The Game Of Deathclaw and Radscorpion

by Silver_Moonlight

Summary

Once she discovers the true purpose of Vault 75, Valery C. Quinn makes a run for it; facing the dangers both in and below the Commonwealth wasteland. Running into foes of all sizes, it isn't until she finds her calling with the Brotherhood Of Steel and meets the mysterious new Knight Nathan Whitehall that she truly understands the dangerous game of 'deathclaw and radscorpion' that each faction is playing with The Institute.
Heart pounding, the sound of screams and shouts as my fingers twisted around the metal bars and pushed them towards myself and slammed them shut behind me. My crystalline green eyes scanned for a lock but gave up quickly as angered voices began to close in on my location. Intense heat struck me however my mind raced a million miles as I rushed for the hole in the Maldern Middle School’s exterior wall, blue and yellow vault suit providing some minor form of protection from the raging sun as my retinas screamed at me to retreat into the vault below and beg for forgiveness for leaving.

My mind screamed for me to soldier on, unsatisfied that I thought not to grab a gun and some ammunition before I left the vault unarmed like an idiot. In front of me sat a trio of rusted cars, windowless and torn by the radiation caused by, as my old tutor would have said in the classroom “The Up-top-land Boom”, a bus directly in front of me provided some cover but any idiot would check there for the misguided lamb of a 15-year-old who just escaped a vault.

The noise had surely disturbed some life nearby, strands of my auburn hair slipped from my simple braid whipping across my eyes as I witnessed an oversized deformed fly, something from one of our stories told in the vault came buzzing up and down looking for the source of the commotion. My eyes stretched wide, a lump in my throat as eyes raced to the right, sighting a dilapidated shopfront signalling the selling books and stationary and forcing my legs to push me towards it with all my might. Its boarded door sunk my heart, but years of being pushed to my limits flickered to life as instinct took panic’s place and I began to follow the curve of the road past a crumbled building with a ‘hotdog’ sign before it just as raging gunfire began to sound behind me. A strange lurching sound covered the battlefield as what could only be described as a horde of jittery people with an assortment of tattered clothes charged at those who wore the familiar vault suit brandished with the familiarly bold 75 on the back. A cold sweat crept up my back as I slowly backed into a cylindrical blue wall.

Mind racing and hesitation threatening to linger on the edge of my consciousness, I pressed the release latch and stuffed myself inside what could potentially become my tomb should I be found.

“Fuck” I mumbled to myself as the toe of my boot nudged the olive-green backpack stuffed inside the shelter, swiftly reaching for it and hugging it to my chest as the sound of gunfire sounded around me, the dim lighting of the blindingly blue shelter giving me the smallest form of comfort. The battle raged on, inhabitants of the vault that I had grown up with calling for the total and utter destruction of the foes they faced, a few familiar voices cried out as their automatic weapons rained down upon any perceivable threat. The lump of saliva in the back of my throat refused to subside, even as I heard voices disappear.

“Where the fuck did that little bitch go?!” an overly masculine voice called, their weapons must have become lowered as their enemies vanquished.

“I saw her run towards that book store over there” another cried, this time it was the light bell tone of Vivian, one of my closest comrades in the initial years of training but that had soon diverged once we learnt that each of us ran in a competition to see who wouldn’t simply drop dead from the over strenuous training and copious amounts of testing done on each of us. Sweat began to form on my forehead as the pang of anxiety stabbed at my legs preparing myself to fight the fight I knew I could not win as the voices began to draw nearer to my hidden location.

“When we find this little shit, I’ll shoot her in the head myself - what the fuck is that?!” The first voice called, my mind raced as I imagined whatever monstrosity they had stumbled across.
“I am super mutant! I am unstoppable!” A deep voice roared and my legs buckled as the voice sent a tremor down my spine and my hand reached to grip the blue wall of the preservation shelter, before a scream could escape my lips gunfire sounded one more time, this time much closer to my presence as both the mysteriously deep voice belonging to this ‘super mutant’ and the voices of those who fought to protect the vault raged on as the sickening sound of bodies dropping to hard cement filled the pod for what seemed like an eternity.

A heavy breath filled the air as someone threw their empty gun to the street sidewalk, walking to rest on a war as those who caught attempted to re-centre themselves.

“Look, that bitch is going to die out here. We don’t need her anyway” Vivian’s voice drifted from where I hid, before continuing, “come on Travis. She is long gone, she has no guns no nothing. She is as good as those disgusting rotten ... GHOULS that litter the street. It’s almost sunset out here, I have a feeling shit will hit the fan as soon as that sun goes down” a matter of agreement and both voices carried off, before disappearing completely.

Lungs burning, I finally let out the tight breath I had no idea I had been holding. Sinking to the narrowly spaced floor I reached for the backpack and caught the tear that slipped across my pale skin. ‘Did I really just do this?! Did I just leave the vault? Oh my god what if I die out here?’ My heart sank for the fifth time since this morning, I had finally learnt what our directive was as the heroes of Uptopland. We were an experiment, made to see just how far we could push genetic mutation. ‘If I die out here, it’d be better than being slaughtered for whatever genetic code sits inside my body or being dragged to the incinerator. Whatever this means, escape the is the key to a new life. Who knows, farming could be the thing for me’ I screwed my face up at the thought of farming for a living out here. Did people still live up here or was everything dead?

Hours seemed to pass before I finally grabbed the large olive backpack and slung it across my shoulders and pulled the latch to view the blood bath before me. Along the street sat gigantic green men, or what i assumed was a man for it had no hair and a large body mass, something a few of the boys in the vault would have been jealous of. Their bodies covered in a rather inconspicuous rag that seemed to cover nothing at all before being wrapped in a leather binding for what I could only assume was their weapon storage. The large discoloured bodies sat strewn with various members of the vault, only two or three boys that I had never really run across. Naturally Vivian and Travis, this year’s two top heroes had taken their vault suits, not prepared for the inhabitants of this desolate wasteland to know of our existence. Who could blame them, our mostly sheltered lifestyle in the vault could be disturbed by anyone or ... thing that just so got a little too curious.

Peeking from behind the brick wall to check the coast was clear, my body turned to the right preparing to start my track as the orange glow of the sunset filled my senses. A life of living in artificial light could never have prepared me for the sight it was, the sun sinking low in to the horizon of decaying and destroyed buildings, the warmth pressing against my skin-tight vault suit and pulsing across the bridge of my small nose. Even though the smell of rot invaded each of my senses I still took a deep breath relishing the freedom I had risked life and limb for. However, I knew, I was not in the clear yet.

Walking southbound my heart raced and fingers pricked as I approached the old police station, preparing my sweaty knuckles for a fight if need be. The small foyer filled itself with a rather torn yellowing couch and coffee table aside the once polished ebony wood desk. Walking behind revealed a rundown terminal, microphone and telephone. The emptied filing cabinets behind said desk proved futile for resources so my mind turned to the jail door hiding the holding cells. Hardly prepared to see it abandoned and empty, my eyes flickered to the desk and red roller chair that sat before the door. On the desk, a dough roll that looked to be glazed in some sort of sugar tempted me.
“Why not save it for later? Yeah, I’ll save it for later...” I let myself trail off as I sat the olive backpack on the rusted desk, placing the sweet roll into the Vault Tec lunchbox before tucking it neatly away inside the back again. Ransacking the drawers, I pulled out a handful of nuka-cola bottle caps, a beverage I had only ever heard whispers of along with the empty rocket shaped bottles that we had saved and used for shooting practise all those years ago. I stashed them, along with the toothbrush and toothpaste I found within the draw into the backpack as well. Climbing the stairs in the main room to the offices, I found another stack of caps in the first desk and an electrified security baton beside the Maldern police evidence terminal. Nothing of interest caught my attention as the screen bloomed to life after all this time, and stood to walk away from the small office I found myself in. As I rounded the corner to leave the building a shiny 10mm pistol with two packs of ammunition beside it caught my eye.

“When life gives you weapons I suppose” I smiled to myself, grabbing the gun and booking it for the front door finally ready to get out of this god forsaken wasteland. Where I would end up, I couldn’t even begin to guess.

I took my chances heading south, small pools of sweat had begun to gather on my back as I felt eyes following me as I approached an empty school bus that sat beside a steel bus stop that sat in rather good condition. Without a mattress, the shelter would be useless, and a few of the seats still has some form of leather cushioning on them. With a shrug and knowing this discomfort could only possibly last a night, I settled inside the shelter mindful of the overgrown and mutated mosquitoes that occasionally floated around outside at the park little ways away from where I now sat.

Now began the treacherous fight about whether or not I was hungry enough to eat the bread I had found earlier in the police station or whether to save it for when I got miserably desperate. As I sat on the edge of the red leather seating, my eyes spied the pale blue cooler hidden behind the long bench beside me. Oh god, someone - somewhere - is looking out for me, I thought to myself. Reaching for the clip on the side of the cooler, the smell of char grilled meat filled the air. Without thinking my mouth began to salivate more than it had in the longest time and I reached in for the small miscellaneous steak that sat rather snugly within the cooler along with two metallic cans of purified water dated with a stamp signalling it had been manufactured some 200 years ago in 2077. I was unsure of what the actual date was out here in these wastes, but I knew from the technical documents kept by the scientists in the vault that it was sometime in 2280. Something did not sit right with me inside the bus, undoubtedly it had something to do with the openness of the windowless carriage. Quickly shoving the steak and water containers into my backpack, I climbed from the wreckage and back onto the extremely weathered cracked road, the only light pulling me forward being from the moon high above in the sky.

Atop a small mount sat what I hoped was an abandoned trailer, my eyes scanning my surroundings thoroughly as I approached the trailer. A small lock held back the potential salvation of my night and all hope seemed lost.

“Shit” I cursed as I looked at the old design of the lock before a lightbulb struck above my head, “actually, I could totally crack this” pulling two of the bobby pins from my braid that simply held back the loose strands of hair that would fall into my face, I jammed the both inside the lock, twisting and turning until slowly but surely the lock began to turn before the small click signalling that I had successfully broken my way inside.

The devastatingly sad scene before me was almost too much.

Inside the trailer sat five bone dry skeletons, two huddled beside each other and a mattress between them, another one sitting by the once locked trailer door and the final two sitting across each other
with their heads in their laps. Swallowing the thick lump of saliva in my throat back and with a sad smile I could almost imagine these people living their lives in here, their only belongings sitting in the tanned suitcases at the back of the trailer, laughing with one another as they joked about how exactly they could make their situation better than before. How they could have been so lucky to have this trailer rather than be without a home at all and how their company meant the world to each of them.

Grabbing each of the sets of remains, my heart lurches as I pull each of them from their eternal home and sit them outside in the tree line, letting them watch the stars with whatever remains of their friends before they each met their untimely demise.

“I hope you guys had as happy a life as you could in a shit fest of a world like this...” I sighed before climbing back inside the trailer and closed the door behind me, grabbing the mostly intact lock and clicking it into place on inside of the temporary shelter. Moving the torn mattress to where the two suitcases sat with nothing more than a surprisingly sparkly red sequin dress, black tuxedo and two thick blankets. Clutching the blankets to my chest I laid one down atop the blanket, it’s smell surprisingly not too rancid as I layered the old cloth pillow between the sheets and laid my backpack beside me. Moving the suitcases to one side of the wooden pallets, my fingers reached for the steaks and water stashed inside the pack. The first few nibbles hit my tongue like radioactive rain tingling inside my mouth, but my time on the inside listening to all the stories about the animals that lived in Uptopland and how cooking their meat would help you survive outside of the vault in order to save the people of the war-torn wasteland.

“What a crock of shit” I muttered as I reached for the can of water, cracking the lid like an old fashioned can of soda and taking a sip of its contents. The metallic aftertaste almost forced the remnants of my porridge-like breakfast to join me in the trailer, but another nibble of the streak carried most of the taste away. Finishing off the can of water, survival theory started to take hold. I could live three days without water and three weeks without food. Being genetically modified didn’t change my overall needs of being human.

Getting up and walking over to the makeshift bed that I had assembled in this little trailer, my fingers pulled away the tattered brown blanket making way for my body to climb into its almost safe embrace, my long auburn braid tangling around me like a rope, it was finally time to get some sleep in this semblance of safety.
Intense heat awoke me before the sounds of crows started to caw in the treetops above the trailer.

A hand smacked into my face, waking myself up by pushing me over the final edge as the crashing heat filled the trailer and my eyes shot open in a moment of panic and unawareness. Images of the Vault crashed through my sleep and my racing heart quelled as my eyes took in the rusted blue trailer. A sleepless sleep and adrenaline pulsing through my body and mind was all the encouragement I needed to brush the hair from my eyes along with the copious amounts of sleep that had accumulated in the corners of my drowsy gaze.

As I sat up, my eyes wandered to the olive backpack, a scowl on my face as my stomach growled at me for some form of sustenance. Reaching in to the pack I grabbed for the can of purified water dated with 2077, a true vintage I remarked at myself as I pulled the can lid open and drank the metallic water within.

“I have to find something cleaner than this, but at the same time …” my voiced throughs drifted off as my stomach settled ever so slightly and the concept of getting out of dodge started to dawn on me. If they hadn’t already, the vaults inhabitants might very well send out another search party if they hadn’t resolved to simply let me die out here in these wastes.

“I’ll show those pricks who’s wrong” I huffed as I reached for the pack one more time and retrieved the 10mm pistol inside and filled the clip with a full set of rounds. Never knew when this gun would come in handy, and id need it to be ready at a moment’s notice if those giant green men and scrappy remains of people were to be taken into account. Mind racing, I looked around the trailer for something to use before my eyes settled on the two blankets wrapped between my legs.

Ah. I stood, untangling myself and rationed about needing a potential pillow and blanket if I had to camp out in a dilapidated car or something by the end of the night.

If my survival training had taught me anything it’s that you use what you must the best of your abilities and one of the blankets on the trailer floor was most definitely something useful. Fingers reaching, teeth tearing and fabric screaming as I pulled each piece into a thin strip, that was long enough to wrap around my waist once before I tilted my leg to the side and pulled the makeshift weapon holster through the small gap between my legs wrapped it around my left thigh. Reaching for the 10mm pistol hiding below my vault-tec lunchbox and slid it into the small holster before tucking whatever was left of the material into the cloth holster with a swift knot.

The rational part of me tore another two strips and looped the fabric around the base of the backpacks straps before rolling the spare blanket and pillow into a portable sleeping bag style bed, securing it in place for the trip out of here and away from Maldern. With a reluctant look at the suitcases sitting on the pallets beside my sleeping spot, my better judgement told me that I couldn’t possibly need a shiny red sequined dress yet it had just seemed to beautiful and rare, like something someone glamourous running away from their life would wear into a high-end city. ‘Sweet baby Jesus Valery, you don’t need that damned dress – it won’t even fit you’ I thought to myself before taking one step away from the cases.

“Who cares” I laughed at myself as my body dashed for the yellowing suitcase and packed the brightly coloured garment away in the odd contrasted olive military backpack. Leaving the trailer
behind and securing the trailer lock to my pack, it became time to track into the wilderness in search of any form of civilisation.

Boots sliding on the steep dirt decline, my feet had never been so glad to be on a mostly solid ground in all my life. The rough material of the backpack rubbed against my thumbs as I looped my fingers in the straps of the pack, my eyes scanning the road for any potential sign of danger.

CRACK!

Adrenaline shot through my spine and alerted my mind, hands racing to grasp the hilt of my newfound pistol, grabbing it from the shoddy holster and flicking the safety off in the event of some mad man with a gun raced at me and tried to rob me. Instinct flooded my mind as a growl filled my senses, the feral growl echoing in my ears as a drop of sweat welled in my hairline at the base of my braid.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. I focused my breathing and steadied my racing heartbeat, slowly turning as the path I had previous walked filled with a pack of mutated and disgruntled mangy dogs.

“Sh-” I started to mutter as the first started to advance, its heavy-set brow covering the beady black eyes of a predator stalking its prey. Move slowly. Don’t alarm it. Keep your guard up. Do – not – turn – your – back, I repeated in my mind, slowing my breathing as the fleshy pink and red muscles tensed in the animal, its jowls starting to salivate before wet chunks of drool fell to the floor. Every part of me wished to turn and run, climb a tree and shoot the pack of mongrels down from some semblance of safety however that didn’t seem like the most viable option. Two dogs began to veer off to the left, an attempt to cover all bases as their pack mentality swung into full effect. Another mongrel separated from the three in my direct eye sight, taking up the right flank in another attempt to corner me in.

CRACK – CRACK – CRACK

Arm recoiling and finger jittering from the quick succession of shots, I had managed to take out the two dogs to my left before injuring one before me. The growl of the feral beast sent a flurry of butterflies to my stomach as my boot snagged on one of the many overgrown roots in the cracked road.

“FUCK!” my words lost themselves as wind rushed to meet my ears, the sound of muscle and flesh smacking to the pavement sent a quick shiver through my body as I let out a strangled “Ughff” before my body scrambled, foot looking for any kind of hold before the dogs would devour me alive. Blood pumped, I swear I could feel my pulse in my torn up hands as my gravel infested hands reached the gun that had fallen a few feet from me – scooping to pick it up and my stomach churning with a sick sense of dread – I began my run into the middle of the wooden wasteland.

Savage barks and growls surrounded me, one of the beasts catching up to me as I reached the first blur of a hill and snapping at my ankle.

“N-not! Today!” I yelled as I aimed the gun and shot with eyes squeezing closed, the sad whimper of the animal carrying back as my legs screamed at me in exhaustion as I passed the second hill and vaulted over the fallen tree before me. Four more salivating howls filled the air as my arms started to tire, backpack flouncing behind my back and hair trailing like a whip in the wind.

The heat began to become a problem as sweat pooled in my back and along my face, dripping as my lungs worked overtime to double back and lead the feral dogs to the road once again. Veering to the left, my stomach lurched as I felt a snap against my ankle, a twig had found the heel of my
boot as I feel once again, eyes wide as the packs alpha bound its way to me, muscles contorting in the most unnatural way as it raced to catch its prey.

In my fall, the baton had come free from the pack, my eyes widened as I reached to my side gripping the shock baton with all my might and swinging it as the beast lunged into the air, attempting to snap at my arms in mid-air as the black stick collided with its skin with a sickening sizzle. The impact seemed to do bugger all as it climbed to its feet and let out a quick howl to its pack mates as its jowls dripped with droll on to the dirt floor below.

Now or never, I thought, as I advanced and brought the fight to the mongrel. Swinging my left leg out, I managed to catch its shoulder joint, a pitiful whimper escaping it as I brought the baton above my head and swung it down to the beasts’ side, followed by another two quick swipes and a gunshot to the middle of its head.

Heavy breathing filled the air as a moment of respite was finally given to me, my heart racing as I tried to steady myself knowing that there were still two more hungry animals out there hunting me down. Checking my clip quickly I counted my shots against those left in my gun. Seven. Seven more bullets before I’d need to reload and put in my final clip of rounds.

The sound of the last mongrels approached, their footfalls slowing as they found me on the edge of the desolate woodland. I really couldn’t have picked a worse outfit to wear out of that god damned vault because their hungry eyes fell on my bright blue form in an instant.

“Let’s do this!” I screamed across our barren battle field, raising the gun in my right hand and gripping the baton in the other tightly as the final pack members raced at me. The first ran for my legs, snapping its rotted teeth at my ankles as I lifted my leg and began to kick out, followed by a quick swing of the baton and knocked the beast off my trail for just a moment. The second wild beast lunged at my arm, its eyes narrow as it tried to grip on to my wrist. A simple twist set it falling to the ground in a puff of dirt and dust but in my stupor I had momentarily forgotten the first dog, its quick but strangled bark filling my eyes as it nipped at my ankle another time, its teeth sinking into the leather of my boot and my throat tightened to release a strangled cry as it began to shake its head back and forth ferociously as though I was no more than its favourite chew toy.

My right leg stomped whatever was left of its eroded paw, my mind paying no attention to the blood that would surely pool and bruise my ankle later tonight. The second dog growled, its jaws snapping as my arm swung the baton into its skull with a sickening CRACK as it fell to the floor, its body going slack as it rolled down the small hill and its yellowing tongue drawled out the side of its mouth. A smile crossed my lips as my sights set on the final dog, its tongue sweeping across its lips as if to say, “More for me”

Its paws pressed into the dirt as it attempted to jump me one final time, my gun raised as its jaws spread and it was as if time moved slower, to a tenth of its natural speed as my finger pulled the trigger of the gun and let off two quick shots, blood splattering across my suit and down my torso.

CRACK – CRACK

The beast fell to the floor, its body slack as blood sputtered from the back of its head, eyes glossing over as it rolled slightly and landed in an oddly contorted position as I let out a quick huff from the exertion and running that had caught up to me.

“Son of a bitch” I muttered as I took in my appearance and noted the potential injuries I would have to deal with for who knew how long. Blood splattered across the dirty blue of my shins, the rusting red creating a vivid contrast to the colour below it. A wet smear across my cheek alerted me to the blood that had somehow found its way to my face, raising my hands it was only then that I realised
they were shaking. Tremors filled my body as my eyes widened, taking in the gravel that had lodged itself into my skin, buried like a treasure in the middle of a pale desert. One by one, my blunt nails reached into the scrapes, plucking the gritty stones from their temporary homes, stinging red pain shooting from the superficial wounds as I hissed with each piece of gravel shifting.

Stomach twisting, the skin around the wounds puckered, red and angry as if to berate me for drawing the attention of the mongrels, as if a slap on the wrist was going to ward me off of this dangerous wasteland. Satisfied with the surface of my skin being mostly free of the rocks, I took a quick step.

Big. Mistake.

“Agh!”

Another shot of searing red climbed my leg, my hand racing at an inhuman speed to the nearest tree for support as I inspected the bite that had started to swell and bruise from the damned dog. What a piece of shit! You just had to come and do this didn’t you? Why couldn’t you just die like everyone else in that bloody vault in another year?

Tears threatened to overspill from my eyes as I took a tentative step forwards, my lips pulling back with a stiff inhale in an effort to mask the discomfort from my ankle. I have to soldier on. My eyes scanned for the backpack, finding it fallen behind a tree stump beside one of the deceased mongrels body. Disgust tore through me as its fleshy pink muscles glistened in the sun high above, my body unnaturally cool from both my perspiration and the insulative properties of the vault suit.

Walking for what felt like hours but was surely only moments, I had finally felt a glimmer of hope as I crossed the small mound of dead leaves and general trash beside the road as the civilisations walls peaked from behind the small lump of dried up dirt, overgrown roots filled the cracked tar roads that lead me across its path. Tall cement walls, a shifty grey colour, that looks rather new hid away the small community from any potential threat. A smile cracked my skin, eyes relaxing as I rounded the rock situated before my eyes. “Welcome to covenant!” the blue sign proclaimed. Stashing my gun away in the makeshift holder I had created, I top a tentative step forward before stopping to see a two headed beast lugging crates and cloth on its back. The beast did not look wild but caused a tug in my stomach as I watched its head move simultaneously from the other, a pink fleshy hoof stampeding on the war-torn ground as it let out a strangled “moo” sound. My eyes darted away to the most interesting flower I could find as two heavily armoured men looked across at my position, their eyes suspicious of the light blue vault suit that hugged my body. The third man stood at the heavily indented blue metal industrial door, talking with rather expressive hand gestures.

“All I am saying is, if you want to keep this trade route going you guys need to understand that the prices of my wares are raising” the man in white frowned as the gentleman standing beside the ebony wood table signed and ran his hand down the side of his face before leaning under the tarp above his desk.

“Look, pal. It’s not me you have to negotiate with, it’s Jacob. Head on inside and state your terms with him”

“I’m on to you Swanson. This little town of yours may have its growing crops but without my goods to help keep this town surviving, you’ll all have to uproot and move away” the man in the white coat yelled as he turned his back on the man named ‘Swanson’. His dark brown eyes moved across to my crystalline green before a weary smile spread across his lips.
“Not looking for trouble I hope” he said, voice like ashen fire as it scraped across my skin. Something just didn’t feel right.

“Whatever could you mean?” I found myself asking. His thick brows pulled down as his leather jacket scrunched before his arm moved to gesture to all of me. It was only then that my eyes wandered down to my vault suit which in my haste to find civilisation I had totally forgotten was splattered with blood. “Oh” was all that could leave my mouth as I drew a blank. ‘God damn it Valery, this is your first actual encounter with a human being with no horrendous mutations or murderous tendencies. Be cool. Start talking!’ my mind shouted at me.

“Encounter something out there in the big bad world, little girl?” Swanson asked, eyes dropping for a moment as if to study how dangerous I might be to the small town filled with voices beyond the cement walls.

“I guess you could say that? A few rabid dogs came my way as I left Maldern. Any chance of me getting in to this little town of yours?” I asked with what I hoped was my best winning smile.

“I’ll cut you some slack. It’s a mean old world out there, everything’s always getting bigger while we keep on getting smaller. It’s honestly a bit of a tizzy out here. Here’s what I’ll do, take out SAFE test, just to make sure you’re not one of those institute synths sent here to spy on us. Take a seat” he moves behind the desk, worn brown work pants stretching at the hand stitched seams that obviously held the garment together as he sighed and ruffled a sun scorched hand through his greying brown hair.

“Alright. First question; you are approached by a frenzied scientist, who yells, ”I'm going to put my quantum harmoniser in your photonic resonation chamber!” What's your response?” My mind buzzes as my years of training sink in. Unfortunately, in all the forced science lessons I had taken in the vault a ‘quantum harmoniser’ and ‘photonic resonation chamber’ struck no bells.

“I'd... sneak away before he finishes” in this hypothetical problem maybe leaving would be the best way to go? A surprised Look sits on Swanson’s face as he reads from the clipboard in hand and ticks the first box off with whatever my response criteria was. Adrenaline spiked through me, a single bead of sweat welling on my hairline as I looked across at the two-headed miscellaneous and guards that started to retreat from the dead fire pit that sat before the small tarp.

“Second question; While working as an intern in the Clinic, a patient with a strange infection on his foot stumbles through the door. The infection is spreading at an alarming rate, but the doctor has stepped out for a while. What do you do?”

“Given what I have around me I suppose I would medicate the area as best as I can before the doctor returns?” ‘That sounds reasonable... right?’ I think as the small bead of sweat welling on my hairline as I looked across at the two-headed miscellaneous and guards that started to retreat from the dead fire pit that sat before the small tarp.

“Third question; You discover a young boy lost in a cave. He's hungry and frightened, but also appears to be in possession of stolen property. What do you do?” Swanson’s lips remain impassable as the question lingers in the air, save for the small tilt of the left corner as he sets his pen down and looks into my eyes.

“Depending on what the items stolen was, I’d lead him to safety before asking someone in charge to give a reasonable punishment?” The answer was not supposed to hang in the air like a question,
but seemed to fall from my lips as though it was almost a plea to be correct. The smirk turned to a smile, his eyes shifting to the paper and back again with the small flick of his wrist and a note being made beside the scribble.

“Fourth question; Congratulations! You made it onto a baseball team! Which position do you prefer?” Mind racing, I thought back to the history taught in the vault. Baseball was not something often played in the vault in the time that I had lived there but old relics still hung around in the scientists’ laboratories as trophies from the past. I suppose my position on the field should be reminiscent of my own fighting style so I answer as best as I can…

“Defence?” hesitantly, he nods and crosses off the paper bound to the clipboard again.

“Question Five; Your grandmother invites you to tea, but you’re surprised when she gives you a pistol and orders you to kill someone. What do you do?” Swanson’s eyes flicker up to me, his gaze intent as he rests his elbows on the table, leather jacket squeaking slightly as his eyes bore into my one.

“She is my grandmother, so I suppose I’d do whatever she told me to… do…?” I say relatively reluctantly. What possible reason could my genetic grandmother need a pistol for? And who would she want to kill?

“Sixth question; Old Mr. Abernathy has locked himself in his quarters again, and you’ve been ordered to get him out. How do you proceed?”

“Easy,” I almost laugh, before continuing, “I take a bobby pin and pick the lock”

“Alright, question seven; Oh, no! You’ve been exposed to radiation, and a mutated hand has grown out of your stomach! What’s the best course of treatment?” His ridiculously unenthusiastic voice almost makes me crack, these questions are so random and have no general theme. I shift in my seat.

“If I had the right medication, I’d take it. If not, id probably chop the arm off. Sound about right?” My arms tugged at my stomach, crossing over my chest as I pulled them from the sides of the chair. His lips turned into an almost dissatisfied smile as he glanced form the sheet to me.

“Something like that” his eyes glanced over the sheet a final time before asking, “question number eight; A neighbour is in possession of a Grognak the Barbarian comic book, issue number 1. You want it. What’s the best way to obtain it?” My mind wanders, thinking about what this … Grognack is? A comic for entertainment purposes. Why would I want to obtain a comic book?

“In the event that I would want a drawn book for entertainment purposes, I would sneak into their room and steal it when they are sleeping” I stifled a yawn, eyes closing for a moment as the battle before me seemed to be a losing one with an onslaught of never ending questions.

“Final question; You decide it would be fun to play a prank on your father. You enter his private restroom when no one is looking and…” his hand hangs suspended in air, as if gesturing for me to continue his rational of thinking.

“Loosen the water pipes so that when he goes to use the sink he gets a bit of a surprise” His brows furrow, his lips moving in a silent conversation as he tallied my responses.

“The good news is… you passed! Head on inside, Penny’s shop is usually the first stop for new comers. Maybe have a bit of a bath as well” Swanson stood, knees cracking as he reached across
the table with a smile to shake my hand as he studied my uniform again, for the second time today I had forgotten that I was covered in bruises and must have looked like I was a walking plague with all the blood spattered on my body. I smiled, thanked Swanson and walked to the blue metal doors before he finished off with a quick yet grandiose;

“And welcome to Covenant!”

Chapter End Notes

So, this is basically what made me start writing, I loved Covenant in the game (minus the whole undercover project part) and it has to be one of my favorite settlements in the game! I hope you guys are enjoying it so far! I know my writing style is pretty horrendous so bare with me - this story still has a long ass way to go :D
I swallowed the lump in my throat as my foot stepped over the threshold between a rugged wasteland and the glistening community. This small yet bustling town seemed to be alive with joy and smiles, the four recently erected houses gleaming with new-ish coats of paint as the sun shone between the clouds from high above. The ground was on the verge of green grass, however it seemed to be lacking enough water to blossom – perhaps the radiation in the water was deterring the growth entirely. Four houses sat erected from the squishy ground, the first to my right an off baby blue with a dilapidated white picket fence, at one point the posts might have been straight, or maybe the people who lived here just couldn’t be bothered making the posts straight in the first place.

“Fresh lemonade here!” the robotic voice pulled my eyes away from the house before me, the floating sphere holding a canister in its claw ripped a shocked laugh from my lips, “Ha!” my feet seemed to drag me to where the robot floated, I found myself asking, “lemonade?”

“Yes miss! Why, its Deezer’s Lemonade of course! It's the most thirst-quenching drink in the Commonwealth!” his happy voice seemed to be positively bubbling as he thrust a can of the lemonade at me.

“How much do I owe you?” I reached for my pack, before its voice called my attention back to it again.

“Free of charge for all of our special guests”

“Thanks, I guess” I smiled and took the lemonade in my other hand, turning and heading for the little off blue house I had passed before. Inside stood two women, the first had her hands crossed over the bench that was her ‘storefront’, her cheek resting in her closed fist as her eyes seemed to focus on everything and nothing at all on a particularly barren wall beside the woman with the white coat over the top of her regular clothing. The woman in the coat stood looking down at someone in the seat in her makeshift medical bay, the man complaining about his shoulder pain seemed to smile a little too kindly at the woman, her voice stern as she advised him against using some medication for the pain and to let the problem subside on its own. My attention turned back to the young-ish woman who held her head in the palm of her hand, her eyes seeming to focus as I took another step into the store.

“Oh! Hello and welcome sweetheart!” her sickeningly sweet voice pierced my ears, the sound of it sitting in all the wrong spaces. She must have been able to tell as my eyes tightened and my lips pulled into a wince, “that wasn’t right…” she muttered to herself as she straightened up and ran her hands down her pink plaid dress to clean herself up slightly.

“Hi…?” how does one simply introduce themselves to people outside of a hostile and competitive living environment.

“Well don’t just stand in the doorway silly! Come on in, I won’t bite! This is Patricia –” the woman gestured to the much older woman dressed in the white coat, the small insignia grabbing my eye as I stepped back towards the door.
“Penny, Trish is just fine I assure you,” she laughed, not noticing my step backwards, “just passing through dear or were you looking for a place to rest for the night darling?” Trish smiled, her eyes finally turning to me before they widened and she let out a shocked gasp, “Is that a vault suit?”

“y-yes it is” I stammered. This woman had a vault-tec scientist coat on, I should have realised the coat as soon as I stepped into this damned shop.

“How odd, you don’t see many people wearing those these days. Last I heard that Vault over near Diamond City was opening its doors up for trade because it’s practically falling apart these days. Where on earth did you manage to find one, in such great condition – might I add – even if you are completely covered in blood” Spoken like a true scientist from vault tec.

“I found it in some bin along the way. My old clothes had pretty much had it with all the walking about out here, ran into a pack of pretty wild dogs on the way past here” I smiled, the lie falling seamlessly from my lips, seemingly well received as the woman, Trish, simply raised her brows and smiled.

“What luck” she huffed before turning back to the woman in the pink dress, “invite the poor girl in Penny” she laughed before sitting down at her desk and turning the cover of a mostly intact book over and scribbling some notes in it with a broken pencil with a quick hum of a tune that started to play on the surprisingly functional radio in the room.

“Come on in, what can I get ‘ya for? We got some armour, weapons but mostly sell foods and general items” she said with a tight smile pulling at her lips. Brows pulling down with an awkward smile I gestured to my being.

“Unfortunately, I don’t think I have enough to buy much from you” she laughed, my eyes closing for a moment before focusing on the box labelled ‘Blamco Mac n Cheese’ and felt my stomach rumble a little. *You still have that meat and that roll, you don’t need the damned glorified cardboard*

“I’m sure that Jacob, our mayor might have some work that needs doing, if you’re interested? And as an added bonus anything you buy from me will come with a discount” her bright smile framed by her dark hair, the twist of the up-do sitting atop her head in a neat swirl, something reminiscent of the women in the olden style magazines people used to read in the vaults at their annual haircut. Of course, I had never visited the salon on as frequent of a basis as every other member of the vault. Unconsciously, my fingers brushed a strand of my long dark auburn hair behind my ear and I looked across the wares along her counter.

“I think I’m mostly after some new armour, I don’t have much in the ways of that at the moment” I laughed as I glanced across at the counter top one more time. “So how long have you guys been here for?”

“Oh, it’s been a number of years now that I’ve almost completely forgotten. My partner and I decided to settle here and take over this little shop maybe four or so years past, there was an elderly woman who used to run the shop who decided to settle down here before us from that … Diamond City … or wherever and what not after that SYNTH went crazy and killed someone in the middle of everywhere. That’s why our little town is the better of the two”

“Synth?” I found myself asking. Maybe this land needed a hero after all if something was going around and killing people of its own accord.

“Nasty things, nobody knows where they come from but they are like machines with brains. Its got everyone in a fair bit of a tizzy of late” her smile was one of sadness and worry as she glanced to
the floor before flickering to the door and back to where I stood again. I knew when someone was attempting to avoid eye contact and change the subject.

“That’s a fair point. Do you think it would be okay to stay the night here, maybe even a couple of days?” I asked, head cocking to the side slightly letting a strand of my long hair shift from the loose braid I wore and fall across my eyes. Right about now I wished I had taken that visit to the salon and cut off my hair, might have been a symbol of new beginnings after all. Penny seemed to hum for a moment before Patricia spoke up from her space at the desk, her silence making me almost completely forget about her presence in the small store.

“It’s best to talk to Jacob dear, he will make sure you have a spot in the guest house with a few of our workers here” without lifting her head I could see her smile as she studied all of her notes, wrinkled fingers flicking the pages of her note book back and forth as if to compare her documentations.

“Fantastic, and where abouts would I find him?” I asked Trish before Penny piped up again, her sickeningly sweet voice drawing my attention once more.

“He should be a house over sweetie, in his office” her delicate hand lifted with a gentle gesture to the wall behind her, her smile seeming almost relaxed as she waved me off and reminded me to stop by any time.

“I’ll be getting a new delivery of goods in to the shop sometime this week, so make sure to stop by – might even sling you a few caps for helping me unpack it all, if you’re interested that is” Penny laughed at my questioning eyes, Caps? my eyes wandered over to her little register and my mind raced back to the small stash of bottle caps that I had in my pack. Realisation dawned on me as my lips tugged at a smile, must have been their currency out here.

My boot crunched on the dusty pathway that led up to the next house on the right, the same off blue colour shaded the next house, the white door swinging slightly in the breeze that lulled through the town as I stepped into the dimly lit room.

The office had all the things I had seen before from the scientists’ rooms back in the vault, a desk with a few odd bits and pieces strewn across it, my eyes immediately noting the two manila folders that sat atop each other beside the half empty coffee cup, a lit cigar placed haphazardly into the dirty yellowing ash tray and a shiny pair of slightly scratched handcuffs found their home on the outer corner of the ebony wood table. Saliva caught in my throat at the sight of the cuffs, my mind racing back to the thought of those restrictive bindings being placed on any person who dared to think outside of the way of life in that god damned fucking vault.

“Ahem” I forced my voice to make a move as the man – who I could only assume was the Mayor – looked up from his magazine and smiled briefly.

“Ah! Yes, you must be the new visitor Swanson told me about, am I right?” he stood, his thick
frame seeming to creak as his legs straightened with a slight click.

“That’s me” I half laughed with a small smile as I nervously brought my arms across my chest in a tight squeeze.

“Don’t fret girl, here in Covenant we pride ourselves on our guaranteed safety, our storefront and our fresh crops amongst such terrible times. Here, come – come! Have a seat my dear. Might I ask your name?” he gestured, the seat before his makeshift desk in the middle of the floorplan had a small cushion on it, as if to make the proposition somewhat more enticing.

“Valery” I resigned to saying in a rather nervous tone. My legs screamed at me as I took my seat across the man, Jacob, as he mimicked my actions and sat at the same time.

“My dear Valery, what can I do for you today?”

“Well, sir,” my eyes glanced to the cuffs as fast as I could before returning back to his face, “I have just come out of a pretty sticky situation –” I laughed as he gestured to the blood on my uniform as most others had done this morning.

“I can see” he interjected with a small wink before allowing me to continue.

“I wouldn’t want to be too much trouble, but I was wondering if I could possibly rent a bed in your town for a few days, just until I can get myself together and head on out to somewhere else” I let my eyes sink to my boots as I awaited his verdict, Way to show your age, idiot! Why not just tell him – ‘hey mister! I’m a 15 year old spastic who decided to leave her friends and livelihood behind because I was too afraid of getting a below average test score and being escorted to the repurposing ward’, I’m sure he will totally understand then.

“I cannot see the trouble, we have a few spare beds anyway in the guest house. You are very welcome to stay with us for however long you wish, just as long as you understand that you must help this community. Every guest we have helps tend the crops and gather water for the town from the water pumps and purifier we have down by the lake. I only ask that you do not travel too far into the water for we are having a bit of a … problem … with the creatures in and around the water” his dark eyes shifted to the door behind me and back again.

“What kind of … creatures?” I asked, voice brave as I questioned why people would be afraid of the water. My money sat on mutated fish with several legs and fangs.

“Nothing much, just a few overgrown crustaceans – Mirelurks as it were”

“Sounds like a bundle of fun” I joked, eyes scanning his as his hefty stomach jiggled up and down with the heavy laughs that escaped his mouth.

“Now dear, if you were after a warm shower or a bath, there is a small laundry station beside Penny’s shop, I might suggest grabbing a spare bunch of clothing from one of the dressers in the guest house and wearing those while you clean your … suit … off” the way his voice lingered on ‘suit’ had me feeling as though vault suits weren’t something commonly seen around here – that and what Penny and Patricia said helped to drive the idea home.

“I can’t thank you enough for your hospitality, thank you mister …?”

“Orden. Jacob Orden” his lips pulled into a soft smile, his eyes crinkling at the corners as his hands patted down his suit coat and followed me to the door as I headed to the guest house.

The little guest house sat in the far-left corner of the small town, its high ceiling an imposing figure
as I entered through its white wooden door and took in the sight before me. Three steel bedframes with shoddy mattresses atop of them sat along the left wall, a small bedside table dividing each of the sleeping spaces with a simple arrangement of dying flowers and a small bedside table lamp. A small sun room joins on the right wall, a ebony shelf set with a few scattered bits and bobs across its tall frame sits beside a torn couch, a communal wall terminal perched outside of the little side room sent a wave of nostalgia through my body.

Warm stinging hit my eyes as a wet tear left a train track down my cheek, turning from the terminal I pull my arms from the pack on my back, setting the olive-green bag and its contents on the bed closest to the door.

“I doubt I’ll have to unpack anything, I just need some money before I get out of here and find somewhere as far away from the vault as I can” I muse to myself as I glance at the small yellow alarm clock which sat atop the rough pine wood dresser to my left, the time of the miraculously functioning clock showing that it was just past four in the afternoon. *That shower sounds like it could really go down a treat to, this suit is starting to smell rancid…*

Rust and rotten flesh wafted up to my nose as I finally took the time to notice just how I must have looked; long auburn hair in a tangled and loose braid that fell just past my waist, dirt smeared face, blue and yellow vault suit strained with a decent splatter of blood, boots scuffed and a blanket tied around my body as a makeshift gun holster and support system. My slender fingers reached into my hair to pull the few bobby pins tucked away in the safety of my bird’s nest of a braid and laid each clip on the dressing table, counting out the fourteen that seemed to come out in an endless stream of clinks and chinks as they fell on top of each other. As the rush of the day wore off, a soreness overtook my body – not the same sense of tiredness and exhaustion of being worked for a straight thirteen hours straight in training courses – but rather the realisation of being out in the real world.

“Ha,” the small laugh escaped my lips as I pulled the elastic tie from my hair and untangled the long strands of hair into loose waves that fell like feathery fines down to my waist. I left the vault, and here I was running from rabid dogs and about to have an actual shower in the real world. No pressure to be the best, not even the pressure to be anything more than a stranger on the street living their own life.

Something was missing though.

All of this work had been put into me, my body in almost perfect physical and mental shape after years of rigorous training and here I was wasting it on nothing more than a small town with the goal of ‘move along, settle and repeat’ in the hopes of getting away from my past. Everyone was going to run, everyone needed that escape and this wasteland could provide that for me. I could become a trader, a mercenary using my skills for money – whatever their currency was up here at least – and make a decent life for myself. At 15, that wouldn’t be too bad of a lifestyle to lead.

My boots scuffed the floor as I reached into the top drawer of the dresser – pulling a tattered towel from its hidey hole - and placed it on the bed I had claimed as my own. Untying the makeshift blanket holster and wrapping it around itself in one coil on the bed next to the pack, I figured I might be able to get away with making a skirt of some sort from the material suitable for walking between here and the shower stall beside Penny’s shop along with the white singlet I had below my vault suit.

Pale green eyes flicking to the door, it seemed logical to close it if I were going to undress, boots clicking as I reached to shut the door in on itself and to my dismay – there was no lock.

“Fabulous” unimpressed I bent for the laces holding my boots together and placed them under the edge of the bed, sitting just below the mostly intact bed sheet. Tugging at the zip on the suit, cool
air cascaded over my chest and a sigh of relief filled the air as I pulled my arms from their bindings and reached for just a moment, above my head and stretched my arms out, muscles singing and straining against my skin as I pulled my legs from the suit and grabbed for the discarded cloth on the bed. Wrapping the cloth around and above my generic vault tec white underwear, my hands quickly fashioned the material into a sarong draped skirt, albeit a very, very short one.

Grabbing for the towel and suit one more time, I made my way to the door and parted it –

“Oh! I figured you’d be –”

“Christ Penny!” I almost shouted, heart racing as I reached for the empty space my gun was previously stowed, realising after a heart beat that I did not have the gun on my person. Heart pounding, I took in Penny’s genuine smile and placed my hand to my heart.

“Sorry sweet pea, I didn’t mean to frighten you none. I had a friend of mine run over from the compound and deliver a few supplies before the shop closed and they brought across this,” her arm raised to reveal a yellow and orange holotape no bigger than the palm of her hand before continuing, “and I figured, you have a story to tell. If not for others, then for yourself at least. It’s completely wiped, as good as new! And you’re welcome to write on any of the public terminals here” my heart leapt at the sweet gesture.

“Thanks, so much penny. Nobody has ever done anything like this for me before”

“Your giving me too much credit darlin’! The only thing is that it’s a portable data archive only, meaning you can’t record your voice on it or nothing. As long as you are okay with clicking a few keys here and there it’s all yours!” her kind eyes revealed the warm fire in her soul, the generosity sending a small wave of gratitude through my body.

“I honestly cannot thank you enough, I’ll be sure to use it as often as I can” I swore, her lips tugging into a smile as she winked and turned to leave before stopping short and turning to me once more.

“One last thing, give your clothes a double wash with the Abraxo by the sink, it’ll do wonders for the blood stains” she shot me a final wink before walking back over to her shop with a final skip in her step. Placing the holotape into the pack along with my other things, my heart beat a little faster as I made my way past the tall elm tree and to the little shower cubical and wash basin beside Penny’s shop.

Thankfully someone had decided to put up a board between the Patricia’s repurposed medical sunroom and the makeshift shower stall, it’s amalgamation of pallets and wooden panels nailed and boarded together before the mess of rusting pipes that seemed to twist their way up the off blue wall like a wild vine giving me little hope of the structure staying up for very long in the future.

I hung the towel on the small hook on the inner board of the shower, just far enough out of my reach to hopefully not get wet. Making quick work of the clothing I was in and kicking it into a pile by the towel on the small stool that they had placed in their cubical to obviously avoid their items sitting on the dusty floor, my bare foot stepped on to the cool floor made of a set of makeshift tiles that led to a small drainage pipe in the direct centre of the slight slant of the floor – as if to make sure that whoever was showering didn’t wish to waste a single drop.

The rusty pipe screeched as my hand twisted the tap for water, thankful for a moment that the water was not immediately cold as I stood below the spray completely naked.

Hands travelled up my toned skin as I rinsed the dirt and grime off of my face and out of my hair,
fingers relishing the feeling of my muscles hiding below my stomach and along my legs as the water ran off of my body and down to the drain below. Relief flooded me as the warm spray covered my body, mind wandering as I lost all thought of making this the fastest shower of my life as I stood here naked before a town of strangers, the only saving grace being that the cubical was completely out of sight from anyone who could have glanced this way.

A ruthless groan ripped through me as my fingers ghosted over my scalp, eyes fluttering shut as I let my slender fingers massage the roots of my hair, lips parting just enough to let some water slip into the cavity before I let the water slip from my mouth with the quick flick of my tongue. Pah

My shower cut itself short as I turned the taps off and grabbed for the towel, quickly passing the cloth over my body before putting the white singlet on over my top half and wrapping the torn blanket around the bottom in the same sarong style drape. Rushing for the laundry basin, I made quick work of washing both my underwear and the vault suit, making sure to hang both in the last few hours of daylight before bringing them inside to the guest house one more time and slipping back into my underwear. A few people had wandered in and out of the guest house, their faces sparking the briefest of memory from seeing them working with the crops by the entrance way of the small town. Mostly keeping to ourselves, I reach into my pack and pull out the grilled steak and the can of ‘lemonade’ that their robot, Deenzer, had offered me earlier – sitting cross legged with my hair drying down my back on the bed and eating the meal with little thought to the people around me for the night, mostly keen on the idea of maybe setting up my holotape and getting a decent night’s rest.

The clicks of the public terminal sent waves of therapeutic joy through my body as I quickly documented all that had happened over the past few days in just a few sentences, a smile on my lips as I twisted my hair into a bun and slide below the comfy covers of the bed and blankets and letting myself finally drift off to sleep … with the comfort of knowing I had my 10mm pistol sitting below my head under my pillow in the event of someone deciding to be a jackass tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I absolutely love making this story a few years earlier than the actual game. I'm thinking about posting the terminal entries from Val somewhere ...? Would anyone like to see them?
Sweat rolled down my forehead as I pulled the back of my hand across the skin before it could drop to the dirt below, the sun shining above scoring my neck as my hair dropped to my side in a loose bun with tendrils of my hair falling across my face. The small yet sharp and tactile digging tool cut into the dirt with a crunch as I reached for the carrot stem and buried it into the ground. My pale hands covered in the thick brown dirt pressing into the soil as I sighed with exertion.

“Dearie me look who might very well have a knack for farming?” Penny’s voice sounded from above, my sunburnt cheeks singing as I looked up to see her polite smile shining down on me. In her hands, a lone cannister of purified water and a small roll glazed with some sort of frosting sat as a godsend in the unending and relentless work that went into their little farming patch.

“I mean, I could see myself doing this maybe as a way to settle down but I much prefer being in the middle of the fray” I said, gratefully taking the snacks and sitting on my behind, mindful of the plants that grew around me as I popped the top of the cannister and took a nibble of the roll.

“I couldn’t agree more! Some people are born for the fight, if you don’t mind me being so blunt, and you seem like just the type – waltzing into our little town covered in blood and guts with no more than a blanket around yourself to hold whatever you had. You must have had some adventure to get all the way out here” Penny laughed, looking nervously over to Mayor Orden who walked around the small community talking with its inhabitants.

“Well now, I might have just the thing! We are getting a new shipment of supplies in from a few traders in Diamond City, I can always put in a special request for you?”

“I’m afraid I would not know where to start, Penny” I sighed as one of the farmers beside me, a man named John, picked his eyes up and glanced to where I sat.

“Leather armour does the trick miss, and it’s the easiest thing to get your hands on at such little notice” his thick Boston accent struck me, my eyes glancing over to where he picked several cobs of corn and dropped them into the small wooden basket that sat at the root of the plant. I recognised his thick swept black hair from the shared housing last night, his bed sat on the furthest wall from where I had slept last night.

“Guess that leaves me with leather armour?” I laughed haphazardly as I looked back over to Penny.

“I’ll see what I can muster up sweetie” she turns to leave, her laundered pink dress swishing behind her before she turns and glances back across at me again, “Oh and dear, I wanted to know if you wished to have dinner with us tonight?”

“Sure” I agreed before turning back to the work at hand.

The disappearing sun beating down on the crop field, sweat cascading to meet the thick soil below, a quiet hum filling the air as my fingers turned the last of the carrot stems into the ground. The foreign music buzzing from the static radio seemed to produce repetitive songs followed by a nervous young man commentating on the events of what he was calling ‘The Commonwealth’ with shaky laughs and loud gasps – as if he did not know how to properly talk.
The music filled my ears as the mild water rushed to meet my skin, the dirt and dust falling down the drain as I let my hand glide across my skin in small circular motions, eyes closing in bliss as I let the water run down my body in this small slice of heaven – or rather the closest thing to it in a post-apocalyptic wasteland such as this.

“Valery, sweetie, is that you in there?” Penny’s voice drifted in to the small cubical walls as I turned the tap off, abruptly cutting off the lukewarm water.

“Yeah, it’s me Penny”

“Oh thank the lord, I was wondering if you wanted to come and have dinner with my husband and I tonight? Saves you locking yourself away with everyone else in those shared rooms of yours” her voice sounded hopeful I noted as I grabbed the towel that hung before me, quickly and vigorously wiping myself down and grabbing for my bra and panties.

“Um, yeah of course. I’d love to” I smiled as I slid one leg and then another in to the leg holes of my underwear, peeking around the corner faced with Penny’s smiling face as she rocked back and forth on her heels like an anxious teenager.

“Wonderful, just wonderful! Swing past once your dressed, we’re making steak and vegetables which should be ready in another couple of minutes doll”

“Thanks so much for the invitation Penny, I’ll head ‘round in a little bit” waving and bidding her adieu, I reached for the singlet beside the vault suit, slipping it above my head before pulling my suit up to my waist and tying it around like a belt to hold the torso and arms up. Grabbing the towel and hanging it over the makeshift rack again I left the small shower stall and crossed the cul-de-sac towards the small shared housing I found myself staying in while twisting my long auburn hair into a tight bun and securing it with a few bobby pins.

Reaching for the small olive backpack, I fished out the red sequin dress that sat at the base of the bag and considered its shiny red beauty.

“Might be a little too flashy for a small town like this” I mused to myself, laughing as it folded back up neatly and sat in the base of the bag again. Eyes flashing down and lingering on the sweat stained singlet, muddy vault suit pants and torn to pieces boots, it didn’t seem like the most appropriate dinnerware. Perhaps a roommate of mine could spare some clothes? I had seen a young woman not quite as petite as me walking around – maybe she had something I could borrow.

Shoes crunching on the dirt below, sun waning in the darkening sky I found the young woman wandering out of Penny’s shop, her brown eyes glinting in the afternoon sun as her torn slacks dragged behind her as she untucked the dusty flannel encasing her body, her darkened skin almost pristine in her youth as she looked up and smiled, the thick tufts of hair atop her hair swinging in the breeze as she acknowledged me.

“Valery, wasn’t it?” her voice held the same Boston accent as every other person I had run into in what they called ‘The Commonwealth’, lips pulling into a smile as she fiddled with her shirt.

“That’d be me,” I laughed before continuing, “It was Liz right? Sorry I haven’t had much of a chance to talk to everyone yet” apologetic, I looked at the dirt before glancing back up into her eyes again, the relieved smile touching the corner of her lips again as she ran her chunky fingers through her hair.
“No, no, you’re okay! Was there something I could help you with?”

“I was just wondering if you had any clothes I could borrow for the night, I’m just having a bit of a sit down tonight and need to get out of this damned suit” a short laugh followed before a quick, “Sure thing!” before we made our way back to the shared housing. Pulling out a small blue suitcase splattered with substances I would rather not mention after being covered head to toe in them the other day. “This is all I really have, it’s not too hard to come by clothes if you’re in a big enough town – the kind of ones like Diamond City or Goodneighour at least” In her hands sat an almost clean green button up folded atop a pair of browning and faded jeans, a patch of bandage wrapped around the right kneecap.

“Thanks so much for this, as soon as I can I’ll try and grab some new clothes from Penny’s shop” I gave her a warm hug with a smile, her body ridged for a moment before she seemed to relax and wrap her arms around my shoulders until she pulled away.

“You know, it would only take a couple of caps to get something decent from Penny – or you could always trade something” she sighed after turning back to shove the rotting blue suitcase under the bed she slept on, her shoulders low as she quickly stood back up.

“Caps?” eyes glancing across, I watched as she dug a hand into her pocket and retrieved what looked like bottle caps that had been popped from the top of a bottle of drink.

“Yeah, haven’t you ever heard of caps before?” her thick brows furrowed in confusion as she pushed the handful of caps back into her pocket.

“No, of course I’ve heard of them. I’ve just never really had any on my person. I grew up in a pretty rough spot, we always used that money from before the war”

“Now that’s something you don’t see too often, there’s a small town run by robots not too far away from here that only lets the people who walk through there use that old pre-war junk. Once the bots started going nuts and killing everyone who spoke to them and tried to trade everyone just stopped going down there” her eyes looked a little lost as she glanced at the small ‘wake master’ alarm clock beside her bed, only just realising the time.

“How bizarre. Well, id best get changed and head out,” I turned with the clothes to walk out of the house and back towards the shower block before pausing and looking over at Liz again, “and thanks, for the clothes. I’ll make sure to wash them and leave them on your bed tonight” her bright smile filled me with a little joy.

An hour later the sun had kissed the sky goodnight and left its safe haven, completely dipping below the horizon as the clocks in the settlement hit 7pm. My heavy boots slammed into the wooden porch of Penny and her husband’s house, a tentative knock and smile later I sat at their small dinner table.

Adorned with a wilting mutated flower and a set of discoloured white plates, cups and slightly worn cutlery set – I found myself talking more about settling in at their table as Penny flushed around her kitchen plating up whatever it was that she had prepared. Strange, there are four seats set I noted to myself as I smiled and discussed covenant matters with Penny’s husband – Brian Fitzgerald.

“So how do you like the little town then, isn’t she a beauty?” he smiled, his hands clutching at each other, elbows high on the table, his keen eyes boring into mine as he asked the question.
“It’s a wonderful little town, you guys seem to have everything running pretty smoothly here” I complemented him, his eyes crinkling with a smile as he sat back in the rickety wooden chair.

“We work hard to keep it that way, you know, with all of the dangers of the world. If it weren’t for our turrets we’d be in a lot stickier situations, isn’t that right hon?” he glanced to Penny, a smile on her face as she looked away from whatever foliage sat on her cutting board and held up a small cutting knife.

Serial killer vibes if I had ever seen them.

“Are you talking about that time the death claw wandered over here from the forest or about those gosh darn Mirelurks again?” she laughed, turning back to the small cutting board and making quick work of the leafy flowers that sat before her.

“Both!” Brian huffed, grabbing for his gut and heaving out a quick laugh as he set his hands down on the table. A knock on the door disturbed him as he stood, reaching for the brass door handle and opened it to reveal none other than the town’s mayor. I should have known that this dinner was a set up – but I smiled and stood none the less reaching for the man’s hand and shaking it with a firm grip.

“Those are some killer muscles you’ve got there miss Quinn” he remarked, smiling as he took his place opposite me on the table, “might I ask a question?”

“That was a question in and of itself” I smiled, gauging his reaction as he picked at the knife and fork before him.

“Very well played, none the less I must ask where it was that you travelled from before coming to stay with us here in Covenant” his eyes staring intensely at me as my heart sank.

DO NOT TELL THEM

Heart pounding, so loud so it seemed both of the men would hear it if they listened close enough, my palms sweating as I ran them down the thick woven material to try and dry them off and get the clamminess away from myself, eyes flickering for only a moment to penny who stood reaching for a salt and pepper shaker before setting it down on the table before each of us and returning to the kitchen again to retrieve the meals that assaulted my nostrils.

Lie.

“I was a part of a small encampment outside of Maldern. I never knew my parents, only the people who kept us there. We never really moved around either staying in a few of the ruined basements fighting those nasty zombie people. There weren’t that many of us, it seemed like over the last few years everyone started dropping off or going mad”

“You say you never knew your parents? So, you were abducted by a mercenary group then?” Jacob leant in, similarly putting his elbows on the table and listening to my lie of a life.

“I suppose, most of us kids went through some pretty intense training to be ready for an attack at any moment. They told us we would be better off for it later. I don’t think I’d have made it past them if I hadn’t of trained as hard as I did” Lie. Lie. Lie. You can’t out the vault, think about all those kids in there, about all the people pulling strings to get the revolt started. This town can’t know about them, nobody can.

“That’s a pretty intense way to go about life as a child” Brian sighed, glancing across at Penny, “Lord knows we try but we just can’t even think about bringing a child into this world. It’s too
risky, especially at such a young age”

My eyes strayed from Jacobs, looking across at Brian with a sad smile.

“Not even in a town as safe as this?” my head tilted, hair falling in pieces down my face as I found it odd that there were no children here that I had seen.

“Not even here. Like we were talking about before – there be monsters here – if a death claw came up again, or even one of those crabs or those crazy bots strayed away from their little general atomics township, anything could happen. Those turrets are our first and last defence I’m afraid”

“Now y’all need to stop talking so morbid. Dinners up!” Penny’s warm smile cut through the interrogation, her arms full of plates baring the most delicious smelling food.

In front of me sat a charring piece of meat, almost as big as my hand accompanied by some sliced carrot, a single sliced tato and some purple flower.

“This looks absolutely marvellous Penny, thank you for inviting us all for dinner” Jacob smiled.

“Oh no its nothing” she blushed, picking up her knife and fork and grabbing a small portion of the flower and some of the tato. I wasted no time, my tastebuds singing and mouth salivating as I carved into the steak and took a quick bite. The sizzle of my state buds was well worth the flavour as the burn subsided and was graciously welcomed into my hungry stomach.

“So what are your plans then miss Quinn,” Jacob spoke up between mouthfuls, “planning on staying in our little town and settling down?” I swallowed my mouthful of food and took a quick sip of the lemonade in my cup.

“I was thinking about getting some gear together and maybe heading to this Diamond City that I have heard so much about…” the men stopped eating, their eyes settling on me as Penny kept eating happily humming away to herself.

“Diamond city, miss Quinn?” Jacob’s voice almost accusing.

“Indeed. I just need a few more caps under my belt before I can head out and see if there is anything out there. I’ve spent most of my life in a rather constricted community, it seems like I should see more of the world”

“Of course, I never asked how did you get away from your little mercenary group at the age of what - Sixteen?”

“Fifteen Mr Orden, and please, call me Valery” I glanced down at my half empty plate and my half full stomach twisted below me, “I managed to sneak away one night, hid inside a Polowski preservation chamber and waited for suspicion to die down and made a run for it”

“Then what about your vault suit then, I only know of that Vault near the city being around here and it’s certainly not vault 75”

*Lie again. You found it in a box somewhere*

“I couldn’t tell you were it was, someone brought a box of them in because we didn’t have much clothing when I was growing up, they were warm enough to stop us from freezing in winter mister Orden. I never knew if they were prototypes or if they were from another state”

“Seems like a pretty valid point, they have a few kids in that vault 88 don’t they?” Brian spoke, his
jowls chomping happily at the steak he had almost completely demolished.

“I heard they did, they would have to if they wanted to keep their vault running” Penny smiled, “besides, I have a few things on the way that Val’s going to help me unpack – isn’t that right sweetie? I need a helping hand to help restock the shop” she smiled with a quick wink as the men went back to their meals.

An hour and a half of torturous small talk and interrogation later, it was time to retire to the shared accommodation, my stomach glad to be full but my mind and heart racing as I thought about whoever was in the vault still. This little town couldn’t do anything to the vault – it would be a suicide mission to walk in there, to a hive of superhuman warriors who wouldn’t take too kindly to anybody who wandered inside. It’d be whoever found the vault’s death wish.

Lying down in the bed, Liz and the man who worked the field with me earlier – John – sound asleep beside me as I tucked my 10mm under my pillow and cuddled under the blankets with a heavy heart. Perhaps tomorrow would be a better day. It was, after all, Christmas eve.

Chapter End Notes

I am so ridiculously sorry for taking forever to upload this! I know its been a while - bare with me cause uni’s just gotten so insane!

Stuff and things are happening so stick around as we move away from covenant next chapter ;)
Chapter Notes

Finally we are moving away from Covenant and towards Diamond city!
Ugh I'm so sorry this took so long to get out I had the worst case of writers block with one section - can you guess where it was? I hope the length makes up for it though :)

Christmas came and went with a bang. The town joining together in the mid-afternoon with a celebratory feast before exchanging some small gifts here and there. My face had lit up as I had unpacked the small parcel Penny had given me, thankful for the mix match of armour that she had ordered in for me completely free of charge after I had helped her unpack everything the day before – the sneaky little minx hiding my package in her little safe behind the counter before I could even see it.

John and Liz had taken the time to get me a set of new boots as my old ones fall to pieces almost as soon as I put them on in the morning after walking around the settlement and helping Jacob with the various tasks he needed done after the Christmas feast concluded. Brian Fitzgerald had gifted me a small map that he had sitting in a drawer in his home and a pen to mark my travels across the commonwealth so I wouldn’t get lost on my way to the city that apparently resembled Diamonds.

As I said my farewells this morning I had a small tear in my eye as I bid penny a goodbye and let her know I would come back if I was passing through any time soon – sending words back and forth with travellers and caravans of my trip to Diamond City and beyond.

Barbra ‘Barbie’ Goldtooth was a beautiful traveling companion, her one gold tooth earning her the last name. I couldn’t imagine anyone having that name from birth. Her three caravan guards making decent conversation as they asked about my life – my mouth feeding them the same story that I had told Jacob, Brian and Penny – and why I wanted to travel the few days trip to the city with them.

“I just need to see more, you know. I have all this time and I feel like I have something greater to do with my life” I told her, her pale skin crinkling in a smile as she suggested I consider being a caravan guard if I wanted some excitement on the road.

“This seems pretty tame, I mean there were those bugs back there but that’s not too bad” I laughed, after crossing the memorial bridge and getting to throw a Molotov cocktail at the oil spills from the cars setting the bridge alight in celebration for the new year we attracted the attention of some nearby blood bugs as the guards had called it. Barbie stood with her heifer of a brahmin and waited for each of us to empty a clip or two of rounds into the pests before continuing onwards, our path leading to what I had come to know as Bunker Hill to restock the caravan before heading to the gates of diamond city in another two days, leaving me with a day to explore the small town.

Bunker hills giant memorial statue struck a cord with me, thinking about the idiots who had dropped bombs on us all those years ago and made the world the catfight it was today.

“Celebrate the coming of the year 2281 with none other than the finest beverages at Savoldi’s!” my eyes looked across at the stocky man with the greying hair and receding hairline, his clammy hands polishing a glass with a tattered rag. A young boy, not much older than me maybe five or six...
years if that, stood beside him advertising rooms for 10 caps a night. Reaching into my pocket I felt around for the small sack of caps I had begun to collect from the work in Covenant and walked to the bar.

“Hiya, was wondering what your availabilities looked like?” his bright blue eyes met my green, a smile tugging on his lips as his freckles danced across his skin and he pulled aside a book and pencil from beside a cash register.

“We have two rooms available, they aren’t much but have a mattress in ‘em miss…?” His voice drawing out the word as I glanced up from the strong hands holding the book open.

“Quinn, Valery Quinn” I winked as he dropped the book down.

“Can I put you down for a room then Valery?”

“Of course, I’ll only need it for one night,” I watched his neat handwriting follow the sharp lines of my name as he asked,

“Staying in ‘The Hill’ for a night only? It’s a shame you’re only passing through” his head lifted, warm brown hair falling in a quick tendril across his eyes as he smiled and moved to tuck the book away below the wooden desk, sticking the pencil behind his ear. I flashed a small smile as he pulled himself together and ducked below the desk before an ‘ouch’ sounded below.

THUD!

Hands flying to the wooden surface, my eyes peered down at the boy who had somehow managed to shack his head into the small lip of the desk, his hand flashing to run over the bump with a wince crinkling his eyes as he looked up with a sheepish glance.

“Oh my god are you okay?!” I reached for his shoulder, little to no concern for any discomfort he may have had – catching the attention of the man who must have been his father calling out for their bar business.

“You’re ten times too clumsy my boy,” the man scolded, “A few more knocks like that and you’ll start talking mad”

“My apologises father,” he said sadly, eyes glancing back across to me and down to the hand on his shoulder – cheeks burning as bright as the sun as I realised what I had done and removed my hand promptly “Room four should be good, go for a bit of a walk around and I’ll make sure everything is sorted for you later tonight” a nervous scuttle away and he was gone with the wind, a fierce blush on his face as he moved to a concealed room behind the counter.

“Well, well. What’s there to do in this town?” I mused, looking back to the tall white structure that seemed to be crumbling from the inside. At the base, a series of makeshift patchwork walls surrounded their miniature marketplace. Inside stood a mix match of both junk and valuable resources, the vendors standing behind their stalls either chatting with the hustle and bustle of customers or cleaning their stock. A young woman with jet black hair stood chatting happily to a couple of older gentlemen, their grimy faces contorted in thick laughs as they shared stories of their travels and encounters with wild beasts.

“No, Craig and I have travelled for years going from end to end of the Commonwealth finding old pre-war technology to sell to the highest bidder. All these military checkpoints just abandoned ripe for the taking”

“George is a sucker for anything shiny!” one heaved as he lifted the long hunting rifle below his
hip into the air, a smirk hiding in the thick bush of a beard he wore. ‘George’ looked over at the 
woman, smiling with rotten teeth as he leant on to the counter and winked.

“Craig here has no sense of adventure. All these adventures lead to a whole lot of monsters out in 
the open road”

“I’ll bet” the woman laughed, her thick cheeks pulling into a knowing smile as she looked at the 
other hefty man with the rifle – George.

“I’ve lost count how many times this oaf has let of a few rounds and attracted a Yao Guai or two. 
Got the scars to prove it too” he trailled off, reaching down with a thick finger to point out a small 
scratch on his arm below the tattered flannel he was wearing.

An older looking woman with a shorter haircut stood behind her counter smoking a cigarette giving 
a wheezy laugh as the young woman with sunken in eyes who seemed to have a flair for yellow 
and green told a haphazard joke about something called ‘jet’, her teeth shining as she delivered the 
punchline and stealing the cigarette from the older woman in the clue puffer jacket and slacks – her 
table assorted with both gear and resources for the picking.

“Hey Carla!” Barbies voice picked up, her lips pulling back to reveal the gold tooth she kept 
hidden away. Turning to watch as she waltzed in followed by only one of her guards, her hand gave 
me a swift pat on the back between the straps of my pack and slightly pushed me towards the two 
women sharing a cigarette.

“Barbie, been a few weeks since we saw you in this block” the woman with the sharp features – 
Carla – coughed as she puffed out a lungful of smoke.

“Figured I’d show some hospitality and bring a lost soul into our wonderful wasteland” she 
laughed, nudging me forwards with a sickening smile.

My heart sank as the woman took me in and laughed.

“What’s with the vault suit?” the woman with the sunken eyes laughed, my arms wrapping 
themselves around my body in an attempt to conceal the blue.

“I think it’s a dashing suit, not like those ones ’88 has to offer” Barbie smirked, pulling the 
cigarette from the older woman’s hand and taking a few puffs.

“Tis a truth to be told, those stuck up hermits wouldn’t know how to really share if a fat man shot 
their little hidey hole to shit” Carla coughed, reaching for a small rag and coughing into it. A glint 
of red struck my eye as the women started talking about the stocks they carried and what they’d be 
loading on to Barbies heifer.

Eventually I found my way around the market, before working my way back to the small shit fest 
of a hotel room I had been granted to stay in. It wasn’t much, but a mattress coupled with my 
blanket and pillow from the pack I wore made for a decent night’s sleep as I listened to the hustle 
and bustle of the small settlement die down as shops closed and everyone went off to bed. Gates 
closed and we locked up as gunfire sounded in the distant bowels of the metropolitan area, shouts 
and screams heard as the night dragged on and into morning.

Waking up was horrible, my back protesting as I reached for my pack and into the Vault-Tec 
lunchbox for my stash of caps that I kept hidden. Today was the day I got myself some new 
clothes.

Reaching behind me I ran my fingers through my long deep red hair in a frugal attempt to untangle
any knots from my restless sleep, to almost no avail as I resigned with a sigh to plaiting it and twisting the long braid into a bun atop my head, secured with whatever bobby pins I could find in my pack.

Grabbing my pack and slinging it across my shoulder, I made my way down to the marketplace where Barbie and Carla had been talking the night before.

“Hiya ‘darls, what can I fix you up with?” the woman behind the first counter smiled, her name badge sewn into the mechanics jumpsuit.

“Hey Deb, just wondering if you had any clothes that I could have a look at” her smile could light up even the most barren wasteland. I watched with curious eyes as she reached below her counter to pull out a series of boxes.

“You look like you’ll be swamped in these, were you looking for anything in particular ‘hon?” she once-overed me, her smile staying as she spoke in her thick Boston accent, hand gesturing to the box filled with what must have been larger clothes.

“Just something a little more … bland? Less … eye catching if you know what I mean?” I gave a quick smile before watching her quick hands ruffle through some boxes before pulling out a series of clothing items.

“Let me see here, I think I have just the thing…” her voice trailed off as her amber eyes searched over each item within the boxes. Her quick hands pulled a set of worn brown jeans, obvious holes within them as through their previous tenant got into a few decent scuffles, followed by a mostly intact red flannel with cut off sleeves and a thick leather vest.

“This ought to do the trick” she winked, “pretty stock standard around these parts, should fit you like a gem” she added, folding the items back up and sliding them across the table. “Anything else I can get you doll?”

“Yeah that should be perfect. Any chance you’ve got some more clips of 10mm ammo?” hopeful, she pulled a small box from under the counter once more, humming to herself as she located the 10mm box amongst the immaculate organisation of all ammo types. I’d have to remember this place if I was ever on the road again.

“How much were you after there love?” she asked, placing down two boxes of ammunition on the counter.

“That ought to do it” I practically sung as I took in what I was about to purchase.

“Well in that case, that’ll be 70 caps doll. We’re having a 75 percent markdown on all ammunition clips at the moment, spend your bullets wisely” she laughed with a wink as I reached into the pack and grabbed out the required caps, leaving me with a meagre 195 leftover.

Bidding her a quick goodbye and rushing to the small hidden alcove to change into the new clothes I had purchased, I let my eyes rake over my form for the smallest of seconds. My toned stomach flexed in the small light within the cordoned off alcove, the grimy mirror in the corner meeting me with a strange representation of myself. My long auburn hair up in its bun seemed to shape my face and show the chisel of my jawline, my crystalline green eyes flashing in the mirror as I pulled the front zip of the vault suit down my body and past my growing breasts. Puberty had hit me last year, my chest size bumping up from barely there to almost an in our face C-Cup as the bra I wore informed me. I had barely noticed how much my training had ripped my legs until I watched the muscle move beneath the skin as I pulled the worn jeans over my legs, the material protesting as it
stretched to accommodate the new owner of its wares. My almost masculine arms pulled the flannel around my body, delicate fingers buttoning the shirt up almost all the way to the collar before I shrugged the leather vest on and buckled up my armour compendium around myself.

Stuffing the vault suit into my pack and holstering my 10mm on my hip, I was finally ready to run off to Barbie and head out to the city I had heard so much about.

“Oh there you are, wondered if you decided to head off without me Val’ey girl” Barbie laughed as she started to get her heifer of a brahmin moving on the road again as the gates to Bunker Hill closed behind us.

Pushing down the highway, we crossed the bridge leading out of the commons and into the metropolitan area and stopped briefly at the derelict statue that once stood tall left only to a single leg protruding from its cinder block stand. Awestruck by the tall standing buildings, I stopped and took in the rusted metal and crumpled brick. Who would have thought Uptopland would have stood this tall after all this time. Gunfire rained before us, shouts and war cries had Barbie’s guards pushing us down a quick side street as we detoured as a pack of feral looking crazy people ran towards the sound.

Heart racing, I pulled the gun from the holster and coked the trigger preparing to push forwards started psyching myself up for a fight.

“That won’t be necessary, we can follow the water and detour before the city to get to the gates” one of the guards told me, hand resting on my shoulder as I peeked around the corner watching as the loud voices faded, their attention turned from us allowing our position to push to the right.

Heart beating in my ears, every fibre of me filled with apprehension as we walked along a cinderblock fence a long piece of cardboard signalling that it was private property. A floating robot almost scared me half to death as it perused the grounds and tended the gardens in the most peculiar fashion as a larger more war ready bots red eyes flashed to life and watched as we merely snuck by its grounds.

Quickly making our way to the waterside, I stood back - watching a confused man surrounded by green stumble on a raft in the middle of the water.

“Guys…?” my small voice stopped them all. Ears ringing and heart pulsing in my throat I watched as if my eyes played tricks on me – forcing me to blink a few more times to really validate that this is what I was looking at.

“It’s a glowing one. Best to stay away from those – the sheer rads alone is enough to deter even the most brazen of hunters”

“I’ll make a note of it then” I whispered, watching the confused ghoul shake its head back and forth as if it had a hold of a dogs chew toy.

We pressed once again, passing a second bridge filled with gunfire as we ran past it in an attempt to void any attention, my fingers tight around the grip on my 10mm as I waited at any moment to be shot at. It had been smooth sailing so far – I had only battled adversaries with teeth and wings, never someone with a gun outside of the fake ones we used on the training field in the vault.

Barbie laughed as we passed what she called ‘money pinching goons’ in a stage like construction by the water, her voice strong enough to earn a ‘oh fuck off” from a tall man in a suit on the top of the stage, as if he were a farmer hoarding his flock of sheep around him.
A larger green man with a bellowing voice yelled out to us as we passed an overhead bridge – I realised a little too late that it was the same as the monstrosity that had been cut down by my follow vault-mates after I had escaped.

“SHIT! ITS GOT A LAUNCHER!” Barbie called to the guards who barely hesitated to open fire on the beast. My gun sprung to life, hands rising and eyes sighting the shot as I pulled the trigger firing shots at the things chest in an attempt to strike some vital organ – if indeed it did have any.

“UGH! Puny humans” it bellowed as it clutched its chest and pulled the trigger on the launcher again, its eyes pulled into a harsh frown as it aimed.

“Barbie keep moving!” I screamed, her eyes wide as she grabbed a hold of the brahmin and pulled it down a side alleyway. Focusing on the beast once more, I lined the shot and pulled the trigger – eyes barely registering as the bullet made contact with the monstrosity’s head and as its brains vacated their home and splashed onto the pavement below.

“Fuck sake. I guess we are just lucky there was only one this time” the guard huffed, reloading his gun as he looked for Barbie.

Barbie and the heifer emerged from the small alley to our left, a cigarette perched between her teeth. Her eyes shifted from the guards to me before smiling and saying with a simple shrug;

“What? I needed to take the edge off” I rolled my eyes and laughed, following close behind as we made our way forward again. A tall green statue and a few more turns down side and main streets later we finally arrived where all my hopes had almost been met.

The giant rusted green metal panels seemed an endless expanse from the ground to their railing that reached for the sky, their towering presence accompanied by the groan of metal on metal friction as a subtle breeze blew in the air. Even form out here, you could hear the town inside, their muted voices outweighed by the collective sound of the turrets scanning over the outskirts and what could have been nothing more than their marketplace turning a profit.

“Diamond City” I mumbled as we passed a sign as a heavily armoured guard stood from his plastic chair with a small groan.

“Well hey Barbs, been a while since we seen you around these parts” his rough voice commented, Barbies eyes flashing as she finished off her cigarette and stomped the butt below her boot.

“You know me Joe, always on the move giving only the best” she winked, her hand slapping the man on the back before pushing past with her brahmin.

“Ey what are you lookin’ at?” The security, Joe, asked as I stole a quick glance his way before letting my gaze quickly flash forwards. Our collective footsteps crunched on the loose rock and road below as we passed between the great green wall and the small chain-link parking lot beside us, the guards muttering to themselves about needing more external security should something happen to their walls.

Rounding the long corridor and into a wide-open space, a remarkably polished statue of a man holding a long stick in his hands, sat in the middle of the rubbish cluttered diamond. Barbie made her way to the small speaker box located beside a tall riveted wall, the latches and pullies above it obviously meant for the panel to be a door.

Pressing the button, the speaker jarred to life.

“Diamond City security, what's your business in the ‘Great Green Jewel’?” the dull sounding voice
behind the intercom sighed, their voice tired and strained.

“Sully! Its Barbie Goldtooth here”

“Barbie? Back on the road again are we?” ‘Scully’ laughed to which Barbie rolled her eyes with crossed arms.

“That’s me. I got some goods from Covenant and ‘The Hill’ loaded up, was wondering if you guys would let me in to share me wares?” barely a moment passed before the intercom buzzed to a halt and the large green panel screeched to a painfully slow open.

Before us sat a series of strange panels and gateways, their rusted brown hiding the small office like space tucked away inside it. A few guards quizzed us on where we came for an asked for extra details such as how long we would stay and if we meant to cause any trouble.

“No officer, just here on a bit of a soul-searching kind of thing” I smiled to the man who stood with a piece of paper and pen bound in a tight notebook as he scribbled things like my name, age and reasons for visiting down.

“At 15, I’m surprised kids like you even do that?” he remarked as he scribbled something down in his unintelligible handwriting.

“Yes sir. It just seemed better than the alternative’

“Which was … ?” he pressed, my mind barely registering before I let the words slip from my mouth.

“Then working the land for the rest of my life. Figured I should see the city, get some irradiated air in my lungs” No offence to Penny or the rest of them, but planting carrots isn’t exactly my life’s goal.

“You make a fair point there kiddo. Welcome to Diamond City miss…” his voice trailed before looking at his notes, “Quinn”

“Thank you very much” I gave a curt nod before following Barbie to a small chain-link fence and gate, my eyes glancing back to the guards who lugged the suitcases and crates of goods off of Barbies brahmin and dragged them inside towards a small elevator behind a countertop.

“So what’s the deal with this place anyway Barbie?” I found myself asking as we ascended the steps towards the main area of the city. So far, its dimly lit foyer seemed to give little to no hope of there being much inside.

“A bunch of superstitious cooks, is what Val’ey girl. Be careful who you play nice with around here, everyone’s always on edge since the synth came in here and tore up the place back in 29’”

“So everyone’s basically paranoid to all hell cause of a machine?”

“That’s the ticket,” Barbie winked, looking across as we stood at the top of the stairs before turning to the town below. The first thing that hit me was the giant tent like cloths that clung to the tower in the middle of the city – the hub. POWER NOODLES the sign read. The slum like pile up of trailers and metal frames surrounded by a never-ending onslaught of stadium seating made me slightly light headed for a moment. Endless stacks of housing and community buildings surrounded by a thick smog of electrical outputs seemed to have wires that had no end – homes and balconies with no clear distinction between one man’s property and another. Perhaps they had shared housing like the vault?
Barbie laughed as she grabbed my attention once more,

“It’s a lot to take in and wish I could give you a tour or something but I need to unload all my junk from the road. Should be stayin’ in the Dugout beside Polly’s if you feel like booking a room in there. Best brew around,” she hummed – more to herself than me, “Hopefully I’ll be outta here before anyone’s up and around – gots me some business to take care of with the surplus and chem-i-care first. It was a hell of ride with you on the road Val’ey girl” her gold tooth flashed behind her lips as her cheeks pulled a smile and her old eyes beamed kindness and honesty.

“Wouldn’t have made it here without you guys, your guards saved my ass a few times on the way over” sharing a quick laugh, I wiped a traitorous tear from my eye. “any chance I’ll see you around Barbie?”

“Depends if you’re on the road at the right time and in the right place. I got myself a family back on a little slice of hell, the road doesn’t call my name no more, or at least as much as it did when I was younger”

“Well, you’ll have to slip me a drink so we can toast a safe arrival and a sincere farewell then” turning back to the gateway we emerged from she winked,

“You’ve got yourself a deal Val’ey girl” before leaving and walking below to collect her wares.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Taking in the city below, a clear segregation of peoples stood before me as I made my way down the steps and into the marketplace.

“Hey miss you got some jet?” a ghoulish hand reached for my lapel, a thick raspy voice reaching out to assay my ears as I looked to the person grabbing at me.

“Ugff!” An unintentional gasp slipped my lips as I took in the ragged man covered in what looked like rotting flesh accompanied by a smell lightly less pleasant than the look. His black soulless eyes reached out – almost palpable stars floating around them as it hit me as his hand disengaged my jacket and drifted back to his small living space below the staircase and amongst the stacks of discarded chairs. A series of winded grunts and groans emerged from the small tent and mattresses below as I realised that I stood atop a small living space for the people – monsters – that dwelled outside of the small city.

“Wha~” I found myself taking a step backwards, almost tripping save for the strong arms that seemed to catch me and stop me from falling on my ass. Whipping my head around a loose wave of blonde caught my eye as I stepped to right myself.

“You don’t happen to have any drugs on you, do you miss?” the sultry voice seemed to be overshadowed by the puppy dog brown eyes that seemed to swarm my vision.

“I – ugh – uh – no – I mean, no I can’t say I have any on me?” verbally stumbling, someone save me. The strong hands pulled back a loose strand of hair behind his ear, the cheeky grin on his lips pulling to the side as his eyebrow cocked upwards in an almost daring look. Fuck I wasn’t blind or anything, I knew what good looks were, geez, I’d lived around those selectively bred to have the best of the best when it came to genetics and traits.

“That’s alright, my friends here chase the high life” the voice. My god the VOICE. He sounded like someone had hand plucked him from a rose bush and decided to drip a stream of honey across the petals and leaves.
“I can try and -” I began only to be cut off by the strikingly handsome man.

“I couldn’t ask you to do that doll face. Say, I haven’t seen you around these parts before. You new to town?” he asked, smouldering brown eyes peering into my soul.

“J-just got here actually” my eyes raced to find something, anything to make me avoid looking into his eyes any longer. A flash of white behind a pair of thin lips pulled me back in.

“Well then, may I be the first to welcome you into the neighbourhood. I’m John, John McDonough” his playful smirk was accompanied by a quick hand gesture, I reached – going for the shake before he flipped the script and planted a chaste kiss on the back of my hand.

“I-” Jesus Christ get yourself together, with a quick cough and clear of my throat I finally got a hold of myself, “It’s nice to meet you John” his eyes flashed as his hand gravitated to the small of my back, pushing me towards the marketplace.

“I can assure you the pleasures all mine doll. What did you need from our little humble abode anyways ‘toots?’

“At the moment? A place to rest my head and get some food” I gave a quick smile as I was slowly guided past a young woman heaving an oversized cleaver and slamming it into a raw piece of meat to separate the chunks before going into a small stand like area and followed close behind into the ebony coloured door of The Dugout Inn.

“Yafim!” John exclaimed as a worn man passed us, his eyes wary of the patrons inside the small lodgings and bar. It was a quaint place, much more vibrant than I was used to in the stark white of the Vault. Red and brown couches filled the open foyer area, a torn rug with a browning pattern sat below each couch – their cushions filled with both the ghoulsh looking people that had lived below the stairs and those dressed in the most casual of fashions, their conversations filled with either easy banter, rage or laughs as they sat and drank from brown and white bottles.

“John, my friend. What can I do for you this afternoon?” The man’s eyes drifted to me, the thick European accent striking me as so out of place I could barely say a word as I took in my situation… I could only imagine how I looked at that moment in time. A tall girl with a messed-up twist of a bun, armoured to the teeth with all kinds of leather armour and a ridiculously dirty pack on my back with muddy boots. His eyes drifted back to John with a suspicious look before continuing, “The usual room for you and your companion?”

“Not this time bud,” John winked to the man, his enchanting smile sticking to his lips as he lifted both of his hands to the straps on my pack and pressed on in the conversation, “Doll face here needs a room for a few nights, the best one you have. Charge it to mother and father dearest for me, would you?”

“Mister McDonough, you remember-”

“-No ifs or buts, I’ll deal with them” the man, Yafim, seemed to resign his argument as he turned to a small terminal bolted to the wall and made the arrangements for the room. A frown pulled at my brows as I felt myself turn in John’s hands.

“I can pay for my own room you know?” my arms crossed above my chest, a full frown tugging my brows down as I took in the mans garb.

“Nonsense. A pretty little thing like you walks into town – a pack on her back filled with their whole life? A room for a few nights is nothing for someone like me”
“Way to gush about yourself then, John” I remarked, his eyes filled with mischief as I leant backwards, pulling away from his grip.

“I find this very unfair that you know my name but I don’t know yours. I’m at a loss here ‘toots, help a brother out would ‘ya?” he practically sung in that deep and mysterious voice of his. A brief moment of hesitation flashed through me as I considered my options. He was paying for my room, no extra cost to me in this moment, showed me a kindness at the gates of the city and he seemed pretty well known by the man clicking away at his terminal.

“Valery. Valery Quinn” Done.

“Well, Well. Miss Valery Quinn. I suggest you meet me down at the power noodles stand in an hour and I’ll give you the grand tour of the whole marketplace.

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“Thanks for everything tonight John” I smiled, putting the to go bowl of noodles back on the counter where the strange robot programmed to only say one thing repeated its only programmed line again as I sat the bowl down before walking back towards the Dugout Inn for the night.

“Don’t mention it doll,” his eyes creased as he smiled, leaning down to the homeless ragged man and woman in a small hidey hole of a tent and offering them a stash of water and a glazed roll before quickly slinging them a red coloured inhaler when the security wasn’t looking with as much scrutiny as they had during the tour of the city for the previous two hours.

“This is me, I should really run back off to my family before I get into any deep shit for showing the loveliest woman around the city when I should have been working on my brothers’ campaign” John gestured to the stairwell leading up into what they had called ‘the upper stands’ where people of a more significant wealth spent their time and money.

“Save travels then” I wished him well before quickly making my way back to the inn. Walking through the door it wasn’t hard to spot Barbie, hand sloshing around a generic brown bottle in the air as she sung with her arm slung around another bar patron who sang in an equally as horrific voice. Her eyes locked on me, a smile spreading her cheeks as she tapped the bar ordering another round of drinks.

“And one for the best roadie, VAL’EY girl!” She laughed, reaching for me and passing the brown bottle of booze my way. With a grateful smile I accepted, pushing the bottle to my lips and taking a quick swig.

The burn hit the back of my throat with a startle – my stomach almost rejecting the booze as the unpleasant burn hit my tongue. The sizzle downed my throat and a cough or two later I was half the bottle down…

… poor John spent his money on my room and I could almost guarantee I wouldn’t even make it down the hall by the end of the night.
How Time Flies

Chapter Notes

Oh my god. This has to be the biggest chapter I've done so far, I swear it wasn't meat to be this long buttttttttt I just couldn't stop myself, so much juicy stuff happens in 2282.
For anyone wondering, this is around August 2282, the year that McDonough gets elected as Mayor and when all the ghouls get exiled from the city.
Dear lord please stay with me cause I know its really long, I hope y'all enjoy this chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Days turned to weeks, weeks to months and finally months to a year and a half - soon I had a small but successful trading post operating in a small shack in the middle of the diamond city market selling mechanical bits and bobs. The people of the small city brought me their broken electronics and I fixed it all up for a fee of course. Mechanics was becoming my strong suit, helping people fix their generators and lightbulbs and offering the instalment of their mediocre mods on their ridiculously underpowered weapons.

Each morning was the same, I spent the sunrise talking shit with the guards of diamond city just beyond the wall in my morning training. I would run the small open space between buildings, occasionally to the crashed train cart beyond the rusted park and push myself to do sprints until my lungs ceased to work. We had set up a small shooting range, not that the mutants or ghouls that seemed to roam the streets at an alarming rate didn’t provide enough practise in and of themselves. After spending an hour or two working on my endurance and sharp shooting, I’d run back inside and spend another half an hour warming up water for a shower in the workshop I rented, just to stand there for 10 minutes and wash the sweat from my face and skin careful to not wet my hair in the process. I’d drowned my boredom in busy work, fixing and making adjustments to different apparatus in the workshop or offering my services to someone in need of help.

The guards had become rather familiar with my stall as I offered to fix their guns for free, the peace of mind of just knowing that they were going to be able to actually cause some damage if something were to happen in the city centre or along the wall that protected the little community. My eyes fell upon the latest broken gadget, a switchboard that had a few loose wires and faulty screws that had eroded due to their over exposure to heat within the confines of the journalists’ workshop. She seems nice enough, her sister a few years younger than me. As I bolted the last screw into the circuit board I smiled to myself. Not exactly the life I thought I’d live at 18 but hey, it was something at least.

My feet skipped over the panels dug into the dirt filled floors that lined our market place, ready to deliver the circuits to the young woman who had enlisted my help to fix the terminal that she so desperately needed. A small three knocks on the rusted red door and a quick hello later, the small apartment opened to reveal the short jet haired woman inside, her eyes filled with quick suspicion before it melted away into a relieved smile.

“So I take you managed to get that old hunk of junk working, huh?” She smiled, rough voice washing over me like a tonne of bark as I handed her the goods.
“It was nothing really, a few minor tweaks and fixes here and there and it was good as new” I told her with a broad smile. Her tired red leather jacket had been replaced by a low cut short sleeve shirt, something that must have been on sale at Fallon’s basement as I knew Piper didn’t make many caps from her little newspaper that she sold around the market place. Her light grey shirt seemed to hug her body in ways I could have imagined many of the men here would find attractive, along with the way her hips seemed to draw in the tightly fitted faded and ripped black jeans that tucked into her usual brown boots.

“Would you, uh, like to come in for a drink or something? It seems like ... the least I could do” her thin calloused hands gestured to the dimly lit room that seemed to be reminiscent of a living space filled with nothing more than a broken-down fridge, small ebony table, red couch and coffee table. A sad smile crossed my lips as sorrow tugged at my heart. Utopland, the wasteland, whatever it is known as by whoever seems unlucky enough to traverse its landscape really is filled with those who are down on their luck scraping by with whatever they could find.

“I wouldn’t want to intrude; besides I’ve got some ... final things to fix in the workshop before the day is over. Many thanks for the offer though, not many people here seem to be in to the whole ‘neighbourly hospitality’ in diamond city” her freckled lips pulled into her usual smirk, her brown eyes rolling as she leaned against her doorframe.

“You’ve got that right. These folks wouldn’t know kindness if it slapped them in the face. The fact is, people are scared. This whole town is scared, everyone’s seen and been through so much it’s hard to believe we are all still standing”

“I guess you’re right, it’s nothing short of a miracle that life has seemed to sustain itself out here in the wastes. Everyone has a story out here, and it’s one of tragedies and despair, but also hope”

“How very... poetic of you Val, one of these days I’d love to hear your story and see just how a electronics repair-woman like yourself ended up in a city like this” I responded with only a sly smirk of my own, a laugh as I waved her comment off and told her;

“I think your terminal would run out of hard drive space” before she bid me a quick farewell along with her younger sister who had been napping in the small space behind their stairs but had awoken at the conversation by their door.

The rest of the morning was a blur, Arturo needed some help cleaning out and aligning a modification for a random weapon that he had come into buying, a quick twist in one of Myrna’s Mr. Handy unit, Percy, screws later and he had stopped talking about the sale they were apparently having on brooms - to which Myrna informed me with her seedy eyes that their stall did not have any current stock of and a few final touches to the generator running cold storage in Polly’s meat shop before I managed to get some grocery shopping done before the sun began to sink in the sky.

“Who needs a haircut? You need a haircut mister, take a seat and let us take a load off your shoulders!” The mother and son duo who ran the hairdressers seemed to be reeling in the costumers just as their salon was set to close, the woman trimming the last of some diamond city patrons beard before smiling and handing him a cracked mirror.

“Val, when you gunna let me touch that gorgeous hair of yours?” John gestured, arms wide, with a large smile as I took a step towards him.

“Ey, listen. This isn’t a regular thing, I think I just need a bit of a trim there Johnny boy” I laughed, tugging at the long mangled braid that fell down my back. My hair had gotten to an unmanageable length, so much so that I had just had enough of it in the mornings and within the workshop as it seemed to tumble down to my outer thigh with nothing but hassle.
“I’m always envious of those long locks of yours” the raspy voice of Cathy came from behind her last customer of the day. A gracious smile and I found myself seated on the plush torn leather lounge chair, a dirty mirror before me as I instructed John to simply cut what I needed.

“So, how’s business going anyway Val, you seem to have everything running pretty smoothly in that little shop of yours”

“Not too shabby, everyone’s been pretty welcoming so far and I feel like I’m fitting into the marketplace pretty well. Even Myrna came around to letting me fix that Mr handy of hers!”

“Could you imagine?!?” Cathy scoffed from behind her client, a smile tugging at her ageing lips as she pulled an ornate brush through the gentleman’s hair.

“I know right. It’s coming up on two years in DC, I just feel like I am missing something. I’ve hardly seen any of the commonwealth or really done much other than fix leaky pipes or fix a terminal or two” a sigh racked my body as I looked down, tendrils of auburn hair falling to the floor as gracefully as feathers in a soft stifling breeze.

“Listen, there’s always something wrong with everyone’s life out here Val,” John began, his eyes set on the task at hand, “everyone’s trying to make it or just trying to survive. You’ve got it good here in the city - that new reporter bird spread some good word about your business too - if you feel like you’re missing somethin’... well then you’d best take a chance and follow ya’ heart” John looked into the grimy mirror set up on top of the cabinet storing all scissors and brushes inside before flashing a reassuring smile,

“What do I know though, right? I’m just a hairdresser” he smiled with a wink before spinning the chair around and brushing off the last stray pieces of hair from my shoulders. A small gasp slipped through my teeth as I looked at just how much hair had to come off of my head, a decent 6 or so inches being chopped leaving my hair sitting just above the small of my back.

“Feels a lot more manageable I’d say, you could almost make a wig off of what you’ve chopped off” I flashed a smile, running my hand through my hair surprised when it seemed tangle free and undoubtedly fresh.

“All in a day’s work ‘darl” Johnny laughed, brushing his seat down and tossing the raggedy towel into their washing basket.

“How much do I owe you Johnny boy?” Reaching for the bag of caps I kept on my belt, John simply asked for 15 caps, half what the normal fee was for any haircut - less a style.

“Stop, I feel like I’m cheating you here, at least take 25” I insist, voice curt as I offered the caps.

“Darlin, take the 15 before I change my mind and don’t charge you at all,” he smiled, glancing quickly at this mother before leaning in close to me and whispering, “if you feel like you don’t belong here then take a chance on those wastes. You never know what you’ll find out there. It’s boring here, same people - every day. Go live an adventure Val! Lord knows your talent is wasted in here” pulling back and smirking, he watched as I counted out my 15 caps and handed them across with a frown.

“Just remember the advice, doll” the trickster that he was, laughed with a wink before waving me away back to my small workshop and living space across the market.

An adventure, hmm?

Lord knows I needed one of those. It wouldn’t take long to find the supplies, Arturo would have
the guns and both Polly and Myrna would have the food and water rations I would need for whatever the wastes would throw my way. At the end of the day, it was my life that I was either living or wasting away.

“A month. I want to be out of here in a month” I promised myself, voice strong as I closed the door of my workshop behind me and locked it with the key. Climbing up the stairs of my little slice of Diamond City, I unclipped the heavy leather belt that I had secured around myself, stowing the 10mm gun that I had first found when I left the vault all that time ago.

My mind wandered...

Had anyone made it out alive? Was anyone still in the vault itself? What about the children, did they make it or perish under the feet of those older and more advanced than them. Sighing, I let my heavy footfall drag me to the staircase that led up to the roof of my workshop, to where I had made my home in the rusting trailer on the top of the metal space below.

My bed sat tucked in the corner of the camper, a glassless window to my right looking down on to the marketplace below – the best view of diamond city save for the pompous asshole of a mayor whose office looked down on everyone in the city itself. A small nightstand stood beside the black and white sheeted bed, a lone table lamp offering comfort on warm nights like these. Across the room, a dresser sat tucked away neatly atop a small black circular rug, the top of the dresser adorned in whatever minor belongings I truly owned; a locket, silver pocket watch and my vault-tec lunchbox.

A string of lights decorated the outside of the caravan, the natural fading light closing up the tato flowers that I had planted on my small living space outside where a small dining table accompanied by a single wooden dining chair sat weathered from the constant storms and bone-dry days during the summers and winters I had stayed here. A grill sat mostly discarded beside the plants I cared for, I never really cooked meat up here even though Polly often told me it was a major game changer to my meals. Along with an abandoned dog house and a ceramic bathtub that had slowly begun to fill with rainwater over the last year and a half of bipolar weather, I had managed to get my hands on some string that hung from two tall metal posts protruding from the workshop below. The main open area of the balcony had a mostly plastic table and chairs, a cloth parasol offering some shade from the overhead sun with delicate white and blue stripes that matched the two outdoor seats that sat tucked into their place looking down at the marketplace.

All in all it was a relatively decent for a relatively slum-like homestead.

With a breathy sigh, I turned and trudged to the dressing table tucked into the opposite corner of my camper. Hesitant hands pulled the bottom drawer open, a single tear welling in my eye as for the first time since I left bunker hill - I looked upon my vault suit and backpack from two and a half years ago.

The vibrant blue of the vault suit was still there, the mesh holding strong as I pulled it from its slumber and hugged it to my chest. The thick yellow 75 stood out, as grimy as the day I had placed it to sleep, pushing the tear from my eye and down my cheek reminding me of why I left in the first place.

Being so secretive about my past was something most people had accepted, the new reporter in the city was a little pushier but I could guarantee it was simply for her own curiosity and need to get the truth out of people. When I left bunker hill without the vault suit on it was like people stopped looking at me with such scrutiny. I was, after all, just another waste lander to them.

I placed the vault suit on to the top of the dresser, eyes glassy as I climbed back into the trap door
and into the second floor of the homestead below, to the rather spacious platform between my toilet and the workshop floor. Thankfully I had managed to work my way around the pipe system here and jacked some of the runoff water from the pumping station on the outskirts of the town, hooking it up to the small shower cubical I had installed down here with the toilet on the same circuit, the pipes running off to some small pond on the outside of the city with water so irradiated nobody would walk within ten feet of it. My boiler on the roof warmed the water past the point of freezing, making the shower a little bearable as I twisted the faucet before the water cascaded over the scrap porcelain I had found lying around.

Pulling my arms from the rough cotton flannel, I threw it down to floor below before stepping from the worn brown pants and unhooking the blackened bra and panties that clung to my body.

“Ah” I hissed as I took a step into the shower, reaching for the faucet as I let the water run across my bare body. Hands reaching for the small container that I had purchased from the young doctor Sun filled with a shampoo formulated from something called a ‘carrot flower’, I couldn’t care what it was after I used it the first time – the floral scent filled the air around me, my hair practically singing as the dirt and gunk hidden inside it washed down the drain and into the nothingness of the lake outside of the city.

Oh god I needed this

I let the water run over my body, hands caressing the skin of my stomach and arms as the refreshing waterfall of warmth soothed my muscles and brought life back to my skin.

“Uhh~” the small jet of water seemed to hit a sore spot on my back, my hooded eyes turning to my shoulder as my hand left the feather-lightest of touches along my collar bone before trailing across my shoulder. Raking my nails across my back with a quick HISS I let the water cascade over me once more – the soapy suds of shampoo falling across my bare breasts and between the small gap between my muscular thighs.

My shower was short lived as cold water rushed over my body as I let out a small strangled squeal, reaching for the towel I kept handy beside the shower and hastily dried myself before wrapping the browning cloth around my body and tucking it under my armpits. Making quick work of climbing the ladder to my living space in the camper, reaching for the top drawer of my nightstand and grabbing a simple singlet and shorts, I sat them down on the edge of my bed and drew the long ‘jangles the moon monkey’ sheet across my doorway blocking viewed access to my home as I dropped the towel and dressed in my pyjamas.

Grabbing for the borderline soft towel, my hands made quick work of moving past the sheet and to my clothesline, fingering the rough wooden peg and clipping the towel onto the line, the warm breeze that embraced the city and scattered the smog that the endless appliances in the marketplace ran through the sheets and along the towel, the material swaying in the breeze like the most delicate dancer.

“Hey Quinn!” the familiar voice jarred me, a sly smile spreading across my lips as I looked down over the edge of the workshop exterior to peer down at the gentleman waving his hand up at me, his other clutching a brown paper bag with a suspiciously squared off bottle inside it.

“John, to what do I owe the pleasure?” I laughed, watching his brown puppy dog eyes surface as he jingled the handle to the workshop, finding it locked.

“C’mon Quinn, what’s a guy ‘gotta do to get into the sweetest girl in towns house?” his fox of a smile practically forced the eyeroll out of me, my hand rising to wave him off as I turned back to the camper and called,
“Give me two seconds”

Practically sliding down to the wooden latter, careful to avoid plank sized splinters in my palms, my heavy footfalls echoed off the heavy machinery and scattered metal pieces in the workshop, its organised chaos making sense to nobody but me.

I had separated the workshop into two sections, my receiving and returning counter where I kept most of my business limited to, the burgundy counter sitting flush against the wooden stairs that led up to my truest home with a torn red loveseat pushed against the opposite wall. Behind the counter sat my private workbenches – save for a chemistry station because I wasn’t as heavily into drugs as my neighbour Solomon was – along with my kitchen area by the second entry point that I had blocked off with a simple bar across the doors and a wooden panel. I had separate compartments for each resource I could fix weaponry or appliances with – the shelving for it all taking up the most space along with the scrap metal and wooden pieces that lay strewn across industrial tables and weaponry racks. I had a few projects sitting on a few different tables, a few mods that needed installing on a couple of Arturo’s guns that he was paying me decent money for along with a few personal touches I was putting on a few of my own weapons. A display rack beside my counter held my first weapon, the 10mm pistol I had picked up in Maldern what seemed like a lifetime ago.

A quick bout of sadness ran through me as I thought about leaving this place behind in a few weeks, I ought to mark it on my pip boys calendar after John left in the morning. A quick flick of my fingers and the switchbox beside the door buzzed to life, the lights in the front of the house springing to life before I twisted the interior lock and opened the rusted red door to let the air of the city into the shop. In the doorway stood John, his pristine white shirt rocking an unbuttoned ‘v’ revealing the thin silver chain sitting upon his lightly sun kissed skin. His – no doubt they had been cleaned and ironed by his family’s personal Mr Handy up in the Upper Stands – sharp black dress pants and polished dress shoes were of usual costume from someone like him, his older brother was, after all, running for Mayor.

“Hey look its Val! What brings you here?” His sultry voice laughed, my eyes rolling as I ushered him inside and made a quick grab for the brown paper bag in his hand.

“And what’s this Mister McDonough? How would the people of the town feel if they knew the real John, if they knew he came and got drunk and high in the safety of the mechanics workshop?” I tried, I really did, to keep my voice playfully judgemental as I pulled a single brow down and crossed my arms. We both stood for a moment, locked in the seriousness of the moment before we each burst out in laughter ending only when we pat each other on the shoulder.

“Almost had me there doll face,” he wiped a faux tear from his eye as he rounded the counter and headed past the endless shelves of materials and resources, his mind set on one thing and one thing only. Procuring a glass for his liquor and opening the small floor safe that I had installed in the back for him to keep all his chems away from the prying eyes of his family. “I doubt the public would even care with the big leadup to James giving his speech tomorrow morning” he let the air huff from his lugs in a quick and tired breath, his arm reaching for the shelf that I stashed all of my mostly clean glasses on.

Sometimes no amount of soap can wash away the stains of a nuclear war.

Looking down at the brown paper bag I pulled it apart to reveal the handwritten sticker on an obvious Roosters Rum bottle.

“John” I looked up, watching as he walked back over and grabbed the bottle from my hands.
“Yes ‘toots?’” he looked down at the bottle and shrugged his shoulders before twisting the cap and setting both the bottle and two glasses he had procured down on my weapons workbench.

“Please don’t tell me you decided on funding Vadim’s fantasy of brewing?” The stern look I shot his way had his brown eyes darting to look at anything other than me, a tight smile on his lips as they finally rested on what must have been the most interesting bolt holding a support beam in place. “JOHN! You know how he mixes his drinks, or did you forget the last time you fucked around with his brew?”

“Nope, it’s not ringing a bell there, doll” his eyes wouldn’t waver as my arms raised in frustration, “No shit!” I growled as I snatched the bottle and gave it a quick sniff – the fumes potent enough to send me staggering a step backwards. “You forgot who you were then came to the next morning and needed several shots of Med-X to get you off the damned floor. Sorry John but not this time, you can settle for some vodka and whisky for once” I sighed, the rage leaving me defeated as I ventured to the makeshift kitchen I had built in the back section of the workshop.

Opening with a vacuumed squeak, I placed the bottle in the refrigerator and hid it behind the one thing I knew John wouldn’t touch – vegetables. Shuffling the carrots, tatos, corn and leafy greens around to conceal the grey glazed bottle in the back of the fridge before reaching for the box of Saddle Up Salisbury Steak and my bottle of pre-cracked vodka from Johns last visit last week. Turning and thrusting the bottle into his hands with a curt, “Here” I turned to the small cooking stove that I had pulled from one of the endless trash piles, igniting the small flamelight in the back with the gold-plated flip lighter I had sitting on the countertop beside it. Standing and grabbing the metal plate from the built-in cupboard, I slid the steak onto the dish and let it warm up inside the small heated space.

John had made himself mostly comfortable on the blackish brown cloth cough that I had purchased with the lot, his dress shoes arrogantly placed on the dirt encrusted pine coffee table that signified the end of the personal space and the gateway to the crazy mess I called a workspace. His hand clutched the glass filled to the hallway point with pure vodka, something I had not yet gotten myself to do in my youth, in his other? A small inhaler of Jet.

Plonking on the couch beside him while I waited for my dinner to warm up, I studied the solemn look etched into his features.

“Uh oh, I know that look. What’s going on in the Upper Stands John?” I asked, leaning across to grab the Jet from his hand and turned it over in my own.

“You know what doll? The last year with you in it has been totally wild. You’re the best kind of friend there is – letting a disturbed 31-year-old with a serious drug and drinking problem sit on their couch every now and then and give into his vices without passing judgement. Its radical, you know?” his eyes focused on the ceiling, chiselled features relaxing as he seemed to reminisce on his life.

“I’m only 17, so what do I know about any of this shit…? But in a world like this you’ve gotta find what is it that gets your mind off just how fucked up this life we lead is. It’ll drive you insane otherwise”

“Righteous. You gotta be the smartest 17-year-old out here in the commonwealth Quinn” he sighed, eyes glazing over as he looked into the glass and took a hard swig of the refined potato juice.
“You’re never this down when you come over John. What’s really going on?” I pushed, hand on his shoulder in the softest form of comfort that we had shared when either one of us was feeling exceptionally down after a hard day.

“If you had the power to help the people of the commonwealth, would you?” his resigned sigh lasted but a moment as he took another gulp of the vodka.

“…Of course,” I hesitated… It’s what I was created for I thought to myself.

“I need to get the ghouls out of here, doll. James is about to do something that is un-righteously regrettable” turning to me, his eyes filled to the brim with tears. I surprised the gasp that tried as hard as it could to escape the clutches of my lips.

He must be truly broken to come to me with this. I had never seen John so torn, between those he considered friends and his family. It was no secret that John looked out for the ghouls in town, where most people regarded them as the lowest of the low John showed nothing but compassion for the community of people he had created a strong and unshakable bond with. There were some in the city, like Yafim and Vadim and Piper who would stand up for them if Diamond City Security had gotten out of hand in dishing out what they called ‘rightful justice’, the machine of a detective who often tucked himself away in his office or wandered the metropolitan area working said cases would stand up for them as well. Everyone seemed so sceptical of him and his intentions after the whole ‘crazy synth who killed five people before blowing himself to bits’ happened all those years ago in the middle of the marketplace.

“What’s the jet for then?” I asked, flipping the inhaler in my fingers, holding its vibrant red up between myself and John as he shuffled in his seat and looked across at me from the corner of his eye.

“My dear Quinn, to make the time before shit hits the fan last a little longer” he said with a quick and short-lived laugh before snatching the inhaler from me and sinking back into the couch defeated. I let my gaze linger on him for a moment longer before heaving myself off the couch, hands slapping down on legs as I conceived to the night with a smile.

“Come on. If shits about to truly hit the fan then I suppose we ought to live up whatever time we have left before shit gets really fucked up” I offered my hand, knowing full well he could simply curl up on the couch and cry the night away or live up the rest of the night – it was obvious what he was bound to pick.

“You always know how to cheer me up ‘toots” he laughed, grabbing my hand and hoisting himself up off the couch, drink in hand he made headway to the stairs and confidently strode up them waiting for me to collect my dinner and follow suit. In a moment of weakness, I opened the fridge and grabbed the bottle from the Bobrovs and tucked it below my arm as I climbed the stairs and set all of the goodies down on my outdoor setting as the pastel oranges and yellow of the sun began to truly fade into the sweet blues and purples of the night.

“And now a message from one of our sponsors!” our DJ here in Diamond City, Travis, awkwardly shouted over the radio system that sat itself atop the grill on my balcony, following up his anxious outburst with a quick message from Valentines Detective agency before playing the next song on his list.

“You know doll face, I never really thought to ask you where you came from when you waltzed in here like an angel sent from the heavens. How did you come to call this flea infested shit pile a home?” pouring the both of us a taller drink than before, I plucked the glass from the table and brought its war-torn texture to my smooth lips, contemplating whether I should be truthful or spout
the same lie I had told everyone who had asked.

*Screw it, Johns just told you his brothers about to expel every damned ghoul in the city to the wastes. He deserves to know the truth*

I sigh.

“What’s the matter Valery?” he leans in, turning in his chair to look away from the marketplace that is still booming below to square me in the eye. I knew he was genuinely asking as a friend because he never used my name unless he was serious.

“I never told anyone what I came from because of how much I wanted to protect the people I grew up with. No matter how much of an asshole each of them could be, I can never find it in my heart to hate them”

“Trust me, I know the feeling” poor Hancock, he was trying to encourage me to spill the beans.

“I wasn’t born to a mother or father. I was made in a laboratory from all the best genetic material from the children vault-tec slaughtered before me, in an attempt to make the ultimate soldier,” I took a steadying breath before letting my gaze settle on the market below me, on the patrons who walked around either high out of their mind eating power noodles or those who purchased the things that their household needed, “I was just one of dozens of kids, in dozens of tests trained for hours on end every single day to become the best hero the wasteland would ever see. My generational lot, VT65 was just a countless addition to those who had come before and those who would come after us. We trained with all kinds of guns and weapons, if you were killed it was just an accident and the scientists who raised and observed us just … shrugged it off … as if we were nothing more than a failed experiment. Every generation was a building block for the next, we either passed the physical exam or we didn’t. Those who had more brains over brawn became the same scientists who fucked the rest of us over. If you didn’t make the cut, they would just kill you and increate your body – as if the last 18 years of your life was nothing to nobody…”

I dared to glance across at John, his eyes wide and jaw to the floor before he quickly snapped himself back into gear, brows rising before taking a long drink – allowing me to continue.

“None of us knew, of course. It would have caused a major uproar in each generation. There were clear divides at every age… those kids who were brutal without a cause, the ones who were obviously trained harder than the rest of us to be the best of the best, the top end of the crop. When I hacked into the scientists’ terminal one night and realised what their primary objective was, I had no choice but to flee. They’d have realised someone broke in and there would have been no graduation for anybody – they’d just harvest all of us in one hit to minimise the chance of the truth getting out”

“Obviously you escaped” John asked, arms crossed as he looked down into the city taking in the same thing I was looking at, but for different reasons. I took a sip of my drink, the hard vodka assaulting my throat like a thousand-degree forest fire, my stomach gurgling at the most unexpected intrusion – the wire thin threat of it emptying is contents all over the metal roof of the workshop before I forced the rising bile back into place.

“I’m sitting here aren’t I?” I smirked, to while he rolled his eyes and clinked his glass to mine, a smile on his lips.

“Smartass” I gave a quick wink and had another drink, the harsh liquor hitting my stomach with a warmer reception than before.
“I escaped while everyone was in training, I took the time to plan my escape when everyone would be the most distracted. I didn’t know how long it would last, but I managed to get the vaults door open before anyone really noticed I wasn’t in training for the day. I heard the jackasses who were at the top of the class chase after me, they had looted the armoury with weapons where I had simply ran and hoped for the best out here. Our vault was on top of a school, and it didn’t take long before the nasties of the wastes found us because of all the commotion my escape caused. Of course, they handled it while I tucked myself away in a preservation shelter and waited for the time to pass. I got out, found a settlement and then relocated here” I looked into the bottom of the glass I held tight in my hands, before taking a bigger mouthful of the vodka, eyes stinging with tears as my tongue singed from the quick onslaught of the burning liquid. Forcing myself to down the mouthful, I could start to feel the not-so-familiar tingle of my fingertips and toes creeping up my spine.

“Fuck” John dragged out the word, his eyes casting themselves on me he reached his hand to my shoulder, the silent question of are you okay? falling out of the air and into the simple gesture.

“I’m fine, but I don’t know if the kids I left behind ever saw the light of day. Ever saw the leaves of a tree or felt anything other than the cold and sterile walls of that damned vault” peering into the tree trunk brown of his eyes, I watched as his thin fingers carefully tucked a piece of my hair behind my ear before returning to the armrest of the chair, a sad smile on his lips accompanied by the solemn tugging of his brows.

“Children hardly make it out here, most people out there can’t face the idea of having kids because of all the dangers of the wastes. So many parents have watched their children grow up to be raiders, get mauled by dogs or Yao. It’s a harsh world to raise children in” John sighed, his shoulders heavy as they slumped down to the very pits of hell itself.

“You see the city under the thumb of everyone in the ‘stands. I saw this as a way to get away, to hide in case anyone from the vault came looking. Oppression is everywhere. I risked everything to get out of that vault, in the hopes of a better life. Those people down there – they deserve that chance too” I let my eyes linger on the ghouls sitting on the marketplace benches, huffing their drugs or smoking their cigarettes. These people needed an escape.

“You know, doll, you’re one of the first people here to consider then people” he half laughed half sighed, reaching for his glass again and dragging it to his lips to toss the potent alcohol back, a cough surfacing as he slammed the cup back down on the bench and twisted the cap off the whisky, pouring himself half a glass and sitting on its contents.

“Everyone has that right. No matter human or ghoul. Some of those guys down there have seen the craziest shit that the rest of us couldn’t imagine” smiling into my glass, I downed the rest of the glass, hissing as the burn hit my throat one more time and grabbing for the bottle of whisky.

‘Train Train - Train Train - Train Train - Round and round we go’

Standing from his place at the table, blonde haired head nearly knocking the paraol above John cleared his throat – an outstretched hand reaching for me. I shot him a hesitant smile, grabbing at his hand allowing him to pull me into a tight embrace, chest pressed to his as the song carried through the air.

‘Ya know you train, train - To be a soldier at war - It was a game, game - Ah but that was before’

“John! I don’t know how to dance” I laughed, my drunken feet stumbling as he swishes me to the side and pulls me close again, a sly smile adorning his lips.
“You don’t need to know when you’ve got me” he winked, his feet atoning for the gracelessness of my own feet by pushing mine or standing quite still while he moved me a different way.

‘We heard the bang, bang - And then it started to change - We took the train, train to the bottom again’

“I-ha!” I hiccupped, my hair in a whirlwind around me, a cyclone of fire as we turned and swished to the upbeat jazz of the song, my numb arms singing with joy at the first real moment of a purely silly memory in the making.

‘We heard the boom, boom - It was a horrible sound - And then the gloom, gloom - We went underground - Now in the room, room - We’re jamming the sounds - Go round and round and round’

“I sure am glad you stumbled into this town Val” he purred, his eyes glancing down to the patrons of the city who had noticed the dancing daredevils on the roof of the workshop.

‘Can’t go forward, can’t go back. Set your mind at ease, you better relax - Throw yourself a party wherever you’re at - And dance your blues apart - Tomorrow you can start - Finding a way back to civilization’

“Couldn’t ask for a better friend, McDonough” I laughed as he pulled me close and wrapped me in his arms and spun me out, a broad smile on his lips as he pulled me in once again, our feet moving in the quickest of steps to my distorted mind.

‘Stay, stay and have a good time - No need to pay, pay - The pleasure is mine - Until the train, train - Is ready to climb again!’

The piano and sax seemed to take all of times meaning away, my eyes closing in delight as my tingling fingers tangled in Johns, his skilled moves leading us along as the song played in the back. I barely noticed his hand reach for the jet, my sloshy mind only recognised the sound of the gas and the huff John filled his lungs with.

Black pupils swallowed his brown irises as they dilated, a slack smile on his lips as he offered me the inhaler. Turning to the whiskey in my glass I reached my arm for the cup, a stumble knocking my sense of distance off making me miss the cup completely before finally grasping it in my hand and downing the contents, the burn a simple satisfaction as it hit my belly. Turning back to John and running a hand up and into his thick blonde mess of hair, I grabbed the inhaler from him and lined the puffer up to my lips – pressing my index finger down on to the cannister and breathing deeply.

Everything seemed to slow down, watching as a small moth fluttered past where John and I stood in the slowest of motions that I could almost see the small waves of air coming from each beat of its tiny wing.

I turned, John reaching for my hand once more and pulling me into a tight embrace – his foot nudging mine to start dancing once more as the song seemed to pulsate through the air around us …

‘C a n ’ t g o f o r w a r d , c a n ’ t g o b a c k’

Music notes danced in the air around us, the beat pulling us into its tight clutches as a laugh escaped my lips, the bell of my voice seeming to get stuck in the air around us.

’S e t y o u r m i n d a t e a s e , y o u b e t t e r r e l a x’
“W…ould…n’t chan…ge…e th…is f..or th…e wor…rld” I hear John mumble into my hair as he pulled me close once more. A slow smile spread on my lips as the edges of my eyes began to glaze, a slow fade waving in and out of my mind.

‘So th rowy ourself ap art wh ere ev er you’ re at’

A slow hiccup left my lips as John brought the inhaler to his lips again, huffing the drug once more with a satisfied “Hahhhhh” as he passed it on to me once more.

‘Danc ey ourblues ap art’

A laugh escaped my lips, looking down at my silly feet I watched as John stepped in, pushing me back a step, my hips swaying to the beat as the warm breeze raked across my legs and clung to my pyjama shorts, my singlet tank taught against my abdomen as I sunk under Johns arm in a slow spin.

‘To m o ro w you ca n s t art f in din g away b a c k to c i vi liz at ion’

Bringing the inhaler to my lips and pressing the cannister once more, I let the haze of the high take me over – completely and utterly prepared for whatever hangover came my way tomorrow morning with nothing but a joyful smile.

‘So you ca n s t ay, s t a y and ha v e a g o o d ti m e’

- - - -

“Oh my god my head” the groan came from my lips as sunlight beamed through my glasses window, the soft sounds of the jangles sheet dancing in the summers breeze more akin to the annoyance of bloodbug wings flying towards you with a speed like a damned bullet train.

Rolling to my side and being met with the harsh metal floor I managed to raise my head enough to catch sight of my weathered pip boy, the sign on its gangrenous green screen showing that it was twenty passed eleven in the morning.

“FUCK!” the shock of the electoral vote was enough to shake me awake, my head spinning as I reached for my clothes and stripped bare, not caring who saw at that moment – knowing everyone would be at the podium behind the marketplace.

Roughly tugging my jeans and boots on, I barely bothered with a shirt and ripped the trapdoor open – boots clattering loudly on the wooden stairs as I rushed to grab my keys and peer into the kitchen.

Sure enough – there lay John across my couch in his crumpled dress pants, shoes still on and shirt completely ruined with liquor stains, arm slung across his eyes as his mouth hung open – a loud snore ripping through the silence of the workshop.

“John,” I whispered, lips cracked and mouth as dry as Myrna’s attitude, hand gripping at his shoulder in an attempt to shake him awake, “John wake up, your brothers giving his speech in ten minutes we need to leave!”

“Mmpfh” his head shook slightly, brows creasing into a frown as he seemed to settle into a more
comfortable position on the couch.

“John, I’m not fucking around. You need to wake up!” insisting and getting irritated by his total lack of care he had this morning. Groaning to myself and accepting the consequences of my actions, I scurried to the kitchen for a glass and rushed for my shower, turning the tap and filling the glass with frozen water.

“Sorry John” I apologised with a flick of my wrist the water splashed across his form.

“G-g-g-guh~!” he gasped, red eyes flashing around the room before settling on me with a dissatisfied but awake glare.

“Sorry” my shoulders shrugged – hands gripping his lapel and dragging him from the couch and towards the front door.

Hand in hand, we rushed to the podium where – luckily for us – everyone from the city was gathered. Naturally everyone from the upper stands had a seated position to watch the election commence in the city while most vendors and general community stood in the back or around the platform. In the middle of the raised floor sat one church pulpit, the candidate going against James McDonough stood behind it, John and I only catching the end of his speech.

“And with that I promise to provide aid for all those who need it, expanding our city further into the stands and providing the best upper-class experience to everyone in the commonwealth. Thankyou” the brown haired man concluded. I had seen him around the upper stands from my balcony, his head often so far up his own ass believing that everyone should pay tribute to the upper class citizens in Diamond City.

“And now… Mister James McDonough!” the announcer called forwards John’s brother.

The man was stocky in build, the opposite to John’s rather muscular body type. His seedy raccoon eyes were the same colour as Johns, his upper lip adorned with a greying moustache to match his balding scalp that had obviously had all of his remaining hair swept across it in an attempt to downplay the fact that he was 11 years John’s senior.

“People of Diamond City! We all know the real problem that we have in this ton that we each call home. A scum that runs amuck in the alleyways and in the backs of our houses. To this, I propose, if you vote mankind for McDonough, I’ll have every filthy ghoul expelled from this beautiful city of ours!”


“OI! You cant do that!”, “What the fuck McDonough?!”, “Who does this fuckwit think he is?”, “Excuse yourself!” , “Get fucked!”, “I don’t think so!” half of the spectators argued, outrage filling their voices as they spat out in disgust.

Then there was the other side of much louder voices …

“Thank god!”, “McDonough for mayor!”, “About time we got that filth off our streets – and out of our homes”, “Kick em to the curb!”, “Fuck the lot of them!”, “About damned time”, “Its time these freaks left our city”
“Now, now. I’m a fair guy. If these ghouls haven’t left the city by sundown Diamond City Security will toss the city to is very foundation to purge the scum from its bones. The people have spoken and I will make sure your voices are heard! Mankind for McDonough!”

“That pompous~!” I began, reaching forward to barrel through the insane mess before me before hands pulled me back, a furious John pulled me to his chest before spinning me in his arms and holding my arms tight, speaking in a ravenously fast onslaught of whispers as the crowd around us went berserk.

“Valery, listen to me. I can handle my brother, he will throw you into the lockup if you try and get anywhere near him. I can’t risk losing you like that so I need you to get home before shit hits the fan, can you do that for me?” I only replied with a curt nod, barely able to speak as John rushed off through the crowd of both frightened and fearsome citizens and security.

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An unending slew of gunshots rang out in the city, Diamond City security yelling at people to get down or worse … not resist arrest as they were dragged into the makeshift jail cells below the city. Each shot had me flinching, ready and waiting for one to land accompanied by the sound of cries and screams.

I sat inside Pipers home, my shaking hands holding on to the bottle of nuka-cola that she had kindly supplied for me. She had been there, her and her sister had heard everything that James McDonough had proposed to the citizens of Diamond City.

“That sack of upper stands shit! How could he do this to his own people?” she stomped around her small living space, eyes downcast and ears as flaming as a hot plate. Her pale fists were clutched in a tight coil, her teeth chewing through her lip with every passing second as more shouts and cries ensued outside of our homes.

“I called this place home, tried to make it a good place to put a roof over our heads. What the hell is McDonough thinking – Evicting everyone who’s different or tossing them into a cell to rot for the rest of their lives or at least until they deteriorate enough to be classed as feral?!?”

“Piper” a whisper. Barely there. Nobody to hear it as it came from my cracked lips.

*John’s somewhere out there*

“I ought to write a piece on this, maybe people will listen then! It has to be better than nothing …” Piper began musing to herself, slowing her rampage as Nat sat cuddled beside me on the couch.

“Miss Quinn?” Nat asked, big eyes looking up at me. She wasn’t naïve, she knew what was going outside even if she was ridiculously young.

“Yes?” I took a sip from my drink and sat it down on the coffee table, pulling my arm around the small girl.

“What will happen to everyone who’s in the cells? Are they going to die?”

Die. That seemed so final. Did everyone in the vault die, did anyone make it out alive? Looking into this little girls eyes, my mind raced to one of the younger boys who was in 75, Tommy. His
tired brown eyes rolling back into his eyes as his body shut down from overexertion after weeks of strenuous training.

“Val... am ... am I going to die?” his cracked lips croaked the question out, my warm hands brushing the hair from his head as his icy cold skin seemed to drop a few degrees. LIE.

“You’re just going to sleep Tommy, I promise. You’ll wake up tomorrow morning fresh as a daisy.” I lied through my teeth, I knew he wouldn’t make it through the night at this rate. Someone would come and get him once his heart rate dropped off, once the stupid chip they’d put into each of our arms stopped pinging results back to their computers. I had seen it happen too many times.

“I’ll miss ... you ... Val” he whispered under the dimmed lights in his sleeping quarters, my lips pressed to his forehead as a tear escaped my eye and rolled onto his cheek. Soon his breathing slowed to soft shallow gasps. I sat like that, for what seemed like hours until the lights flickered on, strong arms pulling me from the boys long dead body as they picked him up as if he was nothing – taking him off to wherever they disposed of the bodies of those who died in their training program.

Tommy shouldn’t have died, nobody should have been subjected to those kinds of torturous conditions.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

“Don’t answer it!” Piper hissed, her hand flying to the side table to grab her pipe revolver, aiming it at the rusted red door.

“Pssst! Doll face, you in there?” …

“John?!” untangling myself from Nat, I rushed for the door – unlatching it and letting the new mayors brother inside.

“I’m glad you got out of there when you did ‘toots,” he ran his hand through his hair, looking over the small house before his puppy dog eyes turned back to me, “Shit got out of hand real quick. I tried to talk James out of it, he won’t listen to me. It’s like the fucker has no remorse for what he has done to people of this city”

“How many got out?” panicked, I crossed my arms and locked the door behind him.

“Oh, you mean before James closed the front gate and practically locked everyone inside the city?” John huffed, fist slamming into the metal wall with a loud THUD!

“HE DID WHAT?!” Piper froze where she stood, her cheeks practically burning her alive.

“Yeah, he’s got every human and ghoul trapped in here like a god damned fishbowl!”

“He’s got everyone under his thumb – total control of who’s going where” I muttered, looking across at the carpet with a glare so intense I could almost see the flame kindling on the frayed edge of the material.

“This is too big to just be the Mayor … no offence but your brothers a nit-wit. He can’t even see far enough to his toes, so how does he come up with this master plan?” I could almost see the lightbulb flash atop Pipers head as something must have clicked into place for her. My attention turned back to John as he started to shake with anger.

“As far as I know, almost everyone is in the cells either wounded or caring for the wounded. This is fucked” John cursed, looking to the roof before both of his hands ran through his blonde locks.
We stood in silence, the only sound being those on the outside of Pipers. The violence had died down a little, at least there were less gunshots than before. The quiet between the three of us stretched on, until an idea hit me. Tommy would have wanted everyone to make it out alive...

“We smuggle them out of here. I can wire the door open, but its going to make a lot of noise. James and security is going to hear it without a doubt” I suggested, eyes wide as I waited for some kind of assurance that it was a good plan.

“How do we get them out of the cells?” Piper chimed in, asking the most important question.

“The guards know me. I can get them out of the cells, maybe get Vadim and Yafim to shout some free dinner for them all. You guys sneak behind me, use a few bobby pins and take a screwdriver from my workshop to pick the locks” the idea lingered in the air for longer than I’d have liked but it was the best I had.

“Let’s do it then” John smiled, putting his hand into the middle of our triangle and breaking like an old sports team would before a big game.

Chapter End Notes

Congratulations, you made it through 12 pages of a word document :’)
I hope you enjoyed this chapter, the next one is going to be a lot shorter - basically just breaking everyone out and getting them out of D.C and Val preparing to leave for a life on the road as well.
Catch ya in the next one :D
Cautious green eyes peered around the corner, my breath hitching as voices filled the open space before the diamond city security hub, the rusted red metal that ran through the whole city providing the only cover as we stood before the faded blue security sign.

“I mean, the new mayors definitely getting shit done, that’s for sure” the thick Boston accent of one of the security guards, probably Tom, approached my position.

Eyes searching with a small sense of panic, I glanced behind me to the puppy dog brown eyes of Piper, a determined frown set in her youthful features as she held up a long pipe pistol type of gun, the gears and springs sticking out from its cranks in its main chamber, the gun loaded with what Doctor Sun had called “Lock Joint Syringes” which for us meant we could set the guards unconscious bodies somewhere while we rescued the ghouls who had been captured as soon as mayor McDonough won the election and the streets turned to chaotic ruin.

I quickly charged the gun, the pressure inside the barrel bursting as I let the sights slip around the corner and aimed the long barrel of the pipe pistol at the first guard, his stomach offering the easiest target as I pulled the trigger, my eyes barely catching the glint of the glass vial shining in the low light of the ceiling fans as it raced to meet its maker.

The second dart flew just as fast as it snagged the other guard in his neck, a low gurgle emitting from his throat as I watched his body slump to the floor alongside his guard partner. Pipers vice like grip caught my attention as her throat cleared and her worried eyes peered around the corner to witness the guards lying on the floor.

“Sun said it would only last a few minutes, we need to hustle and get these ghouls” her curt whisper cut the silence as we rounded the corner, our trio of vigilantes moving with silent coordination.

“- - - - -

“Well, what’s the angle here?” Piper hummed to herself, her lips sealing the bottle neck of the nuka-cola she had been sipping while we waited for the mess outside to settle down, her blunt nails nervously tapping on the hard wood tabletop in her kitchen while we congregated – waiting for a plan.

“The guards know us, they know what we do and who we are. They’ll know something is up if we just walk in there and ask them to hand over the ghouls” I offered, eyes glancing across at John as he fiddled with the white hem of his shirt.

His eyes burnt holes into the door as he muttered to himself, the cogs in his mind turning at the fastest pace while he raced to find an answer to our problems.

“I know someone who can help”
Our feet carried us into the small overhang of the security’s entrance, my eyes scanning behind us as Piper stood watch while I slipped a bobby pin from my up do and tossed it into the lock.

“Come on, come on!” I whispered, the quiet plea heard by fate as the lock popped with a satisfying CLICK as I splayed my pale fingers across the rusted metal door.

“Let’s get inside and do this” John whispered as I stepped inside the long corridor, the pair of our footsteps echoing off the heavy set industrial pipes that lined the walls to our left, the feint buzzing of electricity our only companion as we pushed forwards and down the concrete steps further into the security’s den. Voices echoed from up above, each of us taking a side of the small squared off corridor to peer inside at the guards who stood talking with each other.

My eyes searched for Johns in the darkness, the only light emanating from the large cell stored inside what used to be a baseball locker room, casting ominous shadows across the rough concreted floor. Our eyes met, his soft brown to my sharp green, his gaze dropping to the weapon within my grasp. Right i thought, fingers fiddling with the thick belt wrapped around my waist containing the glass vials of serum before reloading the first into the long-barrelled pistol with a quiet ‘click’.

It’s now or never

Doctor Suns frown seemed etched into his features by this point, his calloused fingers playing with an elastic band as we told him our plan.

“So?” John asked in the proudest voice.

“So? So! So, I think you are insane. The three of you trying to break out all the ghouls from one of the most secure places in all the city? Do you have a death wish?” the thick white lab coat seemed to float around the stocky man as his arms flailed about with the complete and utter exaggeration of how stupid and suicidal our mission must have sounded. I ran my hand across my hair, eyes rolling as Piper spoke up for the first time since arriving at Sun’s small home.

“Honestly, it’s the most anyone is going to do about it” John nodded with her words, his keen eyes turning back to the doctor as he rolled the elastic between his fingertips.

“Honesty, it’s the most anyone is going to do about it” John nodded with her words, his keen eyes turning back to the doctor as he rolled the elastic between his fingertips.

“Doc, they’ll all die tomorrow. Who would have a clear conscience if they stood by and did nothing?” voice sure and strong, John reached for the good doctor with a hand on his shoulder, a silent plea for the doctor to go along with our plan.

“Fine. I had nothing to do with this – should anyone ask or lest you get caught” he muttered as he turned to the small bed side table, rifling around in its contents before pulling out a peculiar looking gun.

The mere design startled me; its long pipe barrel protruding from the strangest helm accompanied
by a typical pipe pistol recoil stock. The addition that puzzled me was the pressurised gas cannister that seemed to attach itself to the barrel of the gun.

“Mind my language but . . . what the fuck is that?” I couldn’t stop the words from escaping my mouth, the word vomit falling into the air as everyone turned to look at me in my small corner of the room.

“I’m with ‘ya, doll face. How’s a pipe pistol ‘gunna help us save those people?” John questioned, his confused gaze joining my own on the weapon.

“That’s just the thing, this isn’t a standard gun but rather one of my own design. It shoots vials instead of bullets” Sun looked rather proud of his work as the slight smile tugged at his often-downturned lips, his dark eyes flashing upwards as he held out the gun to me.

“Wait, are you sure?”

“Naturally, I want someone who knows how to handle guns - ” Sun started, paying no attention as John interjected,

“- Hey! I know how to -”

“- and return them in one piece. You’ll find this serum will do the trick. I believe it will knock anyone hit unconscious for around ten or so minutes. You only have six shots, use them wisely” he finished with a quick nod.

“Jayden, that’s too much to ask” I protested, lips pulled into a grimace as he handed the cold weapon across to me, the surprisingly light configuration of the small scope, taped stock and sensitive trigger attached to a piece of copper piping sending a slight thrill through my body.

“Rather, it is just what you need. I know you Val – You’ll never be able to live with yourself if you kill one of those guards” Jayden smiled, not in happiness but with a sad sense of true knowing.

The saliva seemed to have a hard time traveling down my throat as I held the gun and looked across at the ensemble of misfits before me. Alright let’s do this I let my gaze settle on John, his hopeful demeanour practically beaming from within with the promise of freeing his friends.

“Let’s hope we don’t get shot” I laughed, slipping the first vial into the small ammunition chamber.

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The first guard on the inside stood with his gun cocked, ready to take aim to whatever or whoever came his way. I let my fingers make quick work of filling the ammunition chamber with the first vial of the lock joint serum before slipping the scope back into place.

Steady, quiet breathing. Raise the gun. Take aim. Squeeze the trigger.

Shoot.

Pulling my eye away from the gun as fast as my arms would allow, I watched the first guard drop like a blot fly to the ground, the sounds of reinforcement rushed to meet my ears and a cool panic
shot down my spine as adrenaline kicked me into action.

“Barry!” one yelled as I slipped from the cover, my boots shifting across the dust covered floor racing for the first attack. The visor turned, the man below curling his lip in rage as I rushed his position, my fingers reaching for his lapel and bringing his chin down to my knee cap with a quick thud,

“ARGH!” I cared not for the scream as I flipped my position, rolling my body to the side and grabbing at the strap which secured the standard issue armour to his body and brought all my body weight backwards with a quick heave. The thick material stung my fingers, the fabric burns caressing the skin between each finger as a low *hiss* escaped my lips.

“You bitch!” his strangled garble filled the room as I hurled the man to the concreted floor, his dark blue baseball helmet cracking into the floor while his body collapsed with the almost familiar thud of meat on a hard surface. Wasting no time, I reached for his arm, locking my ankles around his throat until his body simply fell into an unconscious heap.

John seemed to have his hands full, my eyes darting up to watch as one of the guards pulled a baseball bat – coincidentally one of the ones I had modified in my shop – equipped with sharp razor blades designed to cut and dig into the muscle of its intended victim.

**HOLY SHIT!**

My feet wanting to spring into action, all of my training kicked in as I reached the second guard approaching John, their eyes steel and determined to inflict all kinds of pain and maiming as the bat rose above his head. Fingers dropping the pistol, I grabbed for the towel sitting on the small coffee table to my left, wielding it as a weapon was rather new but still highly effective as the bat came down hard – my back sliding against Johns as I lifted the stretched material atop my head catching the blades within their fabric. The guard glanced down, only just realising who stood in his way.

“You!” He snarled, lip curling into a quick sneer as he pried the bat away from the cloth, a furious rage burning inside him as he swung the bat again from the harshest side angle,

“DUCK!” I called to John, placing my hand on his side as I pushed him from the fray as the bat squared off with another sickening thud – a hot wet spray flying across my cheek as I turned wide eye to watch the guard John had been grappling with standing agape with his jaw slack, crimson red spurring from his temple as his arms dropped in a lifeless fashion to his sides, the gun he had wielded clattering to the floor.

The metallic smell of blood filled the air, sick tugging at my stomach as the bile rose to meet the world around it with a speed so rapid it almost made it past the back of my throat. John stood in shock, eyes wide as he looked at the pristine white shirt that had been marred with the vivid life blood of the guard who lay in a growing pool of his own blood on the cold, concrete floor. I could have sworn I heard one of the ghouls in the cells throw up in the corner as bile assaulted my senses and tried to tug the sick from my stomach.

“TREY!” the guard called, a tear falling down his cheek as he looked back up, further enraged by the loss of his friend at his very own hands, “I'll make you pay for what you did!” he screamed, picking up his friend’s gun – the sights aimed straight to my chest.

Quick thinking had never coursed through my body as fast as it had in that very moment, I reached for the gun; one hand slapping his own away and to the left of me while I twisted my body, pulling an elbow high before slamming it into his throat, leg sweeping below him as the smell of rot perforated my nostrils and infiltrated my brain. The poor guy didn’t even see the trip coming, only
realising in a moment of panic as his body seized and fell to the floor.

Another guard ran into the room from the barracks, his fist swinging hard as I made a quick move to dodge . . .

. . . not fast enough to miss the second jab that followed his initial assault.

Blaring red caught me off guard, the sting in my cheeks far outweighing the fabric burns on my fingers as I reached for the spot that had been struck. I looked past the black spots dancing in my right eye, knowing full well that another attack would be coming as the guard pulled out a baton from his belt – the thin bar extending with the flick of his wrist as an electrical current surged around the conductive metal. I flickered my gaze to John, hoping to all the gods that I looked determined as I circled the guard, stepping away from the man on the floor and blocked both the guards from accessing the cell behind me.

“Unlock the cage, there should be a key around here somewhere” my instruction was clear, ‘get everyone out of here while I hold the guards off’ and he took no extra time to dwell on what other shit we would see tonight. I turned my attention to the man before me, caring little for the one who lay wheezing on his side as he struggled to stand. Lowering my fingers from my cheek and heat racing, I tilted my head to the side, a small smile on my lips as I felt the bones pop back in to place.

“That filth aint leaving this compound, you hear” an empty threat, how typical.

“If I were you I wouldn’t make promises you can’t keep” I sighed, my body protesting as I brought my fists up before me, the guard scoffing as he pulled the baton behind his head a deafening battle cry filling the cells.

The impact knocked me a few feet back, my boots slipping on the concrete as the full force of the blow hit my left forearm, the sting of the hit pulling a curse from my lips before a wetness fell down my cheek, the tear leaving a searing train track in its wake.

My eyes ablaze, I stared back at the guard who had obviously thrown all he had at me. A smirk tugged at my lip. I knew it was wrong to bait him… but I did it anyway.

“You’re going to have to try a lot harder than that” with a quick wink I fell to the floor, the back of my foot snagging his knee. The feeling of the bones stretching like jelly shook my stomach as I let my other leg raise and encircle the guards waist – his balance thrown off as he fall to the floor with me.

Wasting no time, I reached for the guards neck as he struggled to stand, boots sliding across the ground and dust saturating the cloth across my knees, and wrapped my forearm around his throat and clutched at my elbow.

“Gurgh!” His fingers pried at my arm, blunt nails digging into the fabric that encased me, as a stream of drool fell from his lips and sank into the cloth.

“Please don’t make me…” I whispered more to myself than the guard as he trashed around like a shrivelling snake, I had almost missed the gun that his foot managed to snag in my haste to incapacitate him. His hand dropped, reaching for the gun and with a vengeful and hateful glance up at me, he aimed the gun right at the cage.

“NO!” Tugging his body up and onto my own as the trigger pulled and the bullet clattered on the metal bars. A sickening crunch filled the air as I released the mans neck and placed a hand on his shoulder, I let a silent screech cough it’s way up my scorched throat, looking up at the ghoul that
John had been helping escape the holding cell, a trickle of blood running down her temple as Johns confused eyes took in her sagging form.

I threw the guard off of my body, his glazed and reddened eyes focusing on nothing at all as I ran for the woman who’s mouth began to dribble a bright crimson.

“Jesus Christ, ‘Trude” Johns voice cut through the silence of the room, each and every set of eyes taking I the scene before them.

I hadn’t known the ghoul who John held, her darkened eyes closing as she collapsed to the floor and John with her. Mummers filled the room as the ghouls looked around the floor of the cells, their course whispers getting overdone to move and spring into action.

“John…” I started, his downcast eyes dropping a tear on Trudy’s chest as he clung to her body.

“They shot her”

“He was going to shoot you” I saw the gun, where it was raised. It’d have gotten John straight in the chest if I hadn’t of… if I had of just … why couldn’t I move that damned gun somewhere else?! Anger surged within me as I looked at what my mistake had cost us.

“You killed him, Val” Johns voice was almost inaudible as I looked down at the mess my hands had created. Four unconscious guards and two ho laid dead on the floor, one with the bladed batt still sticking out from his skull and the other with an unsettling purple tone setting into his cheeks – reddened eyes still staring blankly at me – the gun sitting limp in his cold fingers. Bile rose in my stomach, guilt wracking my body as one of the ghouls came and placed a hand on my shoulder and turned me to hug them close to their body.

“Trudy would have understood, it wasn’t your fault miss” the woman cooed, her crackling voice offering some form of solace as my eyes glanced down to John one more time.

“We need to move, those guards won’t stay down for long and they’ll know we were here. Everyone get back to the door and Piper will show you the way out of here without getting snagged” his voice was unrecognisable, as he laid Trudy’s body back on the floor. Standing, looking down at the stained white shirt, John placed his hand on my shoulder and looked to the gun on the floor.

“You’ll still have a life here long after I’m gone, I can’t stick around here toots, not after all that snot nosed brother of mine has done to screw this city over. So, one needs to step up to that plate and fix this mess. At least the bastards won’t see it coming,” he paused, brown eyes staring holes into the roof before continuing, “I wonder if that makes it better or worse?”

“I can’t let you do this John” pleading, I reached for his cheek – hand caressing the blood-stained skin just below his left eye, and forced his eyes down to meet my own. Shimmering tears started to well in my eyes as I watched the series of emotions pass across his features.

“You should get out of here, doll face. I can’t thank you enough for all you’ve done for my friends,
but you don’t need to see this happen. Piper will have taken everyone to the gate and snuck ‘em out for me. You need to go home and get your head right with a shower. I’ll catch up with ya in a little bit anyway, toots”

“…John, I-”

“GO, Valery!” I didn’t want to be told twice, so I turned my back as tears spilled across my cheeks and started the slow and painful walk back to the entranceway to the cells. The cocking of the gun sent a tremor through my body, the quick jerk of my bones shaking in my skin gating my step as I moved away from what I had done.

CLICK, BOOM

Oh god.

The first shot clicked in time to my footsteps as passed the first two guards who still lay unconscious and dazed on the floor, the loud boom of the gun filling my ears with a deafening ring as tears cascaded down my cheeks and sobs began to bubble up past my teeth.

CLICK, BOOM

“Fuck” my teeth hissed as I heard Johns footsteps shuffling heavily on the floor, not daring to turn around as a ridged freezing feeling washed over my body, numbly stepping forward and reaching for the door handle of the red rusted metal exit from the holding cells.

CLICK, BOOM

- - - - 

“Mph” The warm water of the shower fell across my shell-shocked body, the cool numbness spreading from fingertip to fingertip as the images of vivid red covering my hands flashed before my mind. The snap of the guards’ arm echoing across the vast expanse of the porcelain shower cubical, starting as a quiet tap before it refracted and bounced from wall to wall until the sound was almost deafening.

“Oh gods” I found myself muttering as I reached for the towel draped across the small shelf beside the shower, wrapping the comforting cloth around my torso before shutting the water off.

The blood may have been long and gone, but my hands still shook.

After all, I had never truly killed anybody before.

I wasn’t given the same set of morals, call it some defect in my genetic programming or training, but I had always cared for those around me – be it training partners or the younger children who were scared of dropping like a fly in the testing chambers when their small and fragile bodies were subjected to all the stresses of the scientists and their prying eyes and clipboards.

I wasn’t the same as Vivian or Travis, they had always turned their nose up at anyone who couldn’t get the top scores on the shooting range. I wasn’t the same as Rohit and James, who managed to orchestrate the biggest mutiny in the Vault after being elected to be on the junior scientist staff.
I was me.

And it made me sick to think about how I had used my training to end of lives of several men.

*But . . .*

I had also saved those ghouls, who knew where they would run to. Somewhere that had to be better than having their heads placed on the chopping block by Johns brother and his damned lackeys.

**KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK – KNOCK – KNOCK**, the familiar call sign from my rusted metal door brushed a sad smile across my lips as I wrapped the towel around my body in a tight cacoon before rushing down the wooden steps to unlock the workshop door.

“Hiya, doll face” his smile was a mirror image of my own; sad, reserved, strained.

“Come on in” I gave way, gesturing for John to walk inside with me as I shut the door behind me, fingers reaching for the lock before his hand darted to meet my thin fingers.

“I won’t be staying the night, sweetness. Just here to celebrate my last night in the city” my eyes grew wide as long tendrils of deep red fell across my eyes.

“You’re leaving?”

“No need to shout it, Val” he smirked with a slight wince shadowing his puppy dog brown eyes.

“Oh, John . . . About . . . About tonight,” I began, abandoning the lock and casting my glance to his eyes. What do you even say to someone who just executed people he had known all his life.

“It isn’t your fault, if that’s what you’re worried about. I went and had a few words with brother dearest up in his golden chasse. The – The bastard barely said two words to me,” John moved to the living space behind the workshop, his arm reaching for the blue switchbox that sat nestled on the wall before the lights flickered to life and he let himself fall to the couch in a huff, “You know what he said?” John looked at me expectantly, his eyes barely registering me standing there standing with my shoulder edged into the wall.

“The piece of work told me that he did it, even as everyone ran to those cells and found those men. He didn’t even care. Gave no fucking shits, that’s how little it seemed to affect him. He just stood there with his big ol’ fat smirk on his lips. I didn’t even recognise my own brother”

“. . . John” I tried, his eyes seemed to glaze over as he let it settle on the wall before him, barely registering what was around him.

“Piper sent word. Most of the ghouls made it out, I need to take them somewhere safe – somewhere they can truly call home”

“What stopped you from going?” a tear welled in my eye as I blinked like rapid fire from a gun to clear it, staring at the ramshackle roof before glancing back down to Johns form on my couch. A sob welled in my chest as he looked over at me.

“Couldn’t just leave my favourite girl, now could I?” he laughed. Oh my goodness he laughed, and it broke me.

The sob came out before I could stop it, the prison of white teeth barely managing to contain the sound as I tucked my hands below my armpits and John stood – walking across to me and encasing me in his tight embrace.
“There, there. You know I’ll always keep ‘ya close to my heart, doll” He crooned, sincerity lacing his words as the world seemed to cave in around me.

“Where,” Sob “will you even,” Hick “go?”

“I know a place, here’s hopin’ they take us in for who we are and not where we been” John held me close, the tight embrace bringing me close to his heart – near enough to hear its smooth and rhythmic beating which seemed to elicit a calmness within me.

“You can always come back, you know” I tried, pulling back and looking up into his warm eyes, a smile played across his lips as he ruffled through his jacket pocket, my eyes drawn to the medical syringe filled with the most curious green liquid. The longer I stared, it almost looked to be glowing.

“I somehow very much doubt that” John laughed, holding the syringe close to his body as I stepped back.

“So, you came for one last party?” I smiled, the most knowing smile in all the world, because I knew how John worked almost better than he himself knew.

“With my favourite girl, of course! Think of it as … a farewell party” a sharp elbow hit my ribs in the most playful manner, so I took no offence as I turned for my viciously understocked liquor cabinet.

“I’ve got . . . Whiskey and, oh would you know it, more whiskey!” I laughed, reaching for the amber liquid and turned to cheers John as we sat together on the couch – all thoughts of appropriate lounge wear gone as I downed the first few swigs of the liquid – coughing as it seared its way down my throat and settled into my stomach.

John and I seemed to sit together, talking about nothing in particular until the bottle sat three quarters empty, the buzzing in my mind slurring my speech as I let my head rest on Johns shoulder.

“What amn I gunna do with-hout you, Johnny boy?” I laughed, looking up at him while he downed the last of his drink, his right hand fiddling with the syringe he had pulled from his pockets earlier.

“You’re one of the smart’st people I know, sweetness, you’ll be jussst fine without me”

“Awh! Yo’re to-oo kind” I slurred, looking at the glowing green of the syringe, I gabbed at it, John pulling his hand back and looking down at me from behind his long lashes.

“Trying to steal my high, huh?” a sigh filled the air as I looked closely at the syringe, its soft metal case obviously taken from a used med-X or something of the sort, but I couldn’t understand why john hadn’t used it yet.

“Me! Nev’eh” Hick, “Why ‘avent you used it yet?”

“This, doll face, will be the best idea if it works, and worst if it kills me. The only one of its kind, it is” He gave a sad smile as he looked at my ‘nuka-cola’ clock hanging on the wall. It was almost two am.

“If its going to be the ‘est dec-ces-sision of your life, then” Hick, “You should use’d it” to reiterate my support, I flashed a quick toothy smile and gave a thumbs up beside my cheek.

“Huh, good point” John stared at the wall with a shrug and picked his sleeve up and stabbed the
syringe into his arm, a slight grimace on his lips as he pushed the injector further down and his pupils dilated until there was no single bit of brown left to be seen. I smiled as a sigh of relief left Johns crackled lips, and took a final swig of my drink before passing out on the couch beside him.

It seemed like a day had gone, my head thumped with a thousand trumpets as I felt the figure beside me shift and a groan roared to life in my throat.

“Wha. . . ?” I struggled to open my eyes, eyelids heavy with the looming hangover that my body was surely struggling to combat against as I reached for the figure beside me and was met with a wet and crunchy sound. What the fuck?

My eyes shot open and adjusted to the dark surrounding me, I barely registered the figure beside me staring up at the ceiling.

“John?” I asked, reaching for him once again, the sound ensuing once I made contact with his form … “Why are you all … ?”

His head tilted towards me, and I moved to stand – the empty bottle of whiskey clattering to the floor with an earthquake of a ring as my ears buzzed to try and escape the sound. Confusion hit me like a steam train as I fumbled for the switch box on the wall, my fingers reaching for the small steel latch and braced my eyes for the blinding light that was about to invade my line of eyesight.

The lights blared to life in the most unreasonable fashion, the fuzz of my vision screaming at me to turn the damned thing off lest my eyeballs burn out of their sockets and melt onto the floor in a pitiful puddle.

I almost missed the gruesome sight before me.

“Doll?” a raspy voice called from the couch and I felt my jaw hit the floor.

“Holy fuck! John!” or least who should have been John. In his place on the couch sat the weeping and seeping patchwork of burnt and charred skin, dressed in his white shirt and fitted black slacks. His head tilted towards me, gone were the loose blonde curls – they sat in piles around his shoulders and across my couch standing out like a pair of radstag balls on a concrete floor – but the most disaterious change?

His eyes.

The familiar puppy dog brown was missing, gone was the soft tanned skin, the soft lips and the keen gaze John used to hold, now instead he looked like a piece of strawberry gumballs that someone had chewed up and spat out on the steps of the city.

“Scale of one to ten, how bad is it?” he managed a smile, but I didn’t miss the wince as his chapped lips seemed to give off an audible crack with the rasp of his once sultry voice filling the space between us before standing and hissing at the pain that moving seemed to cause.

“Honest answer?” I pulled back, eying his form cautiously.

“Shoot” he laughed, I’m glad he found whatever he was thinking about humorous.

“Negative fifty” I found myself laughing, Johns throaty rasp joining in before he started coughing his lungs up and brought his closed fist to his chest in attempt to clear his throat with a hiss.
“Oh god, are you okay, you look like you’re in pain. Lord, that must hurt” I winced as he closed the gap between us and placed his hands on my shoulders.

“All that shit doesn’t matter, ya’ know why?” he spoke with a sly smirk attached to his lips the whole time, a wink prefacing his new demeanour with the most sinister implications.

“And whys that?” I found myself asking with the most infectious cheek splitting grin.

“Because, toots, the high was totally worth it!” a throaty laugh and cough later, I knew that John would be okay, I would be okay, we would be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhhh, yeah I hate how this turned out. Its not what I wanted to post and it took me WAYYY too long to write it what with life getting in the way and everything - but here it is. We get a sneak peek at John turning into a ghoul here as well, which is fabulous. Give me some time to get myself together because I'm about to go and visit the wonderfully volcano torn Bali in the next few days and will be MIA for a few weeks ~ Alas I will be back with a new chapter in due time.

Thanks for putting up with my drivel :)
Diamond City seemed almost too smug for its own good. Under McDonough’s fat thumb, everyone seemed to ignore the blatant fact that we had thrown our neighbours, our friends, our fellow survivors out into the mutated hound house.

Of course, three weeks later nobody knew what had happened in those cells outside of the ghouls who had escaped with their lives, myself, piper and John. Piper lived in the simple ignorant bliss of knowing that the ghouls escaped as she helped them though an old passageway out of the city, never knowing the lives I claimed with my bare hands.

I trained for it, was bred for it – to kill.

Of course I had never killed anyone in my lifetime, but the wastes makes a monster out of everyone – its only a matter of time before you can no longer see the difference between you and the deathclaw reflected in your stained and cracked mirror. No matter how many times I washed my hands I could still see the blood that only my eyes colour see and it haunted me each and every night as my eyes flickered below my eyelids long after the sun had sank below the smog filled horizon.

So when I decided to close up the shop and pack my olive green backpack full of my supplies everyone seemed to think it came from nowhere. Piper was by far one of the most confused members of the community.

“You’re doing what?” She exploded, well not literally … although her cheeks did turn an awfully deep shade of red as I shuffled a thick puffer jacket into the bottom of the backpack.

“I’m leaving the city, I figure its time to go and do some exploration – see what’s out there, you know?” I shrugged, long red tendrils of hair slipping from my high bun as I busied myself with the packing before me that lay neatly strewn across my bed.

“I can tell you what’s out there – death and mayhem sprinkled with more … death!” Her quick steps echoed on the metal trailer floor that I called my bedroom, if I could have packed it up and taken it on the road with me god knew I would, but no Brahmin was that reliable.

“Pipes, calm down. I know how to handle myself out there, I’ve made it this far and I’m still alive aren’t I?” I joked, searching for the humour in my situation. Her adorable brown eyes flashed in anger and sadness as the gears turned in her mind like a broken clock, trying to make sense of what lay before her but never quite getting it.
“Why the sudden change? You were fine before that asshat was elected in” her thumb stuck up out
my window to where the mayor’s office overlooked the city, the fat sack of shit’s silhouette
wandering from room to room amongst the light in the elevated building, “was it John? Did his
disappearance have anything to do with this, quite frankly, irrational decision?” She pressed, her
footsteps echoing closer as she peered down at me.

“Woah, no need to go all reporter-y on my ass Pipes,” I laughed, throwing my hands up in
surrender as I scooped my legs under my body and came to a stand. A painful tingle snaked up my
legs and I feigned stability as pins and needles quickly overtook my muscles and a grimace tugged
at my lips as the fuzzy feeling threatened to topple me while I looked Piper in the eyes and
continued, “It was actually something I was thinking about quite some time ago. The shop is okay I
guess, but there is nothing for me here except for the people. When I was a kid I didn’t really get
the chance to see the world and I want to make up for it all now”

Sadness seemed to take over her eyes as her small figure sunk into my black sheeted bed and a tear
spilled from her eye as she regarded me.

“I am the people here though” a crack in the air, surprisingly not from the thunderstorm that slowly
rolled its way across the city but from her broken voice as she twisted her fingers in her lap and
played with the frayed edges of her rough wrist wraps that sat tucked into her favourite red jacket
sleeves.

“Hey, its not like I won’t be back… this will always be like home to me. Everyone has been so
amazing here, even Myrna with her crazy synth accusations. I’ll always come back and visit you
guys, I cant wander too far away from my favourite reporter – now can I?” Soft words and
encouraging shoulder pats seemed to sell her on the idea of me leaving.

“I really don’t want you to go Val”

“I know, but its just something I’ve got to go and do. And besides, you’ve got Nat here – she needs
your help to stay out of trouble. The two of you are way more alike than you might think” I added
with a quick wink as she ran her sleeve under her nose and swiped away the oodles of snot that
seemed to appear from nowhere.

“At least tell me you’re not dumb enough to leave in this storm” brown eyes shot out my window
as the first few droplets of rain hit my trailer like pebbles skipping across a flat lake. A smile
stretched across my lips as I quickly drew the thin sheet of plastic across my bedside window as a
makeshift blockade and looked back over to Piper.

“As much as I would love a fresh start I’m not dumb enough to head out in that and catch some
kind of new age sickness” Even though I would most likely pull up better than any other waste
lander out there, I guess Vault-tec did something right after all that hullabaloo “I need to finish
packing all this up anyway, so I’ll most likely be gone in the morning”

Pipers boots hit the metal flooring with a overwhelming sadness, her arms ensnaring me in a quick
and forceful hug that seemed to crush my ribs.

“Just make sure you stop in and say goodbye before you leave” she mumbled into my hair in a
strained whisper as wet tears fell to my neck and soaked into the thick long sleeved shirt that I
wore.

Half an hour later I sat with nothing more than my thoughts and the sound of the relentless storm
that raged on as I stared for an ungodly amount of time at the dressing table which housed the final
few possessions I refused to part ways with. My tentative fingers reached for the rusted brass
handle to the top drawer, muscles barely straining as the turmoil and war raged within me at the memories that these belongings seemed to threaten to destroy me with.

- CHINK – CHINK – CHINK – CHINK –

The rain persisted as a shallow breath wracked my lungs and stomach, a jar of blotflies let loose in my stomach as I shifted on the bed frame, and peered inside the small drawer.

As vibrant as the day I got her, my vault suit sat neatly folded under a charred journal, pre-war pen and my most forgotten memory – Penny’s holotape that she gifted me upon my departure of Covenant. A brief pang hit my heart as I reached for the blue and yellow bodysuit, and I briefly wondered if it would still fit me as I had changed in the last two and a half years in the most substantial ways – my chest had changed and grown in size while my hips were more robust, akin to the 17 year old’s body I was rapidly growing into.

Let’s not forget to mention that I had also grown a few centimeters since the last time I had worn it.

I re-folded it none the less, and packed it within my olive backpack at the very bottom of the pile, followed by my faded olive button up and torn blue jeans, along with any spare ammunition I had accumulated for my very first pistol, my 10mm – ‘Take a Chance’. Reaching down the side of the clothes I managed to roll up a few sets of socks and underwear with my toiletries, the necessities that I couldn’t bare to live without after being immersed in the city life. Strong hands reaching for the rolled sleeping bag and extra pillow that I had invested in a few days ago, I clipped it around the base of the pack so it would have sat at the base of my tailbone as I walked to wherever my feet would carry me, and stuffed a few disarmed fragmentation grenades into the mesh pockets that sat on the left and right sides of the pack.

Crystalline green eyes raking over the journal and pen, I found myself reaching for it and withdrew the small hand drawn map that Barbie had given me oh so long ago ~

- CHINK – CHINK – CHINK – CHINK –

~ how childish I had been at that time, thinking life was one way when it was in fact, another. The sound of the rain pouring down atop me seemed almost relaxing and it could have almost convinced me to leave and be swallowed whole by the bleak grey weather outside the city limits. However, I had promised Piper that I would go and say my final goodbyes in the morning when I had packed the last of my supplies.

- DUNG –

My head thumped on the metal headboard of my bed, and my eyes seemed to settle on all but none of the roof at the same time, and I found myself slipping into the warm embrace of sleep long before I had ever wanted to.

- - - - -

“I don’t want to set the world on fire - I just want to start a flame in your heart”

Black spots danced before my vision, a hand reaching up to clear the fuzzies as I stared at the ceiling of my – wait no, shit… Diamond City’s newly vacant – trailer while the alarm on my Pipboy 3000 chimed in its happy little tune.
“In my heart I have but one desire - And that one is you, no other will do”

“Ugh” a grunt of a groan left my lips as I looked over at the dresser, reaching for the machine in a half dazed sleep and looked at the time – it was only 05:00am, and it was time to go and stuff the last of my food into a vault tec lunchbox and get moving on the road and discover what else was out there.

“I’ve lost all ambition for worldly acclaim - I just want to be the one you love”

“And that’s enough of that Travis” I laughed as I shut off the alarm with a quick flick of the radio’s frequency. Kicking my legs from the blankets, I made quick work of dressing in warm and comfortable clothes – my thick brown jeans, grey long sleeved button up and lace up boots that the residents at Covenant had given me that somehow – miraculously – still fit my growing feet which I was ever grateful for. Reaching for my stock standard hairbrush, I ripped the knots from my hair and began a quick plait from the long auburn ponytail that sprung from my head, twisting it into a tight bun and securing it with several bobby pins before hoisting that familiar olive green backpack off of the floor and opening the hatch leading down to the workshop that now lay barren – devoid of any life or materials as I had sold each and every one of my worldly items to set off into the wastelands.

The rusted red door squeaked as I made haste to duck past Piper’s office, the early morning crows twisting their unnatural necks to peer at every possible angle before flying to the next powerline and repeating the gesture. Tears were shed and all attempts to convince me to stay fell on deaf ears with a pat on Nat’s head and turned from the small living space and made way for the entrance to the city.

“Stay safe out there” one of the guards warned, cocking his combat shotgun as his head tipped as I glided past the security gates that had long been out of order and stood before the great green gateway to the outside.

- SCREEEEEEECH – CRANK – CRANK – CRANK -

My eyes narrowed as the sound of the heavy barricade lifted above, the misty morning air cascading off of its hinges and early morning sunlight spewed across the concrete slab of a floor, my hand rising to shield my eyes as the early morning sun flashed before my eyes. Two tentative steps turned and into three quick yet confident strides as I looked ahead to the southwest. I knew from traders like Barbie and Cricket, the cave that it would lead off into more of a trade route and the wilderness where mutated monstrosities lurked behind every corner. was the Diamond City grand stands. I gave one final nod and took the first step out in to the cool fog that seemed to linger in the air before the sun dared to rear its head up and over the city that surrounded me.

Slinging the pack over my shoulders and examining my almost mint condition pip boy with a curious glance,

“I guess I know which way I’m going” I laughed as I looked up to green copper statue centered in the outer city’s boundaries and let my crystalline green gaze drop to the pip boy in my hand. The weight of the personal computer shifted as I slipped it over my left wrist and fastened the clap with a satisfying ‘click’ and let my eyes settle on the path before me.

One last look at the descending gate behind me and a heart full of courage – and I knew there was no going back.

Let’s get this show on the road.
Burning ozone filled the air as red beams of our lasers pierced the rustic orange coloured sky, a brutal scream escaping chapped lips as my power armour suffered a blow from one of the feral abominations that threw itself at my figure, making quick work of its jittering and unpredictable corpse with a few quick shots to the head;

*Two in the head keeps em dead* I let myself think for a moment as another swarm of the ghouls filled our small base camp at the Cambridge police station.

“HAYLEN!” I called, looking across my shoulder and stepping back as my laser dropped two of the gasping and groaning corpses, her hands pressing on Knight Rhys’ leg where he had been injured mere minutes before. Her eyes shone in understanding as she peered back at Rhys’ weak form.

“I cannot move him sir! He’s losing too much blood”

“I can’t keep this fight up much longer Scribe, get him inside!” my voice rung out across the fire lit stairs, eyes diverting back to the fight at hand as an attack from the left and right seemed to occur simultaneously.

- BOW - BOW - BOW -

A never-ending stream of ghouls seemed to attack the complex, their lunging bodies seeming to appear right outside our gates, forcing me to step back once again – praying to whatever god was out there for Haylen to find the strength to get Knight Rhys out of the firefight lest we all perish on the doorstep of our temporary home.

- BOW - BOW -

More shots and more bodies on the floor, my rifle barely recharging enough between each and every round as the monstrosities seemed to push me back up the final step of the stations courtyard.

- BOW - BOW - BOW - BOW -

“Haylen get yourself out of here!” an order, not a request as I looked over at her defeated form, her eyes meeting mine almost resigning from the effort it required. I knew what she was trying to say – I knew it myself. This was it, we were going to perish here just the same as the rest of our squad that we had traveled with.

All hope seemed lost as my rifle rose again and let off a few more shots, I would refuse to be overcome and swarmed by these ferocious ghouls without putting up one hell of a fight…

… at least until a silencer rang out across the raging battle and the ghouls who were entering the complex seemed to drop like bloatingflies, their bodies slumping to the floor as a strong arm emerged holding a steady 10mm pistol in its hand, the arm attached to the body swathed in waste lander clothing that quickly rounded the corner

Hope sprang inside me, somewhere long caged by the brotherhood’s regime and mentality of being a soldier who felt nothing for the blessing that luck and faith may bring – let alone the luck of a *wastelander* stumbling across our plight.
Her long red hair seemed to dance around her like wildfire in the setting sun as a long muscular arm tipped with dirty wrist wraps rose up, a spearheaded weapon unlike any I had ever seen before came crashing down on one of the ghoul’s heads, its pale brains erupting in a loud **SQUELCH** as another rushed her from behind. She seemed almost at home in the combat, as her thin body spun and whipped the spear under the ghoul’s leg – effectively tripping it – before a swift stab through its eyes rewarding her figure with a spurt of feral blood onto her boots and shirt.

Lost in the battle, another strained screech invaded my ears as more ghouls cascaded into the compound, their hollow eyes and bony fingers reaching forwards as they seemed to trip over each other to rip us to pieces, my rifle aimed at their torsos and heads as I let off a few more shots, dropping them to the floor one after the other.

- BOW - BOW -

Sweat gathered at the nape of my neck as my brown eyes focused on the fight – on saving my team – as the woman swung her weapon in one hand and quickly fired at the feral with the other, a fierce look of determination etched across her features as she dropped more and more hostiles to the compound floor.

Heavy breathing filled the air as silence seemed to fill the battlefield, my laser rifle dropping to my side as I surveyed the mess of bodies before me and my team. Countless bodies lay strewn across the concrete, their eyes looking up to the heavens with slack jaws – at least for those who still had intact heads – and their sizzling bodies frozen in their demise.

One last ghoul seemed to enter the complex labyrinth of bodies strewn across the floor, its twitching head and arms searching for something to maul and tear limb from limb. A quick yet serious smile crossed her shining lips with a quirk of her eyebrow as she raised her gun and aimed the barrel at its head, her finger squeezing he trigger as a loud shot rang out across the now silent compound and the feral dropped to the floor with a quiet gargle and one final twitch.

“So, can I hunker down here for the night?” she asked with a satisfied smile and playful wink.

I let out a surprised sigh and glanced over to Haylen and Rhys, who simply sat with wide eyes and a silent look between them.

“As much as we appreciate the assistance, civilian, but I must ask what is your business here?” I found myself, asking in a way that seemed even too cold and to even me. Haylen’s brows pulled into a tight frown as she took in the blood soaked woman before our team, her quick hand holstering her familiarly crude 10mm pistol on her hip.

“Me? I’m just trying to survive out here just like everyone else” her tone seemed almost irritated, but her blazing green eyes struck me as overtly tired as they studied the complex around us.

“The way you charged in and engaged those ferals, I find that difficult to believe”

A loud huff from the woman informed me that I may have offended her, but she was in no place to make demands as her eyelids seemed to flutter over an eye roll. Annoyance twisted in my gut as her subordination and defiance of my authority puffed my chest out in the tight confines of the heavy power armour I donned, lips pulling into a tight line.

“Look, hot shot, from the way it looked you guys were overrun. I came in and saved your asses from becoming feral chow – the least you can do is give me a spot to put down my bedroll before I clear out in the morning” attitude seemed to seep off of her, as her thin fingers twirled her long spearheaded weapon around so that it scraped along the concrete below her feet, her eyes flickering
in annoyance as she gestured to the corpses splayed across the floor.

*Fair call*

“I apologise, if I appear suspicious it’s because our mission here has been difficult. Since the moment we arrived in the commonwealth, we’ve been constantly under fire”

“No kidding,” she seemed to take in the space around us, the cracked and crumbling barricades, decrepit buildings surrounding the station that our team had called home since settling inside it before a flicker of a smile seemed to cross her lips, “You could at the very least use a hand clearing all of those bodies out of here”

“That we could. We are on recon duty and are down a man and our supplies are running low… but you seem to be able to handle yourself, *civilian* so if you want to pitch in, we could use an extra gun on our side at least until our distress beacon reaches our superiors”

A light seemed to spark in her eyes as her thin brow quirked upwards.

“What, are you guys military or something…?”

“Indeed. Paladin Danse, Brotherhood of Steel. Over there is Scribe Haylen and Knight Rhys. We may not look like much but we have quite the battalion upon our ship – the Prydwen – back on the East Coast in the Capital Wasteland. What do you say, you help us and we will help you?”

With a light shrug and a satisfied smile, her soft green eyes peered into my harsh brown and she jutted a bandage wrapped hand out before her, pristine teeth gleaming from behind her lightly chapped lips.

“Deal” her voice sung as my gloved hand reached for hers, shaking upon what I only hoped would not end in my teams demise at the hands of a very sharp spearheaded weapon.

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The decrepit and quite frankly unkempt stone walls of the police station seemed to be the more secure option over those which bordered the building. The fallen brass letters of the namesake seemed to be an almost depressing touch on the once lively scene as the rapidly sinking sun seemed to draw the shadows cast by each of their defences and barricades across the blood soaked concrete, the only light shining from the fire dancing around the empty oil barrels stationed around the courtyard which seemed to lick their way up the long dead trees which sat on either side of a bright blue door.

My fingers tightened on my weapon as I hoisted it off the floor in a neat twirl before hoisting it above and over my head, resting the strap over my shoulder and slinging it on the side of my backpack – watching as the ‘paladin’ and his little … scribe (was that the word?) helped their wounded officer inside the station, his grunts and whines carrying across the confined space as they set him down on one of the bedrolls below a bulletin board and beside two upturned chairs.

The woman dressed in the most curious way seemed to busy herself at their desk and terminal, eyes flickering to meet mine only once before a blush crossed her cheeks and she looked back at the terminal and started clicking the keys before her. The wounded man, who now sat with bandages held to his side, stared up at the roof and let out a strained huff of air as my boots squeaked on the
slightly raised floorboards.

For the most part the station seemed to be in a decent state on the inside, the peeling white and blue paint looking like a bored night in’s treat, places already peeling away from where someone must have began scratching the wall beside their small corner desk and operational terminal. To my left stood an open doorway, closer inspection showing its belly filled with broken floorboards and wooden husks of door-frames and rubble, an additional room shooting off to its side with what appeared to be a functional bathroom beside it.

Thank god, one less thing I have to do for those jerks I thought to myself as I peered in to the open double doorway and straight to an unoccupied room. Taking a step towards it, I noted the steel barred cells in the room to the right, their cold and imposing presence raising the hairs on the back of my neck as my mind flashed to place it had not been in the last four years – back to that damned vault and their senseless experiments. The closest I had ever ventured back to the Maldern area was a small community of ghouls who lived at what they called ‘The Slog’ back in the March of 2286.

I quickly glanced back at the way I had came as the floorboards creaked behind me, the heavy footsteps coming from the man in the machinery – the Paladin.

“Is this room over here being used for any diabolical schemes to kill off all the mole rats in the area?” Laughing, I pointed to the room with a lone ebony table, five red pleated chairs and an array of other random benches and a lone metal cabinet.

“That is is not, both Haylen and Rhys share the main area and my belongings are stored in the room just down the hallway from this room,” hesitation seemed to fill his body as he glanced around the room unsure, “would this living space suit you?”

“It would do just well, I don’t plan on staying too long I just need a place to rest for a night or two before I keep on my way” I smiled, slinging the harpoon off of my shoulder and sliding both arms out of my backpack straps – letting both fall to the floor with the clatter of cans and caps.

“So, civilian, are you from a local settlement?” He asked, his heavily armoured fingers fiddling with a plate on his tank of armour.

“I… don’t really have a home. I did, once, but not for a long time” eyes casted downwards, back towards the man of metal behind me I dared not to let my eyes well with tears as I thought about the places I had tried to settle in all my time exploring. Diamond City, that run down diner in the north-east, up north on the coast and in Salem before deciding to loop back to see what remained after years of distance.

“An answer I hear often…” his rough voice seemed to pique as my head turned to take in just how much of the doorway he seemed to take up. “Where did you get that weapon?”

“What, my harpoon?” I laughed, my leather boot kicking the long spear like weapon that lay discarded on the floor.

“Is that what it is called, I have never seen a weapon like that on a battlefield”

“I got it from a place called Far Harbour, I found my way up there when a girl I had met up the coast said something about wanting to get off of the mainland and see more out to sea. I ended up staying in their docks and helped a few of the towns people out”

“Far Harbour? How have I never heard of such a place?”
“It’s quite … reclusive. They don’t advertise their whereabouts and are completely self-sufficient out there and if you are from the east like you say – it is no surprise you haven’t heard of them”

“So, this … ‘harpoon’ is one of their weapons?” His eyes seemed wary as I stooped to pick up one of my favourite weapons I had hand crafted, and held it out in perfect balance.

“Indeed, it is” I laughed swinging the long pole around my hand like a baton before setting it down on the floor with a triumphant thud.

“It is getting late, I thought I should have come and asked if you would be fine setting in for the night and was curious if if you wished to assist either myself of scribe Haylen in the morning. Knight Rhys is in no shape to clear those corpses and we could use the additional set of hands”

“Of course, it can be tomorrows problem. If it is okay with you I would very much so like to set my sleeper out and get some rest”

With a permitted nod he turned and closed the oak door behind himself, the eerie creak of the hinges grating on my eardrums as the door clicked closed. A sigh escaped my lips, my eyes settling on the table and cabinet before me before my arms stretched out before me and I cracked my knuckles into place.

The desk scraped across the floor as I pushed it against the windowed wall, hell if I was going to sleep here I was at least not going to get stared at like some outsider. I had made a habit of carrying a thin yet opaque sheet that could go over whatever surface I lay under for privacy reasons, you never knew when you might need to get changed or just need that little bit of an escape.

Quietly clearing the rubble to a corner of a room, I set to making my bed for the next night or two. Unfastening the clasp on the base of my backpack, its mesh of olive fabric now being held together by patches of other assorted colours of material, I made quick work of unrolling my dark grey sleeping bag and soft cloth pillow and laid it out under the table. The black sheet fit just over the table, its ends trailing the floorboards in a convenient makeshift tent.

I reached for my pyjamas, a less blood-soaked alternative that I would have to don in the warm weather that came with the February evenings. Technically the first day of summer was tomorrow, however the way the weather had felt – nuclear apocalypse aside – deemed it necessary for shorts and a singlet top. Setting the crusting blood soaked Wastelander gear aside on the red seat across the room, I meandered my way into my small tent, fishing the classically heavy pip boy 3000 I had retained from my time in the Vault and checking the time, and setting an alarm for the morning.

The little vault boy animation yawned and stretched as the computer buzzed to life, the little reminder turning up that it was only two more months and change until I would be 21, until I had been out of that vault for just over six years. What became of it, I had no idea and nor did I care. After a harsh life on the road I could only hope that some of the kids got out and that the assholes who ran the whole operation died in a hell they deserved. Setting the alarm for 06:00 hours I snuggled into the warmth of the sleeping bag and let myself slowly drift off to sleep – all worries shuffled away into their respective corners, at least until tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Phawwww I am actually so keen for school to be over so I can just smash this out of the ballpark! Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, I am hoping to have another one up
soon -
Next time we are hopefully getting some training from Danse as well as fixing their transmitter so the rest of the armada can come onto the scene.
“Oh, drinking beer in a cabaret—was I having fun~”

The sweet, sweet voice of Bing Crosby lulled me from my sleep, his blissfully chirpy voice interrupting a nonsensical dream about mirelurks and razorclaws as my tired eyes slowly opened to look at the blackened tent around me. My legs felt overly warm inside the sleeping bag as the dull ache within my muscle tugged both appendages from the steaming insulator.

“Fuuuu~” I sighed as the palms of my hands rubbed into my eyes, drawing the sleep from them and discarding it to the dust as my sleepy eyes adjusted to the warm little bubble of solace that I found here under the black sheet and in this room at the back of the police station.

‘Until one night she caught me right—and now I’m on the run~’

My head sunk into the cloth pillow below me, the sound of it crinkling in my ears seemed to almost entice me back into sleep as my eyes closed once more and a long exhale left my lungs.

‘Oh lay that pistol down babe—lay that pistol down~’

*VRR-THUD* *VRR-THUD* *VRR-THUD*

Heavy metal footsteps dragged me from my fleeting slumber once more as the sound stopped just short of the doorway, a quiet huff of air signalling someone’s arrival.

“Do you ever leave that suit, or is it just bound to you at this point?” I croaked, mouth dry as I looked over to where the door should be, had it not been concealed by my sheet.

“Negative, it is just armour civilian”

“Negative, it is just interrupted my sleep”

“Negative, it is interrupting Mr Cosby’s song. You have duties to complete this morning – I do believe we agreed on them yesterday” his voice sounded as if his lips were twisted in a disapproving scowl, temptation hit me in the chest as I reached for the edge of my black sheeted tent and lifted the material to reveal a very dissatisfied frown strewn across his features which elicited a quiet snicker from my throat as I barely contained my laughter as his heavy arms crossed over each other.

“Is something amusing, civilian?” His curt and sharp voice cut the quick silence as I shrunk back into my small tent, my fingers fiddling with the fabric of my pants as I cast a somber look his way.

“No sir, I’ll be out in ten minutes” I heard his huff of approval as he turned tail and left the room as
my heavily sarcastic voice filled the room, my eyes lingering on the space he once occupied and thought of how his figure seemed to take up more space than the door had on offer. If I had ever considered myself a subordinate to a commanding officer, I’d have stayed in that damned vault … but something about this one kicked my ass into gear and got me out of the small tent I had created and found my way into the showers that miraculously still worked, albeit the water was system-shockingly cold and the slight fizz of radiation seemed to dance across my skin as the bar of soap glided over my shoulders and down my legs.

The soft yet somewhat holy towel that Haylen had stashed in the shower block got most of the moisture out of my skin. A cracked mirror covered in grime and dirt hung above where I placed my precariously neatly folded clothes on the (mostly) clean sink and I finally got a look at my body after the long day of battering it had taken to make my way down here from the harbour.

My barely olive skin sat marred in several places, icy bruises staring to well upon my collarbone and across my left shoulder and clung to the right underside of my ribs. A wind-knocking good punch from a trapper will do that to you I’m afraid. The scar which sat comfortably across my right cheek still looked like a raised hellfire, despite earning it in a fight with an angler not too long after I had touched down in Far Harbour, I had been berated by the Mariner for jumping off the hull and wacking the disfigured beast across the skull with nothing more than my handy baseball bat to stop it from tearing into one of the citizens of the harbour, who seemed to think he was forever in my debt after saving his life.

Tentative fingers glossed over my still cool shoulder, a quick hiss escaping through clenched teeth as its tender bruising almost dictated a need to go and tell metal man outside that I wouldn’t be helping with anything until the swelling went down but god only knew how long it would take me to live that one down.

Time had been mostly kind to my figure, a diet of mostly marine animals from the harbour had sustained my muscle from my time at the vault, whatever genetic coding that had been bred into me must have fed on the protein like a pack of ravenous mutts because I had yet to fall victim to an unflattering stomach or weak and measly muscles. My long and wavy deep red hair fell in thick tendrils down my cheeks as I examined my much – much – fuller breasts and curvaceous hips, did vault tec make all of us girls like this or was I just unnaturally endowed? Whatever lingerie and undergarments I had managed to salvage from old clothing stores and the like seemed to indicate a double D for my breasts and I always fit into anything that was above a small when looking at clothing, although once considered small by those around me, my 5’4 stature seemed to make chump change out of jeans and whatever pants I got my hands on.

A smile graced my lips as I reached for the stained and spoiled white undergarments I had salvaged a while back and donned them in a relatively quick fashion, pulling on a pair of shredded tanned pants and an old ‘super mutant’ green tank top which had been cut and torn to sit just below my bust. Raking my fingers through my tangled mess of knots, my skilled fingers made quick work of fastening the hair into a sloppy yet secured set of Dutch braids that one of the children in the harbour had taught me long ago.

Casting one last glance at the aching bruises on my body, my bare feet padded back across the crowded common room that these brotherhood bozo’s seemed to completely overlook; ruin and refuse sitting in large piles as I passed by the small doorway which belonged to the metal man –

Oh jeez, what was his name … ? Palatine Dane? Paladinner Drake? Paladin Danse – that’s the one!

His quiet figure sitting at a seemingly undersized desk clicking away at a terminal with his clunky
and heavily armoured fingers.

“You know, if you stepped out of that suit you’d be able to type like a normal human being”

His eyes shot up to where I stood and confusion wracked his features as he seemed almost startled by my light footsteps.

“And may I ask what is offending you about my methods and my confidential business, civilian?”

“Nothing at all – you just look like a very intellectual super mutant with fine motor skills” I laughed, and his eyes turned cold and serious as he stood from his place at the desk and knocked his chair back to the wooden floor below.

Oh shit

I swallowed hard as his heavy footsteps strode towards me, arms angled at his sides and a hand reached for me – a harsh index poking at my chest as his voice contorted into a menacing growl.

“You do not have the right nor the authority to saunter in here with your attitude, civilian. To compare a senior ranking officer of the Brotherhood Of Steel to one of those monstrosities is an insult to our cause and I will not tolerate your horrific and frankly disrespectful attitude in this outpost. You are here for the sole purpose of aiding our mission here at the station and not one thing more, do I make myself clear?”

Shock froze me in my place as his deep and sweet sounding voice turned dark and threatening. A million anglers could never stand against this man, nor could a dozen fog crawlers. Fire struck me in the chest as it welled in my belly, screaming at me to stand up and say it was a joke but my coding barked at me to reply with the ever simple ‘sir yes sir!’

“Well?” He pushed, his brows furrowing in anger as much silence stretched on. I finally found the will to swallow and peered up at him with my pristine green eyes – begging as though I were a child found with my hand in the cookie jar – and shrunk into myself, ignoring the biting ache of my muscles as they complained at the sly movement.

“We are clear, Paladin”

“Very well. Scribe Haylen requires some assistance with our transmitter beacon, should you go see her - she will have instructions for you. Dismissed”

His tall frame stormed past mine, my shoulder clipping his armour in a quick explosion of pain as the already swollen and feint bruising seared its way up my neck and attacked my mind, eyes crunching closed as I cradled the weight of my shoulder against myself.

“Well fuck, now I need to wrap my arm” I sneered in his direction, rather quietly for the fear of him hearing me, and slowly made my way to the room that I had bunked in last night. Digging through my pack I found an old set of wraps that I had used for my hands at one point or another and carefully tucked the fabric under my armpit, wincing as the material compressed the bruised and swollen skin, muscles lurking in the depths below shouting their complaints.

Tense jawed and teeth ground together with the hopes of getting through this as quick as possible, I secured the last of the off white and long dried up sweat covered bandage and threw on yesterday’s boots, still splattered with crusty feral blood and stood, casting a weary glance to the door hoping to avoid the man of steel that was the paladin.

“Ready for your first mission, Soldier?” The woman, Haylen, smiled. Her eyes crinkling in the
corners resigning to stress and age – although I assumed she was barely much older than me.

“Something about a beacon…?” I held my arm, uneasy, as her eyes seemed to take in what attire I had selected for the day. A quirk of an eyebrow and a small smile later, she crossed her arms over her chest and a small drop in her hip as she gestured to the oak door across the hall from us. The decrepit and crumbling walls before us wound their way up two flights of stairs before ending at a blue metal door to the roof.

“So what are we looking at here?” A trying smile flashed in her direction as she reached for the handle and pulled backwards, early morning sun peeking across the scratched metal posts, their long shadows stretching across the plated rooftop that we stood on. An underused H pad sat behind the safety of each post before us, and a crumbling wall filled with bricks and a ventilation shaft sat to our left.

“We pulled that down and salvaged whatever was left inside the walls, which turned out to be a whole lot of nothing. Some of the wires were useful in rerouting the beacon though, so it wasn’t a total bust” her sweet voice sounded from beside me, her cloaked figure blocking some of the sunlight on my side as I cast a glance up the expansive radio tower that was erected from the roof.

“Is this … yours? Or was it here when you guys got here?” I found myself peering inwards, taking in the rusted brown coloured panels which all seemed to extend outwards from the towers base. A large green metal spike seemed to extend towards where we stood, its body attached to a rotator chain which seemed to run up the entire tower itself.

“We deployed it when we landed here, our team was dropped into a dead zone and we managed to cart this tower along with us and put in on the roof for ease of access. Safe to say we had more … hands … when we were putting it on the station” a somber look captured her eyes as my figured turned to her, a wince in my shoulder as I reached up for her arm and tried to comfort her.

“How many people did you loose?”

“Four honourable men. We all knew the risks coming out here and doing a LRRO but we were never really prepared to loose them”

“I’m sure their lives weren’t given in vain”

“Never mind all that, we need to get this beacon up and running. We have been recording some serious interference in the radio signals – the burst’s are short and powerful but they are definitely there. We need to get our communications up and running with our ship, the Prydwen. Last night proved that we need a little more support at the station”

“So what can I do to help?” A shrug and a tall glance up the tower gave me an idea of what I may have needed to check, but it was a long shot for even me and my skills.

“I’m usually the first person to jump on any technological problems but this one has me utterly stumped” She looked utterly resigned and fed up with the tower and its problems, so it was only right of me to flash her a toothy grin and a cheeky wink as my hands landed on my hips and I gave a quick laugh.

“You’re in luck, I suppose. Back before I left the commonwealth I used to run a small operation in Diamond City and worked with a lot of the machinery and generators there, I might be able to look at your wiring and see what’s going on with the signals and their interceptors”

“No kidding” she seemed to perk up a little, her eyes shining at the opportunity to share her feats
with someone else. Hell I was glad that if I started spouting off about the inter-workings of the machinery.

“I might need some rope though” I laughed as she cast me a worried glance.

Hours stretched along with Haylen disappearing for a few moments and bringing back up some lunch for the both of us as my makeshift scaffolding harness sat across my waist and chest, the length of the rope anchored on the third and final notch of the the tower, the sun towering over my figure as I stuck a wrench into the grates between the tall shafts in which a trio of radar dishes extended from.

“How are you not afraid of heights up there?” Haylen called up, her hands full of two stained plates filled with preserved meats and some peculiar looking flowers.

“I think that when you’ve faced a torrential amount of creatures in the wasteland something as insignificant as heights is the least of your worries” I called, eyes focusing on the mess of wires that sat inside the small opening of the towers casing.

“Yeah, that’s actually a good point” her agreeable voice came from below as I peered into the cavity, a section of the wires being twisted with one another as the familiar hum of an overworked circuit system graced my ears.

“I hate to tell you think but you don’t have enough power to boost your signal output, you’re going to need something that’s going to penetrate the airwaves over a longer distance” I called to her and watched as a concerned look crossed her soft features, the frown tugging down her brows seemed to set in place before she looked up at where I hung and tried to stretch a smile across her lips.

“I’ll think of something, but you should come down for some food – I managed to find Rhys’ stash of pork n beans and some tato flowers” she laughed, rolling her eyes as she lifted the plates in a slight shrug of her shoulders.

“Give me two seconds and I’ll be down” I laughed, pulling the wrench from the cavity and stashing it into my lasso before slowly lowering myself down the towers side.

We sat in the sunlight by the fence of the roofs edge, laughing at what Rhys’ reaction would be when he found his stash of food missing and listened as the Paladin exited the station to survey carnage that was yesterdays battle.

“By all the …” he muttered to himself as he kicked a ferrels charred corpse, its burnt and crusty flesh crunching upon the impact.

“So how long were you away for, in this 'Far Harbour’?” Haylen asked between a mouthful of beans and tato flower.

“Not too long, just a little over two years. I found my way up there on total chance, but I’m glad I went across the ocean to their little island”

“I can only imagine what the bombs would have done to the life over there, given what it has done to the bugs and other nasties here” her curious eyes cast over the edge of the station down to the paladin, who began trudging around in the mass of bodies searching for anything of use to the station or those who stayed here.

“Lots of Lurks and other monstrosities. I have no idea what a Fog Crawler evolved from and I don’t really want to know” I laughed, tearing a piece of the flower and setting it on my tongue, its bittersweet and savoury taste fizzling inside my cheeks as I thoughtfully chewed.
“So what made you come back, if you don’t mind me asking. We would have been toast if you didn’t walk through those barricades. I was sure we were all going to die last night”

I cast her a cautious glance, and considered my response.

Well what can I say, I’m an outcast who was born in a Petri dish and I was bred with the sole intention of fighting and being a super soldier – so I figured I’d try my hand and fucking over my entire vault and was there for the riot in Diamond City, I moved away because I couldn’t handle the fact that I killed people and then spent the next two years slaughtering anything that moved on an island surrounded by irradiated fog – but that’s nothing compared to the guilt of knowing I left my friends and what could only really class as my family behind so I hopped in a boat and sailed the heck away from my problems because I’m a coward like that. Also because I just feel like I’m missing that extra something in my life...

“I guess I just needed a change of scenery, I don’t have the best track record when it comes to staying put in one place” I shrugged, eyes downcast on the paladin as he started shifting the corpses he had searched to one side before moving on to the next.

“Maybe you just need something that is going to make you want to stay” she offered, smiling as she stood, grabbing the pair of plates and heading back to the door, before looking over her shoulder at me and winked, “I think Danse could use some help down there” before waking back inside the station.

I watched as the Paladin shuffled more and more bodies as the sun began to sink in the sky, and made my way to the edge of the railing. Hooking my hands on the edge and letting my legs dangle down to where the ‘Police’ sign sat mostly erected I let myself drop with little effort before eyeing off the crates below off to my left.

“Oh fuck it” I laughed at myself just as the metal man noticed by presence on the roof.

“What do you think you are doing?” His stern voice caught me out just as I was about to jump down, a concerned and frightfully concerned look gracing his features.

“Coming down to help out, what does it look like I’m doing?” I questioned, hands on hips as I peered over the broken words that once spelt ‘station’.

“Making an abundantly unintelligent decision, civilian” his arms crossed, an entirely unimpressed look crossing his deadpan face as I edged closer to the lip of the roof.

“It’s the fastest way down” I laughed, taking one last look before sitting on the edge and placing my hands to either side of my body, “Its not like ill break a bone or anything” I smiled with a wink before letting go –

“NO WAIT!~” His voice cut through the air as my feet landed securely on the crate below, a small thud accompanied by my flawless landing.

“See, not a problem metal man” I shrugged, dusting my pants off and walking over to his position.

“Do not ever call me that again, civilian” he frowned, eyes glancing at the bandages around my shoulder before a spark of realisation gleamed in his eye, “Your shoulder…?”

“Relax tough guy, you didn’t do this one – its all on me. I copped it a while back when someone attacked me with a bat and threw my shoulder out. Its still mending itself after that little love tap. You just jarred it this morning” I let my eyes fall upon the most interesting piece of gravel I had
ever found in my life, examining its every curve and crease as I avoided the paladins concerned 

to.  

“Very well, as long as you are fit to move these corpses than I would be glad for the assistance”  

“Gladly,” I huffed as I reached down to grab the soft and putrid smelling corpse by its arms and 

heaved it over to a pile that the paladin had begun to create, “So where are we dumping these 

bastards?””  

“Language -” he sighed, before nodding towards the barricades and looking back over to where I 

stood, “and behind that truck is a small pond that these will not be missed in” 

“That sounds fair” I agreed before hiking the ghouls body up in my hands and following behind the 

paladin, moving the bodies one and two at a time before the entire compound courtyard was 

cleared, the smell of putrid and rotting flesh slowly leaving the air as more and more bodies were 

thrown over the railing and drifted in the clouded and most likely highly irradiated water below. 

“That should render this task accomplished” he huffed, small beads of sweat lining his forehead as 

he attempted to wipe the perspiration away from his skin. 

“I’ve never felt so glad to be finished with a job” I laughed as I rolled my shoulder around in the 

air, my shirt lifting to just below my bust with each stretch. 

“We need to have a discussion about your choice of clothing, civilian” he stared, eyes daring 

frown to my exposed midriff. Annoyance flared in my mind as a frown overtook my brows and my heels 
dug in to the pavement below me, a spark of anger igniting in the bellows of my belly as I started 

the man who stood above me by mere centimetres. 

“Okay, firstly - my name isn’t ‘civilian’ so you need to drop it because it’s seriously getting on my 
nerves. My name is Valery for Christ sake! And second of all it’s the first day of spring – its been 

warm as shit today, so I don’t see what the big deal is! I’m sure as shit not a member of your 
military, if I want to take a fucking break from being covered in blood, guts and not smell like the 

bottom of the barrel than I’m going to dress however the high heaven I want!” My foot crunched 

the gravel below my boot as I slammed it into the ground, fists clenched in rage by my sides hard 

enough for nail to dig into skin and draw blood as I was sure my face flushed the same shade as my 

hair. 

Silence stretched in an endless expanse, the vacuum of time and space seemingly to void this space 
as we both stood our ground, his stern look slowly softening over time as his tense muscles relaxed 

– my nails withdrawing from my palms as my feet pushed the world away.  

“It wasn’t fair of me to treat you like a solder, for you are not one. Nor are you a subordinate 

within the Brotherhood. I apologise for treating you as such, civ-Valery” his puppy dog brown eyes 
downcast to the gravel before peering back up at me, confidence in his words shining through in 

the strong gaze as he regarded me again – almost in a new light.  

“I’m sorry for what I said this morning, it wasn’t justified and I shouldn’t have called you a super 

mutant” shame unwittingly flooded my being as my stomach twisted in knots about this mornings 
proceedings, maybe antagonising him wasn’t the way to go for the next few days or at least it 
wasn’t until I got all my shit together and cleared out of this compound.  

“Lets just … leave the past where it has fallen. No point dwelling on it. Its getting late, we should 
sort out rations before we all head off to our bunks for the night” his eyes stared longingly at the 
blue door as the days work wore on his shoulders, a quiet huff of hair leaving his lungs as I
gestured for him to lead the way.

The blue door creaked upon our arrival, the scribe and knight looking up from their small makeshift cooking station stuffed into the corner beside their shared terminal to watch our arrival.

Two cans of pork and beans sat strewn across the bench, accompanied by some sort of container of preserved meat… nice, protein and more, well, protein.

“So what’s for dinner?” I laughed, watching as Haylen smiled when the knight – Rhys – bumped her shoulder and grunted with the exertion on his wounds.

“Mole rat chunks, and Rhys’ last two containers of pork and beans. This and breakfast will most likely be our last meals Paladin, we are running low on the most common supplies now. A replenish run will be necessary if we wish to keep our position here at the station, sir” her eyes sat down cast as she stewed the last of the meat, lips tightening into a grimace as the Paladin looked desperately around the room.

“If I may?” I offered, voice breaking the silence save for the bubbling meat in the pot resting on a small flame.

“Yes, Valery?” The Paladin

“We are located in the Cambridge area, correct?”

“Indeed we are, your point being…?”

“I have a few locations stashed away on my pip-boy, I could chart how far away we are from the city and see if any of my old contacts have food and things, I’m sure I’ve got something that they want to get their little grubby hands on in exchange for some more food” pride of my upbringing shone through my smile, only to be met with his stern look of scepticism.

“Firstly, it is far to big of a risk traveling that far from this base. Secondly, there should be enough old stores and caches in the area that should sustain us until we manage to get word back to our ship for reinforcements”

“But what if we don’t find anything to help boost the signal?” Rhys’ reluctant eyes cast a rueful glance in my direction, a smile gracing my lips as I looked up at the paladin.

“Knight -” he sighed, looking at the man with stern grimace as if to say ‘don’t give her any ideas’ as I perked up in my static spot.

“Actually, I did some digging on pre-war companies in this area and it looks like one of the major corporations had a deep range transmitter in their possession… ArcJet Systems to be exact, its not too far of a hike from here and I’m sure we can hold the fort at least until you make it back”

“And who do you propose goes on this expedition, Scribe? Knight Rhys is not in any condition to leave the compound, while your skills are admirable you are certainly not trained in this field and I cannot afford to make the run on my own” the paladin sighed, his hard eyes staring into the young woman’s soft brown orbs that seemed to shy away from the exchange.

“If I may, sir, what if the wastelander goes,” a smug smile from the knight shocked my system as my brows pulled down into a frown as he crossed his arms with a tight huff, “She’s shown that she is more than capable of supporting fire -”

“- of course, without me you’d be dead -” I interjected as he pushed past and continued talking.
“And if she doesn’t make it, well its one less brotherhood body we have to bury” the knight glared at me, hatred spewing across the floor and wrapping around my ankles as red rage tickled at the back of my neck, *Fuck this guy, what the fuck is his problem*!

“Knight, that is highly inappropriate. Any life spent is still worth the cause. Regardless, you do make a very valid point,” the paladin turned on his heel to look over at where I stood beside him and continued, “you are obviously well trained in combat, know your way around that harpoon of yours, and seem like a valuable asset to this team – even if you are only just passing through”

“Your point being…?” I rolled the words off my tongue, hip pushing to the side as I let my long fingers rest against it as I looked up at his demeaning stature. Reluctance seemed to overtake his being as he regarded me in a new light.

“My point being that you should consider something bigger than yourself, something that the brotherhood can provide you. We could use what skills you’ve got in this mission to reclaim that deep range transmitter so we can contact our superiors. What do you say Valery?” His lips were in a stale line, the quiet sound of four sets of breathing met with a curious set of eyes awaited my decision.

Had I not trained for this? Not spent my every waking moment as a childhood to join some kind of military or militia? I was created for the sole purpose of helping others – or so I was told as a child. My limits pushed, my lungs forced to capacity even when I thought they would explode. My heart beat and bled for this purpose – even if it all was a lie inside that vault. My muscles tensed under my shirt, stomach churned while my brain focused sharply already knowing the answer to their proposition.

My heart beat loudly in my ears as I stood taller, straighter and let whatever genetic coding I had within my veins course through me.

“Affirmative”

A quirk of the corner of his lip sent a thrill through my being as he crossed his muscular arms and nodded,

“Outstanding”
FINALLY!
After all this time we have finally reached October 3rd, 2287! Ten long chapters in the making. Grab your Nuka-Quantum's and settle in cause its about to get frosty!

Weeks had passed since the Paladin and I successfully survived a run in with those mechanical menaces at that prehistoric Arc Jet energy facility, my harpoon making quick work of their circuitry and numbers as Danse’s laser rifle disintegrated their bodies to nothing more than smoking piles of ash. He would never admit it, but I knew his power amour was ruffled by the dumb ass decision I made to fire the engine in the bowels of the building, it seemed like he was just saving face because we had actually managed to intercept the transmitter-ma-bob for Haylen’s satellite.

“Do you need any help with that transmitter Haylen?” I had smiled, bringing her a can of purified water in the shining sun on the rooftop of the station, her warm brown eyes kind as she took the drink and turned back to her work.

“I believe I’ve got this covered, but Rhys might need some help clearing out the square and looking for more food back in towards the city. With this in place we should have word from the Prydwen within a few days”

Fabulous I had thought as I made my way downstairs and found Rhys, his wounds considerably better after a decent amount of time out of the field.

“Where’s Paladin Danse?” I found myself asking in the silence before the Knight let out a long and exasperated sigh – telling me just how much of a bother I was to him.

“He’s off making a running and shooting course, something about getting back into training” his dark eyes rolled back over to the terminal that he sat clicking away at. BREATHE VALERY.

“I’m going to choose to ignore that sarcastic tone you’ve got and just ask if you needed any help with anything” crossing my arms, I stood defiantly and the knight sighed and looked in my general direction.

“Now that you mention it,” he cracked a sly smile as the light shone in his eyes, “The square could use… a mop and bucket with your skills”

I swear one of these days…

And that’s how I got myself into this damned mess, hiding behind a concrete pillar lining the outside of the Cambridge train station covered in Ghoul blood. Several of the beasts had rushed me upon discovering my location, their lifeless bodies littering the ground around me as my chest heaved under my scraps of leather armor and thick padded jacket and slacks. No way in hell I’d be scratched or bitten by one of these irradiated bastards.
Feral grunts and gargles sounded from my left, in the distance and far beyond the ground level. Checking my clip, I cursed.

“Shit” my clip was almost empty and a reload was most definitely necessary. Peering around the corner as my muscle memory took hold of the gun, I spied the ghoul wandering in the upstairs window of the dilapidated red brick building before me. It’s jittery form perused from glass less window to window, dead eyes trying to spy the predator that had downed its horde of friends.

The broken and distorted walls of the training hall forced a bead of sweat to roll down my forehead as the onlookers sneered their remarks about their best held times, their trigger happy fingers holding no hesitation to fire.

“Mark,” this was it.

“Set,” No time to turn back.

“Go!”

I raised the gun, fingers steady as I took aim down the barrel of the 10mm, shoot first – questions later. They’re counting on you.

Quiet breath in, stable hands and –

*CRACK*

*THUD* and the ghoul was down, its sickening cry snuffed by the deafening ring of the 10mm protruding from my steady hands.

Gravel and debris crunched under the weight of the brown leather boots, the crisp wood snapping as I kicked it aside and moved to the rusted red doors illuminated by a single caged bulb on the left. Rotten offal and mold attacked my nostrils as I kicked the metal door, the resulting echo must have knocked more ghouls awake.

Fingers reaching for the olive green bandanna found long ago, cheeks and lips sheltered from the smell and a quick breath in geared my limbs up to the task at hand.

The doors bore no lock, their chains long broken from the bomb fraught world around our very beings, and would be easy to implode open. My lungs filled with air as I raised the gun to the ceiling – muscles tense – as I lurched forward and drove the heel of the boot into the rusted hinges where both metal sheets met. *CRUNCH* The doors almost collapsed below my foot before the unmentionables inside rushed my stance.

Glassy eyes and pawing hands, their long fingernails begged to scratch my skin. Its gyrating and clawing figure screaming as the barrel of the gun leveled with its stomach in a quick three fire shot, telling to the floor with a sickening thud as its entrails leaked onto the floor in a steady pool of red blood and organs. The two remaining ferals charged my position, a quick spin and kick sent one scampering across the slick flooring like a hound – teeth bared as it struggled to find its feet below itself.

Screeches filled the air as the next bounded to my side, its sickeningly hot breath burning the side of my face as I tumbled to the floor, gnawing teeth snapping at me like the starved ghost of a man
Cold sweat beaded at my hairline, slimy mildew from the station floor coated my back as the ghastly being snapped its jaws inches from my face. Lashing out with whatever energy I had reserved – gather telltale scrape of plastic on tile sounded beside my arm.

Of course I cursed as my fingers sought the plastic CAUTION sign, stomach churning as I caught sight of the other ghoul preparing to pounce on my position.

“Come on, come on. COME ON!” I yelled in frustration, fingers slipping on the hazardous yellow plastic as the muscles in my forearm hissed in pain – holding back the ghoul who lay flush against my being trying to maw my face off.

“FUCK!!!” I exclaimed with a loud breath as I reached once more with the hazard sign and ploughed its substance into the ghouls rotting flesh and into its skull, its form slumping off of me as I quickly slid across bye floor and aimed the gun as the last feral bounded for me – its snarling form recoiling from the blast of the shot – leaving my ears ringing as the echoing halls fell into a hushed humming.

Standing, my hands attempted to wipe the foul stench of the station off of my being but failing miserably as I surveyed the semi red tiled room before me, minor spouts of sunlight filling the ghouls den, the putrid smell of rotting flesh undercut with something far more horrific.

Iron.

Someone had died here and not too long ago either.

Whatever minor amounts of sunlight poured in through the broken metal doors behind me illuminated the poor corpse of the man slumped between an extinguished barrel of debris and a fallen rusted trash can, his eyes obscured by a heavy set of wielding goggles.

Poor bastard.

His attire signified his stance as a raider. His cold and pale skin signified that he had been dead a while, but I doubted he had been here long – I’d seen enough bloated carcasses floating in the water at far harbour after the nuclear submarine exploded, and this guy hadn’t been dead an incredible passage of time. His body lay slumped in a pool of his own blood, bite marks lining his legs and arms but I doubted the ghouls had anything to do with his death by the telltale bullet would in the side of his head.

Another corpse lay half submerged in the concrete rubble beside a set of steep stairs, his bulky frame petrified from the scrap material crushing around his form. What else was hiding in here for there to be this much death and destruction?

Striding down the steps, I guess it was time to figure it out.

- - - -

Paladin Danse wasn’t too happy with me when I walked back through the doors of the police station, his frown seemed to pull further downwards than usual while his arms crossed so tightly across his chest I was almost afraid he might pop the chest plate off of his power armor frame.
“You did what?” His cold voice boomed against the walls of the station, his brown eyes intimidating as they bore into my figure. I should have been ashamed of taking on the mission alone, but I’ll be damned if I didn’t throw that smug little shit under the bus.

“Cleared the square… and the underground train station. I asked if anyone needed help with anything and Knight Rhys said my talents would be better spent down there”

“-Wait just a second!” Rhys shouted as he stalked towards me, fists balled at his side as his boots stomped on the creaky floorboards.

“Is this true, Knight?” Danse’s eyes turned to the broad man to my side, anger seeping out of every crack in his power armor as the man towered over the knight. If I wasn’t so smug about kicking Rhys in the guts if have been slightly terrified.

“It…” Rhys shot a filthy look in my direction before raising his chin and looking into the paladin’s eyes, “It’s true, sir. I gave the outsider her orders to clear the square”

Danse huffed in frustration as he examined the man before him.

“Seeing as you are so quick to think on your duty as a Knight, I suppose your affinity for wanting to cleanse the commonwealth may be applied to your own work schedule. You’ll spend the next several days of your deployment here clearing this base of its filth and debris. Consider this the least of your punishment for insubordination, Knight, had you not have been severely injured in battle some weeks ago you would be receiving the same orders you saw fit to give”

“Sir,” Rhys started, but quickly shut his mouth with a glare from the paladin.

“Do I make myself clear, Knight?”

“Affirmative, sir” His callous eyes flashed to mine, a scowl forming on his lips as he pushed past me in a rage, muttering curses under his breath as he left the paladin and I standing alone.

“What were you thinking? Accepting an order from Rhys?” Danse questioned, his arms dropping to his side as he turned to look at where I stood. A crooked smile across my lips, I laughed and let the sack of goodies that I had pillaged from my time in the train station fell to the floor in a loud thump.

“About your squad. We have barely scraped by with the rations we found the other week and wouldn’t ‘cha know it, they had some food down there. Did you know there was a baton of raiders camping out here-”

“Valery! Taking no mind to whoever was out there in that station, we faced those same ghouls before this station and we almost perished then. Why would you engage with their ranks in the square?”

“Whoa there, it almost sounds like you care about what happens to me metal man,” I crossed the room to his very occupied space, green eyes meeting his brown as I crossed my arms, “don’t tell me you have an actual heart in there”

Another huff of un-appreciation filled the air as he rolled his eyes and glared back down at me. If it wasn’t for his damned power armor he wouldn’t have been all that much taller than me.

“Always with the joking, Miss Quinn. You could have been injured, or killed. And I’ve seen enough of that happen on my squad so so far…”
I breathed a sigh and my shoulders sank, casting a glance to a very interesting spot on the floor I refused to let our eyes meet.

“Haylen told me not long after I helped you guys out with the horde. I cannot say how sorry I am for your loss, Danse”

Silence filled the room for a moment too long, each of our eyes fixating on something other than the other while we dwelled in our mournful quiet.

“Guys you need to come and see this,”

Speaking of Haylen…

“What is it, scribe?” Danse’s impassive voice sounded once again, ever the soldier as he moved on and addressed the next issue.

“It’s the deep range transmitter. Its picking up a few signals, sir” she gestured for us to venture up the stairs to the roof where the barrage of satellites and wires stood compiled together.

In our absence, Haylen had set up a small canvas shelter for the transmission machinery that she hoped would be their chance at contacting their superiors in something called the ‘Capital Wasteland’, where they had all apparently hailed from on the east coast. Danse had told me that they had all lived scattered between what was once known as Washington DC, a place I had never heard of outside of the bounds of the Vault and he had seemed quite surprised that I knew about most of what once was The United States. He seemed to want to dig deeper, to ask how I knew, but never pried into my personal business.

“If I just tune this… and adjust that…” Haylen muttered to herself at the station of wiring and ham radios, her eyes focused on each minute detail and logging their end result in a small but salvaged notepad she must have discovered when they arrived here, her hands shaking as she marked each frequency displayed on the radios.

~ Krshhht ~

“Come in, come in. Your signal has been patched to the Brotherhood of Steel from an unknown location. Identify yourself” a static filled voice filled the air as the sound grated across my arm hairs, making each of them stand to attention.

“Oh my god! It’s working!” Haylen laughed as she twisted the dials and tuners on the deep range transmitters switchboard, her hazel eyes lighting up as she looked across at the paladin and Rhys, who for the first time since I met them a month ago hinted at a smile before returning to his stoic frown.

~ Krshhht ~

“CODE 4501 – This is Prydwen command deck, do you copy?” A calm female voice called over the intercom and a flood of relief filled my body in a way I was unaware possible. Maybe these goons had a chance after all.

“Affirmative, this is Paladin Danse – Clearance B.O.S.P T7-2I requesting communication with Elder Arthur Maxson” Danse’s harsh eyes bore into the speaker while the chatter on the other side seemed to cease for a moment, his eyes darting to mine for a moment in an unsure fashion before returning to the tangle of wires before him.

The silence dragged on before the transmitter blared to life once again.
“This is Elder Maxson, Brotherhood of Steel commander, am I to believe this is Paladin Danse?” My stomach fluttered at the new voice, strong and commanding, deep and sultry.

Before I knew it I found myself leaning on my toes as though I could peer at the man on the other end of the transmission.

“Affirmative, sir”

“I presume you are transmitting with grave news, soldier?” The voice crackled over the intercom once again, his tone taking an almost somber turn that didn’t seem to fit the coarse tone he had originated the conversation in.

“Correct, Elder. Our position here in the Boston Commonwealth stands compromised, under constant attack since deployment here. Four casualties”

“Status report on your objective?”

“Haylen,” Danse nodded to the woman, her eyes serious as she stood closer to the intercom and relayed their mission details… which I shouldn’t have been present for.

“We are tracing several signals being displaced in the commonwealth, however they seem most frequent around the Cambridge area. It is my belief our intelligence gathered on The Institute may have been correct in assuming they are located around the ruins of C.I.T. Additional support is required if we wish to engage them, as the readings gathered infer they have wealth of pre-war technology as well as more advanced wares”

“Threat level?”

“Rapidly rising, Elder” her eyes glanced over to where I stood, a grimace set in her lips as I gave her a sympathetic smile and rubbed the hairs on my arms, hoping that the butterflies in my stomach would take a second to calm the hell down.

“Threat level recognised, Scribe. We shall make the required preparations and disembark for the commonwealth. Ad Victoriam” the voice went dark and it was evident that the conversation was cut short at that moment.

Silence.

Silence still. Oh god I didn’t want to have to shatter this fragile glass dome.

Burning desire made me need to know, especially if there was a threat to the people of this capital wasteland. I may have left whatever life I had here behind, the people I had met along the way like Piper, Nat, John and Penny. Even the crazy fishermen I had spent the better part of two years working along side and defending – this threat could potentially decimate everyone if this Brotherhood of Steel militia was willing to wage what sounded like a war on something holding
technology.

I cleared my throat.

Two sets of eyes looked in my direction, their fiery gazes sending a shock of adrenaline down my spine.

Its now or never.

“…What’s the institute?”

---

Oh God.

Coughs wracked my body, blurred vision as the black spots danced before my eyes like static on the television.

“Critical failure in cryogenic array. All vault residents must vacate immediately”

Fists pounding on the airlock, cold and stale fingers clutching at the tanned skin as the metal echoed with a heavy thud.

More coughs, how were my lungs on fire and yet felt as though they had breathed in icy water?

*BEEP* - *BEEP* - *BEEP*

Metal door hinging open with a hiss, weak limbs falling in a heap to the cold and merciless floor, hands barley reaching out fast enough to catch the fall.

Heavy breathing, like the organs had forgotten how to properly function over time, feet found purchase on the metallic slab and pushed the body forward, fists pounding at the glass which seemed to hold her horrifically suspended body in time.

“Come ON! There’s has to be a release …” words, gruff and groggy filled the air as eyes caught sight of the control panel.

“Come on, come on, come on. Oh God…” the red lever gave way, a hiss echoed in the chamber as eyes darted back to the woman who lay motionless in the decontamination unit.

“Critical failure in cryogenic array. All vault residents must vacate immediately”

No words, a sorrowful heart as loss filled the organ pumping fresh supplies of blood into every cell of the being, a pit swallowing up every sob that could escape grief worn lips.

“I’ll find who did this and I’ll get Shaun back. I promise.”

A vow, an oath, a promise. That man was as good as dead.

---
Once upon a time people would have seen October as a cause to celebrate, a time when the leaves changed colour and festive pumpkins were carved into odd faces that haunted the silver screen.

“Haylen, what do you know about Halloween?” I asked, sitting on the edge of the police station roof dangling my legs down over the edge, long tendrils of auburn hair flowing in the autumn breeze as I nit-picked at the edge of my speared harpoon.

“Other than the bizarre decorations strewn across the commonwealth for the holiday, not much I admit” her smile shone in the afternoon sun as she joined me in where I sat. Down below Danse stood firing his weapon at the barrels and targets he had put in place so many months ago, his own little target range.

“Is it not strange to think that on this day, two hundred and ten years ago the world changed forever?” I asked, voice carrying in as the gentle breeze pickled up across our forms.

“What fools man must have been…” her sigh joined my own as we looked out into the horizon together.

“Any news from the mother-ship?” I laughed, eyes cast over the wastes that was downtown Boston.

Haylen laughed, eyes creasing at the sides as she cast a glance my way.

“It isn’t a mother-ship, in as many words. The Prydwen is some of the most advanced technology the Brotherhood has at its disposal, built for holding an entire fleet of soldiers, scribes and vertibirds”

“So, an armada?”

“More like the cavalry. I spend most of my time on the ground, not so much on board the ship. It was my duty back in the Citadel to store and categorise pre-war tech, boring stuff compared to what we have done out here over the last year” with a smile, she stood and brushed the dirt from her uniform before looking back to the transmitter with a hopeful smile.

“When are they due to arrive?” I smiled up at her, trying my best not to eat the strands of hair that found their way into my mouth with the wind.

“Sometime in the next month. Trust me, we will know when they reach the commonwealth. You should head down and get some dinner before we call it a night. I hear you’ve got access to a few games on that pip-boy of yours, we should have a games night and a few drinks if you’re down”

Hope bloomed in my stomach as I looked over at the scribe, our mutual understanding of each other had seemed to blossom over the last few months and she often kept me company when we went on supply runs in the waiting game the police station played as we waited for their fleet to arrive in the commonwealth.

“Only if we find some whisky” a quiet snicker left my lips as Haylen crossed her arms, jutting her hip out to one side with a raised eyebrow.

“Danse is the only one around here with a small stash of the stuff”

“I’m sure he won’t mind if we borrow a few bottles” shooting her a wink, I watched as she walked away before turning my attention back to the blazing sun slowly sinking below the skyline, its
vibrant colours streaking the atmosphere in a hue that seemed almost too beautiful to register.

Turning my attention to the pip on my arm, I set the radio to the great green jewel, the most apt song playing at that moment as the soft autumn breeze carried the sounds of Nat King Cole.

‘I was walking along, minding my business, When out of the orange colored sky,’

As the melodic strings of music and abrupt trumpet horns came to life through the small device, a small black crow seemed to fly from a nearby tree and land on the post nearest my shoulder, a smile played on my lips as I held my hand out and clicked my tongue.

‘Flash, bam, alacazam, Wonderful you came by’

The bird flew away in an instant, but not before cocking its head to the side and shuffling its feathers.

“What a peculiar bird” I remarked as I cast my eyes over to where it had flown, towards what my pip called ‘Concord’

Standing with a quick heave, I leaned forward to glance down at Danse, his laser rifle firing a few more times before he set it down by his side and huffed in exhaustion.

Food was easy to find, especially since we went out on frequent food scavenging trips and brought back a few bags full of food each week or so, most of it outdated and preserved but food none the less.

“What’s on the menu?” Danse’s stoic figure loomed in the doorway as Haylen and I stashed the potato crisps, fancy lad snack cakes, sugar bombs and few bottles of Nuka-Cola that we had found behind our backs.

We exchanged a glance, before looking back at the paladin.

“Vegetable stew and radstag steak. Rhys cooked it up” Haylen smiled, I knocked her side and shot her one of those ‘don’t look so suspicious’ looks before she shut up.

Danse frowned and shrugged his shoulders, casting a weary glance in our direction as we scurried off to the room I had called home for the last few months. The sleeping bag had been replaced with a proper cot, the mattress far from clean but at least I wasn’t suffering from a sore back on a daily basis. Some actual furniture had made its way in here, a small table which Haylen deposited all the snacks onto and a small radio that tuned to the great green jewels broadcast.

“And with that, girls game night is a G.O” I snickered as I popped the top off of my Nuka and stashed the bottle cap – never knew when it could come in handy.

- - - -

The screech of the malnourished gears and pulleys crowded my ears, eyes watering as the fresh air filled my lungs and fingers tingling at the sensation of being able to touch the last rays of the sun.
I had to get home.

Shaun, oh god Shaun.

Nora had gone into the pod with him, only one of them left.


Surely it hadn’t been this dark when we rushed to the vault.

“What happened here?” I found myself asking, confusion wrought my brain as the trees did not bloom, no leaves fell from the tall stalks of dead wood around me.

I need to get home.

Petrified mud and gravel bowed under the strength of my boot, feet clearing a path as I held tight to the arbitrary gun I would never have utilised lest it be for pure necessity.

“As I live and breathe…” the familiar voice drew my eyes, tears stinging at the edges as I approached the ruins of our home, “Awh, its… its really you!”

“Codsworth! What happened… to the world?” My hands shook, confusion knitting my brow together as I examined the dented and scratched mister handy I had once known as family – alive and alone.

“It’s worse than I thought, hmm hmm, you’re suffering from … hunger induced paranoia. Not eating properly for two hundreds years will do that, I’m afraid. A bit over two hundred and ten actually, sir”

Two.

Hundred.

Years.

Two hundred years?!

“Is anybody even alive?”

“Perhaps Concord, sir? Plenty of people there. And last I checked, they only pummeled me with sticks a few times before I had to run back home”

“There’s still people alive in Concord?” Anxiety tickled down my spine, sweat overtaking my neck and forehead as the shining robot seemed to brashly speak as though two lifetimes had not passed since the bombs had fallen.

It was all confusing.

Oh Shaun.

“Yes, although they’re a bit rough. You remember the way? Just across the southern footbridge out of the neighborhood and past the Red Rocket station” It’s quirky programming elicited notability, acting as though nothing had changed in our lives.
“To Concord, I suppose. I need to get a few things from the floor safe in the bedroom and ... collect my thoughts. Thanks Codsworth”

“I shall remain here, and secure the home-front!” He exclaimed before floating into the ruins of my old life.

“...To Concord”

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Chapter End Notes

Yooo, I'm not going to lie, I had to replay the game and follow the dialogue tree's now that we are back on game time.
I hope you guys are enjoying this, chapter ten was originally a tonne longer than this but I broke it where it felt right. The story continues next with the return of everyone's favorite airship and some more ... angsty 21 year old pizzazz.
It had almost been two weeks since Halloween came and went, Haylen had been up on the roof all morning waiting the day before waiting beside the transmitter, discussing technologies with the scribes aboard the Prydwen like a massive bookworm.

Tuning my radio, it seemed like Travis from Diamond city had some new news circling around the station in between his songs which was an unusual change.

“So, uhh... some recent activity in, uhh, here in Diamond City... that... you might want... to, uhh, know about. I've heard... I mean, it seems that, uhh, Nick Valentine is looking into some, uhh, former residents of Diamond City...”

I shifted forwards in my seat at the breakfast table, ears prickling as news from the city was often rare and a momentous occasion since the election of Mayor McDouche all those years ago.

“There was a house in... It was in the West Stands, and there was a guy, and a kid living there... And they didn't really bother anyone, but... Well, I guess maybe there was something funny about the whole thing...”

How strange, they must have only been in the stands recently, from memory nobody seemed to have wanted a living space in the west stands because of how disconnected they were from the main hub area. Maybe that was the point of wanting to be so far away from everyone.

“And I mean weird funny and not ha-ha funny. I mean, I saw the guy, and he looked, uhh, sort of scary, but... Well I don’t really know much more than that. But... uhh, I guess if you see that guy or the kid that was living with him, you should tell Nick and his blue friend... Or the guards. Or maybe both. Let's find out... what Danny Kaye knows about Civilisation... I mean, or something.”

“Hmm…What the hell is a ‘blue friend’?”

A kid and a scary guy? It wasn’t unusual to see a parent protecting their kid but something about the news cast tickled a nerve. I may need to bargain for some time in Diamond City with Danse once the brotherhood air ship showed up and the people we were promised stationed at every entrance of the building. And a blue friend? What was that all about?

I stood from the breakfast table and made my way to the exit doors where Danse had set up his little training yard. Haylen and I came out here to practise some hand to hand combat stuff, and work on her aim considering it was completely rubbish.

I wasn’t out here alone, however.

His tall and bulky frame stood before one of the stuffed dummies he had made on the fly, his strong hands had stuck each material together and forged it into an impromptu combatant.
Fast yet sluggish punches were thrown at the metal dummy, loud pounding fists sinking into what would have been flesh had there been a real foe before him. Picking a fight with the paladin seemed like a deadly choice, even out of his power armour with no additional metal plating to worry about.

Danse was hardly ever out of the heavy, thick power armour frame, so it was strange seeing his bared arms and ankles in the chilly morning. Warm black hair fell just over his eyelashes as sweat covered his forehead in a slick sheen.

I mean I wasn’t a prude, we had all celebrated my twenty first birthday halfway through April, Haylen had celebrated it by sneaking all kinds of alcohol back into the station and drinking until we couldn’t stand any longer. Danse and I had a mutual understanding about my position here with his squad, I wasn’t a part of their team or their militia – but I did lend a helping hand in keeping them all alive.

Like a mercenary of sorts.

But as I stood and watched his heavy hits on the dummy, watched the muscles in his back ripple under the cloth of his sleeveless shirt, I couldn’t help but appreciate the pure strength this man possessed.

Soft grunts of exertion sounded in his little training yard as he continued to pound his fists into the training apparatus, and a quiet smile graced my lips as my stomach pulled into a small knot within my stomach.

_God, did he always look like this when he trained?_

Nope. We were informed that their ship would be arriving any one of these days, and there was a war on our hands from the sound of it. What would someone like him want with someone like me? He was far too dedicated to the cause to even consider casting a sideways glance at anything other than his solemn duty.

Filling my lungs with air, I bent to tie my boot’s laces properly, thin fingers tucking the laces between the leather strips of material, reaching up and locking my hands together and stretching until each of my joints popped back into place with satisfying clicks and cracks.

The first few steps of the jog weren’t too bad, climbing the stairs of the barricades with ease, I settled into an easy pace for the first six laps of the walls Danse had built around the station for defense against the outside world. The metal thundered below my boots as I reached the conclusion of the sixth lap, long strands of my auburn ponytail swaying in the cool breeze as I picked up the pace, watching from the corner of my eye as Danse moved to the small bench press he had discovered in the back of the police stations lockup.

His breathing echoed in the space between us, a heaving sigh as the air hissed between his teeth and he began to lower the weight loaded bar down to his chest.

It would have been impressive, if I hadn’t of seen ten year olds lift the same weight with ease back in the vault.

Granted we were all super soldiers … but still.

The tenth lap came with ease as my heart began to beat in my ears, muscles in my legs pushing me forward with unbridled prowess when I began to speed up and push the limits to my being.

Danse looked up.
I took the steps three at a time, breath huffing from my lips as the late autumn sun beat down on my being, hair swaying from the sudden movement and sweat beginning to matte the thick side bangs that fell effortlessly into the incredibly long mess of hair behind me. Clenched fists threatened to draw blood beneath my hand wraps and a deep frown pulled at my brows as I pushed to finish the last of this lap, my feet gliding down the last six steps as if they were nothing more then stepping stones.

“Impressive, Miss Quinn” Danse huffed as he pushed the bar back onto the support beams for the bench press.

“Well, thanks I try” I laughed, playing off like the run was little to nothing. Somehow no matter how long it had been since I trained I seemed to say relatively fit, another thing I owed to the jerks at vault tec.

“Are you any good with hand to hand combat?”

“Why, is your training dummy not cutting it anymore?” I smiled as I gestured to the metal rust bucket covered in dents from his crushing strength… we were going to need a new garage bin.

“You could say that…” a hint of a smile graced his lips as I moved towards him.

“You should know I’m pretty quick” I warned, raising my brow and lifting my guard.

“I’ll try and hold back” he shrugged, arms high and legs ready to move if needed.

We stood as if we were waiting for the other to move, eyes scanning as each muscle twitched and any open opportunity was the chance to strike.

Butterflies broke their cage in my stomach as they fluttered to my heart, their tiny wings beating with my heart as I looked into his light brown eyes and cocked my head to the side, “You going to throw the first punch, metal man?”

“Thought I told you not to call me that, civilian” he quipped back, and I flashed a smirk. All was fair in love and war.

He moved first, a quick jab that was easy enough to dodge with the quickest of movements from my hip, my head ducked under the blow in a tight circle before I stood upright with a smile.

I think he may have smiled back.

Oh its on.

His arm pulled back, a spike in my stomach pulled back as he swung in a curved hook, the punch swiping at the air I was standing in seconds before finding no purchase.

“Surprised?” I smirked, his eyes infighting as he rushed with three more punches that I narrowly dodged with a few quick turns and pulls to the side. One more jab aimed at my gut had me backed into a corner between the old brick wall and his mass.

Think quick. Act quicker.

My knees bent in a quick flash, chin tucked to my chest as he pulled back for the jab and I fell to the floor in a quick tuck and roll past the bride of his legs and stood behind him, breath hissing from my lips as he turned in confusion and my fist found purchase on the inside of his ribs.
“Damnit!” He hissed as his eyes examined me once again, my position open as his guard raised.

I quirked an eyebrow as he moved once again, his hands curled into fists as he moved with a combo of punches. My hands moved quickly as I raised my guard and slapped his hand to the side, past my shoulder and ducked below the second, the uppercut, however, found a sweet spot on my ribs.

“Ooft” I exclaimed as the wind knocked from me, hardly enough to break anything but enough to leave a bruise tomorrow.

Danse’s demeanour changed, brows knitting together in that stoic way of his.

“So we are taking cheap shots are we?” I remarked, hand cradling the ribs that had betrayed me under my high rise shirt. He shrugged and

“You’ve proven yourself a formidable opponent, and that you’ve got a few tricks up your sleeve in hand to hand combat. Are you going to tell me where you learnt such skill?” His tone dropped a few octaves.

“You don’t want to know” I muttered, eyes downcast while my body repositioned in case he made another move.

“Nobody learns to fight the way you have in a settlement” his voice almost sounded sceptical at my denial of his question. I raised my guard and took a swing at his shoulder, air filling the space as he bent from the hips, arm shooting out to grab my wrist – his victory did not last long before I tore from his grip, a hiss of breath as I reached my palm out and gave his cheek a small slap.

“Trust me, you don’t want to know” I grunted as the next punch I threw hit his stomach with a loud thump, fingers tingling as they withdrew from their purchase.

“The only organisation that would be so —” three punches aimed at my stomach, one I managed to deflect with a quick slap away, the other two contacting with the muscle of my gut, “— secretive about their past is the —” another punch to the ribs as I backed into the corner of the police station wall once again, “— Institute”

“I’m not a synth, if that’s what your asking” I quipped, looking up into his eyes as I took a breath and centred myself.

“Where did you learn to fight?” He tried once again, eyes blaring as I raised my guard and

“I doubt it fits brotherhood code of ethics”

“If not the institute, then who else would train you this way. A militia?” Pressing on, I took a step towards him, left arm snapping out for the kill as I made a move for his cheek, fist meeting skin in a quick tap.

“Not in as many words…” right arm jabbing for his shoulder, his breath hissing from his lips as I made another move finding a sweet spot on his pectorals earning another quick hiss as he wasn’t quick enough to dodge it.

“Mercenaries?” Frustration etched on his brows as I refused his question.

“No”

“You don’t strike me as a raider” he huffed as we both struggled to hold the upper hand.
“No chance in hell” a hiss, another punch to the gut on his part.

“Then what?” He cracked, voice booming over the courtyard of the compound.

“VAULT TEC” I screamed back, “Vault Tec. I was a vault dweller” resigning, I let out a sigh, denying the hiccup of a sob that threatened to follow behind.

His eyes softened, even if the rest of him stayed tense as if he was ready to fight once more.

“You’re a vault dweller?”

“…yes” hesitance overtook my being as my eyes rested on his.

“I… am unsure of what to say”

“Don’t say anything, because I don’t like talking about my past. Only one person truly knows where I came from, and for now I’d like to keep it that way” resigning, I looked over at the sky in the distance, a low humming sound seemed to overtake the air as something I had never thought I’d see in my life.

Undoubtedly, the biggest and most impressive airship I have ever seen glided effortlessly through the sky, smaller detachments of airships leaving the sides of the metallic ship in uniform fashion with effortless precision.

“People of the Commonwealth — Do not interfere — Our intentions are peaceful — we are the Brotherhood of Steel” the loud speaker cut off, ears ringing as one of the airships detached from their squad and started to descend towards where both myself and Paladin Danse stood.

I cast a glance in his direction, butterflies fluttering in my stomach as I took in the heartwarming smile that graced his lips.

“Cavalry’s arrived and it looks like they sent in the big guns”

Someone was happy.

Jabbing my finger into his side, that usual frown replaced the smile as he looked back down at me.

“I take it they’re with you” I laughed.

“Negative,” he shook his head, “We are with them”

“Fabulous” I sighed, watching as the incredibly huge expanse of the airship sped on, leaving only one of their smaller ships, what Haylen had called ‘vertibirds’

“I suggest we head inside, gather your belongings Miss Quinn. If the Prydwen is here, Elder Maxson’s here. And that means we’re going to war”

“Aye, aye, sir” with a mock salute, I headed back inside the station, each member of the paladin’s squad was already packing their belongings or at least making them neater.

A heavy thud shuddered through the building as what I assumed was the smaller airship landed on the helipad of the station, the impact sending small pieces of rubble and dust showering down from the weak spots of the buildings interior.

The back corner of the station, the interrogation room I had called my own sat relatively organised. My bed was made from this morning, my olive backpack sat under the small bedside table and my
minor belongings strewn across the table. In the months I had been here I had never taken one thing out of my backpack.

Bending over to grab the shoulder strap, I pulled the bag onto my lap, fingers digging for the all too familiar fabric.

Vibrant blue assaulted my eyes, accompanied by the horrendous reflective yellow that lined the middle of the suit. Flipping to the back, the bright 75 etched into the insulated fabric pulled a tear from my eyes, my heart stung as the memories of the vault came flooding back past the walls I tried to desperately to keep in place, thoughts of escaping the vault and my venture out to Covenant and then to Diamond City. Nobody ever asked where I came from, nor did they care in Far Harbour. I should have told Danse, but how do you tell someone you’re a clone, an experiment in a petri dish? When you discover all you are and ever were was an experiment to see just how far science could push itself.

_He wouldn’t understand._

His morals aligned with the Brotherhood of Steel far too much for him to understand why I left the vault, how I pushed harder when I trained and fought with a fever.

Shoving the vault suit back inside the backpack, I reached for the small selection of trinkets that had found a special place in my heart on my endless journey in the commonwealth and piled them into the same vault-tec lunchbox that I had carried with me out of Medford, flipping the clips to lock the metal container and placed it into the pack along with the last of my belongings.

Knowing the autumn weather, I fished my blue puffer jacket from its hid-ey hole in the metal chest of drawers that came with the interrogation room, and shrugged it over my shoulders.

Casting a glance back at the bed, I let out a sigh as heavy footsteps echoed down the stairs in the main area of the police station that could have only belonged to the heavy footed Danse, he must have been back in the power armour. Grabbing the final part of my arsenal of belongings, I placed my pip-boy inside the back and clipped the straps over my shoulders, heading out for the foyer.

Several new people stood unpacking belongings and busied themselves by clearing space among all the rubble before setting down new equipment and rations.

“Did you look at those burn marks? They must have spent a while case of ammo holding this site” one of the men in power armour whispered to his comrade, they both nodded in agreement and carried on with their work moving boxes and crates from the stairs to Haylen and Rhys’ sleeping quarters.

“Miss Quinn,” the paladins voice pulled my attention as I entered the foyer, eyes snaking glances at me in confusion as I realised I was the only person lacking a uniform… and my midriff may have been slightly over exposed.

“You’re about to get to know the Prydwen up close and personal, I’ve received orders that we are both to report to her immediately” his brow quirked as he turned to face the stairs, “Follow me up to the roof of the police station… were going for a little ride”

As he made his way to the roof, Scribe Haylen caught my eye with a sad smile. Walking to her, I placed a hand on her shoulder… hopeful.

“Are you coming for a ride?”

“Unfortunately not, my work is here on the ground. Enjoy the sights while they last, Valery. Its
been a pleasure getting to know you” Haylen smiled, her lips pulling into a sift line as her arms struggled under the weight of the stack of paperwork she clutched against her form.

“I’d give you a hug but it seems like you might drop your paperwork” I smiled, nodding to the endless expanse of work she held.

“Its never a dull moment where the brotherhood is concerned” she laughed, giving me a quick nod before scurrying off to wherever those papers needed to be placed. Looking across to where the paladin had disappeared off to, I decided to make my way up to the all too familiar roof and gave one last sorrowful glance down the rickety old stairs.

Pushing the door with all my might, a gust of hot wind thrust upon me as I squinted in the morning sun, the reflection of the metal glaring in my retinas as my hand rose to my brow to shield some of the light on my eyes.

The propeller of the most peculiar aircraft I had seen in my life buzzed in my ears as the vibrations set across the deck to shake my feet within my boots. Intense heat filled the insides of my blue puffer and I almost immediately regretted the decision to bring it along on my person.

The dark metallic material that covered the exterior of the airship lay torn with battle scars and scratches, its hull heavily armoured and I was sure it would fight the good fight as long as it didn’t take on too much fire.

Danse’s eyes found mine from inside the aircraft, his power armour frame clipped into one of the seat anchors in the back before beckoning me over to where he stood. My feet reluctantly carried me to the small step ladder apparatus that seemed to protrude from the ship itself, my arms lifting to grasp on to the small support hooks and brought my feet up to climb the ladder.

A spare space sat beside Danse, so I took the opportunity to sit in the small bench space and found the harness that would lock me into this machinery for good.

Looping arms through the straps and clicking the restraint in with a concerning *clack*. Engines roared in my ears as the deafening shudder of the propellers lifted our bodies from the ground, the captain in front clicking buttons and flipping switches on the dashboard as he ran the final checks and we were soon shaking off of the ground below and hoisted into the air.

I barely had a few other than the skyline, but my breath seemed to cease as I peered over the side of the aircraft and saw the ruins below, the mass expanse of a white brick building sat just mere seconds from the police station, a decrepit and half sunken bridge connected the city line on the other side of the riverbed, the great divide of irradiated water taking my breath away as the sun reflected across its surface like gems under a torchlight, what was once a hellish wasteland could almost be seen as picturesque from this height.

Dance cleared his throat before I turned to look in his direction, wind racing through my hair as my eyes met his.

“The Commonwealth looks different from up here, doesn’t it?” His voice echoed over the roaring sound of the wind around us and barely carried over the sound of the propellers and engines.

I nodded for a second, jaw almost slack as I turned to look back over the water to the tallest building I had ever seen standing amongst the other miscellaneous structures, the sky scraper standing out from each of the other masses of tall buildings in and among the skyline.

“It never ceased to amaze me how drastically your perception of the battlefield changes from the
air. We’re going to need that advantage when we take on the institute.”

My eyes cast down to the crumbling white brick building below as the airship changed course and slowly propelled along side the structure, the long dead trees blasted from the radiation and endless heat sat in what once would have been a courtyard, the dead and dry grass would have surely been a sight to see before the war.

“They’ve already proven that they’re technologically superior, which means they’re no telling what types of weapons they have in their arsenal. Hopefully our air superiority and tactical know-how will make the difference.”

The large green building covered in rust caught my eye, the four circular spires rising from the ground seemed to draw the eye, its brilliant colour still standing out after 200 years of being blasted and beaten down by the elements proving the structural integrity of the material after all this time.

“Now all we have to do is find them… and I’m betting that Elder Maxson will have a plan already in place by the time we arrive.”

“He’s had enough time since the first transmission we made to come up with something that may give us the upper hand” I noted, eyes flashing back to the paladin as he stared back at me, warm brown eyes flooding with some unknown emotion as he held onto the guard rail.

“I wish… I wish everyone down there believed in our cause but they’ve been blinded by rumours and misinformation. They don’t realise that the Brotherhood of Steel is the Commonwealth’s last hope for survival. Every man, woman and child below is in mortal danger.”

A sigh filled the air as his eyes cast back out into the distance of the Commonwealth. “If we fail, its only a matter of time before the enemy overwhels the population. Cleaning the commonwealth is our duty and I will gladly spill my own blood if it ensures our victory.”

My eyes drifted over to the strange sights of the commonwealth below, a colonial ship moored on the shore caught my eye as he high pitched whine of the engines pressed on in my ears. Squinting at it a little harder, I was almost shocked to realise it was crashed into the actual buildings below, the strangest of sights indeed as I felt a chill run across my shoulders.

“We’re on final approach to the airport… the Prydwen should be coming into view just ahead. We’ll be meeting Lancer-Captain Kells on the Flight Deck. Just stick close to me and answer all of his questions.”

Looking back to Danse as he uttered the final string of words, I drew a quick breath before the undoubtedly unmissable ship came into view. It may not have appeared to move very fast from inside the airship but dear god did we make it towards what looked too be the ruins of an airport in record time. The large airship, the Prydwen, hovered with its anchor tethered to the watchtower of the ruins, our approach path seemed to circle around the side of the metallic zeppelin as the pilot before us started reciting code phrases and flicking switches once more for our arrival.

“There she is. It’s been far too long since I’ve been aboard” Danse muttered as he looked upon the ship, eyes glancing to me as the smaller ship started its approach to the mothership.

“Alright soldier… this is the moment when everything changes. I hope you’re ready.”

“Me too” I whispered under my breath.

The vertibird vibrated as a a magnetic pull shocked our systems, lifting into the docking station as we stepped onto the pristine catwalk that joined each outer segment of the ship together.
Our heavy footsteps seemed to shake the ships walkways, a man in a clean and crease-less uniform greeted us with arms folded behind his back in a curt manor that instantly screamed military down to the shining scar adorning his left cheek.

“Permission to come aboard, sir?” Danse began, voice cool and collected as he greeted the man with the most ridiculous hat.

“Permission granted and welcome back, Paladin. Allow me to be the first to congratulate you on a successful mission. And is this our new recruit?” eyes wide I looked across as Danse as he continued to speak with the same tone as before.

“Yes, sir. I’ve prompted her to initiate and I’d looked to sponsor her entry into our ranks personally”

“Yes… we’ve read your reports. You’ll be pleased to know that Elder Maxson’s approved your request and placed the recruit in your charge” his smooth voice echoed in my ears as I took in the conversation before me… recruit? Initiate? These were all new words to me outside of being called civilian.

“Thank you, sir. And my current orders?”

“You are to remain on the Prydwen and await further instructions”

“Very good, sir. Ad Victoriam, Captain”

“Ad Victoriam, Paladin” Danse’s eyes met mine for a brief moment before turning to face the heavy metal door leading elsewhere on the ship, the man before me turned to look upon my attire and a frown set into his stoic features.

“So, you’re the new one Paladin Danse has taken under his wing,” a grunt escaped his lops as his arms crossed behind his back even gather than before, “You don’t look much like a soldier to me”

“Looks can be deceiving” I offered, tucking my arms closely against my body in an attempt to conceal any skin that may have slipped past unnoticed and maintained eye contact with the exception of blinking.

“Which is precisely why I personally insist on scrutinising every recruit who boards this vessel. I’ve read Paladin Danse’s reports, he seems to think you’ll make a fine addition to the Brotherhood. You might expect an endorsement like that to grant you a great deal of latitude with us, but let me make one thing clear,” his low voice struggled to carry in the howl of the wind around us on the catwalks – his body leaning in close so that his nose sat mere inches from my cheek.

“The Brotherhood of Steel has traveled to the Commonwealth with a specific goal in mind, as the captain of this vessel, I won’t allow anyone to jeopardise our mission no matter how valuable they think they are. Understood?”

I nodded my head slightly.

“Absolutely”

He nodded in return, dark eyes dipping below the brim of his captains cap before leaning back away from my form.

“Good. That’s all for now soldier. Your orders are to proceed to the Command Deck for the
address, after which Elder Maxson wishes to have a word with you. If you have any questions, ask me now. Otherwise, you’re dismissed.”

Another quick nod before I followed the path Danse had taken and moved to the heavy metal door leading into the mass of the ship.

“I hope he didn’t give you too much trouble” the smooth and familiar voice pulled my attention off to the left, that curt smile of his warming my heart as I let out a sigh of relief.

“Not at all” I muttered as I directed my attention before me.

The inside of the ship was darker than I expected, blazing orange lights illuminated the sleek panels of metal that lined the inside of the Prydwen. Two sets of descending stairs stood just below my boots with a cleared catwalk to either side before meeting in the middle once more for a solitary ladder to protrude up into another level of the ship, the hustle and bustle of upstairs being muted by its sheer distance.

Before us lay an open expanse of windows, the glass adorned with scratches on both sides. Two tall flags from floor to ceiling with steel beams mirroring one another at each end of the room. Small wooden tables lay stacked to the brim with alcohol of every kind beside two matching red recliners. A small crowd of soldiers gathered before the most imposing man I had ever seen in my life. His strong arms tucked behind his back as he commanded their attention, dark hair lazily swooped back from his face and away from the close-cut military style shave along his right side.

It was obvious, even from here at the back of the room that he was at least a head taller than me, and god did it make me feel like a spec of dirt in comparison to his stature. I stood at least 5 and a half feet tall, so this guy must have been just under 5’8, his muscles concealed beneath the mass expanse of his coat, the black uniform below similar to Danse’s save for the colour choice.

His cold blue eyes settled on my bright green, lips pulled into a tight line below his clean-cut beard.

There was no doubt who this man was.

“Brothers and Sisters, the road behind has been long and fraught with difficulty. Each and every one of you has surpassed my expectations by rapidly facilitating our arrival in the commonwealth. You have accomplished this amazing feat without a hint of purpose or direction, and most impressively, without question,” his eyes met each person in the room, arms waving in express gratitude as each soldier nodded before he continued,

“Now that the ship is in position, it is time to reveal our purpose and our mission. Beneath the Commonwealth there is a cancer, known as the Institute. A malignant growth that needs to be cut before it infects the surface. They are experimented with dangerous technologies that could prove the worlds undoing for the second time in recent history,”

Eyes wide as he paced around the small command deck, I watched as his purposeful strides captured everyone’s attention as he tightened his grip on his fingers behind his back,

“The institute scientists have created a weapon that transcends the destructive nature of the atom bomb. They call their creation the ‘synth’, a robotic abomination of technology that is free-thinking and masquerades as a human being. This … notion that a machine could be granted free till is not only offensive, but horribly dangerous. And like the atom, if it isn’t harnessed properly, it has the potential of rendering us extinct as a species,”
Nods of agreement silently filled the room as the man before us grew more and more passionate with each word as he addressed his brigade of loyal followers. I crossed my arms below my chest and huffed a quiet sigh as he continued.

“I am not prepared to allow the institute to continue this line of experimentation. Therefore, the institute and their ‘synths’ are considered enemies of the Brotherhood of Steel, and should be dealt with swiftly and mercilessly,”

Sorrow seemed to fill his features and tone as he paced once more, eyes downcast as he pressed forward.

“This campaign will be costly and many lives will be lost. But in the end, we will be saving humankind from its worst enemy… itself. Ad Victoriam”

“Ad Victoriam!”, “Ad Victoriam!” Strong cries of the soldiers filled the room as their meeting adjourned and they began to turn and walk from the room past where I stood in the doorway of the command deck.

Turning back, I realised Danse was nowhere to be seen... I guess I was in this alone.

Hesitant footsteps carried me to the imposing man before me, nervous butterflies filled my stomach as I stood behind the man who seemed to radiate power. The Elder. Maxson.

“Sir?” I began, voice quiet as his cheek turned towards me, an endless ocean of blue capturing my gaze as they threatened to drag me in past his thick brows and prominent nose. I almost completely missed the thick jagged scar across his cheek.

“I care about them, you know? The people of the commonwealth”

Silence overtook me for a moment as my tongue felt too big for my mouth, lips pressed together in a sympathetic smile as I uncrossed my arms.

“I … can see that. They’re playing with fire and you need to save them”

“Exactly. I just hope we’re here in time. I refuse to allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated”

“What do you want from me?”

Oh god.

His eyes focused as he turned away from the windows and looked upon me for the first time. It suddenly struck me that I may not have looked like the fragile girl from vault 75 anymore. I’d never been so self conscious until now.

“Paladin Danse’s reports were quite clear regarding your feelings towards the Brotherhood. And he concludes that you’d be an asset to us. Seeing as he is one of my most respected field officers, you couldn’t get a better recommendation,”

My mouth felt dry as I stood a little straighter, eyes wide as I tucked my hands behind the small of my back and prayed to whatever merciful god that existed that I looked like the soldier I was trained to be.

“Therefore, from this moment forward, I’m granting you the rank of knight. And, befitting your tittle, we’re granting you a suit of power armour to protect you on the field of battle. Wear it with pride” his husky voice seemed to spread musical notes in the air as I blinked, mind racing to follow
his meaning.

“I’ll… do my very best to live up to it”

“I’m certain that you will. I suggest you familiarise yourself with the Prydwen, and report to the flight deck for your new orders. Naturally, you may not wear any unregulated apparel while on duty here on the ship. I will send a scribe to obtain your measurements and a uniform may be collected from Proctor Teagan in the armoury towards the front of the ship. Welcome aboard the Prydwen, soldier. Make us proud”
So I set up a sideline account on good old Deviantart for all the conceptual sketches for this fic (and those to come... maybe)
If you’re ever stuck on what an outfit looks like or are unsure of what damage has been sustained, make sure to head over there and check it out - as of this chapter I’ve uploaded every outfit mentioned / described so far nice and neatly sitting over there (seriously, they’ve got annotations and everything)
I’ll leave the link to it here - cause I’m a clutz and can’t get the images to embed on here:
https://www.deviantart.com/vaulttec-rebel

The suit was too tight, and I didn’t like it.

Orange and unflattering on every angle, the metal bits and bobs sticking out of every crevice really seemed to be a setback for whatever range of movement I may have needed to undergo.

I didn’t like it.

I didn’t like my bunk mates, they were too quiet, too serious. Our bedding arrangement was too cramped in the open space that was the Prydwen. My bunkmate, a knight-sergeant of some kind to my right was always doing pushups and sit-ups when she wasn’t on duty. Her undercut and high ponytail was always ashy with dust and dirt – which made me think about what duties she may have had to undertake on this damned ship. I was stuck in here like a mole rat while Danse got to bunk in what must have been his old room beside Elder Maxson and Captain Kells.

The middle of the deck we slept on was too open, with technology and machines stashed in every corner. I hadn’t even really taken the time to clean up my belongings from my backpack before I was being whisked away by Danse to help him fix his power armour while aboard. His strong hands passed the wrench as I peered in closer to the bolts holding the auxiliary compressors together, they weren’t too loose but tightening them up seemed like the better option.

“So, Maxson…” I started, glancing up at him like it was the most casual conversation possible.

“Yes, Knight?” Danse’s cautious eyes pulled away from his shoulder bracket as he looked down at me. I flippantly played with the wrench in my hands, the cool metal offering me a distraction from the conversation I was about to have.

“Maxson seems so young compared to everyone else here. How old is he anyways?”

“Don’t let his age fool you. Maxson’s a brilliant tactician, a formidable warrior and possesses an idealistic vision for the future of the Brotherhood despite being only 20 odd years old”

Christ, he was the same age as me. How does one grow to be that tall and imposing after only twenty years of life? I had been genetically engineered to have more toned muscle and height advantage than most, and I had been considered average height in the vault.
“And you’d follow him despite him being so young?” Eyes flashing upwards, I met Danse’s warm gaze with a quirk of my brow, letting the wrench go slack in my hand as it twisted outwards.

“Affirmative. I’d follow him anywhere, without question” he frowned before turning his stern gaze back to the shoulder brackets.

“I was just curious why you were so confident in his abilities? I mean he delivers a good speech don’t get me wrong” plunging the wrench back into the compressors once more I tapped my foot to one of my favourite songs from Diamond City radio and snuck a peak at Danse as he stared hard at the metal plating before him.

“A decade ago, the brotherhood had almost gone completely astray. The Elder before Maxson sent us down a path that was leading nowhere… he was … more convinced about charity than the preservation of technology. When Maxson took over, he single-handedly re-prioritised the Brotherhood from the ground up and put us back on the path to glory. This ship,” Danse gestured around, “and its crew are a test image to his leadership”

“Alright I’ll give you that, he’s a very dedicated … man. It sounds like he stands by everything he’s saying”

Danse’s eyes shot to mine with a hard look before he lowered his voice.

“Of course he does. How could he afford not to? I just hope you appreciate how much of a chance I’m taking bringing you into the fold this quickly,” he put down his piece of equipment and sighed, “not to put too fine a point on it, but if you screw up… we go down together”

I stopped what I was doing and looked up at the paladin, eyes wide as I swallowed the lump of saliva that had formed in my throat.

“Why did you sign up to be my sponsor in the first place? You of all people know what I’m like on the battlefield. I can admit that sometimes I’m a bit all over the place – but my methods work”

“Elder Maxson is understandably particular when it comes to new recruits. He believes in order to keep the Brotherhood strong, we have to bond as brothers and sisters. As your sponsor, it is my duty to travel with you throughout the Commonwealth to ensure that our ideals are being observed. That is why I’m so concerned about your performance in the field”

Silence overtook us for a heartbeat too long. I stood from the small working stool I had been sitting on and placed a hand on his sculpted shoulder. His eyes suspiciously observed the gesture while I smiled. I could almost feel the heat seeping through his equally dreadful orange uniform.

“Don’t worry Danse, I’ll be careful”

Relief washed over his features as he moved his body away from mine and cleared his throat.

“Good, because we’ve got a lot of work ahead of us and I don’t want anything slowing us down, Knight”

“Oh god, I suppose I have to start calling you Paladin now, don’t I?” I laughed in the quiet hangar bay. Everyone was either in other areas of the ship or were on the ground cleaning or counting supplies.

“It would be appropriate, at least while on duty, Knight Quinn” he smiled back and I swear my heart grew a size as I playfully shoved his shoulder and shot him a quick smile.
“I’ll probably be demoted if I call you Metal Man, wont I?”

“Most definitely, civilian” he huffed back, putting the shining repair tool he was using back into its place inside the toolbox beside his power armour bay. In all the joking I almost missed the intense glare of the Elder on the floor above us.

I wandered back up to my personal storage locker, fingers rifling through my bag to clutch at the pip boy that seemed so far in my journey useless. Clicking the power button, the engines and processors within roared to life and the familiar image of the yawning vault boy came to light as my endless data logs, map and radio flashed to life. The walking vault boy smiled wide as I looked at the date and time.

**November 11th, 2287, 07:00**

A heavy sigh escaped my lips as I spied my bunkmate chatting with another one of the knights on the other side of the deck, and I made a quick decision to sit down at the outgoing mail terminal. I didn’t doubt that any number of the contacts I had on the outside would have terminals connected to some database, but I didn’t dare enter their names in the outgoing message box. Instead, I pushed the small latch on my pip and pulled out the holotape that Penny gave me so long ago. It was filled with various diary entries from every week or month I spent in a new place, each categorised into their own little yearbook of sorts.

Yesterday’s started the dawn of a new chapter. The year was almost out, December was right around the corner and I knew that if I ever had any regrets about leaving my old life behind I would always carry a piece of my friends with me on this holotape.

**November 11, 2287. 07:10**

*It’s the first real day upon this ship – the Prydwen. It’s an impressive metal expanse that never seems to end. Just when I think I’ve explored all I can Danse is showing me some new nook and cranny that I would have completely overlooked. He mentioned how he lived on this ship, or the closest thing to living when your boots never leave the ground. The proctors all seem nice enough, although Teagan gives me the creeps a little, even for a loveable guy like him. There’s a gym on board, which is always nice. Danse says we should train for the coming fight, no matter how far away it is. It’d be good to get my mind off of things. I feel like this ship is going to drive me mental.*

Clicking the last of the keys, I ejected the holotape just as light footsteps sounded behind me. Turning to see a small child dressed in the same garb as the squires, I assumed I was receiving a message from someone important.

“Excuse me, Knight Quinn? A message from the Elder. You’re to report to the flight deck with Paladin Danse for your first official mission” I nodded a quick response before rushing back to put my holotape with the rest of my belongings.

Practically sliding down the stairs, I was given a few peculiar looks as I made my way down the ladder and onto the flight deck. Raging engines and the unusual high pitched whine of the jets around me beat my ears, the sounds echoing off of each corner and curve they came into contact with. The muggy weather persisted, and I knew I was going to have to invest in a jacket sooner rather than later.

Danse was easy to spot, he must have climbed back into his power armour before heading out here himself. It didn’t take much effort to notice he had cleaned up his raggedy five-o’clock-shadow since this morning’s shenanigans. No doubt he would be back into the proper swing of his militia in a matter of days. Me? Not so much.
Since leaving Diamond City and traveling to Far Harbour, it had been at least four years since I trained as hard as I once did in the vault, my skills were by no means lacking but I was certainly missing that additional push to keep me going until my heart felt as though it was going to burst from my chest. I hadn’t been the hero of ‘uptopland’ since I was a child, and things had changed in my maturity, discipline, ability and within my body also. I was no longer that child who struggled to fend off the top of the class, but I wasn’t the hero this wasteland needed me to be.

Despite all the power armour on this ship, nobody had the same echoing footsteps as Danse, his incessant pacing put me on edge. Danse never paced, so what were we about to go and do?

“Paladin Danse” I greeted him, voice low and calm as he turned to praise my arrival.

“Knight Quinn, I assume you received the same orders?”

“Indeed. Where is the Elder?” I asked, peering down the catwalk to see if I could spy his imposing figure. There he stood, in that insanely warm looking battle coat of his, arms tucked behind his body as he stared out into the distance with a far off look. Nodding to Danse, we made our way across to where the Elder stood clearing our throats as we approached.

“Ah Paladin Danse and Knight Quinn, was it? Now that you’ve had the chance to familiarise yourself with the Prydwen’s crew and facilities, are you ready for your next mission, sister?”

Glancing at Danse, who’s expression remained unreadable, I cast my eyes back to Elder Maxson and nodded.

“Just point me to the action” I smiled. I could have sworn I saw the Elder’s eyes crinkle a little at the sides.

“I applaud your enthusiasm, Knight. Let’s get right to it then, shall we? Take a look over there…”

My eyes scanned the water for what he could be talking about, only to land on a small plot of land not too far away from a decrepit bridge. The island wasn’t too large, but the ruins on it seemed to be a tactical disadvantage.

“That’s Fort Strong, and its infested with super mutants. Having those aberrations of nature close enough to smell is making me sick to my stomach,” his steely blue eyes settled back on me, eyes harsh as he spoke of the mutants below. Sympathy for the lives they once had coursed through me, the same way it often did for ghouls who’s brains fell to mush after intense radiation exposure.

“And to make matters worse, they’re sitting on top of a massive stockpile of Fat Man shells we could use in our campaign. I want the two of you to head over there, wipe out everything that moves, and secure that stockpile. Understood?” Those dark brows pulled into a tight knit frown, lips in a tight line as he seemed to lean forward prompting a response.

“Consider it done” I couldn’t help the quirk in my brow as I looked back down to the stronghold on the ground.

His chin lifted, arms behind his back even tighter than before, eyes blazing past his strong nose as he looked down at me.

“Look, I realise you’re eager to take the fight to the institute, but it will have to wait for now. The Brotherhood cannot allow those abominations to have a nuclear arsenal at their fingertips”

“It’ll be a pleasure the exterminate that mutant filth” Danse’s voice echoed through the wind beside me, and Elder Maxson nodded in agreement.
“Now… we have a vertibird on standby, fully armed and ready to depart. Paladin Danse’s reports mentioned you were highly skilled in hand to hand combat, and with some harpoon-spear? Unfortunately we do not carry that kind of weapon so you’ll have to make do with the laser rifles and mini-gun on board the ship. Use them to carry our message to Fort Strong and wipe that filth from the face of the earth. I have no doubt the two of you will come back victorious. Dismissed”

Those harsh lines settled back into his features as he turned and walked back to the main deck of the ship.

I cast my eyes up towards Dance.

“Killing a bunch of mutants that have Fat Man’s is basically suicide, you know that right?”

“I’m well aware. We’ve got a mini gun” his brow quirked with the nod of his head and shrug of his shoulders.

_Fuck sake._

“Because that makes me feel _so_ much better” I huffed sarcastically with a roll of my eyes.

“We had better get going, our Lancer is waiting, Knight”

“Of course, Paladin”

Making our way to the vertibird, Danse allowed me to go first to check the weapon rations in the side compartment of the airship, hands pushing my weight upwards as feet found footing. Danse looked over the water below and flashed a quick smile, one I almost missed as my gaze settled on the crashing waves below.

“Nothing like flying in style” he huffed.

Looking down at the crate of weaponry, I knew we’d be hard pressed to carry any more than two weapons each, and I felt awfully bare without my harpoon strapped over my shoulder. Skewering mutants would be an absolute tale for later in my life.

Fingers sifting through the endless and unimpressively modified selection of rifles, pistols and long barrelled snipers, it was easy to settle on one pistol for boots on the ground and a rifle that was going to need two hands once I ran out of whatever charge was stashed inside it. Quietly reloading as the Lancer patched into the interface on the ships command, I found a small holster that would be able to hold the pistol alongside my leg. This thing would get at least thirty good shots before it would need to be reloaded, I knew Danse had stashed some of his own ammo into the compartments of the power armour, so he would have no issue there. Taking the same initiative, I stashed whatever I could into the small pockets on either side of my flight suit and strapped in for the flight to the small island. I just hope Danse didn’t see me clip a few circular objects onto the small belted part of my leg holster as we departed.

“Instruments are green… and we are cleared for release”

The small airship detached from the zeppelin with a shuddering vibration that had my stomach dropping for a moment as we fell into the airspace, engines bursting to life as we neared the small terminal that once was the Boston airport. A moment later we had begun our ascent into the sky and towards what the Elder had called ‘Fort Strong’.

“Why did the Brotherhood choose to stay at the airport?”
“Having the Prydwen moored above the airport keeps the Brotherhood within striking distance of the city”

“As far as reasons go, that’s a pretty good one” I noted, always with the tactical advantages these guys. Looking down, I was pleasantly surprised at the sound of laser fire, witnessing three soldiers below aiming their rifles at targets and suppressing fire. The small training yard was awfully rudimentary but it met the basic requirements. Casting my eyes to the right, I noted the old and worn out shed beside two halves of a wrecked plane, a place to explore much later when I managed to get my boots on the ground.

Our vertibird curved enough to set out a direct path to the island, my eyes focusing past the early morning glare of the sun on the ocean below. If I wasn’t so damned irradiated and cold, it would have been a decent swim… until considering what kinds of mutated fish and mirelurks may lay below. I had spent enough time in Far Harbour to know the weakest parts of their shells and flesh, and how to deal with them in haste – but had learnt very quickly never to engage with one in the water – it was after all, their domain.

I guess there was one upside to being away from Far Harbour, there weren’t any anglers or gulpers here which was fabulous.

“We are on final approach” the Lancer spoke over the intercom, my eyes falling on the ruins below. Wide eyed, I glance to Danse as the vertibird swerved to dodge a large boulder being tossed at our airship. Warning lights blared in the cockpit as the large rocks came one after another, my gaze never settling on the source until the vertibird steadied itself and Danse rushed to fire up the mini-gun.

Eyes frantic, I looked up at him with a slack jaw.

“What the FUCK is that?!” I screamed at him, hand outstretched to gesture to the tall green mountain of muscle, its hulking hands fishing another boulder from its assortment of junk on its back and aiming at our vertibird once more.

“Behemoth! Lancer get us closer!” His voice carried with no problem as I turned back to the crate of weaponry onboard and scoped a laser rifle and loaded its clip with a small fusion cell. The familiar *whizz* of bullets slicing the air filled my ears accompanied by the *chink* of metal on metal. Surveying the battlefield it didn’t take long to identify the feral mutants below aiming their pip weapons up to us and shooting at our ship.

“You get that fucking thing and I’ll knock the others!” I cried as I lined my scope. The hum of the vertibird as it circled the battlefield was less than ideal but a few steadying breaths let me get the shots I needed.

_Breathe in. Breathe out._

I lined the sights with the first beastly brute below, one eye shut as I let my warm breath carry in the ocean air as I crouched and slowly lined up the shot, finger squeezing the trigger with a quick *POW*.

The first mutant fell to the floor with a quick shot to the head, the red beam of light practically disintegrating its noggin.

I didn’t revel in the victory, there was far more of these hunkering mounds of green muscle to eliminate. The vertibird swung around again, giving me the opportunity to line up two more shots on another mutant as the roar of the mini-gun filled my ears with a deafening beating, the shells
from the endless tether of ammunition either clinking on the metal of the ship's hull or falling useless to the ruins below.

The beasts below raged with anger as blood poured from their wounds, their fists pounding their chests as they rushed to the battlefield and took aim on our position once more. The Lancer cursed as he swung once more to dodge whatever damage they were inflicting on the ship.

“Close the distance! I need a better shot” Danse called, barrel of the insanely oversized gun aimed at the equally oversized brute that stood roaring with frustration as the Paladin aimed for its legs and chest.

“Are you insane, sir?!” The Lancer yelled back, his eyes wide as he looked back to us fighting off the horde of mutants below.

“Just do it soldier!” The lancer seemed to curse under his breath as he steered us back into the fight and closer than before, the shots from the rifle landing on several of the savages below and dropping a few along the way. A low growl from Danse drew my attention to the red hot barrel of the mini-gun, its rotating barrels roaring in protest as they spat out bullet after bullet, most finding their target as the beast below seemed to falter in its final throw, its armour like skin scattered with bullet holes along its chest and arms.

The monstrosity must have been close to death, the final boulder didn’t even travel five feet before its jaws parted with one final battle cry as it collapsed to the floor with an earth shattering thud.

“I’m going to find a place to set her down and then hightail it back to the Prydwen for repairs, sir” the Lancer informed us as we quickly circled back around to the entrance of the island amongst the heaviest of the ruins.

Whatever remained of the mutants below didn’t mourn the loss of their colossal friend, but instead concentrated their fire as the lancer descended the vertibird on the small opening of road a few hundred metres away from the hill fort strong sat upon.

A pit formed in my gut as I looked down and shoved the rifle in my hands aside in favour of the fully loaded gun beside it, gauging the distance between the floor and the bird, I swallowed whatever doubts I had and lunged from the side before Danse could protest.

Raging fire surrounded me as I sprinted for the first small minded mutant I saw, its body partially hidden behind the ruined brick of an office or a housing establishment that once was, I cocked the rifle up under my armpit and aimed for its leg.

– BOW – BOW –

The mutant gurgled as death embraced it, its form slumping as I turned to the next beast that rushed my location, and shot it square in the head.

Endless red like I had never seen spurted as the force of the blow shattered its neck and the head went flying before falling in a sickening squelch. I didn’t dare look back at the head or at the red pool that formed below its slack jaw or vacant eyes.

Push on.

Paladin Danse was also on the ground, I was only vaguely aware of the sound of the vertibird retreating back to the Prydwen as his laser rifle cut through our enemies like a butter knife, the smell of burning ozone filled my lungs with a sickening lurch every time I thought about it too much. I was a soldier, we kept calm and carried on without question.
“I think that’s the last of them” Danse climbed the rubble to meet me, chest heaving as fast as mine as we cast a glance at the door ahead.

“I guess that just leaves whatever is hiding in there?”

“Affirmative” he confirmed. I let out a quick huff of breath as I looked back to the fallen behemoth, and swallowed the lump at the back of my throat.

“I didn’t know super mutants could get that big”

“Once a mutant is submitted to higher levels of radiation they may mutate again, into the monstrosity you see before you”

“I guess the mini-gun was a good choice” I joked, looking at him over my shoulder and tossing him a smile.

I didn’t expect him to return it with a chaste and hearty laugh of his own.

“I admire how you can find the humour in any situation, Valery” He retorted brushing a chunk of mutant flesh off of his shoulder plate and returning his attention to the fort before us.

Dashing to meet him, I gave his armour a little pat before flashing a quick grin.

“That’s what I’m here for. My optimism balances out your seriousness, Metal Man”

“You are aware that we are still on duty, civilian” flashing that knowing look with a quirk of his brow, I retorted with the most childish thing I could think of.

I stuck my tongue out at him.

“I could get you written up for insubordination” He joked, and I faked a gasp with a dramatic hand flying to my chest in mockery.

“Sir, you wouldn’t dare!”

“Come on, we have a mission to complete” he pushed on and while I couldn’t see his face I knew his smile remained…

… at least until we arrived at the old brick walls at the top of the hill.

“These fat man shells must have been something of significance to warrant these fortifications” he mused as he reloaded his rifle with a satisfying click.

The cracked pavement leading up to the rusted out sign reading ‘U.S Army; Fort Strong’ wasn’t too treacherous, but it was obvious that 200 years of disrepair wasn’t doing it any favours. Uncontrollable yet dried up vines climbed across the windows on the left side, the fallen trunk of a tree lay against the old bricks.

“You know if it wasn’t for all the big green bodies on the floor back there, you’d never know this place was infested with mutants”

We ascended the black marble stairs and pushed at the ebony wood doors and crouched down as we entered the building, doubled checking the safety’s were off as I was forced to eat my words.

The putrid smell of rot and decay filled my nose as I took in the grotesque amalgamation of parts and flesh that hung from a chained ball, a puddle of drying blood covered the floor in a rusted out
brown colour while newer parts contained in the meat bag seemed to leak newer fluids that joined
the rest on the floor.

Bile rose in my throat as I looked away for a moment, vomit threatening at the horrific smell of
death and rotting flesh that filled the air in a never ending expanse. I wanted to make a joke, I
really did, but I couldn't bring myself to find light of the situation when so many mangled pieces of
… whatever was inside that bag tugged at my breakfast. Especially when I noted the stripped skull
that lay atop a series of crates.

The building had fallen into disrepair on the inside, the second floor collapsing so there was no
way to get through, we would have to take either the right or left path, and neither was completely
convincing. Slowly making my way to the doorway on the right, I reached for the handle and gave
it a small jiggle looking at Danse and shaking my head, mouthing;

‘It’s locked’

“Can you pick it?” He whispered back in the quietest voice, I almost couldn’t hear. I had never
been so glad to have pulled my hair up in matching buns for today, and had a wealth of bobby pins
stashed inside my thick auburn hair.

“Do you have a screwdriver?” I asked, motioning with my hands as if I was tightening a bolt.
Casting a glance to the desk half submerged in shining red gore I motioned for Danse to stay put.
When he gave me a questioning look I simply tilted my head to the side with a serious look and
pointed at his power armour. He nodded and seemed to understand.

Great for protection.

Horrible for stealth.

I prayed to whatever gods hadn’t forsaken us that the metal desk drawer wouldn’t squeak as it
opened, and they must have listened as it opened without issue.

There in the back of the drawer was a damned screwdriver.

“Holy shit” I muttered to myself as I picked the shiny godsend up and eased the desk drawer back
closed.

Only it didn’t close without incident, something must have caught on it as it screeched back to its
original place.

“WHOS THERE??” A booming voice called from somewhere behind us. Panic took hold of my
mind as I considered our options, we either picked the lock and hoped the mutants weren’t on the
other side of it, or made a run for the already opened door and went guns blazing over silent and
stealthy.

Heavy footsteps barrelled out of the hallway and there was absolutely nowhere to hide in this
ridiculously bright and obvious orange flight suit while there was so much light in the foyer.

Heart racing, Danse decided that the latter idea would win as be beelined for the open doorway and
looked to his left, the satisfied ‘HA, THERE YOU ARE!’ sounding from beside him as he rushed
the room.

Bullets sped past faster than my eyes could see and the mutants inside were huge and heavily
armoured. Damn it!
I pulled my rifle and aimed at the monsters legs, hoping that I could cripple it with a few well lined shots. Sweat matted my hair to my face as I shot again as the beast pounded its chest in success as a second mutant rounded the corner and drew Danse’s fire as it hurriedly approached our cover by the door.

“Fuck this” I cursed as I reached for the holster strap and unclipped the small handheld from its safety position. Shaking fingers raised the rigid lines of the object to my lips as my teeth clamped on the safety and I lobbed it into the room before ducking for cover.

The explosion of fire and gristle rang in my ears in an uncomfortable deafness as my heartbeat echoed in my ear drums. I looked up through thick lashes at Danse who’s confused expression settled on me.

“A grenade? Really Knight?!” He huffed in disapproval as he stood and charged into the next room, readying for the next battle ahead as he reloaded his clip. I pulled the rifle from the floor and bothered not to check the mangled corpses from the explosion as another mutant emerged from around the corner.

“Puny human!” It exclaimed as the barrel of its gun rose and aimed for Danse’s stomach. A few rounds of fire seemed to bounce the bullets off of his body, and it wasn’t long before the smell of cauterised flesh filled the air. Filing through the remainder of the building’s first floor I stumbled across the door that stood locked from the other side.

Grabbing the screwdriver from my pun and a bobby pin I tracked over to the door that almost blended with the ruin of the wall and worked away at picking the lock.

“I’ll cover you from here. Remain vigilant. This place may appear abandoned, but that doesn’t mean we should drop our guard” Danse offered as he covered my back, the pick slowly turning the lock as I granted myself the small success as I broke my way inside.

I let out a quick breath as I regained my sanity and tried not to think about the poor unfortunate souls who fell victim to these monsters, eyes wandering the room and taking in the furniture. A lone desk sat in the middle of the room, the windows caked with dirt and dust so minimal amounts of sunlight broke the surface, the blue carpet scattered with trash in all corners.

“Judging from the amount of dust present, kts safe to assume were the first people to investigate this location in quite a while”

“You read my mind, Paladin. I doubt the mutants ever made it in here”

“We should search around and see if there is anything of value in here”

“I’ll search the desk. Check to see what’s in the trunk” I made way for the terminal before me and clicked the screen to life – almost surprised that its internal processors were still functioning properly.

“No passcode…”

“I beg your pardon?” Danse asked as he riffled through the military trunk beside him, eyes rising to meet mine as I bent over the terminal.

“There’s no passcode protecting this terminal, none of the entries are encrypted either. Its strange” I explained. Danse’s eyes lingered on me for a moment longer before I turned back to the terminal entries and sifted through the information contained within. Out the corner of my eye I saw Danse hesitate before turning back to the chest beside him.
The information was all about the two teams the division manager at the Army depot had created to tackle their assigned tasks, apparently they were trying to weaponise the miniature nukes in some kind of catapult with an electronic charge to boot their range. Each entry ranged in dates, starting as early as 2075 leading up to 2077 a month before the bombs fell. Bingo. The last terminal entry gave me everything I needed.

“Danse, the nukes are still here somewhere under the main building. Find anything useful over there?” I looked at the trunk and frowned at its contents, it was just basic ammunition.

“Found some ammunition, hardly worth stocking up” he sighed. I turned my attention back to the drawers of the desk and pulled the top shelf open to find nothing more than files and stationary. The second held exactly what I was looking for – a heavy set key.

“Fan out and find those nukes” the order was plain as we retraced our steps and looked for any additional places to search.

Seconds dragged into minutes as I tried to find some way to climb to the second floor, only to find any chance of climbing completely obscured.

“There’s nowhere left to search, Paladin” I called as I rounded the corner once more, a flashing light catching my eye as I turned to look at the spotlight which flickered to light illuminating a bright yellow elevator door. Jabbing my thumb with an unamused expression, his heavy footsteps paved the way before pressing the call button.

The small and cramped carrier arrived with a pleasant ding as we stepped inside. The walls were mostly intact with minimal rust inside as we packed in close and I leaned forward to press the button to go down.

Arms tucked in at my sides, my fingernails tapped one another as I looked anywhere but at the paladin, the static of the elevator making the trip awfully quiet as we proceeded the decent. I was almost completely pressed against his suit as we stood squashed together in the small space. The white noise seemed to fade as calming elevator music filled the shaft and my cheeks flushed uncontrollably, no doubt the same colour as my hair as I stared intently at the wall’s flecks of rust. Danse cleared his throat in an equally as awkward fashion as the elevator meter slowly moved to the bottom floor.

*KRSTTTT* FLOOR"

“Oh thank….” I said under my breath as I filed out of the elevator and watched Danse continue to the walls edge where the next lot of Fort Strong’s armoury stood. He cleared his throat as I made my way past the splatters of blood on the floor and away from the stinking pile of flesh.

“What your step. There’s quite a bit of debris here” he whispered under his breath, the low hum of his voice sounding awfully tense as I peered around the corner. The hallway ahead had three potential doorways – three potential threats of inhalation especially if the mutants had intact mini-nukes down here. Danse slowly made his way to the first doorway, waving me forward when no threat showed itself. The second doorway lead to a restroom, the first stall’s toilet completely overflowing with dirty water cartons.

“Gross” I grumbled as I reluctantly made my way to the second stall – its long dried up toilet filled
with purified water canisters.

“Who would take these?” He speculated as he turned to face the final hole in the wall. Sneaking our way forward once more to the steps I put a hand out on Danse’s chest plate to stop him in his tracks, eyes darting to meet his confused expression as I pointed to the sleeping form of a mutant hound on the floor just before a doorway.

I knew he’d hate it, but I had to do it. I unclipped a grenade from my belt and pulled the pin, daring not to look at him until I had thrown the handheld and watched it land neatly beside the mutts snoring form.

A sharp tug at my arm pulled me back into where we hailed from, his body close to mine as he grabbed my hands and placed them over my ears, adding an extra sound barrier as his own warm hands secured them as the explosion carried in the air and alerted the mutants downstairs.

Green eyes looking upwards with curious eyes, his jaw clenched as he cocked the rifle and flicked the safety off once again, legs straightening in the hefty suit as he charged into the battle unraveling downstairs.

“WHERE ARE YOU PUNY HUMAN?!” A mutant called, leaving a hallway to the left as Danse barged down the stairs, his brows pulled into a tight frown as his teeth ground together firing off shot after shot. Grabbing the rusted out handrail and swooping my legs through, feet pounding on the ground as I raised my rifle, the smell of ozone crack lit through the air as vibrant beams of the charged fusion cell exploded from the barrel of the gun, finding a target on its way.


A green mass caught my eye as I turned to face it, past my companion as the thick board came crashing down on his armour with a hefty battlecry before sliding down the metal plating. Jumping to action, my heart leaping in my chest, I raced for the mutant pulling my pistol as it brought the board up once more.

“YOU DIE NOW!” The mutant screeched as the board pulled behind his back and lunged forward.

“Oof!” I coughed, board splintering in my shoulder as I raised the pistol under the mutants chin and pulled the trigger, red raining down upon me filling my mouth full of hot iron before dropping to the floor with a gurgled,

“Yaaaaagh!”

Moving to look back down the hall, pistol low by my side as I approached my commanding officers back, a sting in my shoulder caught my attention, eyes lidded as I brought my gloved hand up to the splinters digging into my flight suit.

“Whaaaa~” I slurred as I tried to make sense of what I was seeing amongst the gunfight.

Vision blurring for just a moment, I glanced down to the mutants weapon below me.

The board was in pieces still.

But I had missed the damned metal spikes jarring out from the top of the board.

Lazily looking back to the hole in my shoulder I fingered the metal rod sticking out of my shoulder.

“Arghhhh!” A strangled cry must have caught Danse’s attention as the pistol clattered to the floor
in a muted thud as I looked at the red stained leather once more, little black dots dancing across my eyes as the world went blurry.

“Valery!” The voice was a whisper as my knees no longer held on and I fell to the hard floor below with a sickening thump.

Chapter End Notes

OOOOOOOOH snapsticks!
Some shit is going down ~
Her chest rose and fell in steady rhythms, heart beating as usual according to the repetitive beeps of the screen beside her. The foreign metal needle plunged into her hand was disturbing to say the least but was not as horrific as the tubes that aided in filling her lungs with air.

I did not like seeing someone in my care looking so bruised and battered.

“Paladin Danse, you should get some rest. She is going to be fine”

Cade, the man who patched me up many times on whatever recon mission the Elder had sent my team on. He would look after her, I know he would.

She had been like this for days, eyes moving quickly below her closed lids as if she were trapped in a nightmare as her fingers twitched and legs jolted every few minutes.

‘The nail had plunged into her muscle, only just missing the point where her clavicle and acromioclavicular joints meet’ Cade had said. The problem was that the nail hadn’t been sterile – as you’d expect in a filthy mutant den.

“I need to inject the next round of anti-tetanus, Paladin”

“I will not leave her side, she is apart of my team, Knight-Captain Cade. Whatever medical treatment Knight Quinn requires can be administered in my presence” I persisted. I knew I was in the way, but I had seen too many good men perish under my command. It was quiet on the command deck, only those who maintained the Prydwen’s mooring were downstairs in the control room and most of the other Knights and Scribes lay in their bunks at this odd hour of the morning.

Knight-Captain Cade pulled a large syringe from behind his small desk space, pressing up the bottom of the plunger until the air bubbles escaped and whatever spurted out into the cloth he held in his hands. Rejoining my form beside the Knight, his adept hands pulled aside the grey blue hospital gown before pinching at the exposed skin of her shoulder – sliding the grotesquely long needle deep into her muscle, treating the immediate effected area as he had been doing since the Friday we disembarked to Fort Strong.

“I find this particularly interesting…” the Knight-Captain said as he moved to her charts.

“I beg your pardon?” A frown set on my brows as I stared at the man beside me.

“Knight Quinn has only been in care for a short amount of time, however her cells are fighting the infection at an alarmingly rapid rate”

“I do not follow…”

“Something in her genetic makeup has made her more resistant to the dangers of the wastes. I would be curious to see how she developed such a strong immune system”

Something about what Cade said tugged at something within my mind, a memory of Valery before we deported to the Prydwen.
Peering back at the Knight before me, I could not help the pang of guilt that filled my bones as I relived the fight at Fort Strong. The board crashing down on my back before she threw herself at the monstrosity behind me and blew its brains out. The weak look in her eyes as I fired at the last abomination, before she collapsed to the floor and knocked her skull on the panels below.

Her red hair spilled across the pillow like the blood that marred the floor from where she fell, heartache and worry overcame my being as I swept the building once more with her in my arms, assured that the armoury was no longer comprised before rushing back to the Prydwen with haste.

Observing her form like this, her skin so pale from the blood loss and the raging infection within her blood and body, brought a single tear to my eye. Hastily wiping it away, my gaze settled on those eyes that fluttered restlessly as the rest of her features stayed slack with the induced coma the Knight-Captain had placed her in once they had found the source of the spasms that wracked her body.

“Paladin Danse,” the voice sounded from behind me accompanied by commanding footsteps.

Elder Maxson stood in the doorway to the infirmary, his imposing figure long lost on my nerves as he entered the room at the early hours of the morning.

“Elder Maxson” I addressed him with the usual formalities, it may have been his ship and his armada but he was still my friend.

“How is her condition, Knight-Captain Cade?”

“Stable, and rapidly improving. Another stimpack or two along with the anti-tetanus injections should have the effected area healed in the next few days. As for the sedation, we will have to wait for Knight Quinn to recuperate enough from the disease before we consider halting their administration. As I was saying to the Paladin before, Knight Quinn has a rather irregular immune system. Her genetic makeup is quite peculiar in itself, but her body is fighting the infection far faster than I would have calculated”

Elder Maxson nodded with his arms in their usual position behind his back, I knew him well enough to spot the twitch in his right eye just above the jagged and dark scar that marred his cheek.

He was equally as concerned for the Knight.

“With such a feat of bravery at Fort Strong, you should be proud to have her on your squad, Eugene”

Eyes wide, I glanced at the Elder of the Brotherhood.

He never used my name outside of the confined spaces of the Citadel or when he and I would share a drink off duty. Hearing it come from his mouth settled my stomach as I looked at the knight once more.

“It’s late, you should get some sleep. If what Cade has observed is true – the Knight should be on her feet when she is fully healed and ready to come back. Your combined success last week honours the Brotherhood,” he sighed, pulling up a chair beside me as we both looked upon the lax form of Valery.

“Give her time, Danse. She will come back when she is ready to rejoin our ranks and fight this war, her body just needs to heal”
“The only reason she is in this mess is because of my carelessness, I turned my back on the enemy without a second thought and she jumped in to save me. I shouldn’t have thrown myself down there”

“I understand your feelings towards those abominations, and they’re quite warranted. It’s been five days, let her rest and if there is any change in her condition Cade will come and find you”

A heavy sigh wracked my shoulders as I stood from my place beside the pale form of Valery and with a resigning nod to the Knight-Captain I left the small room and returned to the confines of my bunk.

- - - -

Soft.

Something so very soft lay under my mess of hair.

A low groan escaped my lips as I brought my hand to my eye, attempting to rub away the sleep that nested there only to be met with an awful tugging resistance in my hand.

“What the …?” I questioned, words thick on my tongue and throat aching as I struggled to open my eyes and take in the blurry room around me. Soft lights illuminated the steal beams contained within the small space I lay in, confusion overtaking me as I looked down at my left hand and gasped at the drip that fed into my body.

A shudder ran through me as I followed the clear tubing that hooked up to an IV bag that hung from a metal spike adorning wheels beside the red gurney that I lay on. Looking down at myself, I was swaddled in a standard black blanket but the unfamiliar material that covered my body pulled my brows down in a frown.

It was a dress that wasn’t a dress, my fingers slid along the greyish-blue material, the short sleeves adorned with two grey stripes on each side. Craning my neck to the side sent a sting of pain shooting down my side as I brought my hand to the tender spot where my shoulder met my neck, poking and wincing as the same pain shot down my back and pierced my brain.

Looking around the room once more the past caught up with me. The meeting on the docks of the Prydwen, being assigned to Fort Strong, wiping out the mutants and then … throwing myself in the path of the bastard that plunged the nails of its weapon into my arm.

Cautiously, I looked to my left shoulder and gasped at the angry purple bruise that marred my skin, the vivid colour peeking out from under the bandage that sat wrapped around my torso. Looking around once more I noted that I was in Knight-Captain Cade’s infirmary. With a grunt of exertion, I worked my legs out of the blanket and swung my feet over the edge, stifling another gasp as I looked down at my legs marked with more yellowing bruises. Gripping the leather gurney for dear life, I shuffled my weight to the floor until my bare toes touched the cool surface below.

Hissing as my weight fell onto my left hip, I hiked the hospital gown up my side until I frowned at the vivid bruising on my side, the yellow barely even fading out to skin. I must have been hit far more than I thought I did when I jumped in front of Danse.

Danse.
Where was Danse?

The medical bay was awfully quiet, so it must have meant that there weren’t many people awake on the ship.

Tentatively I reached my fingers around the rolling IV stand, carting it behind me as I made my way to Cade’s small desk, attempting to flash his terminal to life to get a gauge of how long I had been in here. A small Manila folder caught my attention, the files within poking just out of the side. Curiosity gripped me as I flipped its contents open and read through the report on some new recruit who had apparently appeared out of thin air at the airport dressed in blue.

Thinking it was of no consequence, I grabbed the IV stand and slowly made my way to the open archway, looking down the hallway to my right. A shocking cool breeze shot up my back as I twisted to look behind me, grasping at the long drawstrings that fell lose across my naked back.

“Damnit” I muttered before reaching around myself and tying the extremely long sting around my waist at the front in a neat bow – the action jarring the needle in my hand sending a shiver down my spine with a hiss of air leaving my clenched teeth.

Hesitant feet carried me toward the cast iron ladder leading to the command deck, but some careful consideration of my condition sent me around the railing to Danse’s Prydwen quarters, a quiet knocks on the metal echoed far louder than it should have but earned no response.

Shuffling to the next door I knew, I placed my ear against Elder Maxson’s quarters and listened carefully as the low snoring sound came from within. It had to be early if their Elder wasn’t even awake yet.

Turning tail towards the hallway that led to the mess hall, it didn’t take long before I spotted Danse. He was – after all – the only person in the entire hall.

“Danse!” My voice must have carried enough because moments later his head picked up, cheek turning to face where I stood with the upmost look of relief washing across his tired features.

“Valery, you’re up. How are you feeling?” Quick hands rushed to grab my arms as he examined me, a wince playing on my features as he bumped yet another tender spot on my ribs, at least it was on my right hand side and equated to an all around bruised and battered body.

Fabulous.

“I mean, I took a super mutant board to the shoulder and I’m covered in bruises, so I could be better” I tried to joke, it however didn’t land the way I wanted it to when his eyes furrowed in concern. It was only then that I realised the dark circles under his eyes.

“Jesus Danse, you look like shit”

“I … haven’t slept very well for the last week”

“No kidding,” I mused as I brought my hand up to his cheek to tilt his head to the side examining the sleep deprivation written across his features. Wait. “The last week? What day is it?”

“Monday”

“So I was out cold for four days?”

Silence overtook us as he frowned down at me, concern taking over his deep brown eyes as he
examined me once again.

“Valery… you’ve been under medical sedation for eighteen days”

Eighteen.

Days.


What? How? My mind couldn’t even rationalise what it was hearing.

Oh my god.

“Oh my god” it was barely a whisper past my frozen lips.

My breathing started coming fast, eyes wide in panic as the walls of the mess hall started to close in everything became one big blur.

“Knight Quinn” his voice seemed to far away as three of him swirled around one another in a confused mess as my brain scrambled to make up for lost time.

“Knight!” His arms were around mine now, careful not to jolt me as my mind swam.

“VALERY” something about the command in his voice pulled me down to earth, his warm eyes locking with mine as he stared wide eyed and told me to control my breathing.


“How?! How was I out for almost two-and-a-half weeks, Danse?”

“Knight-Captain Cade explains it better, but you contracted tetanus from the nails in the board and it started attacking your body. I carried you back to the Prydwen as fast as I could, but you had fallen and hit your head before I could catch you at Fort Strong and there was so much blood,” his gaze drew distant as he recalled the events, “When I got you back here, you barely had a heartbeat. I thought you were going to die, Valery”

Maybe my genetics didn’t make me so resilient after all.

“Cade found something odd in your readings once you stabilised. Your body fought the tetanus like nothing he had ever seen before. According to Cade you’re a medical marvel”

Apparently Vault-Tec refused to let their experiments die from copping a rusty nail to their shoulder. Damn them and their sick sadism.

“Unfortunately, that comes as no surprise to me…” I sighed, eyes cast to the bench where a sweet roll lay on a very clean looking metal tray. My tastebuds started to tingle.

“It got me thinking. Before we disembarked to the Prydwen, you mentioned that you were from a vault. What… exactly did they do to you?”

“I…” swallowing the lump in my throat, I looked back up to Danse with what I hoped was resignation, “I don’t want to talk about it. I told you once before that only one person knows about my past and I’d really like to keep it that way. The less everyone knows the better”

“I only ask two things from anyone under my command. Honesty and respect. Your honesty about
your past is all I ask, and I believe in time you may wish to discuss it with me. Be warned, Knight-
Captain Cade is going to want to know why you were only out of action for eighteen days and not
two months when he wakes up”

A shaking sigh wracked my body as I looked back up at the man before me.

I thought about it.

I wanted to tell him.

So, I did.

He listened, dear god did he listen, with his hands tucked under his chin and intense eyes burning
into mine as I explained the way I was created with the best genetics of the children before me,
how I escaped with nothing more than my vault suit and pip-boy, how they were still stashed in the
backpack under my bunk upstairs.

“Theft is an offence in the Brotherhood… however I took the liberty of moving your belongings
into my quarters while you were in the medical bay. I hope you don’t mind …”

I told him about my adventure to the small town of Covenant, how I trekked across the
Commonwealth before settling in Diamond City and using my know how with electronics and
weapons to open a small business. I told him about the election and how it drove me from the city.
How I ventured north-west and settled in a small gas station for a few weeks before getting bored
once again and heading to Far Harbour with the aid of a young girl that I met past the fish packing
plant before retracing my steps down towards Cambridge and stumbling across Danse and his

“… You are not at fault here. Vault-Tec’s inhumane experiments put the lives of many at risk for the
eventuality of the bombs. Slaughtering civilian children and harvesting whatever was left is
senseless and barbaric – no matter what the greater good ought to be”

“So, you see why when I found out, I had to leave. I didn’t want to open up about this because I
know how the Brotherhood feels about … things grown in labs. There is no difference between the
vault and the institute, both grew sub-human beings out of someone else’s genetic material with the
sole purpose of seeing how far they could push science, one of us was just made to be a fighting
machine - never meant to leave their cage”

Danse sat silent in the chair across from me in the mess hall. I had taken the chance to watch the
IV dip filter into my hand and slowly deplete the fluids within over the next hour or so of
discussion.

“It certainly explains your expertise in hand to hand combat,”

“At least until I took a nail to the shoulder” I let out a quiet laugh as a few of the scribes and
knights made their way into the mess hall, serving their breakfasts and chattering with one another
in the early hours of the morning.

“And familiarity with weapons. You said you were considered average in the vault, that you were
being trained to be super soldiers. Did anyone else make it out of the vault with you?”

“If you’re thinking about the Commonwealth being overrun with genetically modified super
soldiers, trust me - I was keeping tabs everywhere I went. I didn’t hear of any vault dwellers
making headway in the Commonwealth. I don’t know what happened to the rest, but I can
guarantee there would have been a firefight. There were a few others who were onto the science
staff and were planning a break in to the armoury before I left”

“How many years has it been?”

“Almost seven years. If there was any activity around there … people would have noticed by now. There are at least three settlements in that area who report to a smaller faction I ran across—”

“The Minutemen?”

“Indeed. From the last reports I heard, there were quite a few of them”

“We have heard of them. Over the past weeks their presence has doubled with some new general leading their ranks. The team at Cambridge has fanned out on patrols and encountered their militia”

I considered their movements for a moment, lost in thought and only shaken out of it when a set of fingers tapped my shoulder.

Knight-Captain Cade’s steely blue eyes shined down on me warmly as he cleared his throat.

“Knight Quinn, glad to see you are walking about. Your commanding officer here has been quite worried about you, despite your speedy road to recovery,” he flashed a knowing smile down at me before continuing, “If you wouldn’t mind, I would like to run a medical examination and remove the drip from your hand. You’ve been on some heavy sedatives for the past two weeks and I would like to be assured that your body is on its way to being fully functional, if you wouldn’t mind?”

“Of course, Knight-Captain” I agreed, sliding out of my seat and standing on weak knees.

I waited for my bruised legs to hit the cold hard ground, but instead my arms felt encased in warmth.

Looking up over my shoulder, Danse was behind me, a shy quirk in his lip as he stood with me in his arms.

“I doubt that walking about is going to do you much good, Knight Quinn. Remember your muscles have not had the mobility they did before the incident at Fort Strong. It may be for the best if Paladin Danse helps you along your way” Cade commented, looking back at my radstag doe legs that seemed to have stopped functioning. An agreeable grunt came from Danse as he scooped his hand behind my back and supported my side as I slowly hobbled to the medical bay once more.

Planting my backside down on the leather gurney almost elicited a quiet groan from me, but I became acutely aware that Cade, Danse and I were no longer in the infirmary alone.

He stood, as imposing as ever with the same harsh look strewn across his face as when I first met him. Dark hair brushed back off his face and beard considerably longer than the last time I had seen him on the flight deck, calculated blue eyes flitting between each of us in the room.

“Welcome back, Knight. How are you feeling?” He questioned, smooth voice gliding across my skin as I looked up and over to him.

‘Like I’ve been stabbed in the shoulder with a rusty old nail. How are you today Elder?’ sarcasm dripped from my thoughts as I forced a quick smile before responding in the most cooled voice I could manage as Cade pulled away the neck of my hospital garb.

“Slowly recovering, Elder Maxson. Did you secure the Fort Strong Armoury okay?”
“Thanks to both Paladin Danse and your valiant efforts, we were able to sweep and retrieve a dozen crates with Fat Man shells that our technicians have started to construct. I must say, you did an outstanding job”

“Then I’m glad our efforts weren’t for nothing” I nodded, wincing as the Knight-Captain prodded at my sore ribs, muttering to himself about being more cautious when out in the field.

“I’m glad that’s you feel that way, although our mission here has only just begun. It is nor the time nor the place to discuss such pressing matters, Knight”

“As much as I appreciate the personal visit, why do I feel like you are here to be the barer of bad news?” Solemn, he looked between Cade and Danse, as if he was regretting what he might have to say.

“Indeed, Knight. Knight-Captain Cade informs me that you made the speediest recovery. However due to the circumstance and your ongoing injury, I cannot permit you back into the field”

Excuse me?

“I must have misheard you, Elder … did you say I wasn’t going back into the field?” Panicked and meeting Danse’s calm brown eyes, pleading for him to understand, I shook my head in confusion – the sudden movement tugging at my shoulder sending a stinging pain down my spine which I attempted to hide … poorly it may have seemed.

“I take no pleasure in placing you on an out of action period, Knight. As I am sure your commanding officer would agree, ensuring your full recovery is top priority while we explore alternative avenues of uncovering the Institute’s whereabouts”

“Paladin Danse, this is ridiculous. Surely you must see this isn’t going to help in any way!”

“Knight Quinn lower your voice,” Danse’s deep and soothing voice seemed too out of place here, I felt less like a soldier and more like a piece of glass, they were too afraid I would break.

“No, you don’t understand. I can’t be cooped up in here, it will drive me completely insane. I need to be on the ground, doing something, anything!” Pleading, I returned my wide-eyed gaze back to the Elder, hoping that he would understand.

“I am not completely revoking your privileges, Knight. You are simply on bed rest until Knight-Captain Cade advises otherwise. I cannot have one of my more promising soldiers further injuring themselves”

No. No way. I couldn’t be held up in here like a damned hostage. I wouldn’t stand for it, I’d find a way out. Anger coursed through me as I crossed my arms, glad that Cade had pulled the needle from my hand and bandaged it up so I could fold them tightly into myself.

“Its for the best, Valery” Danse tried, and I glared at him past the burning rage that seeped through every bone in my body, red hot fury that seemed to boil the air around my fiery red hair.

“Fine. Don’t be surprised if I find a way out”

“I find that highly doubtful, Knight. I’ll station guards at every exit point and assign someone to follow your every move” his smug smile and quirk of his thick brow fuelled the rage further. This is the game he wanted to play? Fine, I’d play. But never would I ever say I’d play fair.

“Have it your way” I mumbled as Cade finished up his minor examination and filled in some extra
paperwork. The Elder turned to leave, before sliding on his toes and looking back at myself and the Paladin, eyes determined as he hid the smirk that played at his lips once again.

“For your safety,” he began, a finger raising to his chin in the coyest way he could manage, “might I suggest you relocate the Paladin Danse’s quarters for your O.O.A. period? I do believe all of your belongings are already stored in there. I’ll leave you to your speedy recovery, Knight Quinn. Paladin, Knight-Captain” he nodded to each of the gentlemen in the room before swiftly leaving like pompous asshole he was. It must have been the coat, it made him look like he had the most inflated ego.

“Your shoulder has taken some severe damage, Knight, under any normal circumstance – that wound on your shoulder should have killed you and would take another few weeks before it scars over with the aid of a few stimpacks” Knight-Captain Cade started, eyes lifting from the paperwork he held in his hands as he re-approached the gurney.

Huffing the strand of vibrant red hair that fell across my eyes, I heard the chair in the corner screech as Danse stood, his eyes shallow and cautious as he approached both the medic and I.

“I understand, now more than ever, why you would not wish to be held aboard the Prydwen, Knight. Elder Maxson is responsible for this as much as I, and you are still severely injured,”

I had told him about the vault, about being trapped for so long by my superiors. How could he do this?

Sliding off of the bed, I sulked my way down the cold metal hallway and waited for Danse to open the door.

It wasn’t highly decorated, I’d suspected that he wouldn’t have much stashed away in here. A few wooden crates, ammunition boxes, rusted out metal cabinet and safe lined one wall, lockers and a lone bed sitting across the back. The sheets were black, curt and professional as always, with a singled fluffed up pillow laying atop it to break the contrast. The room was made of the same steel as the rest of the ship, no surprise at all. The desk lay bare of any non-essentials, with a terminal, slow spinning fan and a discarded mess hall tray sitting to the side of the metal surface. It didn’t surprise me to see the vodka and whisky bottle sitting beside the terminal with a lone mug. A filing cabinet tucked between a small counter and the desk drew my attention, no doubt filled to the brim with the overly analytical reports that Danse tended to write.

The counter held minor equipment, a small blouse lunch pail sat beside a dirt covered toolbox, a few wrenches and bolts thrown carelessly onto the space as if they had been discarded in frustration. Nuka-cola, most likely long warm, accompanied by a stimpack sat on the cool metal bench. In overlooking the room, I could have missed the duffel bag and metal container so like my own storage space on the ship tucked away in the corner, more liquor bottles discarded in a makeshift trash can beside three more tall lockers to my left.

“Gee, Danse. I didn’t expect you to have so much stuff” I laughed, eyes rolling as I spied the dog bowl in the corner. A frown overtook his features as I hobbled my way down to the desk chair and plonked unceremoniously with a smile, hiding the wince as I jarred my hip and ribs.

A gruff grunt came from his general direction as I looked to the military bag containing whatever I had accumulated in my journey and smiled faintly at the patchwork of material that covered that olive green below.

“I should leave you to get your affairs in order” pale green eyes flickering to him, something nagged at my brain.
“There’s only one bunk, I don’t want to kick you out of your own room Danse”

“It is fine, I’ve relocated all of my essentials to another bunk while you recover from your injuries”

Not that I was ever under the impression that we would be sharing a room…

… it’d just be nice to have some company while I wasn’t in the field.
The last four days had been hell, thankfully the awfully tight flight suit wasn’t tugging as hard on my a sore spots as it was the first day I put it back on.

I had resigned to sitting in the workshop while the crews moved out under the command of each Proctor; Quinlan sending troops out for technical documents, Teagan for fresh food and preserved rations, Ingram searching for more coolants and mechanical parts. Even Lancer-Captain Kells training new scribes on boots-on-the-ground training. Damned children and incompetent fiddling teenagers were off having more adventures than I was.

Elder Maxson kept a close eye on me, I’d have to be an idiot to miss his intense glare from the deck above me while I worked on my new laser pistol and its modifications, his careful gaze as I attempted to work my way up to a jog around each of the metal catwalks and finally how he strode through the mess hall every evening when I had sat down for my dinner.

Some of the soldiers aboard threw comments under their breath, joking about how the ‘teachers pet’ was being overthrown.

Knight-Captain Cade filled in his reports, mentioning how I was recovering much faster than he expected once again, poking and prodding my injuries to see how much I’d wince or if I’d hiss under my breath. I knew each of the reports he wrote on my condition were going straight to my two superiors, to Elder Maxson and Danse. I had seen as much when the terminal on Danse’s desk would flash to life at the same time every day. I wasn’t an expert hacker, but I had no desire in cracking his terminal code.

He was going out of his way to avoid me, I knew it. He was off on the ground with some new initiate on our team, who was apparently advancing at a rapid rate.

I hadn’t had the pleasure of running into them yet, between my morning workout trying to push my body in whatever confined space I was trapped in, tinkering with my power armour, compiling modifications for my weapon and filling in my downtime with a nap or two … it didn’t leave much space to meet someone who only debriefed the Elder and Lancer-Captain with Paladin Danse in tow before they deployed back to the airport.

Maxson stayed true to his word, the Knight who almost never left her power armour on the flight deck had given me a stern talking to when I asked to go out and get some fresh air. Of course she had insisted under Maxson’s orders to accompany me to the end of the catwalk and back before going back inside.

He had been busy with talk of the Institute, tracking where they were appearing and whatever encounters our masses had with them. From what I heard every encounter was hostile, with minor casualties on our side. I doubted Maxson knew I could hear him through the small port holes in Danse’s room, each and every meeting held in confidentiality seemed to echo across the steel floor and and bounce across the walls. It mightn’t of helped that I conveniently sat there and read my Tesla Science magazines that I borrowed from Proctor Quinlan.

No new headway had been made with their whereabouts, but apparently the shiny new recruit had some connections in Diamond City with some detective he had saved from the Boston Common.
I sat at the workbench, screwdriver in hand as my tongue snuck out through my lips as I carefully secured the new amplifier to the fusion chamber within the pistol, the mess of metal shavings and assorted parts strewn across the table mixed with all kinds of tools and apparatus hoping to aid in the construction as I lined up the beam-focuser with the barrel of the pistol.

The radio beside me was horrifically classical, the sound grating against my eardrums like nails on a drywall as the strings of sound distracted me from my work. Tuning the radio over to Travis, confusion struck me as I tilted my head to the sultry smooth voice that slid from the speaker.

“Is that … Travis? It can’t be!” I asked, more to myself than anyone else as I slammed a fist down onto the box to assure it wasn’t malfunctioning, the charismatic voice continued.

“Comin’ to you almost-live from Diamond City, I’m your host Travis ‘Lonely’ Miles and this – Is Diamond City Radio”

The tune of Cole Porter twanged over the radio, the sounds momentarily distracting me from the confused well of emotions swirling in my gut. Travis was always the shy, reserved guy who was too afraid to step on toes, who never really left his caravan unless it was urgent and who would never have spoken with such ease at the drop of a hat.

What the hell was going on with the world?

Pushing back the long strand of hair that fell across my face, I finished lining up the fine tuned beam focuser with the barrel and screwed the bolts into place once more, assuring that the safety was indeed on before looking down the reduced barrel size as the light glinted on the small refractor inside. A shake and a satisfied smirk later, I went back to my quarters and reported to Cade for the usual 11:00 am medical checkup.

“Morning, Knight-Captain” I greeted as he clicked away at his terminal, cheek turning with a small smile as he gestured to the gurney beside the one I had almost died on.

“And how are we feeling today, Knight Quinn?”

“Considerably better after a week of bed rest, Knight-Captain Cade”

“Would you mind?” He asked, gesturing to the zips and clips on my flight suit. My skilled fingers made short work of removing the flight suit and tucking it around my waist where my white singlet met my hips, shining new dog tags clinking at the movement. His reaction to the speed in which I was healing was always a cause for concern, my excuse always ready if he ever chose to discuss how and why I wasn’t dead.

“The bruises are almost gone, which is a good sign for the internal hemorrhaging. As I apply pressure I need you to rate it on a scale of one to ten, the lower end being no pain at all and higher being excruciating”

“Of course, Knight-Captain”

With a nod he set out to poking around the yellowing bruises on my shoulder, a small wince creased my brows as he looked up waiting for an answer.

“Two”

“Hmm” he hummed before making his way down to my ribs and feeling around at the mended bone, the sensation of the pushing and prodding barely hurting as his fingers pressed in deeper and deeper probing for a reaction.
“Interesting…” he hummed once again before turning to face his terminal to document the report. Pulling the zip back up to my chest and neck, securing the buckle and adjusting the last bits of the flight suit I waited as the click of the keys stopped.

“Well, Knight, I see no reason why you cannot return to the field after today. I’ll inform the Elder of your stability and that you may resume your duties as before. Ad Victoriam, Knight”

A small smile tugged at my lips as I rushed from the medical bay, towards the room that Danse had allowed me to stay in. Grabbing for the bomber jacket that lay across the back of his desk chair, I turned to the door once more and raced for the cool, heavy leaver. Twisting it down, I made my way out into the warmly lit hallway before practically sliding down the black metal ladder in my haste for fresh air.

Casting a cautious glance into the command deck, I was almost surprised to note the Elder’s absence, the space where he usually stood debriefing soldiers and issuing commands seemed unusually empty with nothing more than the flecks of dust to dance in his place.

A lone scribe sat with a heavy duty wielding mask, soldering a beam that had come loose, humming to himself as the reflective sparks shone across the visor. It seemed as though everyone was just as bored as each other.

Glad I wasn’t the only one.

My boots barely made a sound as I carefully trekked down to the sub level of the deck, stopping just before the second flight that would take me to the bridge where more attention would be thrust upon myself.

Careful to avoid triggering any unwanted attention, my form slinked along the side of the locker bay, breath bursting in my lungs as I dared not to make a sound before I reached the heavy metal door to the Prydwen’s fore-deck.

Fresh air and the smell of dirt carrying on rain washed across my features, filling my lungs as I let the breath that threatened to implode my being moments before slip past my teeth in a quiet hiss.

A week cooped up in this damned airship was killing me, I tried my best to stay hard at my work, filling my terminal with my meaningless day to day tasks and all for what? So the Elder would maybe send me back into the field. Cade had cleared me, I could be back on the ground within the next day if only I held my patience.

The loud humming of the engines filled my ears as I hooked my fingers around the hand railing of the metal giant that I was calling home for now, rainfall slowly collecting on my long fingers as I looked out across the rough waters below. Though the haze I could make out the South-Boston shoreline, never before noticing the large docks nor the pentagon shaped ruins off to the left. I wondered briefly what could have once existed there, before turning my attention to the vertibird below that departed from the airport and up to the ship.

Back inside, it wasn’t long before my stomach started to rumble - my pip-boy long left in Danse’s room – so I made my way to the mess in hopes of wrangling a soup or some noodles in a cup.

My footsteps carried me to the crowded room, noise filling my ears as it seemed most of those who were off duty or on a break Had the same idea as me and each occupied a space within the room sipping their cans of water and eating their meals. Without looking I walked forward,
“Oof,” the breath knocked from my lungs as I walked into something much more solid than I, eyes glaring up with obscenities on the tip of my tongue as my feet stomped back onto the metal flooring.

“And just what—”

Brown eyes looked down at me from a metal frame, their guarded and scolding frown disappeared only to be placed by a look of guilt.

“Da—I mean, Paladin Danse. How nice to see you up on the Prydwen again” I sputtered, eyes wide as I looked at the metal chest plate before me, a few new scratches and dents in its thick shield.

“It is good to back aboard, Knight Quinn. How is your recovery?”

“Well, everything is good. Knight-Captain Cade is discussing my return to duty with the Elder so I should be back in the field in a few days. How were things … on the ground?” Hesitance overtook me as I stared at my feet, a pang jabbing at my gut as I awaited his response.

“Another successful mission, the recon led us on a mission to uncover the whereabouts of the last squad that touched down before we arrived in the Commonwealth. Paladin Brandis should be joining us once again thanks to Knight Whitehall”

“Whitehall?” I asked, peering up at him through my dark lashes, confusion across my eyes as the paladin moved out of the way and a hulking man in the most peculiarly familiar suit carried two bowls of stew in his broad hands. He stood taller than I, easily rivalling Danse’s six foot frame. Dark hair swept in the most obvious military cut possible, the sides clipped short with a small mess of straight hair swept to the side in a lackluster mess. Vibrant blue assisted my eyes, the yellow lining splitting the junction of his hips and centre of his chest. The heavy machinery that sat on his left wrist was the final clue in, nobody had those unless they came from a vault in these parts.

“That’s Knight Whitehall” his deep voice corrected, the rasp of it settling on my skin like a rash as I frowned and looked between the two.

“So this is the new recruit?” I asked, short and curt.

*Was he replacing me with another vault dweller?*

“Affirmative, Elder Maxson has assigned him to our team in an effort to aid our search for the Institute”

“Okay. So what did you learn while you were out and about?” My eyes pointedly stared at the man before me, skeptical of whatever was about to pass his lips.

“A friend of mine in Diamond City helped me track down a Merc in the western region of the Commonwealth, Kellogg. Apparently there is an establishment in Goodneighbour that may be able to divulge more information, however the mission will require my associate’s attendance to get anywhere” he was the military type, the build and the shadow in his eyes said as much. The deep furrow in his brows at the mention of the mercenary but returned to a passive state as he continued to speak.

“Once we are finished here, we are due to meet with the Elder to report and request an airdrop to Diamond City to meet this acquaintance of Knight Whitehall’s”

“Someone’s been busy, it seems”
“Indeed…” hesitance filled the air as Danse finally looked down into my eyes, the same guilty guard dog look tugging at his brows as his lip quirked up.

“I guess I’ll go move my stuff” nowhere near enough to fill the air, but a start as I turned to face the hallway leading out, only stopping as a hand wrapped at my wrist.

“It is good to see you on your feet soldier” his awkward smile fluttered my stomach, before I gave a small nod and walked back to the room to gather my things.

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I watched as she turned and left, regret filing me as my gut cried for me to tell her how I missed her ludicrous humour on recon, how her unusual skill with a fishing hook and fighting style far outweighed the dry and mundane commentary.

But protocol would not allow it.

The Brotherhood came first, there was no room to manoeuvre around the rules that we each abide by.

‘There’s Brotherhood, then there’s everything else. Nothing in between’ I reminded myself.

So I had no choice but to watch her stiff frame walk away with quick steps as I turned to the armour bay with the new recruit.

The knight had discussed the need to travel to Diamond City and Goodneighbour, how his detective friend could aid our search for The Institute. He had walked up to our defences at the airport while Quinn and I had been at Fort Strong, and was not long after drafted into the Brotherhood.

Elder Maxson was pleased with his previous experience with battlefield strategies and that he knew his way around laser weapons. The knight had explained in their first briefing about his past, making no effort to hide his identity as he climbed aboard the ship in his offending blue vault suit.

Something told me it would be less offensive to see that same suit on Knight Quinn.

The distraction of her past life seemed to draw me away from my work and the conversation being had with the man before me, the stretched out 111 across his back shining under the caged fluorescents in the workshop glinting in my eyes as I turned back to my suit of armour before me, the wrench tightening the last few bolts with a satisfied hum.

Work had always kept my mind off of things, but leaving my team behind was taxing…

… leaving her …

A frown set into my brows as I moved to the side of the armour, working on securing the shoulder pieces to the frame below with a few turns of a screw and a couple of jabs from a hammer, the steel bent out of shape from the death claw that showed up when the new knight and I arrived at the bunker.

The ship was practically teeming with life, everyone on edge waiting for news and developments
on our mission – it was easy to read in the scribes, who fussed over their old technologies, the initiates who obsessed over their duties in cleaning and training. Of all the voices, and of all the footsteps aboard it was somehow easier for him to pick up on her light pace, eyes glancing up at just the right time as she passed by the wooden storage crates and towards the science scribes division of the ship, what she was doing was beyond me, but I was almost curious enough to follow.

Knight Whitehall caught my attention as he pushed to see the Elder, reporting back about Brandis and the lead in Diamond City. A resigning sigh, I placed the driver where it belonged and made my way behind the newest addition to my team making our way to the command deck to rendezvous with Maxson.

“Paladin Danse, Knight Whitehall. I understand you are coming to report your success in enlisting Paladin Brandis’ help in our fight against the Institute” the Elder began, his arms held tightly behind his back in the usual stance he took when addressing those under his command.

“Indeed, Paladin Danse and I convinced him to rejoin the Brotherhood of Steel in our fight to liberate the Commonwealth” The knight spoke up, his eyes beaming with pride as he discussed the mission.

“Outstanding. Still, we are still chasing any leads in regards to the Institutes location. It is my understanding that the organisation known as The Railroad may have some form of knowledge about the mechanical abominations that find themselves on the surface, as they have refuge camps for the sympathisers and synths alike. Where they are, we do not now, our forces on the ground have their ears to the ground”

“Sir, The Railroad may not be the lead we need at this stage of the mission. I have found something that an associate of mine thinks may be the clue to finding the Institute”

“As a part of our mission, would we be able to secure a transport to the outskirts of both cities, Elder?” I offered, rather than demanding. I was sure we could least make it to one of these major destinations unharmed in an area as populated by whatever aberrations the war had created in its bowels.

“I can see to it that you land safely on the outskirts of Diamond City, but you shall have to find your own passage to that ghoul infested neighbourhood. In order to return, might I suggest you put these vertibird signal grenades to good use. Find an open space before throwing it, as the bird will need to collect you and return you to the Prydwen”

“Thank-you, sir” I bowed my head, daring not to leave until told so.

“It has also come to my attention that Knight Quinn has recovered enough health under Cade’s supervision. I wish for her to rejoin your team and depart with the two of you on this mission to Diamond City and Goodneighbour. A word of caution, as you represent the Brotherhood, your presence in both cities may cause hairs to stand on end. Might I suggest you take packs for your journey with civilian clothing to ease suspicion of our mission in the Commonwealth?” His head cocked to the side, the obvious distaste for letting his soldiers venture into the more heavily populated areas setting him on edge.

“Knight Quinn is quite familiar with the Boston Common, and has sufficient knowledge on camouflaging with the general populous. I believe she will be an outstanding addition to this mission”

A nod from the Elder tells him all he needs to know.
Quinn is wanted on this mission. He trusts her watching my back almost as much as I did.

“I will debrief Knight Quinn while you two get equipped with whatever you require for this mission. Dismissed”

Turning on my heel, I didn’t wait for the knight to follow. My only concern was packing my things and getting a decent nights rest after three days off my home.

Setting down on my bunk, sadness lurched in my gut as I surveyed the empty room with no trace that Quinn was even here. Lying back on the mattress, the smell of fresh soap and fragrant flowers filled the air.

... my pillows smelt like her.

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“You called for me, Elder?” It’s not every day you’re summoned to the command deck after a week off of duty. Nervous energy teemed in my fingertips as I fidgeted with the zips on the flight suit behind my back, teeth chewing through my lip as I rocked on my heels.

“As you are aware, Knight-Captain Cade has given you a clean bill of health – a miraculous feat in his eyes. He has cleared you for duty with no real cause for concern, so I am assigning you back to your recon team. Your mission leads you, in this fight against the institute, to Diamond City and Goodneighbour” his steel eyes gazed upon me, a lump in my throat as I frowned for a moment.

“I’m… going to Diamond City?”

“Is that a problem, Knight?”

The alternative of sitting on this damned ship crossed my mind…

“Not at all. I spent a few years there” I spoke with a sad smile, memories of my life threatening to invade my mind.

“Then you will have no problem blending with the locals. I … understand this week out of action has taken a toll on you. I do not understand how you pulled through what would have killed three of my strongest soldiers, but I am … glad to see you back on your feet”

“Thank-you, sir”

“I do not usually apologise, although I must admit it was a reckless order on my behalf. A team consisting of more than my finest Paladin and Knight should have been deployed, although Danse tells me you both had the mission under control until he neglected to check his six” worry seemed to flash across his features, a note overshadowed by his words.

“It’s okay” … finest Paladin and Knight? I think I blushed.

“It is not. Your injury could have been avoided, had I not sent a two-man-team to eliminate every mutant on that island. You have my sincerest apologies, Knight. As you will be back in the public eye, we do not want the citizens of these two prominent cities to feel threatened by our presence. I believe Proctor Teagan has some less notable wares that you may use while down in the
Commonwealth. Your vertibird leaves at 08:00 hours sharp.”

“I’ll be sure to pack my things immediately and prepare for this mission, Elder”

“I am sure you will, Knight. Ad Victoriam”

“Ad Victoriam” our fists closed over our chests and a silent bow exchanged before I turned to the ladder before me and climbed to the deck above. I couldn’t resist the temptation to look across to Danse’s closed door and feel a small smile spread on my lips as I thought about going down to Diamond City with him … and that toss pot Whitehall. Something about his temperament disturbed me, I just couldn’t put my finger on what it was.

Teagan sat, bored as ever with his gloved fingers tapping on the scratched surface below, brows shooting up as I approached his small goodies cage.

“Good afternoon, Knight. What can I do you for?” His broad smile and warm eyes earned a playful smile from me, a gleam in my eye as I stared at the small pile of clothing on the back bench.

“I’m going to need some new gear”

Chapter End Notes

Oh Danse you cute potato
Deafening ringing sounded in my ears as I slung my backpack across my shoulder, the long red hair that sat in a neat ponytail moments ago now thrashed in the autumn wind like hissing snakes, threatening to steal my line of sight as I strode down the small flight of stairs onto the swaying catwalk below.

“Knight Quinn, how nice of you to join us” Whitehall smirked, a frown tugging at my brows as I reminded myself not to smack the grin off of his face. I resigned with a huff of contempt and walked past him.

Danse was discussing drop off points with the lancer, searching for the opportunity to place down the bird somewhere open and less populated.

“Might I suggest we land here?” The new knight pointed to the Global Positioning System installed onto the vertibird, it looked to be a small clearing across a set of train tracks that would have a clear shot to DC if we walked with haste.

“That will work. Do you have the signal grenades?” The lancer called over the whining of the wind and groaning of the vertibird’s engines. The knight pulled three thin grenades from his pack, nodding as the lancer turned back to his controls.

Strapping into the vertibird’s seat, my fingers struggled to get the clip to meet in the middle as it strained against the layers of Wastelander clothing that covered my body against both the wind and whatever threats may have been on the ground.

“Oh for fu—” I started, eyes glaring at the ceiling as the button refused to clip. Two strong hands grabbed at the buckles before clipping them together with ease, a knowing smirk accompanied by soft brown eyes settled my stomach as I looked up at Paladin Danse and nodded my appreciation.

Teagan had found some Wastelander garb in his possession, a dirty brown button up along with some very scuffed jeans. It wasn’t until I was about to turn and leave that I noticed the long brown overcoat and green scarf that sat in a box off to the side. The thick brown belt I wore managed to hold it all in place, and I was surprised enough to find that my pip-boy fit over the sleeves if I tucked them in properly.

Wearing the pip-boy wouldn’t have given me away to anyone that still lived in Diamond City, the only two people I had ever really gotten into friendships with were Piper and John. God knew where John was these days, or if he even survived what the radiation drug had done to his body, but I had no doubts at all that Piper would still be writing her newspaper and shoving the press down
their throats.

As the small vertibird deployed, accompanied with the sickening drop in my gut, I played around on the small screen of the pip, smiling as I topped the knights high score in some game called ‘Zeta Invaders’, he said something about being unhappy with my limited experience beating his endless hours of hard work.

The smell of smog was thick in the air as we neared our landing zone, hardly inconspicuous had anyone been looking our way. Rattling as the engines slowed and we rocketed down to the dusty floor below, I looped my pack across my shoulder once more and sprung from the vertibird with a quick huff of air.

“Come on, boys” I laughed as they carefully made their way off of the metallic air shuttle and turned to face the open walkway down to the giant green barricade that surrounded the old baseball stadium.

Guards patrolled the same way they had before, butterflies knotting in my stomach as I thought back to the countless times I walked into this place, the traveler’s I had met and was almost surprised to see many of the patrolmen carrying the guns I had modified for them so many years ago.

It had been so long, a lifetime ago, when I had first been let into this place, when I had made my shop and earned my way. But that was a different me, at least it felt like it one compared to now, standing the shortest of our trio and staring up at the vaulted walls that surrounded the city within.

“That gate is shut, how are we supposed to get inside?” Danse asked. I flashed a knowing smile before the built body of the knight pushed past me and pushed the intercom to life.

“Who is it?” The static asked, a bored and monotonous voice crackling.

“Nathan Whitehall, here to see Nick Valentine?”

“Yes, uh, I don’t know a Nathan what-ch-a-ma-call-it Whitehall. Unless you’re here to do some trading, I suggest you be on your way, pal”

“You listen here Sullivan,” ... Sullivan? “I’m not the only one out here. I’d really appreciate if you. Let. Us. In” anger gave way to his voice, I swore I could see the veins popping out of the tanned skin that covered the knight’s forehead.

I cleared my throat and stepped forward, Danse’s cautious eyes on me as I leaned down into the intercom.

“Sullivan? As in Danny Sullivan?”

“Yes, what’s it to you?” He asked back over the static, hesitating for a beat.

“Its Val! You know from the old workshop in town – how are you, mate?” I smiled as I leaned in closer to the intercom, a breath of recognition filling the static before it buzzed to life again.

“Valery, is that really you? We ain’t seen your face in these parts for years!” His voice muffled for a second but I could only just make out what he said, “hey, Pat open up the gates! Val’s back for a visit!”

“How did you…?” the knight questioned, my eyes glaring back over at him as I stood with a self-satisfied smirk.
“You’ve gotta know the locals”

The familiar screech of the gate opening grated on my ears, as a figure behind emerged from the shadows throwing a bear hug around my shoulders.

“Its been a while! I thought you’d be dead” the shaggy haired man cried as he looked down my figure to assure himself I was still in one piece, “But look at ‘ya, you’re even more grown up than the last time I seen ‘ya!”

“Ah, Sully. How’s that pistol going for you?”

“Ain’t never led me astray once, thanks to you,” he beamed, showing the work I had done on his gun years before – glancing up to look over at Danse and Whitehall with an amused grin, “and these must be your traveling companions. Keep and eye on that one, will ya?” he muttered as he nodded to the mysterious man on our squad. A curt nod later and we were ascending the cracked concrete stairs to the alcove looking down onto the scrap pile known as Diamond City.

A huff of breath came from beside me as I looked up at Danse to see him beaming down at me with a smile past the thick black scarf he wore similarly to mine draped across his shoulders and neck.

“I am quite impressed Valery”

“Well thanks Danse” I laughed, mocking a punch into his rippled shoulder before we descended the stairs.

A helpless smile tugged at my lips and broke into a full grin as the echoing creek of the city roared to life in the cold wind, the sound on a sound loop as it carried from one end to the other. The same overhead lights stood proud among the washed out rusty orange and green colours that filled the city, the smell of monoxide filling the air accompanied by a growing black smoke that piped out of the famous power noodles stand in the heart of the city.

Immediately the most heartwarming sight caught my eye, the bright green sign that told me the old girl was still churning out her news stories.

“Piper!” I called, the red leather jacket turning to face me, warm brown hair spilling across her cheeks and those hazel green eyes flashing past that astoundingly horrid purple press cap of hers.

“Valery?”

“Piper!” I called, laughing as I rushed to meet her with an open armed hug.

“Oh god you scared me to death! I never thought you’d come back after that whole… incident” she coughed, sighing into the hug as her arms relaxed as we stood.

“I’m actually not here on … personal business. Our ‘friend’ brought us here” her eyes darted behind me as I tuck my thumb over to the stick in the mud with the pip-boy.

“Jesus Christ, BLUE! What are you doing back here so soon?”

“Wait you two know each other?” The strong voice sounded from beside me as Danse approached the gathering, heat radiating off of his arm as he stood particularly close to me.

“Nathan came to town a few weeks back looking for someone. Old Nicky helped him track a lead and we were waiting on where to go next to get those bastards over at the Institute” she spoke with
such determination, a quality I admired in her which seemed to only get more and more prominent the older she became.

“Speaking of which, shouldn’t we get a move on?” Whitehall spoke, looking down at Piper with something I could only categorise as … longing.

It would be rude to say, but it almost looked like he had a bit of a crush on her.

Was it going to be too harsh if I told him the only long-term relationship she would ever be apart of was the one with her printing press?

I decided to let it go with a shrug of my shoulders, promising to come back and catch up before we left to skip over to our next stop.

Nathan led us foreward, and I had to admit that not even I knew where a detective could hide in a place like this – there hadn’t been one when I was last in town, so it seemed prudent to think he would be located around the back end. Passing the faded-out sight that read ‘security’, we slowly made out way to third street where a big neon sign that read ‘detective’ stood on the side of the pole.

“Huh,” I frowned as we took a sharp turn down third street and moved towards the second sign that read ‘Valentine Detective Agency’. Odd advertising.

We stepped past the red metal door, the smell of cigarettes and broken dreams filling my nostrils as I tried to waft away the smells, I could see that Danse was equally as uncomfortable with the situation as I. Nathans hand started over to Danse’s shoulder as he waited for the detective to come around the corner, his voice hushed as he said,

“Now, I need you not to freak out, Valentine is a s—”

“SYNTH” Danse spat, eyes narrowed into dark slits as the machine rounded the corner, his hands shooting for where he would have his loaded rifle only to stop short as my hand raced for his to steady it, a stern look in my eyes as I muttered under my breath,

“We need these guys to help us find The Institute” I hissed, clinging to his side enough to calm him down as he suspiciously eyed the mechanical man and the knight sat down at a smaller desk and began discussing plans of attack over some gadget that lay on the desk.

“I actually came to ask for some help over at Amari’s. I spoke to her with some … associates of ours. We all seemed to agree that that device may hold the key to getting in and out of The Institute”

“You know, we may not need the man at all” the metal detective started, his eyes shifting from Danse to the knight, the crumpled fedora atop his head dipping so that the violently bright lights of his eyes were covered for a moment, as if in thought.

“I beg your pardon?” Chirping, three sets of eyes … well two sets of eyes and flashing yellow peered at me before returning to the detective.

“There’s a place in Goodneighbour called The Memory Den. Relive the past moments in your mind as clear as they happened. I’m in agreement with those associates, if anyone could get a dead brain to sing, it’ll be doctor Amari, the mind behind the memories”

Danse’s cautious eyes peered down at me before he stepped forward, the scowl on his features prominent even as he moved away from the robot before us.
“When do we depart?”

Whitehall looked across, his brows furrowed in thought.

“Tomorrow, 08:00 hours. I suggest we gather some intel and supplies before we make our way over to Goodneighbour.”

Looking around the sparsely decorated room between the two men and … synth … I spied the rusted red door we entered through and cleared my throat.

“I know the guys who run the Inn here, I’ll try and get us all a few rooms”

“No need to worry about a bunk for me, I’ve got a place to crash”

Shrugging it off and discussing further details about the mission, it wasn’t long before the distaste Danse felt towards the synth was becoming more and more palpable in the air.

“Lets split up, if you go get some supplies for Goodneighbour, I’ll go sort out a few rooms for the night” I suggested, clutching Danse’s arm in Ernest and pulling him from the small detective agency. The city was a sea of noise as travellers and traders alike moved through the each of the market stalls, merchants pedaling their wares to anyone who would care to listen.

Being back after so much time away… it almost felt like home.

The door that once held my workshop stood cluttered with boxes and scrap metal, it was obvious that nobody really attempted to occupy the space once I had left it behind after the election.

A pang of guilt struck my heart as I thought about the girl who just wanted to make her way in life, forced to call upon the ruthless training of Vault-Tec.

“Once the mission is complete?” He asked, nodding to the cul-de-sac of a marketplace.

“Meet up back at Power Noodles?” With a shrug and a nod, we parted ways. The back alley was as brightly lit as it had ever been, some things truly never changed no matter how much time had passed.

“Yefim, you worry too much” the thick Eastern European accent filled the small tunnel as I entered the Dugout Inn, the pipes humming with electricity as I passed into the open lodging.

“Vadim, you worry not enough”

“Bah! You need drink to loosen up, brother”

Dust in the air fluttered past my form, settling on the patrons who either sat drinking from clouded glasses or hid behind the dated ‘Bugles. A warm smile on my lips as I approached the twins who stood squabbling with one another divided by the old oak benches that made up the Dugout’s bar. Petrified Brahmin heads stood tall upon the wall, a watchful eye over the crowd with no thought for how utterly gruesome they seemed.

“What’s new boys?” The words seemed to dance in the air as recognition sparked in their eyes, their heads moving simultaneously as they looked towards me.

“Valery?”

“It’s been a while” I laughed as Vadim bounded out from behind his bar to encase me in a bone shattering bear hug, a hefty laugh rumbling through the concreted walls as he pulled back to look
down at me.

“What can I do for you, old friend? Maybe some’tink to drink?” He offered, the same warm smile stretching across his lips as he patted my back hard enough to knock the wind from my lungs.

“I was wondering if you had any rooms available?”

“This, I can do,” Yefim smiled, looking down at the battered old clipboard in his hands, “I only have one room. I give you, no charge Valery”

“No, no. I wont cheat you out of the caps, Yefim. Let me pay for it” I laughed, grabbing the small satchel of caps stashed in my pocket as I handed it to him.

“I insist, it has been long time since we seen you, old friend” he laughed, eyes crinkling at the corners with age. I poked my finger at him, shooting him a wink as I lightly tossed the satchel into the air and caught it again before looking back at him.

“You know, I’m going to just sneak this in to your room later right?” Joking, I threw the satchel on the bench and watched as Vadim rolled his eyes and slid it under the counter.

“Take room down in back, number three. Is the best mattresses we have” Yefim smiled, noting down the residency on the clipboard before crossing his arms and rolling his eyes at another outlandish story Vadim began to tell.

Leaving the establishment knowing full well that the brothers were going to send food and drink to the room despite my insisting they not, I left with a smile on my face as I walked back into the marketplace. Danse was nowhere in sight as a strong wind blew through the open space, tendrils of red cascading across my eyes as I followed them towards the left.

The super salon was hardly busy, with a few patrons moving in and out of the small wooden shack and sitting on the worn red leather couch talking among themselves as they waited for their haircuts.

“Well, I never” the breathy voice called as she looked up from her pair of scissors, “I ain’t seen you round here in a long time”

“Hey Cathy” I greeted her with a wide, beaming smile. “Where’s John?”

“Off on an errand at Bunker Hill – we ran out of a few supplies so its just me this week. What can I do you for, ‘darlin?”

I gestured to my mess of hair, and her eyes lit up.

“I guess I need a cut”

“Just a trim, same as always?” She smiled, looking back down to the woman’s hair before her and snipping off the last little bit.

“I’m thinking… maybe a little more of a cut?” With a wink, she pulled me into the chair after bidding the woman before her a good day and taking her caps.

Cathy looked down at me with a smile as she cleaned the scissors and looked at me in the small dirty mirror before us.

“Lets get to work, shall we?”
An hour later Danse emerged from the marketplace, his pack full of supplies and ammunition for the course of the next couple of days. My boots carried me down the steps of the salon, waving goodbye to Cathy as I tucked a stray strand of hair behind my ear only to have it stop so despairingly short I couldn’t help but stare at the incredibly short locks that curled around my shoulders.

His brown eyes rose to find me as I skipped over to him, widening as he realised who it was that stood before him.

“Your hair …” his deep voice seemed to have slowed with time as he took in the lack of hair that sprouted from my head.

“Yeah?”

“I mean to say … I like your hair. It suits you this way”

“I’ll take that, I’ve never really cut my hair – what with the Vault and everything”

“That makes sense, but did you not leave the vault years ago?”

“It just never felt right to cut it. I suppose I’m ready to move past it all and look towards the future” I spoke with a smile as we discussed the supplies he found, running an inventory as the day drew on and the sun began to sink below the horizon. Whitehall found us with Piper in tow, our conversation growing as the crowds started to pull away from the marketplace, hands warmed despite the chill in the air as we huddled around the old counter-tops of Power Noodles, Piper happily slurping away at the flavourful bowl of broth and noodles. Danse had grown progressively more irritated with each question posed by Takahashi, until he had finally given up and conceded to saying yes and accepting the warm bowl of goodness.

We each sat laughing about the wastelands, reminiscing about first encounters of every kind while slowly draining the bottle of whiskey I had flagged from Scarlett over at the Dugout. Keen eyes watched as Piper leaned into Nate a few too many times, the way his eyes cast over at her with a slight smile on his lips. I shook my head and laughed into my bowl as I brought the crooked silver fork to my lips and pulled the small bundle of noodles into my mouth.

“You should have read the article she did on me…” he was laughing, eyes crinkling at the side with age as he gestured around in the air, Piper more likely blushing at the remark than the booze.

“Hey, hey, hey. When a 200 year old relic walks into your office – how can you not ask a few questions?”

Wait. What?

“You’re … 200 years old?” I asked, peering up into the harsh brown eyes of the knight before me.

“A bit over 242 actually”

“How… is that even possible?”
Hesitation caught his eye before he coughed into the back of his hand.

“I guess everyone in the city already knows. I was a part of an experiment by Vault-Tec, my neighborhood was coaxed into signing up for their Vault, a sham really. We got in when the bombs fell, a moment later and we would have become dust. All my neighbors, my family … they … didn’t make it out. I was the only survivor. When I got out, I found a small group of settlers struggling to fend off raiders – took them all to the grave and let them shack up in my old town. I figured that if anyone would have answers, I’d find it here in Diamond City”

“The synt-” Danse started, his voice a low growl as I pointedly stared at him before looking back at the knight.

“The detective? Don’t they, you know, find things?”

“Oh yeah absolutely. Nicky is one of the best. Ain’t never met a man like him” Piper chimed, sipping from the clouded glass filled with whisky and Nuka-cola before her as she cast a wary glance at Danse trying to avoid his aggressive frown.

“I lost someone, and I want them found. I killed the bastard who took him, and Amari can help me find Shaun”

I sat in silence.

So that was what he came to the Brotherhood for, some extra guns on his side to take down the asshole who abducted his son.

“It’s getting late,” Piper yawned, downing the last of her drink before standing and stumbling over a loose wooden board. Before we could move Nate’s arm reached for her in an attempt to steady her.

“Geez, Blue, you’re my hero” she laughed, gloved hand clutching at his arm tightly as her eyes swam.

“Someone’s had a bit too much to drink tonight,” he smiled, almost affectionately at her as she steadied on her feet.

“I guess I need an escort home then” she winked.

Watching them swoon over each other almost made me sick, a frown pulling on my eyes as a friend fell from Trinity Tower to the wasteland floor hard for the man who seemed to be a pre-war artefact.

“You two go ahead, I’m going to go grab some more booze from Scarlett over at the Inn” I sighed, grabbing the neck of the bottle and swishing whatever was left around and downing the liquid fire in a single gulp. A curt nod from Danse and both of our companions were off towards Pipers house.

“God I hope Nat isn’t home to hear that” I laughed, the buzz in my ears seeming to shout over my own voice.

“Maxson isn’t telling me anything these days” Danse grunted, almost quiet enough to miss it as I peered across at him past my thick lashes.

“No offence, and this is said from the bottom of my heart, but Maxson is a dick” I laughed, hand resting on his shoulder as I wiped a tear from my eyes.
“He is your Elder, Knight - His rank demands respect” he scoffed, brows pulling down with a hint of a smile pulling at the corner of his as his bulking arms crossed and head shook slightly. Tapping my nose, I shot him a wink and grabbed at his hand pulling his towering figure towards the back alley where the Dugout sat nestled behind choice chops and some residential lot.

Diamond City Radio filled the open room once again, the tune of Nat King Cole sliding through the air with the upbeat keys of the piano seemed to dance through the air as I slid the heavy brown jacket down my shoulders and cast a look back at Danse.

“What do you say, first round is on me?”

“I doubt it, Knight. We are going to be walking tomorrow and need to keep an eye out. Might I suggest we stall the drinking and get some rest before tomorrow’s mission?”

“Lighten up Danse. We aren’t on duty until tomorrow, just one or two drinks and then we can bunker down” I smiled, nodding towards the bar where both brothers stood discussing business for both rooms and the bar service. Sliding two whiskeys across the bar, I slowly sipped at is as the buzz in my mind got stronger and the jokes the charismatic bartender told became increasingly hilarious.

“Oh! This-s is one of-f-f my favour-rite songs” confused by the slurring speech leaving my lips, I ran to the radio and turned the dial all the way up, the Saturday night patrons laughing and singing along to the song in their slurred and off-key voices as they raised their drinks and downed them one by one.

‘ I see you looking ‘round the corner ’

“Dance with me, Danse” I giggled to myself as I took in his skeptical smile, the rolling of brown eyes and the head shake as he gave in and laced his fingers betwixt mine and led the way around the open room, dimmed lights in the Inn casting across silhouettes as the beat of my heart strung along with the slow melodic colours that danced through the air, drifting in effortless succession as my feet carried me away.

‘ Come on inside, and pull up a chair – no need to feel like a stranger ’

“Eugene” he huffed, my swimming eyes looked up to find his and let a sly smile pull the corner of my mouth.

“Excuse me?”

‘Cause we’re all a little strange in here’

He rolled his eyes in a very unlike himself way, and smiled down at my drunken state.
“Eugene. My name is Eugene”

“Huh, I nev-v-er would have picked that”

“Sometimes its easier to keep at a distance from those under your command, rank’s are always a good way to keep it impersonal” he shrugged, fingers tightening as we swayed back and forth on the cold concrete floor. I gasped in fake mockery as I pulled back and looked across his features.

‘Have you got a history that needs erasing? – Or did you come in just for the beer and cigarettes’

“Hmm? Were you un-nder the imp-ression that you were the on-e in command?”

His eyebrow quirked as he scoffed down at me, a short laugh filling the music flowing across the air particles like miniature burst’s of colour cascading down a riverbed.

“I think the rank in the Brotherhood earns me that much”

“Oh god, I’m kid-ding Danse. That’s cal-led a joke”

‘A broken down dream, you’re tired of chasing – ooh, well I’m just the girl to make you forget’

The slow drawl of the sax plucked through the song as the smooth voice of the woman filled my ears along with my racing heart as the burning whisky flushed through my veins like hot fire, the sounds and smells of the Inn fighting among my mind as I slowly stumbled across Eugene’s feet in an effort to stay upright.

‘So we’re glad you could drop by – come in and loosen up your tie’

The third trip seemed to send me into a fit of giggles, that soon had Danse following suit as we swayed and danced in a clumsy rhythm of our own demise, our laughter echoing around us as those inside the bar began to file to their rooms or back out into the streets to find their own beds and homes.

‘Have a drink or, or maybe just one more – but if you’re searching for something to bring you comfort’

“Come on Quinn, that’s the fourth stumble”

“No, no – I’m,” a hiccup interrupted me as I raised a finger in the air and lifted my chin with a smile, “I’m absolutely fine”
“You most certainly are not. Come on, lets get you to bed”

‘Oh, well, I’m the one you’re looking for’

“Which way is the room, Valery?” He peered down at me as I gestured lucidly down the back of the hall and mumbled something that slipped past my consciousness. With a roll of his eyes I watched with fuzzy eyes as he walked alongside me, hands around my shoulders as if to try and support my troubled steps.

Humming vague sentences about the way towards the room, I let my fingers trail along the incredibly worn wallpaper of the inn with a small smile as the drawn-out scratching of nail on paper filled my ears like a symphony akin to the one swirling in colourful bars from the radio on the European man’s bench top.

Hardly on tune, but carding none-the-less at how it sounded, I began singing along with the woman’s sultry voice until my hands found the circular door handle and twisted it to reveal the room within.

“Ah shit,” a gravel-ish mumble escaped my lips as I looked at the room we had been given.

In the the far side of the room a double bed sat nestled in the corner, an unattractive thin green couch beside it accompanied by a few squarish ebony surfaces and that I could only guess were drawers and cupboards in my heavily drunken state. A lone lantern lit the room, the soft light dancing across the shadows flickered in the corners of the room and I stared wide eyed at the two sleeping choices.

Raising my hand to my face, I cast a guilty look his way as he shuffled on his feet. Two sets of eyes fell upon the lone bed in the corner, a sheepish smile crossing my lips as I wandered inside the room.

“I’ll take the couch” he smiled, as if to reassure me he wasn’t as phased about the bedding situation as I was, turning to rummage through his pack I made an effort to pull the thick coat off my shoulders and unwrap the loose green scarf from my neck, barely registering the soft click as the door to the room locked behind him.

My deft fingers turned their attention to the dirt ridden laces on the scuffed boots I had worn into town, lip tugged between my teeth as I frowned as I tried to loosen the ridiculous knots I had tied earlier in the morning.

A growl of frustration bubbled in my throat as I stomped the boot onto the floor and noticed a set of tensed shoulders hunching over the greyish brotherhood backpack that spewed its contents across the dark wooded desk. If I couldn’t get these damned things undone … maybe he could help.

“Danse,” I whispered, coy eyes looking up at him as he rolled his eyes and turned his chin over his shoulder, “I … I can’t get my boots off”

“And I’m to assume you want me to provide some assistance?” He huffed, the tail end of a laugh sneaking into his thick voice.

“I don’t fancy sleeping with socks and shoes on, ya know?” Adjusting where I sat on the edge of the mattress, eyes straining in the soft light cast across the walls as I examined the roof, ears
pricking at the sound of his tentative footsteps, I couldn’t help the churning feeling inside my stomach.

Oh god.

The last thing I want to do is be sick on the poor guy who’s about to get down on his knees and unlace my shoes.

Taking a deep breath and closing my eyes as his scent seemed to fill the space around me, I dared to cast a glance down at the sight before me praying I wouldn’t be sick.

His brow slightly creased as he tried to focus on the task at hand, a small drop of sweat seemed to be beading at his hairline where every strand seemed to be effortlessly pushed up and back in that way that everyone seemed too war torn to care about these days. The shadows that flickered from the lantern in the corner danced across his soft brown eyes, gleaming on the whites as his lashes dropped with every blink. As I tilted my head to the side, taking in his strong features and the short stubble that seemed to gradually grow into a well-maintained beard, I couldn’t help the smile that graced my lips as I felt the first boot give way and the second follow close behind.

A small nod of approval that both boots were now firmly on the ground and away from my feet, he slowly started to stand.

Oh shit.

No that’s not what I want.

Wait.

What do I want?

“To hell with it” I whispered so softly I barely caught it myself.

I reached out and grabbed at the material of his off-white fitted shirt, fisting the fabric as I poured every ounce of strength into the quick pull in towards myself as I could.

Warm lips melted into my own as the surprise subsided, the smirk that usually adorned my lips replaced with hot breath as his beard scratched across my smooth skin. Pressing myself in closer, as if trying to steal all his body heat, a soft moan filled the air when his lips moved against mine, a hand moving towards my cheek with incredible heat as fingers began to tangle in the strands of fiery red and noses brushed against each other.

Reality hit me like a bullet to the leg, sobering and shattering all at once when my eyes shot open and I pulled back when his hand dropped from my cheek.

“Oh my god Danse, I-” I began, eyes pleading as his brows pulled into a tightly knitted frown, words already tumbling from his lips as I pulled back further.

“This is extremely inappropriate Knight,” that commanding officer voice of his seemed to pull me back in line as I stood and ignored the pointed flush of warmth that tingled in my stomach.

“I don’t know what just came over me” I tried, eyes darting to anywhere but him as I struggled to let go of his shirt.

Silence was becoming an unlikely friend once more as the wheels in my mind turned, rationalising what I had just done.
I … just kissed Danse.

_The thing was, I wasn’t even sorry. And worst of all, I wanted more._

But I’d never admit it to myself.

Shame and guilt flooded my being, head to toe as I cast my eyes down to my socks and felt a frown overtake my brows.

“Danse … I,”

Lips crashed back into mind as my words ceased to exist, twin hands cupping my cheeks as I tilted my head back to taste the fireworks of spicy rum and whisky on his tongue that seemed to chase the liquor away from my own buds. The bubbling moan in my throat seemed to be swallowed whole by his teeth grazing my lip, a low growl in the back of my mind as he pushed forwards, and my calves dug into the rickety wood behind me.

“Holy shit I - ”

“For once, I don’t think this is the time for snarky comments” he muttered past my ear, fingers trailing up my sides as a shiver rippled through my spine and clouded my mind when the feeling of fabric being lifted, and the chill of the air latched onto my bared skin.

Feeling returned to my fingers as I felt the first button slip between them, then another and another until all that was left was the chilled air leeching itself onto my bared skin and attacking whatever warmth my bra seemed to be providing.

Tracing his lips down my neck, his strong hands gathered the last of my shirt and eased it down my muscled arms, another shiver rushing down my spine as my head lulled to the side as wildfire ignited in my blood. Grabbing at his shirt once more, I tugged it up and over his head, marvelling at the course patches of hair that covered his chest.

Sharp nails raked at his arms as his nose traced back across my jaw until his lips found mine again, burning hot desire pooling in my gut as his tongue snaked out across my bottom lip. Eyes wide as his arms ensnared me, it wasn’t long before my lashes fluttered back down and I let myself slowly succumb to the raging fire within.

Space and time moved around me as my back fell to the mattress below, the whining squeak of the springs hissing as my weight shifted across its surface and another breathy moan escaped my lips.

Heavy breathing seemed to emanate from somewhere within as Danse papered hot open-mouthed kisses down my chest and across my well-toned stomach. Panic surged through me as my elbows stood to attention and I looked down as his eyes seemed to darken for a moment, fingers fiddling with the button and zip of my dusty jeans.

He waited for a moment, as if watching for my eyes as I let a sly smile cross my swollen lips.

_I guess there is no going back now,_ I thought as I gave a quick nod.

His fingers reached for the belt loops, my eyes watching as he oh-so-painfully-slowly eased the scuffed denim down my long slender legs. Suspense ate at me as I peered down at him across my toned stomach, butterflies hammering at my chest begging to escape as his eyes flashed up to me and his lips descended onto the sensitive flesh of my thigh.

“Oh god~” I sighed, my voice scratching at my throat as I rolled my head back and felt a chaste
kiss land on the inside of my thigh, the cool air meeting his hot breath as I briefly wondered if the last kiss was higher than the other one.

**Holy fuck!** Okay, that kiss was **definitely** higher than the last one.

Hot breath spread across my sex, my fizzling nerves standing to full attention as my eyes rolled to the ceiling as his slick tongue draws up and elicits a shuddering moan to escape my lips.

A satisfied hum sound below me as he continues his slow assault, warm hands running across my legs and below the curve of my ass, the buzzing cloud of intoxication amplifying my senses as his calloused fingers pushed into my entrance.

“Danse!” I gasp, the sound utterly shattering reality as white-hot fire courses through me once more in the drab room, the walls alive with dancing stars as his fingers slowly moved in and out of my cunt.

God knew how, but my fingers found their way to his hair, fingernails raking at his scalp as my back arched at the heady assault that tugged at the tightening coil within my stomach. Loud earth-shattering moans filled the air as his fingers sped up, the movement pulling a string of curses from my lips in a lacklustre effort to quell the raging fire within me.

“I think – Danse – oh god” incoherent mutterings fall from my lips like a prayer to whatever gods may be listening, caring not for the thin walls of The Dugout, one final swipe of his tongue sends me over the edge, diving head first off the cliff before me and head spinning, screaming as the stars dance before my eyes and heavy heady gasps for air pull my back from the bed.

Slumping back down into the ruffled sheets, I risk a glance down to the mountain of a man below me, in time to watch him wipe the sheen away from his chin with the back of his hand, dark eyes hungry.

“**Sweet Jesus -**”

A low chuckle falls from his lips as those pillars he calls arms come up to cage me under him, a dangerous look in his eyes and a sly smile that I was sure in this moment would strike me down and send my soul to a hell worse than this god forsaken wasteland.

But boy golly would I go willingly after that ride.

“Dare I ask if you’ve ever …?” his low and gruff voice sent my eyes wide as a radstag doe,

“No, I’ve … never … done this” eyes cast to the side in shame, a blush spreading across my face a shoulder as his hand swept to my cheek and he pressed his lips to my forehead in a soft and comforting kiss.

*To hell with it, I’ve come this far.*

“But I want you to change that” I add in a soft whisper.

“You’re sure?”

Glancing back up into his dark eyes I smile,

“Absolutely”

With a wink he leans his head down and peppers small kisses along the pale skin of my neck.
“Well then” he huffs as his hand reaches to extinguish the oil lamp, rolling me on top of him to straddle his hips with a mischievous grin.

Chapter End Notes

Please don't kill me, I haven't the faintest idea how to write smut but darn-it I gave it my best crack.

Hope you've enjoyed this chapter, we covered a lot of ground in here and returned back to Diamond City for the first time since the beginning of our tale. The next chapter takes up on the manhunt for Kellogg’s cornflakes :)
Hello Darkness, My Old Friend

Chapter Summary

Some feels are admitted after the little ... rendezvous from last chapter.
Strap in folks, shit is about to get real ;)

Also, everyone's favorite ghoul is back!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“GRENADE!” the word pierced the air as Whitehall tossed the small handheld at the impossibly large green masses that searched the area for their next meal. Covering my ears with my hands and wincing from the raining metal and dirt chunks that flew into the air, I cast an angry frown at his lean figure, curses prepared as he raised the laser rifle and began aiming at the mutants on the other side of the ravaged street.

“HOLD POSITION!” Danse called, rifle aimed at the enemy as Whitehall began firing off shots of concentrated red hot fusion power. Two smouldering shots to the chest and the mutant dropped to the floor with a suffocating war cry, its comrades enraged at their fallen brethren.

The cool metal of my own laser pistol held fast in my hands as I lined the sights with the skull of my next victim, its beady black eyes narrowing as it charged our position behind the rusted and torn bus. Pulling the trigger, the satisfying smell of ozone filled my senses as the charred head flew off the mutants shoulders, its eyes rolling into its skull as the grotesque form fell to the floor in defeat.

“Clear” his thick voice sounded from beside me, green eyes cast down at him as I moved away from our cover to survey the scattered remains of the green abominations in the metal spiked courtyard of a rusted teal painted commercial building.

A frustrated sigh left my lips as I turned towards Danse, tucking the stray strand of short hair behind my ear to show the low frown that creased my brow.

“So its okay when he throws a grenade at mutants, but when I do it I get a talking to”

His eyes shift to Whitehall, who busies himself with checking the green monstrosities for whatever resources they may have been hiding, my arms crossing as I looked up at Danse.

“The last time I checked, you did it inside a military base”

“…True”

“That was full of fat man explosives”

“- A very good point .”

“Twice, Knight”
“Okay, okay – point made. How far are we from Goodneighbour? This place is giving me the heebies…” I ask, settling the pistol at my side as Whitehall approaches us once again holding a few meager scraps of ammunition that are of little use to our recon team.

“According to my ‘pip we should be right on to of it-”

“Its right there” I smirk, looking at the giant neon sign exclaiming ‘HOTEL REXFORD’ and ‘GOODNEIGHBOUR’ with a comical neon arrow pointing along the ramshackle wooden walls that acted like a barricade.

Whitehall’s calloused glare widened my smile as he stepped over the viridescent bodies on the floor, holstering his rifle behind his back as his legs pushed him towards the rusted blue door beside a flaming barrel.

Exchanging a quick shrug I moved past Danse, daring not to look back as I followed behind Whitehall. Memories of last night sprung to mind, no matter how I tried to repress them in this hostile wasteland of a city – where threats lurked around every damned corner. The way his lips had felt on my neck, my legs and on my – well…

“Knight” Whitehalls voice called as he looked back to me, it was only then that I realised I had been staring at the blue rusted door in a far of stare as my comrades tried to get my attention.

“My apologies, lets go”

One last look behind us and we were enveloped in the smoking gun of a settlement, drifters dressed in similar grab to myself stood against walls discussing the news of the day, haggling with the two storefront traders at the entrance to the ramshackle town or scavenging the debris on the outskirts of the streets.

I was almost surprised by how civil it all was.

“Hold up there. First time in Goodneighbour?”

Spoke too fucking soon.

The greasy man’s shining head gleamed in the sunlight, the dirt covered leather jacket zipped snug up his broad torso reeking of cigarettes and poor life choices as he approached us at the entrance to the small town. Whitehall spoke up, his eyes gleaming with malice.

“What’s it to you?”

“Can’t go walking around without insurance” the bald man smirked, eyes jittery across our three forms as he stepped off the cobblestone sidewalk.

“Unless its, ‘keep-dumb-assholes-away-from-me’ insurance, I’m gunna have to pass” I roll my eyes, fingers reaching down for my pistol and jutting my hip to the side. The man’s spacey brown eyes flickered to me, a sense of dread filling my bones like cement trickled down my spine as I took a quiet breath in, barely registering Danse’s form sidestepping as if to protect me form this asshole.

“Well, don’t be like that. I think you’se are going to like what I have on offer. So here’s the deal; you hand over everything you’ve got in them pockets, or ‘accidents’ start happening to ya. Big. Bloody. Accidents”

Silence overtook us as I peered up at Danse, his strong brow pulling down as his arms crossed his
chested.

Is this what a stand-off is?

A throat clearing caught my attention, followed by the muted red and dusted overcoat that could only summon one thought to my mind, pompous.

“Whoa, whoa. Time out. Someone steps through the gate the first time, they’re a guest. You lay off that extortion crap, Finn” the croaky and sharp whisper like voice of the man dressed like an utterly ridiculous pirate filled the courtyard, the drifters around the settlement stopping in their tracks to look up and lean in closer at the approach of the man.

Must’ve been some hotshot to em.

Although …

It was only when the tri-corn hat lifted that I saw the skin.

Charred and fleshy, like meat exposed to the sun for too long stretched across his nose-less profile,

“What d’you care? They ain’t one of us. You’re gettin’ soft Hancock. You keep letting outsiders walk all over us, one day there’ll be a new mayor”

The man, Hancock, smiled sweetly at the bald headed man, Finn, his name seemed to be. Taking a few steps towards him and placing a strong fleshy hand on his shoulder and leaning in awfully close.

“Come on man, this is me we are talking about. Let me tell you something…”

The silver gleam came out of nowhere before any of is could make a sound of protest, the blade slicing into Finns stomach as his eyes went wide in shock, the blade coming out only to stab him once more before his leather clad body slumped to the floor with a deafening thud. After all the atrocities I had seen in the Commonwealth, somehow his pool of red blood seeping onto the floor shook me to my core. At least the enemies I downed were actively trying to attack me.

“You three okay?” The man croaked, his endlessly black eyes peering up at us as he smirked and cleaned the blade off.

“You – you killed him” I stutter, looking away from the mans corpse as the life left his eyes. Ice bled into my gut as I looked at the red-coated man, the mayor, Hancock. His mischievous smile was hard to miss as I glared at his face.

“Got a good pair of eyes on ya, I think you’ll fit in well here” he laughed, more to himself than me, before looking at my traveling companions and continuing, “Goodneighbour is of the people, for the people, you feel me? Everyone’s welcome”

Danse’s hard frown pulled down more than I ever conceived possible as his arms crossed tighter around the waste-lander garb he wore.

“Sounds like anarchy to me”

Hancock nodded and tossed a nod over his head to a shadowed woman behind him, her eyes conceding as she took three confident strides forewords and gripped the handle of the blade before stowing it in her own holster.
“Maybe so. Hopefully our little town of freaks and misfits lives up to its namesake – who knows, might even make a few friends here… So long as you remember who is in charge” the dangerous pitch in his voice sent a quiet shiver through me, mind racing back to the previous night when –

“I’ll be sure to keep it in mind for future sake” Whitehall shrugged, eyes flickering to myself and Danse as the mayor of the town turned his back and walked towards the stately house with the white door to the left of the entrance to town. The way he walked, the swagger sent my mind into a questioning frenzy as he turned his head once more and quirked what one would have to assume was his brow when our eyes met. The mischievous smirk before he disappeared flashed a vivid memory to mind and god damn it, I couldn’t help but roll my eyes at how utterly and ridiculously stupid I was.

“I don’t like it here” Danse’s quiet voice pulled my attention once more, “These abominations of man all in one place makes me sick”

“Lets just get in and get out. The sooner we work out what was bouncing around in that asshole’s head the better. Where did your detective say he would be?”

Whitehall’s hands clutched around the bizarre fever dream of technology spurting out of the fleshy brain matter – which in my no means necessary medial opinion – looked like a damned slug.

“The Memory Den. Should be around the corner”

Clearing my throat and looking up at Danse, I grabbed a hold of his arm and watched as Whitehall moved ahead the corner.

“What is it, Knight?”

“I uh, I’ve got to go chase some things up. Mind if I catch up with you later?”

The confused tip of his head shone light on the feint scar of his, arms dropping to his sides as he glanced back behind us.

“Knight Whitehall’s piece of brain matter could prove vital to the continuation of our mission in the Commonwealth. What could possibly be more important than your direct orders?”

“Catching up with an old friend…?”

Shooting him a smile when he slumped down, I leaned in to give him a quick hug before skittering off to the worn white door and turning the cool silver doorknob.

The spiralling staircase caught my attention second, the first was the heavily armed triggermen that stood at every point of entry … and exit.

“Hey, I’m looking for your mayor”

“Boss is upstairs” his croaky voice sounded, my eyes daring to glance up the spiralling staircase and nodding my thanks. Each step creaked as I moved up them, my warm scarf bundled around my neck as I climb higher and higher.

His back was to me, his hands shaking some kind of chem at the kitchenette set up on this floor.

“Watch yourself” the woman beside the door growled in warning, I placed my hands up in surrender as I leaned against the flaking and splintered door frame and smiled.
“You know, I never would have picked you to end up here after all this time” I smile, looking at the woman to my left before glancing back at the atrocious red frock he wore.

“And why is that?”

“After everything in Diamond City, you didn’t strike me as the ‘mayor’ type … John”

He turned, dark eyed gleaming in the light with a serious grimace on his face.

Bellowing laughter filled his little recreational area, his legs carrying him across the expanse of the room in a few short paces.

“God, I’ve missed you, Val”

- - - -

What they called ‘The Memory Den’ was truly just a poor excuse for an abhorrent misuse of technology. Knight Whitehall seemed somewhat familiar with the pleasantries passed between the red frocked woman lounging in a long velvety chair and himself. The knight asked for his doctor friend, before heading downstairs and forcing me to share the company with that damned synth detective.

What played out before me seemed like something in one of Proctor Quinlan’s pre-war comic books, the knight and detective discussed the piece of brain matter in his hands and the synth offered its circuit boards to boost their chances of finding out how to get into the institute.

The Knight climbed into the chamber and I moved to sit around with the doctor and watch what he was seeing on the monitor before him, scenes of another man’s life flew by as the doctor, Amari, turned to change the memories shown.

Something settled after a climbing further back in the dead man’s brain, a child sitting on the floor of a ramshackle living room playing with old times comics whilst the bald headed man cleaned his impressive .44, the bright flash of lightning that accompanied the black leather clad gentleman that said something about taking the child back to the Institute.

“Teleportation! Now it all makes sense. Nobody’s found the entrance to the Institute … because there is no entrance. Let me pull you out of there, as soon as you’re ready…” the doctor exclaimed, her fingers typing fast on the keyboard of her many consoles and pushing buttons to begin the process of letting the knight out of the chamber – as well as unplugging the synth and letting him walk out of the room with a quiet nod.

The machine opened up with the Knight shaking his head, dizzy from watching his whole life fall to pieces before his eyes not once but twice now.

“Slow movements, okay? I don’t know what kind of side effects the procedure might have had. No ones ever … done this before. How do you feel?”

Shaking his head once more, he looked up to the doctor and managed a tight smile.

“I’m okay, doctor. Thankyou …”
“That’s good, but I want you to keep monitoring yourself. We have to be sure there is no long-term damage. Are you … ready to talk about what happened in there?”

The knight and I exchanged glances and I moved to stand, legs whining in complaint as the bones straightened back out.

“We’ve … got what we need. The institute uses teleportation to get in and out”

Nodding along with their conversation and preparing a mental report for Elder Maxson,

“Yes! Their greatest secret has finally been revealed. But that only leads to more questions. How does it work? Where do we go next?”

“We will need to explore further avenues for infiltration once we get back to the airport” I hum, the doctor nodding in agreement.

“That scientist that Kellogg was supposed to track down. Virgil. We need to find him”

“You’re right. A rouge institute scientist could answer all kinds of questions” Amari crosses her arms and looks to the ceiling on consideration.

Whitehall seemed distracted, thinking about something while my mind raced for tactical advantages for the next step of our mission.

“One problem. He is located in the Glowing Sea. A team should be put together to scope out the area”

“Indeed. Why would someone go there? That doesn’t make any sense. No one goes there, not even if they are desperate” her voice is lower than the previous moments of their conversation, eyes flickering back and forth between myself and Whitehall.

Whitehall stopped and turned to where I stood, a questioning look in his eyes.

“What’s this … Glowing Sea?”

Silence filled the room, save for the quiet buzzing of electricity in the air as the doctor and I exchanged a glance.

“Ground zero for the bombs in Boston. Its the most irradiated area in the Commonwealth”

“Then that’s where we find this … Virgil. I guess it goes without saying that there is probably going to be untold monsters out there?”

Humming more to myself than Whitehall, we head back up the stairs. Already losing one of my squad members, I hardly wanted to leave him to his own devices but being in such a close proximity to the synth almost made me want to be sick. Pushing past their conversation and out the red painted doors of the Memory Den, I knew I needed a drink after the absolutely absurd couple of months I had.

If there was anywhere that would have decent booze, it would be the shining rail sign before me.

At the very least it would be good distraction from the thoughts swirling around my muddled up mind concerning the events of the previous night with Knight Quinn.

As if the mere thought of her name were enough to send my once focused mind-frame, it suddenly felt impossible to not think about her once long hair sheered to her shoulders, spilling around her
like a halo of vibrant auburn across the off white bedsheets from the little Inn we had stayed in. How, despite her inexperience, she rolled her hips to meet my own in the early hours of the morning or the mewls of appreciation as she cried out whenever my fingers found their way to the bundle of nerves at the apex of her thighs.

“I really need that drink” grunting to the strangely attire the ghoul guarding the entrance to the renovated rail station and making my way down the stairs. Melodic music that could only be achieved by someone actually singing floated up from the lowest level, my eyes scanning every crevice and corner of the bar before purchasing a beer from the bizarrely British sounding tin can, Charlie.

The woman on the stage sung in a delicate blue dress, the shining sequins sending light dancing around the room as she swung her hips side to side in her own rhythm like waves to the shore.

This entire trip had seemed so far off when receiving the mission from Elder Maxson, glad to finally have Knight Quinn back after her out of action period. She was an utterly loyal solider, despite her sneaking off into the state house to revisit an old friend. I had a sympathy to her plight, raised in a laboratory to be some inhuman super solider, brought up to believe in a cause and dedicated to fighting for the good of The Commonwealth. Her training had been enough to land him on his ass plenty of times, always surprised when she suggested another round of hand to hand combat or shooting down at the range at the airport whenever they found some spare time.

His squad had started with so much hope and promise, of bringing justice to the wasteland after so many years of torment from the mistakes of those who came before us, this war torn land left as a reminder of the greed of man and destructive power of technology run amuck.

It was no surprise that Knight Whitehall had an agenda, he was after all, a parent looking for his lost son. The Knight had confided in me about it upon our first mission in the Commonwealth, when we had tracked down the monster that stole his child from his wife’s cold, lifeless arms in the vault.

It seemed I had an affinity for vault dwellers … I thought as I nursed the beer bottle in my hands.

Sighing and looking into the neck of the bottle for some sort of sign, my ears spiked at the bubbles of laughter that bounced down the tiled walls of the establishment and –

Dear god –

Her hair was pinned back on one side, the red waves free in gentle waves that swept down her cheek and stopped in the unusual hairstyle that I had yet to acclimatise to. The curves of her body cocooned in the vibrant red dress similar to the singer on the stage, with a slit down one leg and a low scooping neckline. The black heels that clicked on the ground below her as her lightly sun kissed skin stretched with her dazzling smile, a sight fair enough to make anyone believe in angels.

Beside her was the –

— Ghoul —

Who laughed along with her at whatever joke the two had to be sharing.

Her bright emerald eyes scanned the room, settling on my figure before a slow blush crept across her cheeks and eyes casted down.

Looking back down at my beer and taking one final swig, I looked up at the tin can bartender and called for another drink. It’s comical accent nodding as it produced another beer that danced with
condensation.

“So, do you come here often …” her velvety smooth voice sounded from beside me, a quiet smile
on my lips as I turned to face her and her … companion.

“First time for everything” I huff as I take a sip of the borderline cold beverage.

“Well, in that case, wouldn’t you want to make some memorable moments in a new town where
nobody knows your name, soldier?”

“The last time I checked, we were still on a mission, Knight”

“Eh” she shrugged, the red sequins dancing in the light once more. “I ran into Whitehall on the
way out here, he’s got the information we needed. There isn’t much else we can do until we depart
for the Prydwen in the morning. Why not relax and take a load off?”

I wished I had her blasé attitude sometimes.

My whole life it had been about the cause, about justice and reprimanding those who have done
wrong to the innocent.

And then she came along, a bad influence in my life that made me want selfishly.

A glimmer of hope, a ray of sunshine in the forever irradiated darkness.

And who was I to say no?

Grabbing for her hand we moved to the small dance floor, swaying back and forth as her heels
clicked on the floor and the crowd around us slowly moved to join. Drifters and ghouls alike,
something so abhorrent to me seemed so far away while the dazzling redhead was in my arms.

“So where are we bunkering down for the night?” She asked, eyes peering up under her thick
lashes.

Could they have made her any more perfect in that laboratory of theirs? – the thought brushes my
mind un-permitted.

How could something made – someone like her – be so different than flesh and blood? She wasn’t
a machine, born from circuitry and processing units. Her skin was so soft, her emotion so real and
raw. She couldn’t be held to blame for her creation.

“The establishment next door has lodging, I presume?”

Her quiet hum drew my eyes down her slightly marred skin, so many injuries for a short lifetime
above ground. The scar the decorated her cheek, the matching two thick lines that marred her arm.
And of course those nasty nail punctures on her shoulder, still horrific and in the process but
healing none the less. A pang of guilt fills my gut as I look back over to her shining green eyes.

“So, we know how synths get in and out of The Institute, but not how to get in ourselves. What’s the
Brotherhood’s next move?”

“Tomorrow we go back to the Prydwen and report back to Elder Maxson. Our efforts will most
likely be poured into finding a scientist that has hidden in the Glowing Sea…”

She stopped moving and took a step back.
“Why the fuck would anyone hide there?! It’s a death trap! Stingwings, radscorpions and …
deathclaws galore. It sounds like a death sentence, and that’s not even mentioning all the rads.
How the hell are we supposed to track down a wayward scientist in that chaos?”

“Elder Maxson will have a plan”

“Of course he will…” she mutters so quiet I almost lose the words amongst the strings of music
that fill the room.

I had no doubt I’d be sent on the mission, a small detail would search for the scientist, Virgil, and
get the information the Brotherhood needed or bring him back somehow. Considering my team
had the most success of recent weeks, I had little doubt we would be ordered to find this man, this
Virgil.

Whatever monstrosities lay before our team, I had little doubt we would pull off whatever mission
the Elder assigned us.

- - - -

The deafening thudding of the vertibirds propellers filled my ears as we docked back onto the
Prydwen, the gleaming silver bullet feeling strangely like home despite being hundreds of metres
above the ground. Lancer Captain Kell’s bulky uniform sat waiting for us, similarly to the way it
did the first time I boarded the ship.

“Permission to come aboard, Sir?”

“Granted, Paladin. Knight Whitehall, Knight Quinn. Welcome back. I presume you have updated
information about the Institute’s whereabouts, Paladin Danse?”

“Affirmative. Knight Whitehall’s outstanding efforts in tracking down a Commonwealth
mercenary named Kellogg resulted in the acquisition of the information we require to infiltrate the
Institute”

“Outstanding work, soldiers. Your team is required at a strategy meeting in Elder Maxson’s
quarters at 17:00 hours. Dismissed”

Daring not to look over to Danse, I let Whitehall push in front first, his stocky shoulder brushing
me out of the way before I followed up the stairs behind him and back on board the Prydwen. The
cold steel ladder below my fingertips and boots sending a shiver down my spine as I climbed
upwards and heaved myself up the final step.

Making my way over to my bunk, I couldn’t help the sigh that escaped my lips and the dreamless
sleep that overtook my mind and body … at least until the pip on my arm began chirping at me like
an annoyingly irradiated bird to wake up.

Just in time for a meal and the meeting with Maxson. Mess seemed to be dishing up the same old
consumable slosh; cracked noodle cups, vegetable soup, blotfly steak, questionably preserved cram
and assorted radroach meat. My best bet of keeping anything down was going to be the final bowl
of vegetable soup that sat unoccupied and unaccounted for on the edge of the scratched sliver
counter top.
Grabbing for the bowl and a … mostly clean spoon, I found myself sitting alone for the first time in a while. Strewing in my thoughts, much like the vegetables had been in the broth, I let my mind wander back to the events of the mission into the commonwealth.

Piper was still running her newspaper, each article being close enough to the truth to be credible, and she had somehow found herself head over heels for that jackass, Whitehall. I couldn’t see the appeal, the bastard was hiding something, something I’d be more than happy beat out of him.

Dinner rolled around like a radstag grazing in a meadow, slow and being unequivocally boring. Watching each of the scribes fuss over some new plant specimens whilst they ate their meals was probably the highlight of the night.

At least until Maxson’s meeting.

His cold steel door sat closed and foreboding, I knew I was the last to arrive at the meeting based on the cool and collected voices inside. Putting my hand on the handle and pushing my way inside I was greeted by each senior member of the deck, save for Knight-Captain Cade.

Ingram’s power armour frame paced around the room, a lengthy discussion with the Elder about keeping the Prydwen moored above the airport and all the resources it is draining.

“I’m just saying, if we hope to win this war, our ship will have to stay fully functional. She is running on reserves Elder Maxson”

“I will put my best scribes on it, Ingram. Now that everyone is here, let us begin”

The intimacy of sitting with such highly ranked members of their military faction made me feel a little uneasy as I took one of the cracking blue leather chairs and sat down beside Danse.

“Our first order of business, I presume your mission into the Commonwealth was a success, Paladin Danse?” He asks, his piercing blue eyes settling onto myself, Whitehall and Danse.

“Affirmative. Thanks to the intel gained through Knight Whitehall’s connections in Diamond City and Goodneighbour, we were able to deduce that the Institute uses teleportation to get in and out”

“Teleportation… Proctor Quinlan does your order of the quill has any intelligence on teleportation?”

The gaunt older man peered out from behind Knight-Captain Kells and pulls several pieces of paper from a small Manila folder before him.

“Unfortunately not Elder Maxson, there may be some research we have yet to uncover from more prolific sources in the Wastelands. I can assign a team of scribes to go and scour the Commonwealth until we find what we need”

Maxson nods with his fingers clasped tightly under his chin, a content hum as he looks towards Danse once again.

“I believe you may have a way to access this technology, Paladin?”

“Yes sir. The mercenary known as Kellogg showed an institute synth in his memory. The synth discussed a bounty to find an escaped scientist hiding in the Glowing Sea”

“Christ” he mutters more to himself.
Silence fills the Elder’s quarters as each member of his staff contemplates their next move.

“If I may sir, Knight-Captain Cade has additional rations of Rad-X and Rad-Away, with some specialised gear from Proctor Teagan that I can modify – there is no reason a small battalion cannot retrieve this scientist from the Glowing Sea” Ingram chimes in, her dark brown eyes creasing at the side as she pushes on, “I say we send a small team, armed to the teeth, in to find out what we can about the Institute”

More silence.

“Very well. Paladin Danse, your team has had numerous successful missions over the past weeks. However it is too dangerous to send all of you together. I suggest you take Knight Whitehall with you into the Glowing Sea to retrieve this … scientist.”

*Excuse me?*

*Did he just -*

The Adam’s apple in his throat bobs as he considers his options.

“With all due respect, Elder-” I begin, only to be silenced by the raising of his fingerless gloved hand.

“Knight Quinn. Whilst I admire your enthusiasm to dive head first into the most dangerous place in the Commonwealth, you are not long from recovering from a grave injury. There is still plenty of work you have left to do aboard this ship, it is my decision and it is final”

Whatever retort I had on my lips dies, eyes down cast as I dare not to look up until the end of the meeting. Nothing more than boring strategy and how to equip the team that will be settled on the edge of the glowing sea and those that traverse into its deathly depths.

Which was going to be Danse and that jackass Nathan Whitehall.

What a joke.

Cop a board of nails to your shoulder and all of a sudden you cant go out on active duty anymore.

Bullshit.

Once the meeting is adjourned I hastily move to the exit, practically running up the stairs to my bunk and grabbing for the pack hidden under my steel bed.

“Knight Quinn,” his voice makes me freeze, eyes looking up to meet his as I sigh.

His puppy dog brown eyes cast down for a moment before that familiar hard frown replaces it.

“I know what you are about to do, and I am here to warn you against it”

Glaring at his boots I frown and kick my back back under the bed.

“And exactly what rash and impulsive thing am I going to do?”

His frown pulls down as he nods to the pack I tried to push back under the bed with a concerned grunt.

“So what, you’re just going to leave?”
“I don’t have a choice Valery. It was a direct order. You forget that you almost died a few weeks ago”

Rage boils within me, filling every nook and cranny of my being as I stand with my boots firmly placed on the cold indifferent floor below.

“So what? I don’t know if you noticed, but Whitehall is a jackass who couldn’t cover your six – even if he somehow mutated and had three extra sets of eyes. He wasn’t there when your squad was dying at that god forsaken police station and he most certainly wasn’t doing us any favours of getting into Diamond City. If I hadn’t of been there - you’d have never gotten in”

He sighs, fingers pressing into his eyes as I feel my face flame to life with a bright blush creeping across my cheeks and rushing down my spine.

“You are an invaluable asset -” he begins,

“Excuse me?! An asset. Is that all you see me as?”

“What? Of course not! That’s no what I -” he starts and for the first time I witness him fumbling for words.

“Then what is it? You know I’m faster and stronger than half of the knights aboard this ship, and thats without power armour. My shots don’t miss and I’m ace with hand to hand combat. What does Whitehall have that I don’t?”

“Jesus Christ, Valery, he doesn’t have anything that you don’t have ten time more of, and you know it”

“I don’t understand why I cant go on this mission, I’m fine. My arm is healing fine, Cade has given me the go ahead to be on field duty -”

“I don’t want to see you hurt!” He practically explodes.

Ice cold fear spreads across my veins as I stare blankly at him.

Mouth running dry, all I can do is stare blankly at him.

For once I’ve got nothing to say.

“Eu-Eugene… I …”

“Look, Valery. You mean so much to the Brotherhood, so much to this team. Going in to the Glowing Sea would be a death sentence if more than two of us go. You must know that. I can’t risk loosing one of my best in that godforsaken hellscape. You said it yourself, radscoprions, stingwings and deathclaws. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you out there”

In a voice so quiet I can barely hear him say,

“I can’t watch you bleed out in my arms again”

“Danse, I need you to promise me that you will be safe. And come back alive”

“I will do everything in my power to fulfill that oath. But you need to make one in return…”

“… Of course”
“Don’t try and be a hero by gallivanting into the Glowing Sea. Promise me Valery”

“I promise” I whisper as he moves to place a small kiss atop my head.

Stunned into silence, I watch as he rakes his hands through his hair and moves to walk away.

*What kind of mess have I gotten myself into?* I ask to no one as he walks back down the stairs towards his own quarters.

Chapter End Notes

OH MAN ~ someone resuscitate me cause this took me forever to get my head around. I think this story is about halfway done and we are about to enter "The Glowing Sea" quest line. it wont be long before we storm the gates of The Institute and find out exactly what Nate is up to ;)

Stay tuned for another update (hopefully) next week
A Wicked Workout

Chapter Notes

Forgive me father for I have sinned -- Who knew smut took so long to write ... and why do I feel like I need some coffee scrub to atone for bringing this into the world?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was no idiot, I’d give him that.

I sat, brow sweating as the warm recycled air of the Prydwen filled the power armour bays, wrench in hand slick with the perspiration that I had wiped from my cheek turning one final bolt holding the shoulder plate in place.

“Fucking glowing sea … bloody scientists” I muttered to myself as I twisted and prodded at the power armour suit, I had come to know and trust so well. Ingram had made sure to enlist my help when it came to modifying the rad resistance measures on the power armour suits for Danse and Whitehall.

“He can go die in a hole for all I care …” I grit my teeth as I roll my eyes, sneering at the second set of armour that sat in the bay beside mine. I detested the walking death traps and would take a fight with a Deathclaw over putting one on any day of the week. But if upping the resistance and lead lining on these bastards was going to bring Danse home safe then I’d make sure to install every ounce of lining properly.

My mind had been a whirlwind for the past three days, Danse had been so busy on the ground collecting last minute supplies that I had barely seen him. Whitehall, however, had been nowhere but in my line of sight since the meeting with Maxson. The smug little shit had been so pleased to go into the Glowing Sea, everyone congratulating him on being so brave and daring to risk his life like that. Naturally he replied with;

“I’m just doing what anyone else would’

God, I hated him.

Danse had seen right through my plan to run off into the Glowing Sea and I guess he was right. I had no idea where this scientist was nor did I have the equipment to go. It’d be a death sentence, but it didn’t make me any less angry that I couldn’t go and make sure Danse would make it back safe.

With one final twist and a decent hammer smashing, Danse’s power armour seemed up to scratch and ready to take on whatever dangers lay in the journey ahead. Casting one last glance to Whitehall’s armour, I decided to move into the mess hall to grab a drink. Very few people were wandering around at this time, with most of Proctor Quinlan’s scribes being out scouring the Commonwealth with guards armed to the teeth with weapons accompanying them. Everyone seemed desperate for some knowledge on how The Institute was teleporting their synths in and out of the facility and they were determined not to stop until they knew.

Which left Danse and Whitehall. They were both set to depart for a small outpost just on the
outskirts of the Glowing Sea where a few scribes had set up a communication station to keep in contact for as long as possible. My mind had jumped on the chance just to walk out with them to the edge, to make sure I would see him one last time before he walked into certain death and destruction.

That thought had been squelched like a tato in the mud as Ingram pulled me aside and inquired about extra privileges if I helped her with the power armour suits. Because of his absence and him not uttering another word to me since our strange conversation a few nights before, I had resolved to give Danse something Ingram referred to as;

‘the silent treatment’

She had chuckled to herself as she moved her attention to the workbench before her and continued hammering away at Whitehall’s suit of armour.

Wiping my brow once again, I was almost surprised at how hot it was inside the Prydwen despite the chilling winds that screeched against the hull. I could only imagine how cold the soldiers below and out in the field were as we slowly crawled into the heart of winter. The unforgiving post-apocalyptic wasteland hadn’t graced us with snow yet, so any plans to move ahead were still on.

Whitehall was discussing the need for weapons with Teagan, mentioning in a hushed whisper about an extracurricular mission he needed to undertake before leaving with Danse for the scientist, Virgil. I rolled my eyes, paying little attention to it before moving to the mess hall and grabbing a bowl of soup. Stirring the vegetable contents around for a moment, I thought about the ensuing battle to come.

“If we fail …” I didn’t even want to think about it. All the blood of our fallen brothers and sisters. After living on the Prydwen for so long it was hard to imagine it not being here. Leaning over the bowl so I wouldn’t splash the soup onto my flight suit, I made quick work of the watery meal below me.

Whitehall pushed past in a flurry, arms full of rifles and pistols as he moved to the duffle he had sitting beside the ladder to the flight deck. He loosely packed each weapon into the olive-green carry bag and made his way down the steel ladder, eyes shifting from side to side as he descended lower.

“What are you up to…?” I mumble as I slide from my seat, abandoning my meal and trailing his footsteps.

The sly mongrel hollers for a vertibird off the ship, my hands gripping the freezing metal bar as I watch it take off towards the north-east, a direction I had never seen anyone travel to outside of needing to the Cambridge Police Station. As far as I knew he had no business being out there.

A huff of air leaves my lungs and the vapor dissipates with a loud howl of wind. Shivering with arms around my shoulders, I make my way for the gym in a lacklustre effort to warm up. Tugging at the endless series of clips and zips on the horrendously orange flight suit, I managed to shimmy it down to my waist and tie both sleeves in a quick knot revealing the not-at-all white singlet below. It was one of – barring my vault suit – the only remnants of my life before I had shown up at the police station and found my way into this twisted war.

The gym was rather sparse, with a large boxing ring with loose ropes around its perimeter and a few pieces of constructed metal strewn around that reminded me of the endless pieces of exercise equipment in the vault.
I eyed pull-up bar that sat above a small mat and smirked, stretching my arms and pulling my leg up and feeling the muscles within start to lax as they began to warm up.

Reaching up with muscular arms, fingers gripping the slick bar with all my might, I began to lift my weight up and down, feeling the pleasant and familiar burn trickle down my biceps and shoulders as a slight sheen of sweat covered my cheeks and back. A few more sets and I was puffing, readying myself to drop as I slinked over to the bench press and loaded the bar with a few medium weights and lay back, bracing my arms once again for the heavy load and lowering the cool well-worn barbell to my chest and pushing it back up once more.

The weights, while nowhere near heavy enough to inspire a cardiac arrest, had me huffing with each repetition. It was somewhere in my fourth set when the heavy metal door swung open and footsteps echoed in the room as they moved to a small set of barbells.

“Ingram said you might be in here”

“Did she now?” I huff as I lift the bar one final time and place the loaded barbell down and move to the squat rack beside me.

“Did you need some help, knight?”

“Nope. I’m quite fine on my own. I’m getting quite good at that these days”

He sighs as I drop in a low squat, bar heavy on my shoulders as I sink down lower and give a tight cough in attempt to coverup how heavy I had set the bar.

“Val,”

“Don’t, Eugene. I’m still not over this whole mission”

“But we spoke about this”

“I never said I liked it” I huff as I sink down once more.

He hangs his head and sighs once more.

“I don’t particularly like it either, but we both know we cannot trust Whitehall to retrieve this scientist by himself”

I nod and slowly stand, calves and thighs shaking as I begin another repetition.

“When do you leave?”

“06:00 hours” he twists his wrist between his fingers and slowly makes his way to my position.

I don’t know when I started to tear up, and I’m even more unsure of whether the droplet that fell to the floor was sweat or a tear.

“Not long then, I guess – oh shit” I curse as my grip slips on the bar and he is by my side in a flash, rippled arms grabbing at the bar and raising it above my head before letting the weights clatter to the floor in an ear ringing thud that sounded more akin to thunder and lightning striking the ship.

“Thanks – I – I thought I had that” I huff, looking at his boots for a moment.

“Valery, I-”
Before the words are even out my fingers grip his shirt, pulling his lips down to mine in a frenzy, teeth clashing against teeth before I find a steady rhythm both he and I work well at.

His fingers run down my arms before his all-encompassing arms wrap me in a cocoon, my sweaty hands finding their way up to his cheeks as his lips take charge and his tongue finds a purchase between my teeth.

Mouth opening wider to satisfy his demands, his fingers trailing up my arms leaving train tracks of goose bumps upon the skin. Breathless, I pull away as his lips move further down my neck, lapping at the skin with tongue and teeth as my eyes roll into the back of my head, a moan escaping my lips as I rake my fingers through his thick hair.

“Oh god, Eugene” I mumble as he works his way over my clavicle and down my chest, a curse flying off my lips as I peer down into his fiery brown eyes as his lips trail lower towards my breasts.

“We should -” he hums before grabbing my wrist, leading me in a lusty daze through the sparse hallways and towards his living quarters. He grabs for my hips, large hands ensnaring them as he leans down towards me and captures my lips once again, a moan of agreement bubbling in my throat.

My feet drag us backwards, until I hit the cold hard surface of the metal desk, my ass finding purchase there as fingernails rake across his flight suit to find the clips and clasps.

Heady breaths and racing heartbeats don’t stand in the way as his fingers rip my singlet above my head, lips breaking for a moment before he hungrily leans back in. The heady mix of his scent mixes with the thin droplets of sweat that run down my neck and bared back as the warm air sticks to my bared skin.

“Danse – I – Good God”

“Tell me … what you want” he huffs as he bites and licks his way down my throat, my fingers tangled in his hair once again as I guide his face back up to mine, his puppy dog eyes consumed by a fiery blaze.

“On the bed” I smile, brow raised as his fingers move to unclasp and unbuckle like a man possessed, his arms snaking around my ass as he lifts me up and moves towards the bed. God knows how he manages it, but he throws me down in a flurry of blankets and grabs for my flight suit.

The air sticks to my skin and sends a shiver through my being as his hands run up the sides of my legs, a satisfied hum leaving my lips as his tongue drags its way up my thigh.

“Danse, as much as I’m – ungh – loving the suspense, I – ah – need you” I peer down to watch him smile, the expression so warm it could ignite a third nuclear Armageddon and I would happily skip into it as long as I was with him.

He places one last kiss on my sex and lazily rolls me over so that my belly is planted on the mattress and I smile over my shoulder as he shifts, calloused fingers slick with his saliva working away at the bundle of nerves at the apex of my womanhood.

“You’re so wet” he muses in fascination as two digits push into me, a low moan muffled by the pillows below me as he starts to move them in to the knuckle. His fingers ease the iron-hot burning, desire pooling in my belly as I mewl into the pillows strewn across the bed.
“Please, Danse” I turn to look over my shoulder, moaning as his fingers give one final stroke and he shifts to line himself up to my dripping womanhood. With a quiet huff, he leans forward, hips pushing against my ass slow enough to feel every inch of his impressive cock inside me.

He gives my body time to adjust before easing back out with untold patience. *God this man drives me wild,* I moan once more as his hips slam into mine, the bedframe scraping across the metal floor ending with a satisfying thud as it hit the wall. Pulling out once more, hands gripping my hips, teeth biting into my lip to contain the sounds of pleasure, he hums in approval and sets a relentless pace, my breaths falling in ragged huffs from my lips as we rock back and forth.

Moans fill the room as his nails rake across my skin, his rippled arms pull me up, so my back lay across his chest, a gulp of air fills my lungs as he picks up brutal pace he has set, fucking me into oblivion. Head resting on his shoulder, a scream rips from my throat as his fingers snake down my stomach until they found what they were looking for.

“*Come for me*” his husky voice purrs into my throat with one final thrust, his seed spilling into me as I mewl into the abyss. Legs spasming chest fluttering with abandon, the tight coil inside me letting loose as I shiver and shake with my release.

Easing me down into the soft blanketed bed with a satisfied smile, he grabs for the blankets and curls in behind me, peppering soft kisses along my neck and shoulder as the tremors coursing through my veins stop.

“I should probably get back to my bunk” I mumble, eyes closed snuggling into the blankets further.

“Doesn’t look like you plan on going anywhere” he laughs, placing one last soft kiss on my shoulder.

“Stay here while I’m away” he whispers, I roll and look at him over my shoulders as his hands pull me tighter into him.

“But whatever will the crew think?” I laugh,

“Hardly anyone is on board”

“When did you turn into such a scandalous scoundrel, Mr Danse?”

“The moment I met you” he laughs.

“What’s in it for me?” I challenge, rising a brow.

“You get to keep my sheets warm” he winks with a smirk

“Sounds like a delightful deal. Now get some sleep, you’ve got an early morning”

Chapter End Notes

Hoooo, I guess I'll just leave that there.

Thanks y'all!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!