular, but when you step outside into our cold, dead air, the city looks just like that, cold and dead. Everything is so gloomy and grey, practically black and the wall surrounding us casts shadows and fog all over the place. If it weren't for all the people running around smiling at me all day, I would believe that I was living in a ghost town.

I don't understand why everyone is so happy living like this.

Everyone except me and my best friend Miles.



The bell rings and I reach into my bag pulling out my rock. Time for hopscotch. We all line up outside on the grey concrete and watch as one of the younger children takes the chalk bucket from the shed and redraws the entire game, then we play. Taking it in turns each person attending the school goes up to the number one square, throws the rock, watches it land and then hops from one end to the other. It sounds simple because it is simple. Without hesitation each child takes their turn, starting from the youngest and working up to the oldest, my class.

The principal starts calling our names.

“Briella Mayfield.”

Briella walks forwards, her mid length and wavy light brown hair falling into her face. She also lives in the apartment blocks, her mom working down in the morgue. I don't know why anyone would choose to work down there. Seeing all those dead bodies would destroy my mind, and we have had a rise in the number of dead bodies over the last three years. Ever since the escape, the Allegiament stopped hesitating in killing whoever gave the impression of rebelling.

“Clover Bellwood.”

Miles and Clover and I have been a trio since we first met each other on our first day of school, when we were five years old. She always wore her dark brown hair in a plait, a few stray strands always flying out. She is small but strong and hates this game nearly as much as I do, nobody will ever hate it as much as I do.

Georgia's name is called out next and she slowly walks forward, her eyes focused on the ground. Everyone in the class loves her but she thinks it's only because she's the Chief's daughter. I don't think she realizes how much everyone actually admires her, much to my disbelief.

She plays the game and it's over in less than thirty seconds. Then it's my turn.

“Hope August.”

I roll my eyes, my signature response whenever I'm called to play. I make a point of dragging out my steps as a walk towards the chalk boxes, bringing on laughter from half of my class, the ones who hate this game, and annoyance from the other half, the ones who follow every inch of the rules.

“Get on with it Hope so we can get this over with,” I hear one of the boys shout and I look over to see Kaden Holloway grinning at me. I grin back and go even slower just for his entertainment. Kaden has short dark blonde, nearly brown, messy hair, the greenest eyes I have ever seen and has had a crush on me since we were kids. Then again, Kaden has a crush on any girl who so much as smiles in his direction. I could write a novel on all the different ways he has tried to ask people out and on all the different ways that they have said no to him. Don’t get me wrong, he would be the best looking guy in the class if Miles didn’t exist and he is extremely fun to be around, he has a great sense of humour and is spontaneous, but he just tries too hard. If he stopped trying to ask me out, I would have no problem with saying yes but I want someone who acts naturally around me. Someone who treats me the same as they would treat anyone, someone who realises after a long time has passed that they care about me as more than a friend and then waits for me to realise that I feel the same way even if it takes me longer.

I finally make it to the last square and take a bow to the sound of Kaden’s sarcastic applause.

The principal calls for silence so he can carry on with the list, clearly annoyed with our behaviour but not annoyed enough since he lets this happen every day.

The rest of the class take their turns and when it's finally over we are allowed to go home. Home to that tall building that I wish I could burn to the ground.

“Same Hope, same.”

I spin around startled to see Miles behind me with his short wavy dark brown hair, light honey-coloured eyes and tanned skin. He was smiling but it wasn’t fully happy, not the smile that made me want to become his friend all those years ago. Ever since his dad got promoted and they were allowed to move into the apartment blocks he changed. Miles hates everything here, he hates the Allegiament, he hates anyone working for them and anything that relates to them. If we were being technical about it, then he should hate me and all our friends too but since we all hate the government just as much he decided to stick with us.

“Hope you really have to learn to stop saying your thoughts out loud.”

I link my arm in his and we start to walk toward the building. “I don’t realize I do it until someone hears me and panics to shut me up.”

“Well try harder because one day the wrong person will hear you and I don’t want to add your execution to my list of reasons to be miserable.”

“Oh relax, the only way that I’ll end up in the morgue is if it's by my own hands. Nobody cuts my life short without my permission.”

Miles gives a small laugh, but I knew he wasn’t convinced. “Come on or we’re going to be late for the assembly.”