

ICEHAVEN

Sum of all Tears – Book 1

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CHAPTER ONE

In the near future...

August Madison glanced at her watch, then back at her father, her shoulders tight with anxiety. “Minus seven minutes.”

Anticipation flickered in his blue eyes as he smiled and watched the images of the dozens of military aircraft taking off from various airports throughout the United States and around the world on the mammoth digital screen inside the university’s largest auditorium.

As chief climatologist of the International Climate Change Initiative, he believed he’d finally discovered the answer to the world’s most pressing issue. With the oceans growing more acidic, dozens of animal and plant species becoming extinct, and the atmosphere ten degrees higher than a decade ago, widespread catastrophic weather events, each more violent and deadly than the one before had increased. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, and horrific flooding due to rising sea levels had caused the destruction of some nations and continued to kill millions around the globe.

All of that was about to change.

“Can you check on Luke and Chloe?” her father asked under the increasing commotion surrounding them. “They should be here by now.”

August frowned at the cause of her stress. She wasn’t surprised by her brother’s tardiness. He was always late, an eighteen-year-old who had an excuse for everything. All he had to do was pick up their younger sister from school and show up on time for their father’s shining moment. Just be on time for once. Do what was expected. One time.

“I’ll call him.” August snatched her phone out of the back pocket of her jeans and hit speed dial. He finally answered on the fourth ring, right before voicemail kicked in.

“Where are you? You’re late.”

“Chloe was poky leaving class.”

August rolled her eyes, knowing her brother had been up all night playing video games with his friends. She’d bet her Yale tuition he’d been sleeping and hadn’t gotten up in time. “Hurry up, Dad’s asking for you.”

“I’m pulling into the university parking lot. Wow, there’s a ton of people here. I didn’t know this was such a big deal.”

She checked her watch again. *Five minutes.* “You’ve known your whole life how important this is to him.”

“I’ll be there in two minutes.”

August ended the call and forced a smile for her father. “They’ll be here soon.”

He nodded and put his arm around her shoulder. “I don’t want them to miss it. This will be a story you’ll tell your own children one day.”

She smiled, imagining a future where the climate wasn’t the dominant issue of the day. Her father hadn’t been this happy in a long time. Five years almost to the day her mother had passed away, he deserved some happiness.

While the auditorium filled to standing room only with faculty, students and media, excitement buzzed in the air. Her father really was about to make history, his experiment, his hard work, bringing them to this moment. She took a seat in the front row beside him and looked up at the screen. A low hum caught her attention. Unsure where the sound came from, she glanced over her shoulder, searching for her brother and sister, disappointed that Luke would probably be too late. The humming grew louder. August covered her ears, the high-pitched deafening sound too much.

An earth-shattering boom savagely rocked the auditorium.

The tile floor cracked and shifted under her feet. The seismic force catapulted her out of the seat, slamming her left shoulder and the side of her head into the floor with a hollow whump. Dazed, August staggered to her knees, then to her feet and reached for her father’s hand, mere inches away through the smoke and dust. She couldn’t get to him.

Phantom outlines of people bumped into her, scurrying by, searching for an exit. Screams, sobs, and moans filled her head. Blistering heat ripped through the room, as if the atmosphere was being sucked out by a high-powered vacuum. Her heart thrashed in her chest.

Where were Luke and Chloe?

She fought back tears as panic drove deep into her bones. Stretching out her arm, she reached for her father again and struggled against the growing clatters and groans.

A gale-force wind rumbled like a freight train, and the building blew apart.

“Daddy!”

Chunks of debris pelted down around her.

August tripped on something, maybe someone, and landed flat on her back. While she gasped for each painful, labored breath, electrical wires popped and sizzled around her and shot fiery particles everywhere.

Overhead, a metal beam swung wildly in her direction, like a giant pendulum. A pungent, suffocating odor, similar to lighting a million matches, filled her nostrils. An acidic taste touched the tip of her tongue and burned the back of her throat. Muffled quiet descended over her. The world blurred.

Then came the cold.

CHAPTER TWO

Arctic air sliced through August's lungs like a hundred tiny knives. She gulped her first breath and pried her eyes open one at a time. Adrenaline surged, and her heart took off like a rocket. Pushing her elbows against the frozen ground, she sat up and surprised a figure kneeling at her feet.

While the woman worked awkwardly with gloved hands to unlace August's boots, she stopped and looked up at her.

Her eyes widened. "You—you're dead!"

Fear rose in August's chest. And she remembered.

All around her, hard-pack snow and ice stretched for miles.

Everything was gone.

The university.

Everything.

Beneath the mounds of winter, remnants of scraps of metal, wooden planks, piles of bricks poked through, odd-shaped ghosts of what used to be. What happened? Where was her father? Her brother and sister?

While the woman rambled incoherently, August used all her strength and grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. Her frozen joints shrieked with pain. "Where am I?"

The woman's watery eyes blinked between the black knit hat and red scarf draped around her head, shielding her face from the wind. "Icehaven."

The word meant nothing to August. No. There had been an accident at the auditorium at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where she attended school. Her father's decade-long experiment to end climate change by stabilizing temperatures around the world had gone wrong.

Horribly wrong.

All she remembered was trying to grab her father's hand. By then, nothing could have saved them. A sound like high-pitched booming jet engines had overwhelmed her, and she raised her hands to cover her ears. "No. That's impossible."

Taking her opportunity, the woman shoved her backward with two hands and ran in the other direction, her frayed boots crunching with every rapid step. August bounced off the ice onto her butt, then slid backward until she slammed against the fender of a half-buried, charred car. Air exploded out of her lungs, and pain shot down her spine, her

body. She doubled over, pulling her legs to her chest, and dragged in a stinging breath. Then, she released it.

Her piercing scream could probably be heard for miles, but August heard nothing. She only felt the extreme cold invade every fiber of her being. Within moments, the unrelenting chill blocked the searing pain and she straightened her stiff limbs, first her legs, then her arms. She glanced down at her blue fingertips and scrambled to her hands and knees with one thought: shelter. She needed to find refuge as soon as possible or she'd die. *Again?*

None of that mattered right now. August dragged herself to her feet and spotted bleary black dots against the white horizon. She blinked through tears and tried to focus. Were they moving?

She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and tried again.

They were definitely moving.

They looked like fuzzy outlines of humans, other survivors, coming to help her or to kill her. Either way, she put one frozen foot in front of the other and resolved to meet them halfway.

The wind whipped around her, blasting ice crystals against every inch of exposed skin, sticking in her hair, soaking and freezing her jeans, sweater, and jean jacket within minutes. By the time she met the four strangers, carrying large backpacks and rifles, heavily clothed in winter coats and colorful blankets, all she heard was the monster howl of the wind. Maybe their lips moved, she couldn't be sure. She couldn't even tell if the people were men or women. August didn't care. Shivering uncontrollably, she fell forward, collapsing against them, hoping they meant her no harm.

"Get her something for her head, hands, and feet," a familiar female voice said.

After digging through their backpacks, a layer of comforting warmth encased her shoulders in the form of a pink shag carpet, secured by strong arms on either side. Another woman handed her white oven mitts with cows printed on them, men's gray wool socks and a fuzzy black headband.

Were they serious? August hesitated, then took the items, knowing they weren't anything she'd ever use as clothing on a normal basis, but grateful for anything to keep her warm. After putting on the headband, she sat on the carpet and took off her army-style black boots. While she finished putting on the extra pair of socks, someone handed her four plastic bags.

"Put them over your feet and hands. They'll keep them dry, keep the heat in. You don't want to end up with frostbite," a man said.

August took the bags and shoved her feet inside, tied them tightly closed, then put her boots back on. She slipped her hands into the bags and then stuffed her frozen fingers into the oven mitts. "Thank you."

"Where did you find her?" a man asked as he blocked the wind with his large frame and helped her to her feet.

The woman with white hair pointed then placed the carpet back over August's shoulders and head. "Over there by that beam. She was dead. I took her pulse and listened for her breath and a heartbeat. Nothing. I worked on her for thirty minutes. I was

a nurse for a lot of years at Hartford Primary Care. I know when a person's dead. She *was* dead."

August tried and failed to laugh. The woman who'd tried to steal her boots had gone back, wherever back was, for help. At least she hadn't left her for an ice-filled grave.

A man's low, deep voice silenced the others. "Let's get her back to the bunker and see if we can get her warmed up enough to talk. If she came from that direction, she might know something."

August groaned as they trekked as a group, a clump of humanity buffeting the swirling air and ice that blanketed the endless frozen terrain. She couldn't tell them she didn't know anything, at least nothing that seemed logical or made any sense in this strange world. Even the sun didn't look the same, its fiery yellow-orange glow had changed to a dark shade of red, the light much dimmer, as if someone had shut off a gigantic light bulb.

She had plenty of questions for the strangers. Like where had the buildings and cars and civilization gone? Where were they, really? Who were they and how did they live in such harsh conditions? Why were they carrying weapons? First, she needed to make it to shelter before the sun dipped below the horizon and the temperature dropped beyond measure. August trudged forward, gritting her teeth. One thing she knew for sure. If any of this turned out to be her fault, her father's fault, she had to find a way to make things right.

* * *

Plodding across the slippery landscape for what seemed like forever, August's legs throbbed and blazed with fiery pain from the biting cold. The strangers hadn't said a word since they'd started their bone-chilling journey. All she knew was they were heading southeast on I-95. Ice packed shells of entangled and smashed vehicles with haunting statues of broken bodies in sculpted poses littered the once busy interstate she'd traveled so many times with her family. Carnage was everywhere, more visible in some areas than others.

With each cautious step, ice cracked and groaned under the heels of her boots. August held the carpet tightly around her body, her shoulders aching from the heavy weight. She stopped in mid-step and gasped.

Beneath her feet, a woman with black hair lay curled on her side, clutching a newborn baby in a powder blue bunting bag. The mother and child's eyes were wide open, staring back at her through the frosty glass-like tomb. Horrified, she looked away, sidestepping the buried family, wanting more than anything to erase the image from her mind. She'd be happy to get to their destination, out of the cold and away from the death and destruction.

"You can't think about the ones who are gone. It's too late for them. You have to keep moving," the female said.

August fought back tears and removed one of the bagged oven mitts to reach into the pocket of her jeans. She pulled her iPhone out and stared at the shattered screen, her hands shaking violently.

The man with the low voice, who appeared to be the leader, stopped and glanced at her. A thick layer of crystallized ice covered his eyelashes and mustache, making him look much older than he probably was. He had brown hair and kind blue eyes like her father. Her heart ached even more for her family.

“That thing won’t help you. Nothing works anymore,” he said through gray-blue lips.

August glanced down at the phone. She was hoping she could call her brother’s phone and maybe find her family...if they were alive.

His hand touched her shoulder, and he gave her a little shove. “Keep moving or you’ll freeze. We’re almost there.”

Wind blasted around them in gusts, cutting through the carpet tented over her head and wrapped around her body.

As they plodded past a gas station almost completely embedded in ice with its front door missing, August noticed the overturned and barren shelves inside. The cash register drawers sat open and empty. It wasn’t as if money would help anyone now. On the floor inside the door, she spotted two large bare feet sticking out of a bump of ice. She glanced away, not wanting to see more.

“Where are we going?” The air stung her lungs and made her involuntarily gasp milky clouds of steam as she spoke.

“East Haven.”

Thank God. They were still in Connecticut. August let out a breath of relief and started coughing when she inhaled a gulp of frigid air. “I thought we were in a place called Icehaven?”

“It’s the name for the state of Connecticut. That’s what they call it now.”

August turned her face out of the wind and tried to process what he’d just said.

“I’m sure this is all confusing. We’ll talk more once we get to the Army National Guard armory. We’ve been digging it out for two weeks.”

Weeks? How could that be?

Panic bubbled up inside her chest and her head spun.

Impossible. She was at the university on Monday.

August shook her head, hoping the action would knock some sense into her, into the man.

He must be mistaken. He had to be...

Her feet were numb and frozen, and she wasn’t sure she could walk much farther. She knew she had to. “Why don’t we just stay at the gas station? We could light a fire to get warm.”

“It’s not safe here,” the woman beside her said.

The man clutched the rifle tighter. “She’s right. It isn’t safe. The armory is secure, at least for now. We have some supplies: clothing, food, water, and whatever else we scavenge. But supplies are dwindling by the day.”

Great. She’d either freeze to death or starve.

As they continued heading south, bleak crimson skies surrounded them. The sun lowered, and so did the temperature.

* * *

Darkness gathered around her. Barely visible from the outside, all August could make out was a massive four-story high bank of white with crumbled red bricks and wooden beams protruding in different directions. She headed through a number of narrow, chiseled ice tunnels and down a long set of stairs lit only by candles. She slowed her pace to allow her eyes to adjust and her vision to clear. With the wind blocked to a soothing wail, they hurried through a corridor of the building into an open area.

A small group of adults and one child, a toddler, clasped silver reflective blankets and huddled around two space heaters in the middle of the room, casting curious glances as she neared. They were dressed in mismatched winter clothing, some wearing military ponchos and wool hats. At her appearance, their whispered conversation stopped. Did she know any of them? Did they know her?

“This way,” the nurse said and handed her a silver foil blanket.

August set the carpet down and took off the oven mitts and plastic bags and put them on a chair. She gratefully wrapped the blanket around her shoulders then followed the woman into another hallway on the opposite side of the room. “How many are here?”

“Unfortunately, too many.”

Realization hit August in the heart. Too many people to feed, clothe and shelter. Had the world really come to that?

“What’s your name?” she asked her host.

The woman unwound her scarf and grinned. “Snow Globe.”

Was the woman serious? “That’s your real name?”

“Actually, it’s Sandy Globe. Everyone calls me Snow—especially now.”

They continued, winding through a series of short halls until August couldn’t remember how they’d gotten there. Probably on purpose, she thought. “Where are we going?”

“All newcomers need to meet with our leaders, no matter what time they come in. Even if we have to wake them up, which they hate.” Snow came to an abrupt halt at a crossroads in the hallway, and August nearly ran her over. “You’re in luck. They’re waiting for you.”

Facing these unknown people made the blood pound behind her eyes. What if they didn’t let her stay? August shivered at the thought of going back outside, recognizing the armory provided the best protection. They had to let her stay. They couldn’t just put her out, could they?

“Let’s go.”

August dragged her feet like she used to when going to a class she didn’t like or a party where she didn’t know anyone. Before she had time to arrange her thoughts into an argument about why she should be allowed to stay, they emerged from the deceptively short tunnel into a small room.

A decaying red and blue oriental rug lay beneath a long, bowed metal table. Behind the table sat three individuals, each passive face staring at her; two women, one man.

A woman with short red hair at the left end of the table greeted them. “Hello, Snow. Tell us about this one.”

The nurse cleared her throat. “I was out scavenging with the others and wasn’t having much luck. On my way back, I saw her in the snow.”

The man in the middle raised his eyebrows. “Dressed like that?”

Snow shook her head and shot August a sideways glance. “She was dead. No pulse. I tried to revive her and couldn’t.”

“Apparently you could,” the man said, combing his fingers through his bushy beard.

Everyone except for August laughed, and Snow’s face turned red. “It wasn’t by my effort. I was planning on taking what I could—her boots—then she sat up. Scared the hell out of me. I ran back to the group for help because the sun was going down and didn’t know if I could get her in by myself.”

At least the account of events was accurate. August stood still while they studied her like some kind of middle school science experiment. Did they still have schools? Probably not. Focusing on survival meant other things were impossible.

The other woman sitting at the table with almond-shaped eyes and long brown hair asked, “Is that all, Snow?”

“Yeah. If you don’t mind, I need to get back to my kid.”

“Of course,” the man said as he stood and stretched his legs. “Thank you.”

How civil everyone seemed to be. August’s skin crawled for no real reason other than she was alone before the three-person panel without a clue if they would allow her to stay.

The woman sitting in the middle chair spoke up. “What is your name?”

“August—Madison.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-two.”

They glanced at one another, and the man sat back down.

“How did you end up out in the open, dressed like that? Did you run away from another group, settlement?”

What was he talking about? Settlement? “No. I don’t know how I ended up there.”

Even to her trained, logical mind, it sounded like a joke. But no one laughed.

The red-haired woman leaned forward. “Where were you from...before?”

“New Haven,” she answered. “I lived there all my life.”

Until I died...

The man’s eyebrows drew together, making his face appear smaller. “What’s the last thing you remember before you woke up today?”

August’s eyes met his. He knew something, understood the strange thing that had happened to her. Or perhaps he knew who she was, who her father was. Was it safe to tell the truth? She had no proof they wouldn’t use it against her. The longer she waited to answer, the more discomfort bloomed in the room.

“I was in the auditorium at Yale University, waiting for the climate change experiment to begin.”

No one said a word. They traded glances again, then the man asked, “Are you saying *you* survived?”

Tears flowed, and August quickly brushed them away with the back of her hand. His question meant no one else had survived. Not her father, brother, sister or anyone else who had come out to support her father. With her throat too thick to speak, all she could do was nod.

“Amazing,” the women said at the same time.

Then the redheaded woman stood and walked around to the other side of the table.

August felt a vague uneasiness and stepped back when she approached.

“It’s late,” the woman said, her accent something other than New England. “Let’s get you something to eat and a place to rest. You can stay with me and my husband until we decide on the best course of action.” Her green eyes gave nothing away except a sincere offer to help.

“Thank you.”

The man also stood. A small smile flashed across his otherwise stern face. “Lydia will look after you. We’ll talk again tomorrow.”

Lydia rested a hand on August’s shoulder and steered her toward another room with two sets of bunkbeds on either side of the space. “Don’t worry, we’ll get to the bottom of all this in due time. For now, you need food and rest. I’m guessing you may have more questions for us than we do for you.”