Finders Keepers- The Cure

by NeverDyingRose

Summary

For the small group of survivors in Alexandra, the cure couldn’t come at a better time.

So when Enid comes back to the gates of Alexandra with a woman who saved her along with a mysteriously obedient walker, Rick opens the doors for her. But Artemis Wilde has her own problems and a cure always comes at a price.

The story is based at the point after Glen and Abraham has been killed but Daryl hasn’t been taken by the Saviours.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Artemis Wilde had someone waiting for her.

Black smoke was pouring into the room she woke in.

Pain stabbing through her shoulder…. Alarm blazing noise…. Smoke… pain.

Explosion?

Explosion.

someone was waiting for her. She had to get up.

Artemis tasted something metallic and wet droplets dripped down her neck. Every bone in her body grieved as something wet lapped at her shoulder. Her head throbbed and a constant ringing wouldn’t leave her hearing. She spat out blood and tried to rub the back of her neck. It took her a massive amount of pain to realise she couldn’t move her arm.

Her left shoulder was bent back at an unnatural angle, leaving her arm hanging uselessly besides her. A huge dog twice as big as anything she had ever seen lapped at her wound and gingerly nudged her shoulder. Blood soaked through her thin vest and jeans, touching her skin. But worse was the familiar smell. She scrunched her fingers into the floor and crawled up onto her knees.

She was in some sort of kitchen with chairs stacked at the side and metal tables scattered throughout the room. In between the tables, the bodies were everywhere. There was maybe a dozen- all dead- all missing parts. The blood wasn’t hers, which she guessed was supposed to reassure her. She couldn’t remember why. She looked down at the dog, grey fur matted with blood and sharp teeth bared, and a name came to her.

Shadow.

This was her wolf. A dire wolf saved from hunters. But no names came for the bodies.

She choked on the decaying smell surrounding her. Looking closer, she noticed the bodies had been… chewed on.

“Security has been breached, subject.”

The female voice sounded mechanical and crackled. Artemis’ head shot up to the roof where she was sure the voice had come from. Nothing but a small metal speaker stared back at her.

“W… where am I?”

The speaker blared to life again. “Security has been breached. Immediate evacuate is recommended.”

“I don’t remember anything! Who are these people?” She screamed, staring at the blood staining her palms. “Did I kill them?”

“Immediate evacuate, subject.” The voice repeated.
“Am I going to die?”

“Chances of survival lower the longer you stay.”

That got her up. She stumbled up to her full height and clutched her arm as if she could tear out the blinding pain.

“Where’s my family?” She coughed as she wobbled over bodies.

The voice didn’t reply.

“Where should I go? I don’t… I don’t remember how to get out.”

“You have suffered significate head trauma.” The voice explained. “The front exit has been overrun. The chances of survival are low if this route is chosen. The roof remains clear and is the optimal option.”

She noticed a familiar military bag peaked out from underneath a body. Swallowing down the bile raising in her throat, she reached down and yanked the bag free.

Stitched to the side was a series of numbers and a name.

Her name.

“I can’t move.” She groaned. “My shoulder… I think it’s dislocated.”

“Take inventory of your wounds. If you cannot move, you will die.”

She gulped loudly. Gingerly, she moved her good hand over her broken arm. Her fingers traced over jagged marks. She narrowed her eyes and glanced down. A large bite mark stared back at her. Quickly, she checked the rest of her body. She already knew what she would find.

The same bite marks covered her body. There must have been at least 3 on her back and another on her chest. She bit back a sob and shook her head.

“You can move.” The voice instructed. “You must climb into the air vent.”

Taking in a gulp of air, she pushed open the door leading out of the murder scene. Just as the voice promised, overhead was an air vent. It was only a couple feet from the ground but for Artemis it might have been on a different planet. Her shoulder sent a burst of pain to her head, reminding her of the damage already done. She ignored it and climbed on top of the desk below the air vent. She wrapped her fingers around the rails and yanked with what strength she had. It refused to budge even slightly.

“I can’t move!” She huffed. “It’s stuck!”

Without a pause, the gate broke off in her hands.

“They are on electronic control.” The voice stated. “Climbing will hurt. I suggest you be quiet.”

She nodded and placed her good arm on the vent’s edge. She forced herself to leap, clinging on barely. Heaving, she yanked the rest of her body into the vent. Shadow jumped up next. She leaned down on her stomach and held out her arm. Tears immediately strung to her eyes at the sudden weight as she helped up her pet.

Finally, they both landed in the vent. Sweat already dripped down Artemis’ forehead but she was
sure that was from having to hold back from screaming. She clumsily stumbled trying to protect her arm. The quiet patter of the wolf’s paws behind her comforted her more than it should.

*What do you remember?*

She crawled along the hot vent till she had to stop or pass out. Blood flowed freely from her hands, leaving trails of handprints along the metal vent. She paused above another air outlet and peered down into the room below.

“Has the commander been sighted?” A gruff voice demanded from the room.

Her hand flew to her mouth and her eyes widened. Three men, all with machine guns flung over their shoulders, stood still in the room. She recognised one of the men though she wasn’t sure where from. He stood taller than the others with his shoulders back and a mean scowl on his face.

“Not yet but we will find him.” The man stated.

His voice was gruff and harsh but so familiar. She leaned closer so her face was touching the metal grid. Most of his face was hidden beneath an overgrown beard and his eyes were a cold blue. *Did she have the same eyes?* His chest was like too slabs of concrete his white t-shirt struggled to contain. She drifted her eyes to his exposed arms, already knowing what she would see.

Bite marks covered his upper arms and hands. The same marks she had discovered on her back and arms. They looked deeper than hers though-as if the biter had tried to take a chunk out of him before stopping.

“Burn the bodies.” The man instructed. “Find me the key alive. I don’t care how many you have to kill to get to her and I don’t care what condition she arrives in, but bring her to me.”

Artemis flinched away from the grid and hurried forward. She stopped when the way forward lead her to a massive fan still running somehow. Below her was another grid except this one lead to an empty room. The grid slid open without protest. Clenching her teeth, she leapt down and landed with a thump on the cold floor.

Pain burst through her like an iron poker. Black dots danced across her vision, threatening to drag her into unconsciousness. She lay there, tears leaking streaks down her face, and clutched her arm close to her chest. A wet noise nuzzled her cheek gently. Peeking one eye open, Artemis could have sworn she saw pain in Shadow’s grey eyes. She eased herself up and took in her surroundings. Around her were rows of desks, some with chairs and some with benches. At the front was a chalkboard with a half-finished alphabet written with white chalk. She stumbled over to the floor length windows covering the entire right wall.

Start simple, she reminded herself.

*My name is Artemis Wilde. I’m 22 years old. My pet is a dire Wolf my father tamed from birth after saving her from hunters.*

Her father. Tears sprung to her eyes at the thought of what could have happened to him. She shook away the tears, forcing herself to look outside the window. At first, she thought the entire place was filled with bodies till they started moving. Then she realised they were alive and feeding. Dozens of walkers filled the entire grounds as far as she could see. She covered her mouth and blinked away the tears threatening to spill.
Suddenly, a heavy breath landed on her neck. Goosebumps rose immediately. She fought back the urge to shudder. She turned around an inch at a time till she stood breathing the same air at an undead man.

The biter leaned closer and crinkled its nose at her. She was sure he was sniffing her but the undead didn’t care about smells. Its military outfit was still intact. They stayed like that for a while—dead and alive waiting for the other to move.

Suddenly, booming shouts brought both of their attention to the door. Without hesitation, the biter ran over to the doors faster than she had ever seen a man move. Artemis didn’t wait to see who was shouting. With Shadow leading the way, she barged out of the room and into the staircase.

She launched up the stairs with a speed she didn’t know she had.

*My name is Artemis Wilde. My favourite place is Venice. I know how to use every weapon from handgun to rocket launcher to machete. My weapon of choice is a bowie knife. My favourite food is steak. I didn’t kill those people.*

*But I could have.*

*I could kill anyone I wanted.*

She passed three walkers who didn’t turn twice at her pushing them aside. Instead, they shuffled down the stairs— to the men chasing her. Her boots finally hit the last step and she kicked open the door advertising roof exit. She balled her fists and clenched her teeth.

She didn’t bother to hide the frustration. Everywhere she looked, the undead were surrounding her. They outnumbered her 30 to one, all crowded in one spot. Yet, they didn’t go for her. What used to be a woman turned its head towards her and bared its teeth but didn’t move. Artemis bared her teeth in return and barged through them. The voices were getting closer— as was the gunfire.

Soon she was stood on the edge looking down at the fire escape ladder. Or what was left of it. The metal staircase ended midway, curled metal showed the remnants of an explosion. The jump would kill her she knew. At the bottom, waiting for her to try, was a pile of metal laid over what used to be a lake.

It was hopeless.

“A clean dive and a heap of luck and you could probably make it.”

She turned and narrowed her eyes at the man. He stood still as tall despite the walkers surrounding them. He smiled though it didn’t quiet reach his eyes.

“Who are you?”

He frowned, showing hesitation for the first time since she had seen him.

“Do you not recognise me, Artemis?”

“You… you did this! You killed everyone! You killed my family!”

“No, you did that all by yourself.” He stated in a deadpan tone. “Now you’re going to get down from there and come with me.”

She hadn’t realised how close to the edge she had moved. She gulped nervously as the wind tried to
drag her down but didn’t move away from the edge.

“Do you remember the rumours, Artemis? Surely you remember those at least.”

“I’ve had a head trauma.”

“You’ve had a lot.” He replied. “But have you forgotten the rumours of a cure? The experiments? Those whispers of a key to recover the world?”

“It’s a myth.” She spat out.

He laughed again. It was a warm, comforting sound which made her want to cringe. Then he stretched out his arms.

“Take a look around you, princess! Why are we surrounded by the undead and not being eaten alive?”

She stayed silent. It was all the answer he needed.

“Let me guess, you’ve seen the bite marks on you. How old do you think they are? Mine are 8 months old today though yours are a little younger. We were bitten and never turned. Why do you think that is?”

“No… no! This isn’t right! It wasn’t supposed to happen this way!” She shook her head wildly, strands of crimson hair springing loss of her bun.

“I know, princess. If it could be any other way, I could have done it-”

He cut off mid-sentence and narrowed his eyes at her. She followed his glare to her neck. Glistening around her neck was a silver chain attaching a golden police badge.

“So that’s where you were when your people were being slaughtered! The irony, sweetheart!”

He chuckled as he shook his head.

Artemis’ hands shook wildly at her sides. Her arm ached and blood left cold chills on her skin.

“I’ll kill you.” She whispered.

“Princess, I’m already dead. I know you don’t want to jump so come down.”

The words were so familiar. She had been there before. Someone else had wanted to not to jump too.

“I know you.” She said finally. “I know what you want.”

He smiled but there was no warmth this time.

“I won’t let you use me. I won’t let you- I will not be the key.”

She spat at his feet and uncurled her fists. Arms spread out and a grin on her face, she let the wind take her. The last time she heard was a bloodcurdling scream before she was falling.
“Is that really what you came here for?”

“You bet.” The girl grinned. “A random bullet will do it. You don’t even have to make it silver.”

“Even after everything, you still surprise me. I don’t believe you were overcome with guilt and I don’t believe you’re here from the goodness of your heart.”

She shrugged, the chains attaching her hands to the desk rattling with her clipped movements.

“Then you haven’t learnt. You haven’t learnt anything until you learn monsters have nightmares too.”

The silence woke her.

She wanted nothing more to let the darkness drag her back unconscious. She kept her eyes closed for as long as she could before the pain in her leg became unbearable.

Artemis was moving somehow. Her head kept bouncing off ground as she moved but she was sure she was still on her back. She moved her fingers on her good hand which thankfully responded. She decided to pass on the pain of trying to move her obviously dislocated shoulder and opened her eyes instead.

Shadow was the first thing she saw. The humongous wolf was caked in dry blood and was moving aside her, a limp in her steps. Fresh blood was still flowing from a massive graze across the wolf’s leg. Artemis cringed and reached out with shaking fingers for her pet.

A sudden burst of pain stopped her. She bit back a scream and scanned down her body for where the agony was coming from.

It didn’t take her long.

Her eyes immediately landed on the huge metal rod pierced through her thigh. Blood gathered around the open wound and left a trail of blood on the ground as she was dragged along the forest floor. She forced back the urge to pass out again and focused on the military dressed man dragging her along.

“Hey!” She shouted though it came out hoarse and weak. “Let me go! You’re hurting me!”

If the man heard her, he didn’t care.

“Please, I’m hurt! I’ll bleed out! Do you hear me? I will die!”
This made him stop. She landed with a huff on the forest floor, her leg landing on the end of the pole stuck out. Biting back a scream, she crawled her way to a tree and leaned against the soft bark. The man turned around slowly.

The breath left Artemis’ lungs in a hurry. She had known there was something wrong with the man by his shuffling walk but she never expected to stare into the lifeless eyes of an undead. Her eyes flashed down to the familiar army uniform. His face was grey and showed signs of fresh bruises.

He moaned and collapsed onto his knees next to her leg. Around his shoulders was her bag, dried blood staining every inch but somehow still intact. She nodded and reached for the bag. He bared his teeth but didn’t stop her.

Everything she had before her head trauma was tucked safety inside the bag. Everything needed for survival from food and water to a set of handguns, a sharpened bowie knife and a red handled machete. Her fingers grabbed at everything in the bag, ignoring everything till she finally grasped a soft fabric. She silently thanked God and pulled out a green bag labelled medical.

“Can you hear me?”

The walker didn’t reply. She wasn’t sure if it would be better if he did.

“I need you to pull out the pole, okay?” She instructed. “My shoulder is dislocated or I’d do it myself. On the count of three, okay? One, two-”

A blinding pain hit her and the sound of flesh ripping torn into the air. An inhuman scream burst from her lips. She clutched uselessly at the spot where the pole had once been and screamed again as she touched the empty space.

“I said fucking 3!”

The walker didn’t blink at her pain. He watched as she soaked the wound in alcohol, biting down on her arm to stop herself from passing out, and dressed the wound hazily in a bandage. Artemis didn’t realise she was shaking till she tumbled onto her side.

“Come on.” She slurred more to herself than the walker. “Shadow next.”

She cleaned and dressed the wolf’s leg as best she could one handed. Shadow sat obediently, only growling when the cleaning alcohol touched the wound. As soon as she knew Shadow would be ok, she took a second to examine the damage done to her shoulder. The bone preventing her shoulder from moving definitely shouldn’t have been at a straight angle and she was pretty sure it should have been inside her body. Breathing deeply, her arm dangling uselessly by her side, she rolled back her shoulder. She gripped shoulder in a tight grip and, without giving her body time to react, twisted the shoulder back into place. Even she couldn’t contain her pained scream. It came out more of a choke and she had to focus on breathing to avoid blacking out.

“Why are you here?” She screamed at the unresponsive walker. “Why did you save me?”

Shadow whimpered at her screams but the biter didn’t flinch, not even when she pounded her bloody fist against his chest.

“Why did you save me? I didn’t want to be saved! I killed them, don’t you understand? I probably killed you as well! Say something! Say something!”

She screamed and yelled at the walker till her throat was dry. The walker watched with dead eyes as...
she wrapped her arms around her legs and scrunched her fists into her hair.

“There’s no cure, you hear me? I’m not your hero. I’m not anyone’s hero. I can’t save you!”

It was no use. The walker didn’t storm off, leaving her with her anger and pain. Instead it leaned against the opposite tree and stared at her. The anger sapped from Artemis’ body, leaving her eyelids heavy and her body aching. As her eyes fluttered close, Artemis found herself staring into the dead eyes of the biter as he watched over her.
“Jesus, can you not?” Artemis groaned without opening her eyes.

She wasn’t sure what time it was or if it even mattered but the harsh sunlight told her it was time to wake up. Another sharp tug on her leg and she lashed up and pointed her finger at the walker.

“Look, I know you don’t know me but I don’t like being woken up by someone yanking my leg when I’ve just tore a metal pole out of it.” She growled.

The biter shuffled away in the opposite direction. She sighed and gathered her things together. Shadow shot awake as soon as Artemis stroked her soft fur. She heaved the bag over her shoulder and limped over to the edge of the forest.

“Shit! You know for a corpse you’re goddamn fast.” She stated as she spotted the military uniformed walker.

She stopped alongside him and followed his line of sight till she spotted the little blue Ford Focus. The windows were covered in filth and the passenger side mirror had been broken off but it was as good as car as any.

Artemis had the car hotwired in a minute. Shadow jumped into the backseat as soon as Artemis opened the door for her and lounged across the seats.

“Yeah, you just get comfort there. Please don’t worry about helping your owner who has just recovered from a dislocated shoulder.” Artemis announced with an exaggerated bow.

Then she turned towards the walker and sighed. “You’ll have to get in the boot. If we pass anyone and they see you, it’ll get messy.”

The walker huffed and stumbled towards the boot. Thankfully, it was spacious and relatively clean. The walker climbed in without an argument though he did stare at Artemis till she eased the boot closed.

“It’s not like you have to worry about breathing anymore.” She justified as she climbed into the front seat. She threw her bag onto the passenger seat and eased the engine to life.

She wasn’t sure how long she drove before she spotted life. The walker hidden in the boot hadn’t made a sound and even Shadow had drifted off into a heavy sleep. It gave her time to study the never-ending forest as it passed her along.

The tranquil silence was broken by the roar of an engine. She took a corner too fast and had to swerve to avoid the line of cars blocking her way. The sudden break jolted Shadow awake but Artemis quickly shushed her.

“What’s the car.” A heavy southern accent ordered.

There was no way she could take them on straight away. Besides the cars blocking the road, there
were 6 men all carrying machine guns and sharpened knives. She sighed and stepped out of the car.

“I didn’t mean to step on anyone’s territory.” She announced, hands held up in surrender. “I’m just passing through. I don’t want a fight.”

“What’s a little girl like you doing on the road all alone?” The man scoffed.

She shrugged her shoulders. “I was driving and got lost.”

“Where’d you come from then?”

“I’m got a head trauma. I don’t remember, sorry.” She explained.

The man laughed cruelly and strolled closer to her so she could smell the sweat rolling off him. She gagged and cringed as she leaned away.

“Are you one of those Alexandra bitches?” He spat out in disguise. “We just found the other one of you hunting in our forest.”

“And just how is your forest?”

He turned towards the other men, a sneer on his face. “How about we have a little fun before we drag them back to Negan?”

A few of the men shared knowing glances.

Artemis smiled and covered her mouth with one hand.

The man shot around and pointed a greasy finger at her.

“What the fuck are you laughing at, Alexandra whore?”

“I’m laughing at you, sweetheart. You’re hilarious.”

Her eyes glistened with humour even when he raised his hand to slap the smile off her face.

The knife in her hand glistened too.

Before he could touch her, Artemis stabbed the blade straight through the man’s skull. She held him there for a moment, letting the panic sink into his friends before she yanked out the knife and let his corpse crumble to the ground. She tilted her head to the side and offered a half grin before the undead came.

Filthy ragged and haggard faces, the walkers didn’t hesitate before attacking the ground. The sound of men screaming, dying, rang in her eyes. They tried shooting but with Artemis there, the walkers were faster and more vicious: the perfect killing machines. She turned around and swung open the back door. Shadow leapt out with her fangs bared.

“Go get them, girl.” Artemis said in a sing song voice.

The wolf happily followed her order. She raced across the road and leapt at the first man she saw. Her massive fangs latched around the man’s bare throat, cutting off his scream before it even started. Artemis whistled low in her throat. She flicked over the boot and smiled down at the walker. The biter jumped out of his container but Artemis placed a cool hand on his chest to hold him back.
“I need one alive.”

Her eyes fell on the only survivor. His arm was missing from the elbow down. It only took a quick sweep to see the walker next to him gnawing at the limb. She whistled and the walker dropped his food.

“Find me this girl.” She ordered.

The few biters stumbled to their feet, fresh blood dropping from their mouths, and shuffled into the forest. The injured man was crying freely, staring at his detached arm.

“I know what you’re thinking.” Artemis stated as she kneeled down besides the man. “You’re wondering if there’s a worse way to die. Trust me- there are plenty. I come from a place where death is a reward.”

“Fuck you, bitch.” He choked on a sob.

She laughed and shook her head. “I can keep you alive for weeks, you know that? I can slow down that disease in your blood and keep you barely alive so it slowly turns you. What is this Alexandra place you mentioned?”

The sudden change of topic brought a frown to his face. She nodded over to the walker stood behind her.

“Do you want me to ask my friend here to eat you while you’re still alive?”

“It’s a compound 20 minutes away.” The man answered quickly. “Negan took control of it and now everyone answers to us. We found the girl from there in the forest and we just thought you were with her.”

“Who’s Negan? Is he your leader?”

The man bared his bloody teeth in a snarl.

“I’m Negan.”

She shook her head and revealed her sharpened bowie knife, still wet with his friend’s blood. She leaned closer so her blade rested against his cheek.

“You know what? I don’t believe you.”

The man barely had time to gasp before her knife was piercing through his skull. She yanked out the blade and lazily cleaned the blood off using his shirt.

Voices echoed from the forest- soft groans that could only belong to the undead. She whistled for the walker to follow and took off into the forest. It didn’t take much to follow the direction of the walkers. They had left little breadcrumbs in the form of bloody shoe prints along the forest floor. She spotted the first one, what once was a woman with braids in her hair, perched behind a tree. She stopped alongside her and sucked in her breathe so she could listen.

There were more voices only this time they were definitely human.
“What you doing out here, girl?” A gruff voice demanded.

Someone spoke but too quiet for Artemis to hear.

“Do you know what happens to little girls when they’re bad?” Another one laughed. “They get punished.”

“I was scavenging for Negan!” A light voice boomed.

Something, a memory, rang inside Artemis of another voice which sounded the same. She remembered a young girl smaller than the world but still trying to out yell it.

“Liar!” The man shouted back. “You were trying to run away! Now, I’m gonna teach you a lesson.”

That was all she needed to hear. She narrowed her eyes at the biters besides her. There were only 3 so the other must have been hidden elsewhere. Placing a finger to her fingers, she slid forward slightly till she was directly behind the first man. He wasn’t starved, that’s for sure. He towered over 6ft and would have made an intimidating sight if Artemis hadn’t seen much worse. Without a pause, she signalled for Shadow and out she leapt, growling at the men while she stood to her full height and put her blade in between the first man’s ribs.

Out of the corner of her eye, Artemis saw one of the men go for her military uniformed biter. He had a Swiss army knife in one hand and a hand gun in the other. Without hesitation, she leapt across the forest floor and pierced her blade into the man’s skull before he could hurt the walker. She froze, hand still gripping the knife handle as she dug the blade out from his mass of hair.

The man with the gun could have turned around a second faster and she would have had a bullet in her head. The biter could have mistaken her and taken a chunk out of her neck. Someone could have crept up and stabbed her in the head while she was saving the army biter.

But worse was the feeling of emptiness in her gut.

There was no regret or guilt for the half dozen bodies littering the forest or the ones left on the road. There was no value, no importance, of the human lives she had taken.

Then she knew who she was.

In a rush, her memories flooded her. They overwhelmed her with their flashing images and screaming names. She clutched the side of her head and screwed her eyes shut.

“You’re the girl from Alexandra?” She said, turning to the young girl. “My name’s Artemis Wilde.”

The girl couldn’t have been older than 16. Her long blonde hair was loose which somehow made her seem smaller. Her hand trembled as she pointed her small knife at the stranger.

“How do you know where I’m from? Where did you come from?”

“I killed a few guys on the road who tried to ambush me. They seemed to think I was with you and thought they could take advantage of me being alone. They regretted their decision in the end. I come from nowhere, sweetheart.”

The girl blinked and waved her shaking blade at the uniformed biter.
“Hey, they won’t hurt you.”

“What?” The girl exclaimed. “They’re walkers!”

Walkers. She tumbled the word around in her head for a moment. It fit better than biters and clearly the girl only knew them as walkers.

“Yes but they just saved your life. I’m immune. I can control them.”

The girl’s eyes widened. Slowly, she lowered her weapon. Artemis released the breath she didn’t realise she was holding.

“I need to go back.” The girl finally said. “Will you come with me please? I think Rick, our leader, will want to meet you.”

Artemis scoffed and shook her head. “I need to figure out where I’m going first. I think I was trying to make a cure… I have a head trauma.”

“We can help.” The girl replied before Artemis had even finished her sentence. “We have a scientist there who will know how to help.”

“I don’t know you. I don’t know your people. I don’t know Alexandra but I do know humans. They tend to shoot first, ask questions later.”

The girl held out her open hand. Artemis frowned and looked down at her hand for a pregnant moment before shaking it.

“My name’s Enid. So now you know me at least, Artemis. Where did the other walkers go?”

Artemis shrugged her shoulders and dropped her hands to her sides. “I let them go. They went about walker business.”

“Why doesn’t he go then?” Enid asked with a sharp tilt of her head in the uniformed walker’s direction.

“I knew him. He won’t bloody leave me alone.”

Her hesitate smile made Artemis look away.

“I’ll drive you to this Alexandria but if this scientist can’t help me I’ll leave. Deal?”

“Deal.”

A purr of an engine broke through the conversation. Enid’s glare shot to the direction leading to the road.

“I need to go talk to him. He’s from Alexandra too but I’ll explain before you come out, okay?”

Artemis nodded her head and watched her run till she was out of sight.
Then she leaned down beside a man’s body.

“I know you’re still alive. If you were dead, I would already be able to control you.”

The man stifled a groan and rolled onto his back. He was younger than the rest, maybe 20, and would have had a few years ahead of him if it wasn’t for the massive bite mark on his neck.

“Did you hear what I told Enid?”

The man nodded.

“Good. I need you to take a message back to your boss.”

“I ain’t doing shit for you.” The man growled.

She grinned and leaned closer to his bite mark.

“You no longer have a choice.”

Without warning, she wrapped her hand around his mouth and bite down hard on his neck exactly where the walker had bitten. His pained scream was muffled by his skin as his already bitten flesh came apart.

Artemis left him there, slumped against a tree, blood pouring out of his neck and turned to the uniformed walker.

“What? Demoralising is the first move of any hostile takeover…don’t you judge me.”

As usual, he didn’t response.
The lights were blaring down on her now. She pounded and pounded against the metal door but it wouldn’t budge. There was screaming coming from the room next to hers, the roof, and the hallway-everywhere. None of that mattered to her. She was ready to die.

“Let me save her, please! I can save her!” She screamed above the noise.

From the small window on her door, she saw her loyal pet being dragged away by a metal chain across her throat. Shadow howled in pain and tried to fight but it was useless.

“Please I can save her!”

Artemis blinked away the memory. No, she wouldn’t try and remember there. It wasn’t time when she was staring down the bad end of a crossbow. Sighing, she raised her hands above her head and smiled at the handsome man behind the crossbow.

“Who the fuck is this, Enid?” He growled in a deep accent she couldn’t place.

The Alexandra girl jumped in front of Artemis, stepping in-between her and the crossbow’s fire.

“Her name is Artemis! She helped me and killed those saviours who were going to…”

She stopped, the blood draining from her face as she realised what would have happened if Artemis hadn’t stepped in.

“How the fuck do you know she ain’t one of them?”

“Cause she killed about a dozen of them?” Enid replied with disbelief biting into her tone. “Look, she’s immune. I saw it myself. All these walkers came out nowhere and attacked the saviours but not her or me! We can take her to Eugeen and we can make a cure!”

A cure. The more she rolled it about in her head, the more she warmed to the idea.

“Prove it.” The crossbow man ordered.

“Okay but to do so I’m going to need my hands.”

“Fine but I’m keeping my crossbow on you.”

She offered a half smile. “You can keep whatever you want on me, sweetheart.”

Dropping her hands, she gripped the edge of her t-shirt and lifted it just enough so he could see the bite mark in her side. It looked worse in daylight than it did in the building. Under the unforgiving
stare of the Alexandra survivors, the bite revealed the chunk of flesh which was missing from where the walker had got hungry and the deep red teeth marks showed perfectly. Even Enid gasped and covered her mouth when she saw the wound.

“Don’t worry.” Artemis stated as she smoothed her t-shirt back in place. “It didn’t happen by accident. If your scientist can make whatever it is inside me a cure for everyone then great but if not,” She said with a directed look at Enid. “I’m gone. I’m not sticking around for your problems with these ‘saviours’ and I’m not sticking around to join some community. Your problems are yours and mine are mine. Got it?”

The crossbow finally lowered away from her face. The man gave a brief nod.

“Name’s Daryl.”

She smiled brightly and winked.

“Pleasure’s all mine. Now, you’ve got to promise you won’t shoot?”

He mumbled something under his breath which Artemis took as agreement. She gave a shrill whistle and waited for the familiar groans.

She saw Daryl raise his crossbow before she saw her walker. She jumped in front of Daryl’s arrow, cursing under her breath.

“Like I said, you can’t shoot.”

“Insane bitch, move! There’s a goddamn walker behind you!”

“I know.” She replied calmly. “He won’t hurt you. He saved Enid, didn’t he?”

“Yeah.” Enid answered.

The walker paused aside Artemis, not a signal sign of fear despite the crossbow pointed at his head. Daryl’s eyes shot from Artemis to Enid to the walker.

“There’s no way it’s riding at the back of my bike.” Daryl huffed.

“That’s fair. I have a car just done the road. Enid can come with me and direct.”

“That car surrounded by bodies?”

“You bet.”

He heaved the crossbow over his shoulder and jumped back onto his motorbike.

“Maybe you aren’t as useless as you seem.”

“I bet you tell that to all the girls.” She laughed and winked.
“Will you listen to me for once?” Artemis fumed.

“No.” The agent replied.

“Why?!?”

“Well, because you just shot me. That kind of behaviour leads to trust issues when we’ve fresh in our relationship.”

Artemis huffed and blew a few loose hairs out of her hair. She would have crossed her arms if they hadn’t been handcuffed behind her back.

“So, office Ryan Winters, you stubborn son of a bitch, do you have a plan? You want to go all heroic and charge out while taking out as many as you can?”

He chuckled and Artemis had to hide the satisfaction she felt at getting a reaction out of him.

“Would you be open to joining me?”

“It’s not like I have anything better to do.” She sighed, shrugging her shoulders.

“We just need to take out that asshole leader… not that I don’t appreciate your willing spirit.”

Artemis raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. “So it’s him or you.”

“One shall rise and one shall fall.”

He winked and revealed the key to her handcuffs.

“That’s a fucking stupid saying.” She scoffed, trying to hide her smile.

The car conversation was mainly one sided. Artemis chose to drive, not bothering to ask if the girl was old enough to even have a provisional. Shadow leapt into the back seat and this time Artemis let the walker sit on the seat next to Shadow.

“Does… did he have a name?”

Artemis shrugged. “He did.”

“Were you together?”

“Not for long. But you can call him Ryan if it makes you feel better.”

Ryan. The word leaving her mouth made her eyes itch. She swallowed the sob threatening to catch in her throat and focused on the world in front of her window.

“Why did Ryan and you save me?”

“I didn’t intend on saving you. I just wanted to kill assholes.” She lied.

“Well you’re going to hate the Saviours. They take our food, our medication and everything we fought for. They killed two of us. Survivors, like you.”

“No one is like me, sweetheart.” She said, checking the muscular figure driving his motorbike behind her.
“Yeah, well Glenn was my friend. His wife is pregnant and she was ill- that’s the only reason they were out there when Negan ambushed them.”

She gave a bored sigh.

“Shit happens, sweetheart.”

“Stop calling me that!” Enid shouted, earning a growl from Shadow. “My name is Enid!”

“Why don’t you stand up then if this Negan is such a tyrant? Is your leader a coward?”

“No! He watched them get killed! You have no idea what it was like seeing Maggie so broken and hurt. Then they came into our homes and took all our stuff. Rick’s trying to keep us all alive! He will stand up, anyway. Just you watch.” Enid huffed.

Artemis stole a side glance at the furious girl and smiled.

“What the hell are you smiling at?”

“I can appreciate people who are passionate about shit like justice.”

“Whatever.” She muttered. “Why do you keep playing with your ring anyway?”

Artemis glanced down at the ring on her left hand and instinctively twisted it around her finger. It was a beautiful piece of jewellery which had been handcrafted to fit around her finger alone. It was a simple band of silver but in the middle was a purple ruby carved into a cross with her initials tattooed inside.

“It’s a habit.” Artemis stated as she pressed on the breaks. “Is this the place? Looks like where desperate housewives were filmed.”

Enid looked up at the giant metal gates blocked their way. It was easy to see it was home just by the light sudden in the girl’s eyes. Artemis stepped out of the car and opened the door for Shadow but shut the door on Ryan.

“Wait here, okay? We don’t know these people and… well humans tend to want to shoot. You… you still look like him.”

The walker groaned which Artemis took as an ok. She eased the door closed and took off in the direction Enid went. She winked at the two women stood on platforms overlooking the fence. She was more paying attention to the heavy machine guns pointed in her and Shadow’s direction. The purr of Daryl’s bike appeared behind her.

She turned around and raised her eyebrows. “You guys aren’t the most trusting out there, you know that?”

“We have reason not to be.” Daryl mumbled as he marched past her.

“Open the gates.” Enid shouted.

Artemis stood aside with her wolf as the gates creaked open. The first person she saw was a bearded man wearing a shirt and jeans. He met her eyes and for once Artemis felt the urge to flinch away. He had a gun holster around his hips, like she had seen cops wear before the world went to shit.

Daryl stormed inside with Enid and they spoke with the bearded man she guessed was Rick.
“You can come in.” Rick eventually shouted out to her. “But the dog stayed there.”

“She’s harmless. Besides, where I go- she goes.” She assured.

Rick narrowed his eyes at Shadow for a pregnant moment. Just when she was sure he would demand she leave, he begrudgingly nodded his head.

Artemis smiled and walked past the gate with Shadow trotting behind her.

“Where are your weapons?” Rick asked.

“I left them in the car, per Enid’s suggestion.”

“You ain’t worried about us being cannibals? Murders? Looters?”

She cocked her eyebrow. “I think I can handle myself.”

Rick held out his head for her to shake and she took the offer. His hand was callous from hard work and she held on for a moment longer than necessary. She would have brought his palm up her lips just to touch the hard skin of his fingertips if a woman with a crown of black braids hadn’t walked straight to her and stared until even Artemis felt uncomfortable. She let Rick’s hand slip from hers. She smiled at the stranger.

“Who is this, Daryl?”

Daryl grunted.

“Ask Enid. She’s her best friend.”

“Aww.” Artemis cooed. “I’ve never had a best friend.”

Enid shot her a look which could have iced water.

“She saved me from some saviours who found me when I was over the fence.”

The woman shook her head yet her face remained clear of any disapproval.

“You shouldn’t be going over the fence. We’ve been over this.”

Artemis stepped forward, a grin on her ruby lips. “If she hadn’t she wouldn’t have met me. You are?”

“Michonne.” She replied without returning Artemis’ smile.

“Pleasure, I’m sure.” She winked.

Michonne turned towards Rick. “Have you asked her the questions yet?”

Rick shook his head. Artemis raised her eyebrow and rolled her eyes.

“What questions?”

Rick placed his hand on his gun holster and tapped his finger against his Kolt.

“How many walkers have you killed?”

The smile dropped off her lips and she tilted her head to the side.
“40… 50 maybe?”

Rick’s eyes didn’t reveal anything and she doubted Michonne had showed an expression since the apocalypse.

“How many people have you killed?”

Artemis winced as if she had been punched. She opened her mouth only to close it again a second later.

“I don’t remember.” She repeated. “I stopped counting after the first dozen. 70… maybe 80.”

Daryl’s hand twitched no doubt to reach his weapon. The assassin studied Rick’s face, unsure if her answers had just got her killed.

“Why?”

Artemis tilted her head to the side and took a deep breath. “In a past life it was because I was paid to. In this life, I kill people because they would have killed me if I didn’t. But I know I’m immune and I know you guys aren’t. Am I right?”

Rick’s eyes drifted down to her throat and landed on the glistened badge hanging from her neck. He stiffened and glanced back to Michonne, looking for some sort of confirmation though she wasn’t sure what.

“That badge you’re wearing is FBI, right? Is that what you were before this all began?”

“No.”

“Then where’d you get it from?”

“A good man who didn’t deserve what happened to him.” Her answer was clipped and short. It left no room for the discussion to be continued.

Rick glanced down at Enid and Artemis knew what he was going to say. She was unwanted, a murderer, and probably psychotic. Unfortunately, they needed the cure much more than she needed them.

“I saw her control walkers like they were toys. She has walker bite marks but she hasn’t turned!” Enid objected.

Rick had the same expression Artemis had seen on Daryl’s face too. The same disbelieve and distrust, echoed onto their attractive faces.

“I could show you incredible things, Rick.” She offered, her tongue darting out to lick her bottom lip. “If you let me, I’ll show you.”

He smirked and finally let his hand slid away his weapon.

“Enid said you’re immune. If you can prove it, we can talk about you staying.”

Artemis nodded towards the two women stood guard. “If I do, you have to tell everyone not to shoot no matter what they see as long as I do no harm.”

He agreed and Artemis went outside to her car. She opened the back door and leaned in to where Ryan waited.
“Don’t eat these people.” Artemis simply instructed before moving aside.

She went in front of Ryan, all too knowing of the guns pointed at her.

“Hey! She’s got a walker!” One of the women on the fence, who was wearing a cap which covered her face, shouted.

Artemis shot around to Rick and narrowed her eyes.

“You made a promise.” She reminded.

Rick tapped his finger in the air and the two women slowly lowered their guns. Artemis held out her hand and Ryan followed her to the gates. They stopped in front of Rick.

“If you bite, I’m going to be super pissed.” Artemis warned Ryan.

Before Rick could object, Artemis slid her finger into the walker’s open mouth.

She grinned.

Ryan stood with mouth obediently open around her ringed finger.

“Do you believe me now?”

The silence around the group was all the answer Artemis needed. Even Rick was knocked silent.

Artemis removed her finger and wiped her hand on her pants’ leg. She accidentally grated her wound on her thigh and winced.

“Now, I hear you have a problem. I might be able to help.”

Chapter End Notes

So bit of a long chapter! I kinda put everything in this chapter :)
“Which direction did you come from?” Rick questioned. “How did you know you were immune?”

“I gave from far west. I might have driven for 5, maybe 6, hours. I don’t remember how but I woke up in a building surrounded by zombies. There were… a lot of bodies I couldn’t explain. I think people like me, immune, are trying to kill me and I don’t remember why.”

“How do you know you didn’t do something to make them want you dead?” Michonne asked.

Artemis glanced down at the dried blood on her pants’ leg. “When I was trying to escape, I overheard a few of them in there. They were talking about finding ‘the key’ no matter who they had to kill. I probably did something horrible to piss them off.” She paused, swallowing the lump in her throat. “I should have been the one to pay for it.”

Rick opened and closed his mouth twice. Judging by the pity in his eyes, Artemis knew she had brought up a sensitive subject. She hadn’t picked the leader as a father but she had been wrong before.

“You said you could help us with a problem.” Michonne hinted.

Artemis grinned. “Those men I killed on the road- I’m guessing they weren’t the only ones part of these ‘saviours’. I’m also guessing they’ve got you by the balls. If you let me stay and can make a cure while I figure out a way to take down the other immunes, you’ve got the services of a cultist assassin at your disposal.”

“You were an assassin?”

“You were in a cult?” Daryl repeated.

She shrugged and nodded. A year ago, she would have laughed and told them to look up her name. Obviously times weren’t as simple.

“Even if you are as good as you think are,” Rick stated. “There’s no way you can take down every saviour.”

“We don’t need to. You know the thing about cults, sectors, and bullies which destroys them? They put too much stock in their leader. If we take down the leader, they’ll all coming tumbling down. Then there’s going to be a few angry, uncoordinated, saviours running about but we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

“You think it’s that simple?”

Her lips tipped upwards into an easy smile. “One shall rise and one shall fall.”

Her fingers automatically reached for the badge hung around her neck. The touch of leather warmed her fingers.

“You seem like trouble.” Rick stated.
“All the best things are.”

They stood staring at each other for a moment, both refusing to break eye contact. In the end, Rick was the first to speak.

“You can clean up in my home and stay until we decide if we want you here. This isn’t me saying your stay is anything other than temporary. That’s not my decision to make but it’ll be considered. That’s all I promise for now.”

She nodded and sighed in relieve. Without adrenaline flood through her system, the past few days was beginning to drain her energy. She hadn’t realised how filthy she was. The blood had dried on her face and skin, leaving an irritating itch everywhere.

“I’d like that.” She agreed. “Do you have any bandages?”

Artemis had never been so happy to hear the answer yes.

Her eyes flickered up to the women guarding the wall. Their fingers were still on their guns’ triggers. As least they didn’t lie about an illusion of trust.

“This walker… does he have a name?”

The badge warmed in her hand almost trying to remind her of its presence.

“Ryan. His name is Ryan.”
There was no chance of escape.

The injured man’s hands were cut into ribbons from fleeing over a fence lined with barbed wire and his feet were bare- both left perfect blood splatter for his attacker to follow. He didn’t doubt she was toying with him. Like a cat with a mouse, she hadn’t killed him straight away. Instead, she had maned him, slicing open his side, and let him escape into the deserted night streets. She had even let him stab her in the shoulder, laughing as she slid the blade further in. But he wasn’t giving up without a fight.

Just as he turned the corner into another alleyway, he heard her. Then he did his first mistake- he looked behind him.

Like a beast in the night, she stood proudly on top of a car roof. She tilted her head and he could have sworn he saw her grin even through the pitch darkness.

“Why are you running?” She asked in her honey voice. “Surely, you know this is a one way street?”

The man’s panicking stare dropped on the walls surrounding him. How could he have been so stupid? A huge brick wall blocked his way forward and an assassin blocked his way back. He hadn’t noticed the twists and turns, only focusing on escaping her mocking laughter. It left her perfectly able to manipulate him into a one way street.

She dug her fingers into her shoulder and grinned. There was no blood, no yelp of pain. It had healed as fast as it had happened.

“The organisation that created me made it so even moral wounds heal.” She explained. “I could take you back to my people they would fix you if I told them to. Unfortunately though, my employer asked that you die in a great deal of pain.”

She smiled again and this time he was sure he saw it. It wasn’t a cruel or hateful smile. It was the same smile had seen on his daughter’s face when she was playing in a ball pen. It was the same smile he had seen on his wife’s face when he had given her roses on their anniversary.

She was enjoying herself.

It was playtime while she was killing him.

It took Artemis an hour and a layer of skin before she finally felt somewhat clean. Her shoulder burned but one quick glance told her it wasn’t that bad. Compared to the gap in her thigh, it was practically a paper cut. It would heal soon enough but that didn’t stop the occasional shot of pain. She tried to take the badge off her neck but something held it in place. Small groans reminded her of Ryan still in the corner watching her step out of the shower. She didn’t bother checking her reflection in the mirror. She knew the cuts and bruises on her face would have healed already and her body didn’t have any mark which would take away from her beauty.
“Sure, you’ve the perfect creation.” She scoffed at her reflection.

She shook her head and stepped into Rick’s bedroom. Lying on the bed was her bag along with her clothes freshly cleaned. Rick didn’t notice her creep into the room and continued laying out her clothes on the bed.

“I didn’t realise housekeeping was included.”

She smiled at Rick’s small surprised jump.

“There was a lot of blood on your clothes.”

“I noticed.” She agreed.

She walked into the bedroom and bumped Rick out of the way so she could reach for her bag. His eyes took in the sight of her barely covered body as fast as they could.

“Your shoulder looks better.”

“That’s such a keen observation. It’s no longer jolting out from my arm so it will be looking better, won’t it?” She replied, with a quick check at the massively bruised skin. “There’s unfortunately a hole in my thigh that’s not looking as good though.”

“Do you want me to look?”

Colour rose to her cheeks before she could stop it and she burst out laughing.

“I’ve got it, thanks. Did you come in for something other than to drop off my laundry and make me blush?”

The smile softly fell from his lips. His fingers tapped on the gun hanging in his hip holster.

“I know you said you don’t remember how you ended up surrounded by zombies but I need to ask- how did you know you was immune?”

“I’ll show you.”

Artemis let the towel fall down till it was only hanging around her waist. Rick couldn’t help his eyes would wondering down her body, taking in her every curve and inch of tanned skin. She was skinny and had no doubt gone without a meal for days but her beauty hadn’t diminished. Rick was so busy trying to look anywhere else besides the sloop of her breasts that he didn’t notice her turn around.

The gasp caught in his throat when he saw her back. After everything he had seen, the cruel marks on her otherwise perfect body was shocking. His eyes widened as he took in the dozen bite marks dug into her skin. There was too many for it to be a simple attack. They still showed where the skin had come loose, healed, only to be ripped off again. But Rick had seen a lot of bodies destroyed by walker bites- it was the welts which shocked him. He counted 20 altogether- blue and black, surrounded by yellow swelling and deep red cuts slicing into her skin. Stretching from one of her shoulders to the other, strange words were tattooed in black ink and somehow he could see the anger in the twists of the letters. She must have noticed him staring because she grabbed her towel and tucked it around her again.

“It wasn’t an accident. I volunteered for it. Or my father volunteered me for it anyway. The organisation who governed us created me with a cure that made injuries heal faster. I was one of the few who the ‘cure’ didn’t kill or cripple so it made me a perfect candidate for the apocalypse
experiments.”

“What happened? Not the bite marks… did someone whip you?”

Images flashed before Artemis’ eyes. Images of her helpless again, being held down and her shirt ripped to pieces. Then the pain, anger and the god awful heated betrayal.

“You ask a lot of questions.” She said, flicking at her broken fingernail.

Thankfully, heavy footsteps charged up the stairs and the bedroom door swung open. Daryl narrowed his eyes at her and she winked in response.

“Michonne wants to go on a supply run before the saviours check in,” He said with a head nod in Artemis’ direction. “Everyone would feel better if she stayed behind.”

Artemis wrapped the towel back around her and smiled. “Are you going to keep an eye on me? You know, to make sure I don’t get into trouble?”

He grunted and Rick raised his eyebrow.

“Since a couple of guys have turned up dead on the road, someone needs to keep an eye out for them for when they start to suspect us.” Daryl pointed out.

“That could have waited.” She smirked. “Were you just trying to catch me naked?”

Even Rick laughed and Artemis enjoyed the shocked blush on Daryl’s face. He mumbled something and stomped out of the room, leaving Rick still laughing.

“He doesn’t seem to have taken to me. Is it my accent?” She laughed. “Don’t worry, I won’t cause trouble. I’m not really wearing enough clothes to.”

He blushed and nodded his head. When he turned around, Ryan was shuffling by the door. His dead eyes flickered from Artemis to Rick.

“He can stay outside the walls. A walker around here is going to make people anxious, itchy on the trigger.”

“No.” She said quickly. “Ryan stays with me. Ryan always stays with me.”

She waited till Rick left till she let Ryan into the room and dressed. There was only one set of clothes- a pair of skinny jeans and corsets and a thin leather jacket, something she had flaunted about in and was hardly suitable for a zombie outbreak. She cursed and flung on the first things she found. She didn’t remember packing the bag.

Something told her it wasn’t her who did it.
Rick was still laughing when he met Daryl outside his house. Carl was still with Enid doing whatever those two did together so Rick had some time to spend with his best friend.

“What are you laughing at?” Daryl grumbled.

“You ran out of there pretty fast.” He pointed out with a smug grin.

He tucked his crossbow over his shoulder and a machine gun over the other. “She seems too good to be true. The cure to the outbreak just suddenly appears at our doors with a smile and promise to help? I’m not buying it, man.”

“So if she was a 600 pound man with a comb over, you’d believe it more?”

Daryl shook his head.

“Do you know what I think this is?” Rick continued without waiting for a reply. “You’ve got a crunch bigtime on her already and you’re just nervous cause she hit on you.”

The look on Daryl’s face brought fresh laughter for Rick.

After stuffed her few belongings back into her bag, she stepped out with Ryan and went out the back door. No one paid too much attention to her, something she had grown to appreciate. Even Ryan went under the radar for a while.

“Can you just… I don’t know, walk like a normal person?” She huffed as Ryan walked ahead of her. “Where are you going so fast anyway? I don’t know if you’ve looked in the mirror recently but you kind of stick out from the crowd. As least try to walk proper!”

She tried to demonstrate walking normally and signaled for Ryan to copy. Ryan eyed her suspiciously before continuing to shuffle. With a heavy sigh, she gave up and walked to the fence.

The two women weren’t there. Instead there was a long haired man with beady eyes stood by the gate and Daryl stood on the fence platform, looking over at the burnt out houses.

She stood behind the platform and out of eye shot for a moment. Daryl wasn’t what she would have classed as attractive before the outbreak. She had been in several relationships, all with pretty boys or dangerous men, all ending when she got bored. The longest relationship she had was with an eco-terrorist. He had been killed not long before the outbreak by the FBI, something that hadn’t been much of a surprise.

“I can feel you staring.” Daryl called down without looking at her.

She smirked and stepped out of the shadows.
“Mr Walker guy over here doesn’t much being seen. I mean, you did point a gun in his face last time you saw him.”

“He shouldn’t be a walker if he doesn’t want to get shot.”

“Poof!” She exclaimed. “He’s suddenly cured. You are more than a pretty face! How did you get so wise?”

He shook his head but she saw a flicker of a smile on his lips.

“You know how to shoot?”

She cocked her eyebrow. “Do I- a cult trained assassin- know how to shoot? No, you’ve brought up my one weakness there.”

“Are you gonna make more smartass remarks or are you gonna get up here and show me what you’ve got?”

She laughed but started climbing up the ladder anyway.

Ryan stayed with his feet firmly planted on the floor. She reached the top and Daryl held out his hand to help her onto the platform. She took it gladly along with his gun. The warm touch of the weapon molded to her hands. She was all too familiar with the feel of a sniper and she lined the sight on instinct.

The first walker came into her sight. Daryl stood so close to her she could smell leather and the earthy smell which followed him. With a squeeze of her finger on the trigger, she sent a bullet hurling through the air and into the walker’s forehead.

“I thought you didn’t know how to shoot.”

Another perfect shoot.

Another fallen walker.

“It’s your amazing patronising skills. Where did you learn to shoot?”

“I taught myself.”

She whistled and clucked her tongue.

“I suppose you had no choice. Rick, I’m guessing he was a cop but you don’t strike me as someone who had military training. Hunting, maybe?”

“How did you know Rick was a cop?” Daryl asked, ignoring her question.

“The way he reacted when he saw my badge. That was a reaction of a cop thinking he was looking at one of his guys. You don’t survive the outbreak without knowing people.”

“You don’t look the assassin type.” He pointed out, his eyes drifting down her revealing outfit.

She laughed loudly and took out another walker. “I’ve finished plenty of fights wearing less, sweetheart.”
“I bet.” He mumbled.

“Mr Dixon! Are you flirting with me? Here I thought Rick and you were an item!”

He furrowed his eyebrows and his mouth hung open.

“You better watch your mouth if you intend on sticking around.”

“Maybe I don’t intend on sticking around.”

“You always talk this much?” He asked as he took his gun back.

“I just like talking to you.” She smiled, colour rising to her cheeks. “It’s been a while since I talked to a human who wasn’t trying to kill me.”

She glanced down at her feet and fidgeted with the ring around her finger until he spoke again.

“How can we trust you? You admit you’re on the run and brag about being an assassin. Why did I bring you back here?”

She frowned and held her ring in place.

“I didn’t mean for it to come across as bragging. It was before the outbreak.” She sighed and rubbed her sore shoulder. “I actually spent most of the beginning year of the outbreak in FBI custody after I handed myself in.”

He opened and closed his mouth. No doubt he was dying to question her but he held his tongue.

She touched the badge around her neck. The name engraved still brought back the memories of nights the federal agent spent asking her the same questions and coping with her sarcasm.

“That’s where I met Ryan. Not the walker Ryan but agent Ryan Winters who back then was just some asshole who arrested me.”

“What’d you turn yourself in for?”

"It seemed a good idea at the time. Then again, so did throwing Hitler out of art school.” She held her finger to her lips. “You’ll have to cook me dinner if you want to hear the rest of the story.”

He rolled his eyes but there was a smile on his face. She took it a minor victory.

“Are you this friendly with everyone?”

“Well, mainly with cute rednecks. Isn’t it obvious?”

He scoffed. “The only way you could make it more obvious is if you stripped down in front of me and don’t call me a redneck.”

“Why? It’s what you were before the outbreak, right? Not that it’s any of my business-”

“You’re right. It ain’t any of your goddamn business.” He barked. “What are you even doing here?”

She shrugged her shoulders and uncurled her fists which threatened to connect with Daryl’s nose.

“I was wondering and got lost.”

“Where you gonna wonder off next to then?”
She smiled and turned back to the ladder. She wanted to turn around and yell at him but she didn’t. She grabbed the badge and held it in her hands till she felt the anger leave.

Ryan would have been proud if she hadn’t got him killed.
It was surprising how easily it was the 8th most wanted person in the USA to walk into the headquarters of the FBI. Said wanted criminal had been waiting in line to speak to the receptionist for 5 minutes.

“Good morning. I’m looking for a friend of mine.” She greeted.”Tall, handsome, blonde, has a habit of jumping in front of bullets…”

The receptionist looked at her with a straight lipped smile and raised her eyebrow.

“Excuse me, mam?”

She shrugged. “My humour isn’t for everyone. My name’s Artemis Wilde. Could you tell agent Ryan Winters I’m here please? I think he’s expecting me.”

The receptionist froze with her mouth open. Artemis nodded and walked to the middle of the floor. She knew the receptionist was currently running her name and facial scan into the system.

Whistling a tune she had heard on the radio moments ago, she kneeled down and placed her handgun on the floor besides her. Then she placed her hands behind her head and kissed the floor with her cheek.

Within seconds, the alarm was blaring. She smiled at the time it took the FBI to realise they had a wanted fugitive in their own home. She didn’t pay any attention to the guns pointed at her. Instead, she waited till two polished shoes paused in front of her.

“Hi! You must be Ryan. I thought I’d catch you once you’ve come back from your lunch because you’re in for a long day.” She grinned. “I believe you’ve been looking for me.”

Artemis hadn’t spent 2 hours in Alexandra before someone was shouting. For a change, it wasn’t at her though judging by the panic it might have been worse. Ryan jumped up from his spot besides her on the porch and scanned around. For once, she did the same.

A few others came out of their home including her neighbour.

“What’s going on?”

The 40ish woman took one look at the walker besides Artemis and hurried back into her home. The door slammed and Artemis had no choice but to march down the street with Ryan in tow. The groans from Ryan grew more aggressive as they got closer to the gates.

Before she could reach the gate, a rough hand grabbed her arm and forced her to turn around. She
spun around, mouth set in a sneer. Rick released her immediately and Daryl took her by the arm instead.

“It’s the saviours.” He explained. “If they see you, there’ll be questions. Go hide with Ryan.”

She huffed and chopped her finger across her throat.

“Give the word and I’ll wipe them out.”

“No.” He replied from behind gritted teeth.

Daryl yanked her arm. Ryan growled but she hushed him and let Daryl lead them away.

The saviors flooded into Alexandra like maggots. The few Alexandra natives who had watched the outbreak from behind frost glass preferred to hide in the houses whenever the saviors came. It left Rick to answer for everyone, not that he wanted to. He stormed up to the fence and took a second to calm his anger before he stood face to face with the savior's leader.

Despite the hatred on Rick’s face, Negan grinned when he saw him like he was seeing an old friend. It made Rick want to claw out his eyes.

“You said 2 weeks.” Rick stated. “You’re early.”

“I missed you.” Negan drawled.

From behind him, one of the military trucks opened and a pale man stepped out. If it wasn’t for his nervous eyes, Rick would have mistaken him for a walker. Blood stained the entire left side of t-shirt and dripped down his pants leg. It took Rick a second to realise it was coming from a massive bite mark in his neck.

“A few of my men were happily minded their own business and suddenly they get attacked. Now, I can’t say who it was because there were no survivors. But it only happened a few roads from here so I’m just wondering, Ricky, did someone lose their temper?”

“It looks like a walker attack.” Rick pointed out.

Negan laughed loudly and Rick clenched his teeth.

“Not unless walkers start stabbing people in the head now.”

Rick’s eyes flashed to Daryl’s house. While he had to face the man who had murdered his friends, Artemis was safe inside probably watching him.

With a deep breath, he declared: “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Artemis was watching but her eyes were not on Rick. She watched saviors- strangers- enter homes and throw out anything worth value. She saw some even drag out mattresses. She curled her lips in disguise and slid down on the wall to the floor.

“I could end this right now.” She sneered. “Rick should have let me take them out.”

"No one's happy about this."
"Why bring me here if he doesn't want me to kill them?"

"God fucking question." Daryl responded.

Daryl shook his head but didn’t say anything. She was forced to hide Ryan under the bed and order him not to come out under strict orders of Daryl. Shadow was beside him, somehow enduring the smell of the undead. She had her bowie knife tucked into her belt and her handgun hidden in her ankle holster so she didn’t exactly need the back-up but she had moaned the entire time.

“Just sit down and shut up.” Daryl ordered.

“No! This is ridiculous! I could kill every last one of those and Rick treats me like some goddamn kid who wondered in sucking my thumb! These motherf-"

Her sentence was cut off with a gunshot. Her eyes widened and her mouth refused to close, the words still on her tongue. It had only come from a couple houses down- Rick’s house.

“You can stay here with them but I’m going to help.” She announced, jumping up from her spot and running towards the door.

“Hey! Stop!”

Daryl’s order felt on deaf ears. She fled out of the house, slamming the door shut behind her. Her hurried footsteps pounded on the road in time to her racing heartbeat. The door to Rick’s was hanging open. She burst in and kicked open the living room door.

The men in the room all turned to stare at her. Her boots weren’t running material, being laced up to her knees and the heel worn down, but sure they made a bang. She didn’t recognise the eye-patched boy holding a man twice his height at gunpoint but she did recognise bullies. Rick narrowed his eyes at her while the baseball wielding man next to her just grinned.

“Is everything ok?” She offered with a gentle smile.

“Everything’s fine.” Rick said quickly.

She held up her hands as she noticed one of the men’s fingers twitch on his gun trigger. She didn’t make an intimidating figure, something she counted on.

“And who might this beautiful piece be?” The baseball bat wielding man exclaimed as he strutted in front of her. “Rick, have you been holding out on me?”

“Artemis.” She introduced. “My name is Artemis Wild.”

“Negan.” He replied, his baseball bat rested without care against his shoulder.

She hid her smile. So this was the infamous leader of the saviors. Her fingers twitched at her side, her blade soft against her skin. She wasn’t sure if Rick saw the dangerous glint in her eyes but he quickly put himself in between the two.

“Artemis is passing through. She comes here to rest up but she’s not one of us.”

Negan tilted his head back and chuckled.

“Don’t be so fucking rude! Don’t be interrupting me when I’m talking to a beautiful woman, Rick! Now, we were having ourselves a conversation with Carl here but you look much more fun.”
“Oh, I am.” She smirked. “I’m a real thrill.”

She eased her hands behind her back and wrapped her fingers around the cold knife handle. A quick look in Rick’s direction showed the horror on his face.

“Since we have ourselves a bit of a situation, I’ll make you a deal.” He offered, grinning at Rick. “I’ll forgive this misunderstanding with your little badass son, Rick, and just take Artemis here to soothe my pride.”

Rick’s hands curled into fists and he exhaled slowly before replying.

“Leave her alone.”

The order just seemed to spur on the savior leader.

“Don’t tell me she’s yours, you sly piece of shit!” He laughed. “You don’t want to share with me? Sharing is fucking caring, Rick.”

Before Rick could reply, Artemis burst into laughter.

“Sweetheart, I’m flattered but you remind me too much of my father. It would be so awkward.”

He moved fast but Artemis was faster. She saw the flicker of metal before he had the gun pointed at Carl and she had her knife ready in her hands. With a furious kick, she knocked the legs out from the closest savior and connected the heel of her hand with his nose. A sickening crack immediately responded. She didn’t give him time to recover and choked her arm around his throat, a knife at his throat and his body in front of hers. Still holding the shocked man as a body shield, she pointed her own gun at Negan.

“Let me tell you why I’m such a thrill- I don’t appreciate people who pull guns out on kids. There are lines.” She stated calmly. “Let me explain: if I killed you it’s fair game. If I killed your men here, it’s fair game. But if I slaughtered your entire camp and hung up your wife or girlfriend like a pig just so you would have to cut down her body… that would cross the line. Do you get what I’m saying here, Negan?”

She smiled, baring her teeth. There was humour in his eyes but something else she couldn’t mirror.

“Don’t you think you’re outnumbered her?” He laughed.

“Bite off more than you can chew,” She replied. “And then chew it.”

He stepped closer to her. She pressed the knife tighter against the savior’s throat earning a pained yelp from him. A thin treacle of blood splattered on Negan’s shoes as he stopped in front of her. Her breath failed her and caught in her throat.

“You don’t want to kill him.”

“Oh, no. I would never kill a guy I’ve never met before and has no discernible worth.”

“Are you sure I can’t tempt you on returning with me?” He growled. “I was already thinking you were the hottest thing left in this world and now I’m 50% more attracted to you.”

Artemis gently took her bottom lip into her mouth and batted her eyelids.

“You wouldn’t know how to handle me, sweetheart.”
“Take your stuff and leave.” Carl suddenly interrupted with a cold snarl at the saviors. “You should leave before you find out how dangerous we are.”

Artemis winced and held her knife tighter. The boy couldn’t have been older than 17 but he didn’t hesitate. Despite the guns pointed at him and the baseball bat wielding maniac he stood tall.

“Well, excuse my fucking French but did you just threaten me?”

Artemis softly ghosted her knife along the man’s throat. Not hard enough to kill him but enough to draw blood and make him yelp. Thankfully, that got Negan’s attention away from the boy.

“Listen, you don’t know me but I don’t take shit.” She spat out. “Leave the boy alone.”

“How long have you been here, Artemis?”

She tilted her head to the side. “A few weeks. Like Rick said, I just pass through.”

She thought she saw mistrust flash in his eyes but it gone as soon as it arrived. He pointed the dangerous end of the bat at her and pointed towards the door.

“Let’s go for a walk, babe.”

“Don’t call me that. I ain’t your babe, sweetheart, love or darling. My name is Artemis.”

“You’re like a feisty little kitten! All claws and meows.” He laughed. “I’ll tell you what, kitten. You let my man keep his neck and I’ll forgive this little accident. After we take the ass load of guns Rick here has.”

“Deal.” Rick agreed for her.

She narrowed her eyes at him but released her hostage.

He bowed dramatically and strutted out the door alongside Artemis. There was a few of her neighbours who had been thrown out of their homes dotting the road and they all turned to stare at Artemis.

“You always get this reaction?”

Negan asked, winking at the middle aged woman who had slammed the door in her face. The woman blushed and quickly walked away.

“I think they’re staring at you. Unlike you, I'm somewhat welcome here.”

“Now that hurts me that you can’t recognise they’re staring at a beautiful woman.”

He grabbed her arm suddenly and spun her so she was facing him. Even in her heeled boots, he had at least 3 inches on her and she was forced to look up at his cocky grin.

“You are as much an intruder here as I am.” He whispered into her ear.

From behind Negan, she spotted Daryl. He met her eyes and shook his head.

“Unlike you I was invited in. Now let go of me, you son of a bitch.”

Resisting the urge to break off his arm, she yanked free of his hold and turned on her heels. She caught herself a second in time to not fall into another savior- only this one looked familiar.
There was still a speck of blood staining his shirt collar. She fought the urge to hide her ring which she was sure matched the bruises on his cheek. Even if that didn’t she was sure her teeth perfectly matched the bite on his cheek.

“Alfie, there you are! I was just looking for you. I don’t suppose you’ve met Artemis here before?”

She froze. For a pregnant moment, her eyes remained unblinking the man she had attacked hours before.

Then the man shook his head.

“I don’t bite, sweetheart. Well, not unless it’s asked for.” She smiled sweetly at the bitten man.

His eyes were blank and empty, already showing death before his body was. Negan locked eyes with her, mirroring her smile.

“You are something else entirely.” He finally hummed.

She tilted her head to the side. There was no longer a smile but a cold grin.

“Oh, you have no idea.”
The questions bombarded Artemis immediately. The entirety of the Alexandra community seemed to come out and surround her with questions she couldn’t answer. Voices she had never even heard before all shouted and demanded answers about her life, her origins, her control over the bitten and even her relation with the saviours.

Where did she come from?

How did they know she wasn’t going to turn?

Why did she kill those saviours? To cause trouble for them?

Why did she get to be immune?

Was she some kind of terrorist?

Who else was immune?

Artemis stepped further and further back until her back hit Daryl.

“Shut up!” A gruff voice boomed. “This ain’t no petting zoo and she ain’t no monkey so give her some space!”

She mouthed thank you over to Daryl and released a shaky breath. Even the neighbour who had looked at her like a dead rabbit was in the crowd, waiting for her explanation.

“I’ll answer any questions that I can.” She agreed.
One of the people from the Alexandra community stepped forward, a greying man with kind eyes.

“So you attacked those saviours and bite that guy?”

She nodded.

“How come he didn’t tell Negan?”

“Because he’s a walker and I can control them somewhat. Being bitten by me slows the virus, sure, but it’s still there. He doesn’t know it yet but the virus has killed him.”

“Did you know it was going to work? Have you done it before? How many times have you done?”

“I’ve done it enough times.”

Her answer was clipped and harsh. She hoped her tone was enough for him not to ask any further about it. Thankfully, Michonne elbowed through the crowd to reach her.

“How do we know you’re really immune?”

“I’ve seen the bite marks.” Rick stated. “There are walker marks on her. They must have been months old and she’s hasn’t turned.”

Michonne’s eyes narrowed at Rick’s statement. He didn’t say where the marks were but it was obviously somewhere she couldn’t see. She didn’t say anything but Artemis could have cut the tension with a knife.

“So you’re immune.” She said finally. “Why did you choose here?”

Artemis pointed at her leg. Despite the fresh clothing, blood was already starting to soak through her bandages and pants leg.
“I got in a fight with some bad people. I was injured and outnumbered so I went in the opposite direction of them. That led me into the savior's path and that led me into Enid’s path. She said you had a scientist here who could help me create a cure.”

Rick cast a glance to the long haired nervous looking man at the back. Straight away, she knew that was her scientist.

“How did you survive this long by yourself?” Another voice asked.

“I wasn’t by myself. I spent most of the past year in custody of the federal government.”

A few murmurs echoed throughout the crowd. She saw the widened eyes and fidgeting fingers of the few who didn’t know life beyond the wall.

“I told you all as soon as I stepped past that fence what I was.” She announced, her fingers curling protectively around the golden badge. “Before I knew the world had gone to hell, I handed myself into the FBI. I spent the past year with the man who was in charge of my case.”

“What happened to him?”

“That’s none of your business!” She snapped. “All you need to know is that he’s gone.”

She dropped her head and took in a shaky breath. It was still so fresh, an empty gap she didn’t want to poke in case it caved in and dragged her heart with in.

“I’m sorry.”

Artemis looked across to the young boy who had spoken. She saw the resemblance with Rick now. With his police officer’s hat and hip holster, he was the image of his dad.

“Thank you.” She smiled.

“So can you cure them?” An impatient voice questioned. “Can you cure the walkers?”
The young woman who had been on watch nudged the questioner. Rick had introduced her as part of his group but she couldn’t remember her name.

“There’s no cure. Everyone knows there’s no cure.” She stated, crossing her arms. "Just tell us how you were made immune."

Her name clicked on her tongue. “Rosita, right?”

The woman gave a brief nod.

“Have you ever seen someone get bitten and turn before? It’s a fucking long process. They feel every part of their body rotting and dying. They start to lose their memory, their senses, their emotions… they become feral. I felt every second of that when I was made immune. So no, I won’t go into details of how I made immune.”

“There has to be a cure!” A tiny voice demanded.

She narrowed her eyes and searched the crowd for the familiar blonde hair of Enid.

“There’s no cure, Enid. Leave it.” Rick growled, his husky accent drawling out the words.

“There must be! She must be the cure!” Desperation slipped into the girl’s words. “Tell them you’re the cure! Please!”

She looked down at the blood staining her knuckles. She hadn’t remembered hitting anything or anyone hard enough to break the skin but still the blood left tiny smears across her hands. Tiny, little drops of blood on her hands. She traced the drying blood on her palm, smearing the blood further across her skin.

“I can’t cure them, Enid.” She quietly said. “I can’t cure them because I killed too people trying.”
It hadn’t been long enough for Artemis to forget the way home. Even when the moon overcame the sun and it became impossible for her to see the road, she stumbled forward. The few walkers she passed didn’t pay attention to her. Blood and sweat was smeared across her face. The only thing holding her up was Ryan’s arm wrapped around her waist.

“Hey.” He gently cooed while supporting her entire body weight. “Come on, we’re nearly back. You’ll be okay.”

She tried to laugh but she only managed to spit out blood. A cough ended up as a choke and Ryan soon had to stop or risk her passing out.

She was dying. He knew it. She knew it. There was too much internal bleeding, too many black-outs, too many cuts that wouldn’t stop bleeding, too much damage done for her to possibly walk away from this.

But still Ryan refused to leave her behind.

“Not to doubt your judgement but are you sure this is the way?” Ryan asked.

“Have I ever led us astray?”

“God, let’s not go there.”

The compound was quiet after the savior’s invasion. The sun was still high in the sky and there was a warm breeze so Artemis dragged Ryan out of the house despite his protests. Strolling along the roads, a cigarette in her mouth and her bag around her shoulder, Artemis was able to avoid most of the people outside. Since her confession no one had bothered her much. No one wanted to have anything to do with the woman who killed her friends whilst trying to resurrect the undead. Not that she blamed them.

“I thought I’d find you over at Daryl’s.”

She paused and smiled up at Rick. She hadn’t even noticed her stroll had taken her all the way back to his house but she was happy to see him.

“I tried but he kicked me out. It was all very dramatic.”

“Well, I hate to take second place but would you like to have dinner with me?”

“Are you asking me out, Rick?” She purred.
“Don’t get too full of yourself. It’s just dinner.”

She shook her head, a grin across her lips and took a final drag of her cigarette before stomping it out underneath her boot.

“I’m starved so I’ll ignore that you’re just doing this to try and dig into my dirty secrets on the condition that Ryan comes too.”

“Does he even eat food?”

“No but he likes to stare at me while I eat mine.”

On cue, Ryan bumped into her and nudged her into the house. Rick raised his eyebrows but didn’t say anything as she walked into the house alongside the walker.

The amazing smell of food hit her immediately. She couldn’t remember the last time she had eaten warm food at a table. It must have been weeks, if not months. She plonked down at the table and watched Rick serve two plates of steaming homemade spaghetti. Ryan ignored the offer of a seat and stood guarding the front door instead.

“I think the last meal I had was beef jerky and sardines. I ate it sat in the middle of a road during a storm and surrounded by walkers. This is…”

“Like the old days?”

“I never had this.” She corrected.

Her eyes fell on the delicious looking simple meal and then Rick. She half expected him to defend himself immediately or look down on her. Instead he simply nodded his head and swirled the pasta around his fork.

“How did you get caught?” He asked after swallowing a mouthful of spaghetti. “How did you end up with that badge?”

She sighed and gulped down half the glass of wine. She swallowed the bitter taste and let her hand drift away from the badge.

“Before everyone knew about the outbreak, I had a job. It was a routine hit on some politician who was looking too closely at cults. The people who gave orders wanted him gone and I was the one they called.” She scoffed and shook her head. “So this guy is going to be surrounded by bodyguards. Hey, I think: ‘maybe this is my chance to prove I’m the best of these sons of bitches’. So I set up a trap on the road. Landmines. I’ve got my finger on the trigger and I’m on a roof where I got a perfect view of where his car while be coming. I see this black ford matching his plates and boom!”

“The bombs went off?”

“The car went up in flames, his three cars backup went up in flames, the building opposite went up in flames… there wasn’t a chance someone was working out of it alive. But what my employer didn’t tell me was that this rival wasn’t travelling alone.”

Rick’s blank eyes met hers. She didn’t need to say what came next. The look on his face said he already knew. But it wasn’t Artemis’ to hide.

She continued, “I get down from the roof and go to check my guy’s dead right? No payment if the guy’s still breathing even if burnt. And I see him, dead as a doornail, and then I look into the
backseat. It takes me a second to realise the little body couldn’t possibly be a bodyguard. At this point, I started to realise I’ve been lied to. Every car was full of woman, kids, and old folk. I checked every car- no one even had a weapon. I got into my car, drove to the federal Bureau and asked for agent Winters, the guy I knew was in charge of the investigation into me.”

“That was brave of you.”

“The rival had seen what was happening with the outbreak and tried to help as many people as possible get out of infected zones. I murdered 12 innocent kids.” She spat out. “There was nothing heroic about it. I spent 3 weeks in Ryan’s custody before we both realised the world had gone to shit and there was no one who cared about some assassin anymore.”

Rick filled up her cup with sparkling wine again without her asking. He stayed quiet and let her talk.

“I was the 8th most wanted person in the world and no one even offered to shoot me.” She laughed humorlessly. “Ryan and I ended up travelling together somehow until…”

She stopped- the words still raw in her throat. There was no longer blood on the badge but she could still feel the warm and wet liquid slipping through her fingers and the final gasps of a dying man and the never ending emptiness of being alone.

“Ryan sounds like a good man.” Rick finally said.

Her lips tilted into a sad smile. “He was the best.”

“Why did you take the hit?” Rick hinted as he polished off the rest of his wine.

“I was bored.” Artemis shrugged. “Plus I was already in hot water so it was pretty much spelled out that the hit was none optional.”

“What was it like? Being an assassin?”

Artemis frowned and tilted her head to the side. “Remember those flogging marks on my back and bite marks? That was an easy day for me.”

Rick didn’t say anymore and Artemis was more than grateful for his silence.

They finished the meal in silence. Rick occasionally glanced up at her and she grinned every time they met eyes. She was stuffed by the time her plate was finally cleared and the bottle of wine was empty.

“Thanks for this. I… erm should go.” She stuttered. “I’m sorry if my story isn’t the fairy tale you were after.”

“I wasn’t after any fairy tale, Artemis.”

She nodded and smiled. Before she could twist the door handle and leave, Rick called out her name.

“You can stay for however long you want.”

“I could be dangerous, Rick. You shouldn’t let strangers into your home.”

“I’d say I’ve a pretty good judge of character after being on the outside for so long. Most of the people here, they’ve been behind these walls since the beginning. When I came, I was ready to take
this place from them. You and I had sardines surrounded by walkers and they had a hairdresser who worked weekends.”

Artemis eyes widened. She paused, hand on the doorknob.

“I never thought you’d lived on the outside.” She admitted guiltily. “I should have known better than to judge.”

“I get it. Living inside these walls makes you different. That’s not always a bad thing but I’ll admit I forgot that nowadays, humans are even more dangerous than the dead.”

“I’m going to help you with the cure and with the Saviours and then I’m going to leave. You know that right?”

“Do you think you belong out there?”

“I know I do.”

She stepped out of the warm house and strolled outside. Ryan was already waiting outside for her, guarding the house against a large figure that looked just as pissed.

The crossbow on his back struck her memory before she recognised Daryl.

“You guys should just kiss already.” Artemis shouted out.

She whistled and Ryan turned on his heels to follow. She trotted down the pathway, the walker’s and Daryl’s boots hitting the stone behind her.

“Where’d you think you’re going?” Daryl gruffly asked.

“I’ll sleep in my car for tonight. Ryan’s not yet used to people being around and Shadow can be intimidating to say the least.”

“So you don’t trust us yet.”

“I don’t trust you yet.” Elisa agreed.

“It’s gonna get cold tonight.”

“I’ll turn the heating on.”

“That’ll attract walkers.”

“Well,” She huffed. “Stop knocking my idea unless you have a better-”

“You can stay at mine for now.” He offered. “I don’t scare easily and I can take the conch.”

There was already a chill in the air, proving the night would be cold. Ryan wouldn’t need to keep warm but she would and the noise from the car would attract too much attention. She hated to admit it, but the redneck was right.

“Alright,” She said hesitantly. “Ryan and Shadow have to stay with me though.”

“Walkers don’t need to stay warm.” Darryl grumbled.

“Maybe not but I like his company.”
Eventually Daryl shrugged his shoulders.

“Fine, but he tries anything, I’ll put an arrow in his face.”

“I’m sure he won’t try and take advantage of you, sweetheart.” She laughed, rolling her eyes.

She offered him one of her cigarettes, hand outstretched until he took one.

“I’ll get my things from Rick’s place then I’ll settle at yours. Can Ryan tag along with you and I’ll get Shadow?”

Daryl shrugged and tucked his crossbow over his shoulder. He didn’t say no so she took it he didn’t mind.

She didn’t knock and instantly regretted.

If looks could kill, Michonne would have taken her down with one glance. She didn't even notice Rick stood with his back turned till she managed to wiggle out of Michonne’s piercing glare.

“Sorry.” She finally stuttered. “I just came to grab my things.”

Rick turned and smiled at her but it couldn’t compare to Michonne’s frostiness. She decided not to stick around and disturb more.

“Shadow.” She gently called out.

A small whimper responded from the room hectic to Rick’s. She tiptoed over to the room, careful not to make too much noise in case Michonne got even angrier with her, and eased open the door.

It took Artemis’ eyes a second to adjust to the darkness. A cot came into view while Shadow’s large form lounged next to it. A gasp caught in her throat as she realised there was a baby in the cot.

The air froze around her. The child innocently pulled on Shadow’s tail, ignoring the fact that she was a massive wolf with blood still staining her fangs. Panting slightly, Shadow turned around and licked the child’s face till she felt back in her cot laughing. The wolf wagged her tail wildly and rested her giant paws on the side of the crib. The child fell back a couple times but got back up to rub the wolf’s ears.

“There aren’t many animals around there that don’t get eaten.”

She tensed at Rick’s words and cursed the distraction for not letting her hear Rick come up the stairs.

“You shouldn’t let wild animals near your baby.”

Rick chuckled and leaned against the doorway. He was close enough she could smell his cologne and touch her lips with his… if she wanted to.

“She’s not a threat.”

“No… I guess she’s not.” Artemis murmured. "It's good... it's good she remembers the rule even when I forgot."

“What was the rule?”

“We don’t hurt little girls.”
She made a soft clicking sound with her tongue and Shadow pounced happily to her side.

“Is that why you think you belong out there?” Rick shouted after her once she was halfway down the stairs. “Because you broke the rule?”

“I broke a lot of rules that day… and a lot after too.”

The streets were deserted when she finally found Daryl’s. If it hadn’t been for Ryan stood hunched over in the road she would have wondered around the town forever.

From a distance, she could have mistaken him for the real Ryan. The closer she got the more she could tell his flesh was slowly decaying, his eye sockets as hollow as his cheeks and his teeth bared. She shook her head and tried to pretend her disappointment was just tiredness.

“Looks like we’re not out in the cold tonight.”

Ryan growled and glared across the street.

“I know it's not what you're used to. Hell, It's not what either of us are used it. For now it's all we’ve got.”

The only response was a small murmur she took as agreement.

“You're smiling at a walker.”

She jumped at the sudden intrusion and instinctively reached for her knife.

“How long have you been there?!?” She hissed as he stepped out of the shadow of his front door.

“Long enough. Does he ever reply?”

Artemis scoffed. “I’d be worried if he did. Do walkers ever talk back to you?”

“I don’t have full conversations with them.” He shot back.

He offered to help her with her bags but she turned it away. Shadow came limping in after her, tiredness slipping into her movements. Daryl’s place was small but cosy. With a back door that led directly to a side street and half the windows boarded up, she could see why he had chosen the house. She threw her things in the spare bedroom and sat down on the double bed. The sheets felt foreign and crisp beneath her fingertips. She frowned and held the pillow to her face so she could breathe in the fresh washing powder smell.

“It takes a lot to get used to.” Daryl stated.

He hovered by the doorway, one foot in the room and other one out. Ryan shuffled past him and slowly kneeled down till he was laid on the floor. The 200 pound wolf took this as a perfect opportunity to pounce on top of him and settle in for sleep.

“How does the walker… Ryan act like that?”
“I don’t know. Maybe memories from when he was human. Maybe he’s just weird. Good night, Daryl.”

He stepped away and nodded his head, a lock of shaggy dirty blonde hair flopping in front of his eyes.

“Wait a second.” She called out quietly.

She skipped over to him and stood on her tiptoes so she could kiss his cheek. As soon as her lips touched Daryl’s skin, he froze. It was a ghost of a kiss and then, just as fast, she skipped back into her room.

“What was that for?”

“I was going to go insane out there.” She said casually as she tucked a stray piece of hair behind her ear. “There’s only so much talking to the dead and bleeding a girl can do before insanity kicks in so thanks… I guess.”

I was scared, she wanted to say, I was so alone.

It wasn’t till Daryl left and Artemis was alone with a walker that she released she would have died if it wasn’t for Ryan.

Both the dead and undead Ryan.
“You dropped this.”

Artemis glanced at the smiling man to the knife in his hands. He had changed since he had arrested her. His beard was untamable and his hair hung shaggy down to his cheeks. There was dirty smeared across his face, blood splatter on his t-shirt. The only sign of the FBI agent was the badge he wouldn't get rid off. Artemis had never seen him look so handsome.

“It was never mine.” She muttered but accepted the blade anyway.

Sadness tugged inside her like a rope coiled around her stomach when she saw him smile.

“I…I don’t think this is a good idea.” She stuttered.

He shook his head and reached for her hand.

“We made it this far. It’s too late for us to turn back.”

“No, it’s not.” She said: eyes wide and a tremble in her bottom lip. “We can turn back and everything will be ok. We can be together.”

“Artemis.” Ryan sighed impatiently. “You know this can’t continue. It has to end eventually.”

Her body shook and tears rolled down her eyes. She mouth hung open, silently begging him to turn around. Ryan didn’t say anything. He just smiled softly and turned away from her.

The stone building was massive. Every hallway lead to a different hallway and every room led to just another room. She had been there before but everything was different. Maybe it was the bullet wound leaving a trail of blood dripping down her body. She needed to get up, get out of the pool of blood… her blood? She scrambled to her feet and stumbled to the only door in the room. She twisted and hit at the door handle but it wouldn’t budge.

More blood now… darker this time and slipping through her fingers like sand. She sucked in her bottom lip between her teeth and gritted down the pain. Her bloody hands left fist prints on the door window as she banged and banged on the glass.

Outside the door, the screams drown out her desperate pounds. There were men without faces, soulless grey blurs with black eyes, attacking men with guns and then the faceless were just on them.
Eating, tearing the men apart limp from limp without mercy.

The bullet was killing her as well.

*She stumbled and landed on all fours, two filthy feet directly in front of her face. Her eyes widened. She did everything she could to stop her bottom lip from trembling but the blood soon washed from her face.*

“Oh, god… Oh, god… I’m so, so, sorry.” She whispered. “I’m sorry. I never meant for any of this to happen. I didn’t mean to kill you, Ryan.”

It was too late. Faster than she could move, his dead hand reached out and wrapped itself around her throat. She gasped, choking on what air was left. She was going to die… he was going to kill her and she would die alone and in the dark…

Artemis woke hearing her own muffled scream. The sheets suffocated her in like a spider’s web and a cold sweat dripped down her body. Her eyes flickered around the room desperately searched out Ryan. She struggled weakly against the iron grip covering her mouth, her cries muffled by a rough hand.

“Hey, calm down.” A soft voice whispered. “It’s Daryl, ok? It’s just me.”

She stopped struggled and released a shaky breath. After a few seconds, Daryl took his hand from her mouth. Artemis sat up and buried her face in her hands.

“You were screaming loud enough to wake up the dead.” Daryl finally said. “You kept screaming for Ryan and saying it’s burning or something.”

“I…it was j…just a nightmare.” She tried to snarl but her voice was hoarse and it came across as a squeal even to her ears.

She waited for him to leave and let her try and get back to sleep. Instead, he picked up the blanket she had kicked off and wrapped it around her.

“I’m fine, Daryl.” She snapped. “I lasted this long taking care of myself and I’ll do just fine without anyone’s help still.”

She curled her lips up in disgust when he didn’t rise to her taunt.

“Is this where you’re from? Do you have any idea what I did to get here? Do you have any idea what I had to do?” She hissed.

He sighed and lay down next to her. “Yeah, I do.”

The answer took her back. She wanted to ask how, what he had to do as well but judging by his closed eyes he wasn’t going to be answering back.

“You don’t have to sleep here.”

“I’ve slept in worse places.” He grumbled without opening his eyes.
“Sure you have.” She scoffed.

A few months back she wouldn’t have even considered sleeping next to someone else. There were too many risks and opportunities for them to kill her in her sleep or worse. She glanced down at Ryan. Even he had his eyes closed though she doubted he was doing little more than trying to comfort her.

Besides, she was so tired and Daryl was warm and her body would fit so comfortably against his.

Eventually Artemis gave in and let her eyes close.

Artemis half expected to wake up with Ryan trying to drag her out of bed by her leg again. She had started to count on it like an alarm going off, or so she told herself to excuse waking up at 12pm.

There was no sign of Daryl so she took the chance to check the living room. Ryan was busy staring outside the window at a bird. Shadow was also watching alongside him. The sight would have been funnier if Ryan didn’t have a lump of flesh in between his teeth.

“What have you got in your mouth?” She shouted, her best ‘mum impression’ coming out.

Both Ryan and Shadow quickly stopped chewing.

“Spit that out immediately!”

A half destroyed squeaky toy flew out of Shadow’s mouth while a bloody lump of meat came out of Ryan’s. She screwed up her face and shook her head.

“I want better manners! These people are gonna start chasing you with pitchforks if they see you chewing their stuff up and starting out of windows like peeping toms! You cut this shit out right now- both of you!”

Leaving her sulking walker and wolf inside, Artemis tucked on her pilot sunglasses and stormed outside.

She’d be lying if she said it wasn’t a beautiful day. The sun was high in the sky and for the first time in months she could hear people chatting. A quiet moan from behind her revealed Ryan has followed her out. She ignored the strange stares from everyone she passed till and assumed they were looking at the walker. It wasn’t the first time she had been looking at and judged by a thousand eyes.

When she had first been arrested by the FBI, they had paraded her around like a prized show horse. She was the poster girl for how the American justice system really does work (despite the fact that she had handed herself in) and the main case for the FBI getting more funding. The press had a field day. Her picture had been in every article and features on every new show for a solid week before some other terrorist had blown up some other people. They had labelled her a serial killer, a contract killer, a psychopath and a monster. Needless to say, she was used to people looking at her with disguise.

She spotted the shy man with the mullet from across the street and skipped over to meet him. Rosita was next to him talking about something which obviously made him fidget.

“You must be the scientist who’s going to save the world.” Artemis greeted with a wide smile.

She held out her hand for him to shake but he just stared at it till she got uncomfortable.
“That is not accurate. My intelligence is certainly above average and would enable me to be a scientist and I do hold an advanced knowledge of biology but I am not a scientist and I will not be saving the world.”

Artemis chuckled, her smile unwavering.

“Of course you’re not, sweetheart. I could sense that from a mile away but you do have all the skills necessary to help me create a cure based on the high contaminate of it already in my blood, right?”

“How do you know that?”

She quirked her eyebrow. “Sweetheart, you don’t get given the cure to save all humanity without knowing something about how to use it. You said you have an advanced knowledge of biology- so do I. I’ve studied how to use biological toxins and make them into weapons which we can use to transfer the cure as well.”

“Bioweapons.” The mullet man summed up.

“Yeah, bioweapons.”

“I wasn’t aware assassins had any use for bioweapons.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “We did a lot more than the occasional hit, honey. What’s your name?”

“Eugeen.”

She smiled and this time he did shake her hand.

“My name’s Artemis. The people I came from were called The Liberators. We were the right hand of The Army of Solidarity.”

“What does the right hand do?” Rosita asked.

She had been through it all before. Any loyalty she held to the group had dispensed with the ‘New York attack’ as the press had labelled her massacre of 30 innocent people.

“What does your right hand do?” Artemis replied. “It takes, it gives- it makes a fist.”

Eugeen didn’t say anything for a pregnant moment.

“You were a terrorist.”

Rosita elbowed him sharply in the ribs but Artemis had already taken the comment like a slap.

“It’s fine. Yeah, according the federal law I was involved in the organising of terrorist activities so yes… I was a terrorist. If it makes you feel better, though, I had no intention of blowing up the earth.” She lifted up her foot and tapped her heel. “I got these boots from there.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

The three turned to Rick. He walked towards her with his hand tapping his Kolt and a confident cock to his hips.

“Whatever she used to be, whatever we used to be, doesn’t matter anymore. What matters is surviving. Can you make this cure, Eugeen?”
“Assuming she has a high level of the necessary contamination in her blood and we can savage enough testing supplies, research, testing supplements and examination tools… yes.”

Artemis released the breath she didn’t realise she was holding and turned to Rick.

“If I can help get these supplies I would like to. I’m guessing you do runs here? I’d like to be part of them until we get the stuff.”

“Only if he stays behind.” He answered with a head tilt towards Ryan.

She playfully stuck out her tongue.

“Fine but don’t blame me when he starts sulking.”

“Rosita, Daryl and I are leaving in half hour for a supply run. Eugeen, where can we find the equipment?”

“Your guess is as good as me.” Eugeen helpfully answered. “I can write you out a list of the required things-”

“I bet the saviours will have all that stuff.” Rosita offered. “They’d have that science stuff and more.”

“Then we should go talk to the saviours.” Artemis said.

Rick shot her a look which could have hardened water.

“We don’t go near the saviours.”

"No, you can't. I can."

Rick grabbed her arm and turned her away from Eugeen before she could say anything. She forced back her urge to lash out and get his hand off her barely but it didn’t stop the anger showing on her face.

“Hey!” Rosita shouted after her. “If you were a terrorist, why did you get the cure and no one else?”

The assassin pulled Rick to a halt and glanced over her shoulder.

“Because there is no God and I don’t make the rules.”

Rick yanked more harshly this time and Artemis was led away by her arm. She huffed but let him until they were out of earshot.

“Why do you let the saviours keep in fear like this?” She growled, ripping her arm out of Rick’s grip. “What did they do to make you so scared shitless?”

He didn’t say anything till they turned the corner out of the line of sight of Eugeen and Rosita. Without warning, Rick pressed her hard against the brick wall, caging her in with his muscular arms. The air rushed out of her lungs and her head banged off the wall.

“Listen to me.” He growled slowly. “You weren’t there. You didn’t see what he did to Glen and Abraham. You didn’t grieve them like we did because you’re not one of us.”
“You’re right I’m not because if I was, I would have avenged by friends already and not let some dickless bully take all my shit!” She exclaimed, shoving her finger into Rick’s chest. “You’re a coward, Rick Grimes. If it was up to me, I would rip out his spine through his throat so he would never hurt anyone ever again.”

“Well you can get back in your car and drive away then. Clearly you did fantastic on your own out there.”

Keeping one hand firmly locking her hands above her head, Rick reached down and pressed his fingers into the wound in her thigh. A pained groan escaped the assassin’s lips before she could help it. She would have buckled if his grip hadn’t held her in place.

“Alright!” She whispered harshly. “It’s not my place, I get it. I’m sorry, okay? When you’re ready I’ll be there but until then I won’t mention it.”

She finally met his eyes and noticed his stare wasn’t just on her face anymore. He quickly stopped digging his fingers into her flesh and let her go. She instinctively rubbed the red marks on her wrists but didn’t look away from his icy blue eyes.

“If you was looking for the moment to kiss me… that was it.”

Rick’s gruff chuckle broke through the silence.

“You’ve got half an hour and then meet us at the gates. The walker and wolf stay here.”

She rolled her eyes and flipped him the finger when his back was turned.
The neighbors didn’t have any raw chicken. Unfortunately, they only revealed this after Artemis’ awkward explanation of why it had to be raw. As much as she wanted Ryan to be vegetation, he wasn’t having any of Daryl’s celery. In the end, she was forced to leave him with Shadow making sure he didn’t try to eat the neighbours and followed Daryl to the car waiting outside the gates.

Ryan followed up to the gates, growling the entire way.

“Look, if I find any meat while I’m out I will bring it! Stay with Shadow and don’t creep anyone out, okay? Jesus H. Christ!”

He groaned and snapped his decaying teeth at her.

“I’m not promising chicken because we both know you ate Daryl’s.”

The walker tugged at her back bag, broken fingernails snapping at the fabric.

“Fine, I’ll keep an eye out! Are you happy? Will you please leave me alone?”

Ryan shuffled back into the compound and the gates creaked closed behind him.

She sighed and rubbed her forehead. When she turned around, both Rick and Michonne were badly trying to hide their laughter. The only one not laughing was Daryl who looked eager to start driving.

“What’s so funny?” Artemis demanded.

Rick held his hands up in mock surrender.

“We were just wondering if he looks like his dad but I think I see a look of you there in the cheekbones.”

Artemis rolled her eyes and climbed into the backseat. She tucked her bag underneath the driver’s seat and checked the pistols she had in her thigh holsters plus the machete in the shaft strapped to her back. Michonne climbed in the back with her while Rick and Daryl sat up front.

“Is he going to be alright back there? Can you control him from here?” Rick asked.

“I can control them- not Ryan. Ryan does his own shit.”

Daryl muttered something under his breathe which was too quiet for Artemis to hear.

“You trust it there?”

Artemis raised her eyebrows at Michonne but ignored the patronising tone.

“More than I would any human.”

“Why?”
“Before I came to Alexandra, I was attacked and trapped in a building overrun with walkers. Ryan wasn’t there. My shoulder was dislocated and there was no chance of me fighting my way out so I ran onto the roof with these guys on my ass. Way I see it, there was no way I was making it out of there: so I jumped.” She said with a shrug. “This super cool assassin here got knocked out and landed directly on a metal pole.”

Michonne glanced down immediately at Artemis’ thigh and studied the bandage covered wound.

“You survived though.” Michonne pointed out.

“Just about. I woke up with Ryan dragging my sorry ass out of danger by my legs. He could have left me. Hell, I would have left me. Ironic when a walker has more humanity than you.”

Michonne’s question was cut off by the car rolling to a halt. Artemis jumped out and immediately stretched out her arms over her head.

“Michonne and I will hit the shops at the end while you take Artemis round the front shops. If you run into anyone, assume they’re not friendly.” Rick instructed Daryl, pointing to the beginning of the street half a mile away.

Daryl glanced down from Rick to Artemis. For a second, she thought he was going to turn down the instruction and demand to go separately. Thankful, he nodded and started walking in the direction of the shops.

“I’ll go in first. I can sense infected from a while away and you can watch for anyone-”

“Alright, go.” He agreed gruffly.

Artemis’ mouth opened and closed twice before her argument fell from her lips.

“Wait- you’re just gonna let me? Are you trying to get rid of me?”

His small smile was enough of an answer. He nudged his head in the direction of the first shop. Gun outstretched, Artemis silently stormed inside.

Thankfully the only walker inside was a decayed woman with half her face hanging in lumps down her neck. Artemis easily took her down with a knife through the skull. Daryl zoomed past her and checked the backrooms. Artemis waited till he was gone till she examined the walker.

She must have been dead 4 maybe 5 months. She hadn’t died of natural causes judging by the infected bite on her arm. Artemis leaned down and pressed her hands to the woman’s forehead. Closing her eyes, Artemis focused on the virus swelling the walker’s body.

Nothing happened. The walker stayed still with the virus still dormant in her dead body.

Cursing under her breath, she stood up and dusted off her jeans.

“Stupid girl.” She muttered, kicking the woman’s arm away from her boots.

She didn’t know what she expected. She was part of a cure and immune but she wasn’t the Messiah—she couldn’t expect to resurrect the dead even if they were infected.

“Here.”

She turned in time to catch the dead possum before Daryl could throw it on her head.
She grinned and tucked it into her bag. At least Ryan would have a reward for not eating anyone in the Alexandra compound.

“You guys find anything?”

Artemis nodded her head and grinned at the large full bag in Rick’s hands.

“The nights are gonna get colder now. We’re lucky we found some warmer clothes and food. The shelves are looking pretty bare recently.”

A sharp groan stopped the group in their tracks. Rick raised his gun immediately in the direction of the noise but Artemis was faster. Her eyes widened as she spotted the familiar walker stumbling towards them. Before Rick had chance to pull the trigger, she leapt in front of the walker and shielded him away.

“Wait! Wait, ok?” She shouted with her hands held up in surrender. “I recognise him!”

“Get the hell out the way.” Michonne ordered.

The bite to her words was almost as dangerous as the sharpened glint to her sword.

“Look at his ring, ok? It’s the same ring as mine! It’s the ring of the assassin! Just look!”

She frantically waved her ringed hand in their faces to prove it. Begrudgingly Rick lowered his gun. Releasing a shaky breath, Artemis turned around and faced the walker.

He was young- too young. He would have been in the class beneath her. Not even old enough to vote yet but old enough to take a man’s life. She shook her head at the waste. His skin was hollow and yellowing but not yet in any decay. His clothes still looked clean as well.

It wasn’t till Artemis saw the bullet wound in his chest that she realised why he was still coming towards her.

“I… I can’t control him!”

She shot around, eyes wide and face distorted in horror. If she had more time, she would have warned him. It was too late, though, and the words never had chance to leave her lips.
Their dead shuffling bodies came from every side. Artemis counted a dozen but there was more still creeping out of the forest. A shot of silver flashed against her eyes seconds before a hard pain clawed at her mouth. She reeled back, covering her mouth instinctively, already tasting the metallic tang on the tongue.

“Walkers!” Michonne shouted.

Artemis quickly recovered from the blow and launched at the ringed walker. Her body collided hard with his and both landed on the ground with a thump. With a sickening gust of blood, Artemis impaled her knife through the walker’s neck and pinned him to the ground.

The assassin leapt up and bared her machete. Something hard snapped at her leg but it wasn’t painful enough to stop her. Gunfire already rung in her ears. Without hesitating, Artemis charged into the group of walkers. She slashed into the walkers faster than Daryl had ever seen anyone move and with just as much fury as him. She sliced away at the walkers’ heads, cutting straight in the middle of their brains.

“We need to leave! Now!” Rick ordered.

“No!” She objected, dodging dead hands. “I can fix this!”

“Artemis-”

She ignored his wary warning and barged her way past the walkers, pushing those who she didn’t behead. She cringed as she stared down at the walker pinned down to the ground, dead fingers still trying to reach her.

“I’m so sorry, brother. I never knew.”

Yanking her knife from the walker’s neck, she suddenly impaled the blade straight into his brain. Instantly, the few remaining walkers slowed to a crawl. Artemis simply held out her hand and the walkers stopped, dead eyes glued to her.

“What the fuck?” Daryl gasped as he caught his breath.

“We need to take his body back with us.” Artemis stated as she wiped her brow.

“You’re kidding-”

“Do you want this to happen again?” She demanded. “Because I can guarantee this assassin wasn’t here before I turned up. He had control over the walkers even in death and I need to know why!”

She released a shaky breath and tried to fight the adrenaline which had flooded her system.
“Look, if I could rip the cure out of my body and give it to you, I would. But I can’t. There is no easy route here.”

“You’re bleeding.” Daryl stated as he pointed to her leg.

Artemis frowned and glanced down. Sure enough, a red stain was blossoming on her thigh. She wouldn’t have noticed the glass shard hanging precariously in her skin if it hadn’t shone in the sunlight.

“He got a lucky hit- that doesn’t change my point at all.”

“He busted your lip.”

“Alright, he got very lucky.”

“This is reckless. You’re reckless.”

“This is necessary.” She snapped back. “Do you not think I’ve tried everything else?”

“We don’t even know where you came from!”

“For god’s sake!” Rick exclaimed. “Just fuck already!”

That shut both them up. Elisa huffed and bent down to pick up the walker body despite the disguising blood flowing down from his neck and skull. Daryl grumbled something under his breath and gently pushed her away. Before she had chance to shout, he picked up the body in a fireman’s hold and tossed her the bag to carry instead.

“What do we do about them?” Daryl asked with a head nod at the shuffling walkers.

Artemis smiled and waved her machete in the air.

“We can’t leave them here. Besides, this is the fun part!”

Neither Darryl nor Michonne talked to her on the journey back. The engine’s hum and Rick’s attempts at conversation was the only thing stopping her from drifting off. Well, besides the image of the undead assassin leading a mob of walkers towards her. She toyed with her own ring, glistening on her finger like a small beacon.

“Was everyone like you given a ring?” Rick asked.

“Every assassin who was experimented on to find the cure, yes.”

“Then how was he turned?”

Artemis shrugged her shoulders and didn’t take her eyes of the passing scenery outside her window. “Million dollar question right there. I don’t... I don’t know. It looked like he was beaten-probably tortured- and killed but even then, when we die that should be it. Someone did this to him... I’m going to find them and make them pay.”

The car went silent again. Maybe it was her careless way of discussing torture and murder but she got the sense she had creeped them out.
“The FBI told me its ‘psychopath trails inherited through association.’” She continued. “Because I was raised surrounding it, I have very little trouble with… pain. I also struggle with empathy. Sorry if I make you uncomfortable.”

Michonne turned to Rick. “And that is why we don’t let strangers in.”

Artemis smiled and went back to staring outside the window while holding a cloth to her bleeding leg.

Sasha was waiting by the gates for them along with Ryan. She saw the anger in her eyes and knew immediately the walker hadn’t kept up his side of the deal.

Thankfully, she charged straight for Rick. The walker shuffled over to Artemis and let her lean on him as she climbed out. She didn’t know if he could see she was injured but she could have sworn he was trying to help her walk.

“Please tell me you stayed out of trouble.”

A rough moan was her answer. She sighed and hobbled into the compound, leaning against the dirty walker.

“Did you even try? I mean, all I ask is that you try. If you would just try, I wouldn’t complain!”

“Artemis!”

She looked at Ryan in horror for a solid minute before she realised it was Daryl calling her and not the undead. Biting back her pain, she shuffled around to face him.

“We don’t have a doctor here but I could get Rosita to take a look at your leg.”

“Thanks but it’ll heal as soon as the glass is out. ‘Don’t even think it’ll scar. You can help me by taking it out?’”

He glanced across at the walker she was using as a crutch.

“Does he have to come?”

“Do you want me to leave him out here? Judging by the looks he’s getting from the neighbours, they don’t have the hots for him.”

Draping her arm across his shoulders, he helped Artemis into the house and up the stairs. She landed with a huff on the bedroom floor.

*It’s ok if it hurts. That means it’s working.* Artemis kept repeating the advice in her head as pain burst from her wound. Daryl tried to be as gentle as he could but it didn’t stop the glass from cutting further into her leg.

“How do you want to- ow!”

Artemis yanked her leg away from Daryl’s reach and shielded the now empty wound. She hissed at him like a hurt animal and cursed in Russian.

“Other people would have counted to 3!”

“Other people would have cared.”
She huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. Ryan paced back and forth, clearly agitated. The walker growled until both Daryl and Artemis were forced to look at him.

“What’s he doing?”

“I don’t know. Do walkers remember pain?”

“No.” Daryl replied quickly.

“Then I don’t know- maybe he’s hungry. I should see to him.”

He took the hint and stood up.

“You’re welcome.” He muttered sarcastically before he closed the door behind him.

Once he was gone, Artemis stripped off her bloody clothes. Her jeans were only torn a little but the blood had soaked her t-shirt completely. She hissed as the fabric rubbed against her still tender side. Her body was a display of purple and blue bruises but they were healing.

Slow and pain but healing, all the same.

“Hey, you forgot-”

Daryl stopped midway into the bedroom, bag in his hand, eyes glued to the topless assassin.

Artemis thought about covering up her scarred body but dismissed the idea quickly. He had already seen the brutal whip marks and bites. There wasn’t much else worse to see so she took her time reaching into her bag for a fresh vest.

“What does that tattoo say?”

Artemis smiled at the image of the large black words scrolled across her back from shoulder to shoulder. She wanted to say that they were pinpricks, a reminder, and a little piece of her which couldn’t be removed.

But she didn’t.

“It’s Latin for ‘the end’. That’s what I am: the cure and the end.”
Fence duty had always been the dreaded slot on Alfie’s week. He despised their groans, their grabbing hands and disfigured faces. The other guys liked to abuse his fear and get the prisoners to push walkers right towards the fence whenever it was his turn on guard. Whatever got their kicks.

But since the attack, he didn’t mind it so much. He didn’t talk much either. The bite mark on his skin was clearly infected and glared angrily against his pale skin. Though the doctor had marked him as ‘ok’ Alfie knew something was wrong with him. He could feel it inside him.

He wondered past other saviours, ignoring them just like them ignored him. Everyone had heard about the attack. Most of the other saviours made it brutally clear they thought he was bitten by a walker even though he would be burning up with fever if it had been. No- he was sure it had been a human. But when he tried to remember, his brain felt like it would explode.

He wasn’t sure how he had got there but Alfie had found his way back to standing directly in front of the fencing. There, with the walkers, his brain didn’t hurt as much. The undead didn’t pay much attention to him. Even the ones who were left stumbling around didn’t go to touch him.

His brain didn’t bang and the voice… the voice was back.

“Stumpy Alf!” Negan loudly called out.

For once, Alfie didn’t immediately jump to his beckoning. He kept his hand on the warm metal fencing and closed his eyes.

“I can hear her voice in my head… She won’t get out of my head!” Alfie screamed out as he turned across at Negan. “And another, a red horse, went out; and to her who sat on it, it was grated to take peace from earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to her.”

Groaning in pain, he clutched his hands to his head and crumbled to the ground. A few brave saviours ran to him and tried to help.

They didn’t notices the walkers desperately crawling forward towards the fence.

They didn’t notice the pulse stop in Alfie’s wrist.

By the time they noticed, stumpy Alfie was undead Alfie.

Before he could clamp his teeth around the first saviour’s throat, the massive bard wired bat ball bat came smashing down on his skull. Blood sprayed across the ground and spattered the fence, painting every saviour in red. He hit and hit until Alfie’s head exploded in a gory mess of blood and brain. When Alfie’s fingers stopped twitching, Negan finally stopped pounding.
Miles away, sat at a dinner table reading a romance novel, Artemis smiled to herself.

They shared watch most nights. Ryan Winters didn’t trust Artemis Wilde, the Butcher of Moscow, watching her over him. Artemis, in return, couldn’t sleep through the pain. But on the nights when Ryan was exhausted and the pain wasn’t overwhelmed for Artemis, they slept side by side, appreciating the few moments of safety.

For a change, he didn’t argue with Artemis standing outside while she kept watch. The walkers surrendering her helped with the pain. He knew they wouldn’t hurt her even though he struggled to remember why he cared.

“Hey, I think I’m getting the hang of this!” She beamed, turning around to him with a toothy grin.

He smiled back and let her show off controlling the walkers and getting them somehow to hold hands. There wasn’t a chance he could sleep with the moans of the undead outside their tent’s thin fabric anyway. At least this way he could make sure she was keeping out of trouble.

“Well?” She exclaimed. “Are you proud of me?”

He chuckled under his breath and offered a half crooked smile.

“As proud as I can be of a psychotic, ditsy assassin who likes to make zombies hold hands.”

She shrugged and took out her machete. With a few swift swipes, the walkers were down and dead again.

“You don’t like it, do you?” Ryan asked. “You don’t like killing them.”

“The light has already left their eyes. There’s no purpose in killing them besides survival. This stupid apocalypse has just drained the fun out of everything!”

He shook his head and stepped closer so he was within cutting distance of her machete.

“Joke all you like, you’ve changed. You don’t think that way anymore.”

“You clearly don’t know much about serial killers, sweetheart. I am never going to change- are you ever going to realize?”

Chapter End Notes

Ok so bit of a short chapter I know but I just wanted this part separately to show both Ryan and Artemis’ progression and also what she can do. Even though he’s a walker, I’m hoping it's coming across how much he still means to Artemis. Is it working?? Let
me know!

- Al :) x
Isaac Rowland was the second funeral Artemis had been to. The first was her auntie who had been murdered by her father (or a heroin overdose). Assassins didn’t get funerals. It was simple enough to justify: if they held a funeral for every time one of them died, they’d never get anything done.

She wasn’t sure why she had been allowed to attend the funeral of the Alexandra native who had got in the way of the wrong saviour. For whatever it was worth, she had promised the saviour would die slow. A couple years ago she would have told Rick to give her a lab, 2 weeks, a flea and a month worth of caffeine and she would give him a bioweapon. Instead, she had to attend funerals.

Carl found her leaning against a wall out of sight from the mourners.

“I don’t get funerals.” Carl declared. “There’s not even food because we’re on half rations.”

She shook her head but didn’t say anything.

“Can you teach me to kill like you do?” He asked.

She laughed before he wasn’t laughing as well.

“How old are you, sweetheart?”

“17.”

He was just a kid. He was a kid who had probably seen and lost just as much as her but still a kid learning to walk without his dad to guide him along.

“When I was 13, I asked my dad the same question you just did. Believe me when I say there’s a big difference between killing walkers and the occasional saviour to what I do. What I do is massacre, Carl.”

“I don’t care.” He answered stubbornly. “I want to make them scared like you do.”

“Are you sure about that? Cause it’s not just the bad guys I scare.” She laughed and ruffled his hair.

“Before the apocalypse, they used to call me the Butcher of Boston and the Petersburg slayer. They called me that because the things I did made me inhuman. It was a short journey from asking someone to teach me how to kill to becoming The Butcher. Kid, just always stay safe out there. Don’t let this war turn you into something like me.”

She walked away from him, a sway to her hips and hands tucked into her back pockets, Shadow and Ryan hot on her heels. For a few weeks she’d been there, Artemis had been largely ignored. She still got the occasional worried or disguised glanced but people weren’t sure what to make of her. She was the cure but she was also a criminal- a murderer. Plus, they couldn’t use the cure unless they were willing to go out and get bitten by a walker and take the 35% chance that Artemis would be able to save them. Whenever she looked like she was about to go crazy from boredom, Rick sent her out for runs with one of the Survivors or just with Ryan.

The funeral hadn’t been the highlight of her stay. She wondered where Daryl was and why he hadn’t
attended. If anything, she needed the support to ignore the looks. She knew what they were thinking even if they didn’t say anything to her.

Why wasn’t she there?

She could have stopped them.

She could have killed them all by now.

Why is she in our home when she should be out there?

She couldn’t take it anymore. She grabbed her bag from Darryl’s place and walked straight out the gates, ignoring the questioning glances. Someone called her name but she was too far away for it to make a difference. She couldn’t go far anyway in case she ran into any of the saviours but she had seen Michonne sneaking out a few times and had an idea where she was going.

The assassin heard the survivor before she saw her. A rouge shot tore through the air from a field half a mile away, barely missing her and landing in the tree unfortunate to be next to her. Artemis’ eyes widened and she raised her hands in case the next bullet had better aim. The lone figure sat on top of the abandoned car didn’t pull the trigger again. It took her a second to see the walker still stumbling towards the figure. Artemis stayed back as Michonne gave her the gun and stabbed her sword straight through the walker’s forehead.

“You might be the worse shot I’ve ever seen!” Artemis exclaimed. “And I have seen children shoot!”

Michonne waited till the assassin had climbed the car and sat beside her till she answered.

“How did you find me?”

“I literally made a living out of tracking people- give me some credit. Why are you sneaking out here? Does Rick not know?”

The silence was her answer. She smirked and shook her head before she eased the gun into a direction position Michonne’s hands. She lay down on the car hood and whistled shrilly. Within a few seconds, shuffling dead bodies separated themselves from the forest. A shake of her head was all it took to tell Ryan to stand out the way.

“You’re angry.” Artemis stated as Michonne’s finger tightened on the trigger.

The bullet whizzed through the air. It missed but not by much.

“I’m not angry. Angry makes you stupid.”

“Right now, you need to be fucking furious. That anger is going to keep you alive during this. Have you ever used a sniper before?”

The assassin gently adjusted Michonne’s arm so it rested more on the roof.

“All those books which say the only way to use a rifle is to stay calm and be careful? That’s bullshit. You’re thinking of wind, the target moving, and the shaking in your hands… don’t. Instead think of how much you hate walkers. Think of that walker as the one who killed your loved ones. Think of him as the one who tore your friends apart and ate their insides—”

Artemis’ mouth slammed shut as the walker fell down, a gaping hole blown into his forehead.
Michonne’s hands were trembling and there was a mean scowl on her lips but it didn’t matter.

“That’s more like it!” Artemis congratulated. “Just be careful, yeah? When you start pulling the trigger without emotion, you’ll turn bad fast.”

“Is that what happened to you?”

Artemis scoffed. “Nah. I started cutting off fingers and keeping them as souvenirs so that pretty much did my angel in. I’ll teach you how my dad taught me how to shoot if you want? It’ll be better before I’m not drunk and the targets aren’t alive.”

Michonne’s eyes narrowed but Artemis was pretty sure that was just her standard reaction to her now.

“We should get back. People will be looking for you.”

She let Artemis walk besides her which the assassin took as a small victory. The rouge bullet had struck a deer which Michonne had promptly picked up and tucked over her shoulders. They were almost in Alexandra when Michonne recognised the vans blocked their way.

The saviours stood out from the terrified community. Those who knew about Isaac’s death gave Negan a wide berth which made him seem ever larger. Rick was lagging behind the maniac, Darryl by his side, baseball bat in his hand and his head down. Artemis grabbed Michonne’s arm and dragged her into one of the run down shacks but it was too late. Footsteps soon stormed into the shack.

Rick stepped inside the shack and took a long look at the deer lay at Michonne’s feet while she stared at the bloody barbed wire bat in his hand.

“He had me hold it.” Rick grimaced, defeat echoing in every word.

Michonne tilted her head to the side but didn’t say anything.

“I need the rifle.”

“What?”

“I know it’s in the bag. Artemis, did you know about this?”

Artemis innocently raised her hands.

“She has nothing to do with this.” Michonne hissed.

“I know what you’re doing out there.”

“What am I doing?” Michonne demanded.

Artemis risked a peek out of the broken window. Negan caught her eye and winked back.

“You’re practicing.” Rick stated. “We have to give up our guns. All of them.”

The pleading tone made the assassin’s stomach turn. Hatred set in her gut and curled her lip up.

“You’ll be leaving yourself defenceless if a walker outbreak happens.” Artemis accused. “He doesn’t
need them. He just wants to show you that he can take them! Don’t give him the satisfaction, Rick.”

“She’s right.” Michonne agreed.

“Look, if they find it someone dies. I’m not losing you or Carl or anyone else!” He pleaded. “Now I’m giving it to them. Are you going to let me?”

Artemis turned away and looked out the window at Negan while Michonne begrudgingly handed him the rifle.

In a sing-song voice, Artemis quietly said: ‘I looked, and behold a white horse, and he who sat on it had been given a bow, and a crown was given him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.”

Michonne shot her a questioning look before walking out in front of Rick.

“Pestilence.” Artemis hummed to no one in particular.

She took a deep, calming breath and followed Rick to meet Negan.

“Now this is something to build a good relationship on!” He laughed.

Artemis placed a hand on Michonne’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry about it.” She whispered. “I have a better one anyway.”

“Now ladies, didn’t your mamas ever teach you its rude to whisper?” Negan called out, strutting towards them.

Michonne dropped the deer at the feet of one of the saviours and shot Rick a cruel glare. Artemis refused to move. She grinned at Negan and crossed her arms over her breasts.

“I was wondering just how little your dick is that you have to overcompensate like this. I mean, is it microscopic or if you squint, can you see something that resembles a pill?”

Negan tipped his head back and chuckled. Suddenly, he grabbed her hand and forced it onto the front of her pants.

“You got me all kinds of hard right now!” He grinned as he forced her to grab him.

His erection grew the more she wiggled to free her hand till she could feel the full length of him against her. He leaned even closer to her, lips nearly on hers, and when she turned her head away from him he licked a long stripe up her bare neck.

“You smell good.” He hummed against her skin. “You taste even better.”

She turned her head back despite the fact that their noses were now touching.

“I’m going to rip your throat out with my teeth if you do not get the fuck off me.” She growled slowly.

If he knew how close she was to fulfilling her threat, he didn’t show it. Instead he released her hand and pressed his erection into her thigh. She felt the soft touch of his lips against her earlobe.

“I like a woman who bites.”

Before she could react, her arm was snatched away from Negan and she was hurled into a different
set of arms.

“She’s with me, Negan.” Rick growled as he wrapped his arm tight around her waist. “You can take your guns and food and that’s it.”

Daryl’s frown hardened. Artemis’ eyes drifted down to his tightened fists, ready to strike. She was glad Michonne had already walked away otherwise Negan wouldn’t have been her only threat.

Negan held his hands up and pretended to be shocked for a second before bursting out laughing.

“I was gonna ask permission, Ricky!”

He leaned in and a shiver ran up Artemis’ spine.

“I’ll be seeing you again very soon, kitten.”
Artemis watched the saviours leave. Along with Rick, she made sure the trucks disappeared down the road and stood ready in case Negan changed his mind.

“He licked my neck.” She grimaced.

“I understand.”

“You really don’t. He licked my neck.”

Rick rubbed the back of his head, a habit Artemis had noticed he did when he was stressed.

“No one likes this, Artemis.”

“I know and I know those people are terrified. I also know that it’s goddamn hard having all that on your back.” She linked her arm in his despite how he tensed immediately. “For the record, I think you’re doing a better job than him. He’s an asshole.”

Once the trucks had disappeared into the horizon, Artemis placed a hand on Rick’s shoulder and turned away.

She gritted her teeth and rubbed her aching thigh. It hadn’t helped her recovery that she had refused to rest and had already been stabbed in the leg again. She wasn’t surprised that it was taking its time to heal especially when her body was fighting a constant infection as well.

She was so wrapped up in her own thoughts she didn’t notice the blonde haired man till she nearly walked straight into him.

“Hey! Artemis right?”

He offered a winning smile, a glint she expected to see on a car salesman, and shook her hand. He didn’t know she already knew his name. Everyone in the community knew her name.

“Sure. And you’re spencer, right?”

He beamed like her knowing his name was a sign of something.

“I don’t think we’ve actually met. There are a lot of people talking about you and the cure… I thought I’d say hey. How are you adjusting?”

The suspicion must have shown on her face because he smiled even wider and raised his hands.

“You’ve come from out there- I get it. Enid took time to getting used to the place. It must be hard coming from that life to this.”

“Picking my friend’s guts out of my hair was hard, Spencer. This life in here isn’t hard.” She slowly snarled. “Now, is there something you wanted? I’m in a lot of pain right now and if you hadn’t noticed, my leg is bleeding.”
Spencer’s eyes shot down to the red stain blossoming down her pant leg.

“There’s... there’s a party at mine. Tonight. To get everyone’s mind off what’s been happening. I wanted to know if you want to come... should I get some help for you?”

She smiled at the man’s nativity. There were few people in Alexandra who didn’t look at her like a wild dog. And those people constantly asked her to miraculously cure the world.

“I’ll try and make it.” Artemis smiled through gritted teeth. “I don’t need help.”

When she walked away, her limp was obvious. Daryl saw her and immediately let her lean against him without her asking.

“What happened?”

“Goddamn stitches opened up. I’ve not had chance to dress it since last night and infection is setting in.”

“There’s a doctor at hilltop. You could go.”

She shook her head. “When I was given the ‘cure’ it was modified. I age slower, fight harder and heal faster. This isn’t anything.”

He didn’t bother objecting. He helped her to the porch and let her sit down on the steps.

“I got invited to a party.” She announced, hand pressed against her leg. “Do you want to be my date?”

“Judging by the blood, you won’t be going anywhere.”

She waved off his concern and smiled up at him.

“Then have a drink with me. I found some scotch on the road…”

“It ain’t happening, Artemis.” He declared, cutting off whatever else she was going to offer.

Considering he was dead, Ryan looked pretty comfortable. Changing him from army scrubs to a red shirt and suit pants hadn’t been a problem so much as baring the sight of his infected wounds. Artemis had been given a red dress that ended at her knees and showed enough cleavage that the badge around her neck was on full display. She tucked her knife into her clutch bag and strapped her gun to her thigh. Even she had to say she didn’t look half bad.

Or she would have been if she hadn’t been doubled over the bathroom sink, her face scrunched up in pain. Clutching her stomach, she braced against the porcine sink as she vomited fresh blood. Her throat was raw and her fingers trembled but she held on knowing it would end soon.

The sessions were lasting longer than they used to.

Ryan glared at her in the bathroom mirror reflection. She wondered what would happen to him if she turned. Would something in her subconscious keep a hold of him? Would she use him to hunt the living with her? It terrified her more than anything to think about it. That fear was the main reason she had stolen the cure.

That and the promise of immortality. Who didn’t want to live forever?
She laughed humourlessly and turned the tap on. The remains of vomit and blood specks disappeared down the tap and she watched until there was no sign of her illness. When she glanced up again, there was a different man staring at her.

“'The cure isn’t all it’s made out to be, is it?’” Darryl stated gruffly.

“'The strain I’ve got?’” She shook her head. “But the strain which can be made from me? That has some potential.”

“'What happened to yours?’”

She grabbed a towel from the handrail and swiped the spit from her lips.

“I flew too close to the sun.”

Daryl watched the assassin leave with the walker shuffling behind her. From the way he constantly stared at her and followed her every move, Daryl wouldn’t be surprised if the walker watched over her sleep as well. That walker watched her eat, watched her hunt, and watched her in the shower…

It hadn’t ever dawned on him that he would be jealous of a walker.

Artemis was everything he thought was gone. She was beautiful, smart, lethal and the cure. And she was interested in him. She wanted him. But that was all wrapped up in her end games. Someone like that didn’t come out of nowhere without someone worse chasing her. Knowing she was an assassin, made his thoughts worse. He wanted her stripped, tied down to his bed, spread out and defenceless. He knew it was wrong but his thoughts drifted back to seeing her topless. The scars on her body only made her more beautiful. The bite marks drew attention upwards and he wondered what it would be like to leave more bite marks on her soft nipples or to suck a bruise onto her breasts.

He didn’t need to look down to realise his pants were tightening uncomfortably around his crotch.
The bite mark on her side ached and burned as Artemis walked over to Spencer’s home. Despite her body fast healing from near enough fatal wounds, the bite marks never went or hurt less. She let Ryan go ahead of her, somehow his shuffling beating hers, and gritted down on her teeth. The burning in her leg told her she should have been in bed or at least sitting down. A party was the last thing she needed.

The door was unlocked and Ryan used his new skill of using doorknobs and barged right into the house. Judging by the sudden gasps, the party was already under way. Artemis smiled and walked into the hallway.

Artemis waved at the shocked crowd.

“Not a walker invasion, I swear.” She chuckled.

It took a few moments of nervous laughter and hushed whispers before the party went back to normal. There was laughing and people talking in groups. She spotted Spencer across the room in the middle of a conversation as she dragged Ryan away from the buffet table. After 10 minutes, she gave up and made the walker a plate of meats.

“Well, one of us should have fun at least.” She muttered, handing Ryan his plate.

She wrapped her arms around her bare arms and slowly retreated to a quiet corner. She was debating quietly retreating out the door when a hand slapped down on her shoulder.

“Do walkers get drunk?”

A glass of amber liquid was slapped into Ryan’s hand. He glanced at Artemis before he gripped the glass tight and drained the drink in one gulp.

The stranger laughed boisterously and she turned around to shake his hand.

“My name’s-”

“I know who you are!” The large fennel shirted man exclaimed. “Everyone here knows you are. I gotta say, you know how to make an entrance. My name’s Tobin.”

“Since we’re making introduces,” Another voice added from behind Tobin. “My name’s Aaron.”

She was sure she had seen Aaron before. With his bright eyes and friendly smile, he had waved to her and seen her out hunting more than once.

“Enid did me wrong when she found you and showed me up like that.” Aaron stated, an easily laughter flowing from his lips.

His laughter was so genuine it was hard for her not to laugh along with him.

“If it makes you feel better, I kind of found her.”
“You know what, it does.”

Tobin handed her a glass of champagne from the table. It was mainly flat and warm but she was happy for the luxurious taste. It had been years since she had last tasted the sweet bubbles. She drank it in a single gulp much to Aaron’s entertainment.

“For such a little girl you sure know how to drink!”

He grabbed her one and this time she sipped it.

Once upon a time she had drunk champagne with serial killers and bomb makers. Looking around at the smiling faces and innocence, Artemis could have been a different person all together.

Sasha joined them and brought with her an ancient bottle of silver tequila. The smell made Artemis gag but she didn’t turn down Sasha’s offering. Soon the entire group of Rick’s was gathered around her, talking freely with only the occasional suspicious glance at Ryan.

“So it’s your turn, Artemis!” Tara slurred as she handed the assassin another shot, spilling some of the sticky alcohol on her hand. “How did you get that scar on your ear?”

She grinned and instinctively touched the rough skin on her earlobe.

“So I was …13? Yeah, 13. I’d just got out of isolation for something and the girls in my class had got their ears pierced. I got pretty upset cause I’d not been outside my cell for 6 months so my brother gets it in his head that he’s going to make me feel better: One hot ass needle and a piece of apple later and boom- lifelong scar.”

She roared with laughter which soon spread to the entire group. Even Rick chuckled.

“Wow… you’re not even tipsy, are you?” Aaron exclaimed as she downed the shot without a flinch.

“As a kid I was drinking snake venom to become immune to it so a bit of tequila is a no biggie.”

“Remind me never to try and keep up with you.” Rick muttered into his beer bottle.

A familiar blonde figure wavered her way through the crowd and stopped in front of her. Somehow Enid seemed to get taller every time she saw her.

“I didn’t think you’d come.”

Artemis shrugged. “I’m not an assassin anymore and I don’t have the plague. Gotta’ show people that it’s safe even with me here.”

“It’s not.” She said quickly. “I mean, it wasn’t safe before you got here. Too many blind spots and ways the others can get in.”

Enid flinched as Ryan breathed down her neck. His breath didn’t smell great and he was creepy but the look on Enid’s face wasn’t disgust- it was fear. The walker only wanted to get past her but judging from Enid’s reaction, Ryan might as well as tried to munch on her throat.

She grabbed Enid’s hand while it was still in her pocket. Her fist remained clenched around the knife but she took her eyes off Ryan long enough for Artemis to get her attention.

“I get it.” She whispered low enough so only Enid could hear. “Walkers killed you family? Friends? Humans killed mine. Humans with conscious, souls and morals. But not Ryan. It wasn’t him. Has he hurt you so far?”
Enid begrudgingly shook her head.

“He could have done if he wanted to but he hasn’t. He just wants to get past you, sweetie.”

Enid slowly took her hand out of her pocket and rubbed at the red mark Artemis had left on her skin.

“There are a lot more dangerous things than Ryan outside of these walls. But you already know that, don’t you? Why do you still go out there?” She shook her head. “I had a sister like you. She was always getting into some kind of trouble.”

“What happened to her?”

“What happens to everything good?”

“She died.” Enid answered quietly for the both of them.

“Such is life.”

“What did Carl ask you?” She suddenly asked, turning to her with her dim eyes. “At the funeral, I saw him go up to you and say something and you shook your head.”

Artemis offered a wide grin. “Are you jealous?”

The blush on Enid’s cheeks was priceless. Artemis nudged her, nearly knocked her over in the process, and burst out laughing.

A warm hand gently guided a fresh glass of brandy into her hand. Artemis immediately knew who it was from the smell of gun cleaner and oak. Enid flashed a quick smile at Rick before disappearing into the kitchen.

“I think you scare her more than I do.” Rick gruffly whispered into her ear.

She smiled warmly and pretended to frown.

“I’m pretty scary.” She agreed. “Have you seen my angry face?”

As she sipped on her lukewarm drink, she followed his stare down her displayed chest till his eyes landed on the badge hanging from the gold chain. It rested perfectly in between her breasts but she doubted he was looking at her body.

“I don’t think I ever met an FBI agent.” He muttered, taking a large gulp of his beer.

“Really? They were everywhere in Washington. I couldn’t go 10 miles without running into a tight arsed, black suited, moron. Honestly, I saw less FBI when I handed myself in then when I was walking the streets as a free woman.”

“Why’d you give yourself in if you hate them so much?”

She frowned into her glass.

“It seemed like the right thing to do at the time. Besides, I’d heard a lot about Ryan and I wanted to meet him.”

She waited for the bombardment of questions which always came. Instead, he took the drink from
her hand, placed it on the nearest table, and spun her into his arms. Her head swam, whether from the drinks or the suddenly spin. Her eyes widened in surprise but Rick simply grinned and led her into a dance away from the others. She quickly placed her hands on his shoulders to steady herself as she laughed and followed Rick. He spun her so many times the room spun around her head. Somewhere along the way they had danced their way outside under the starry night. A cool breeze tickled up her dress and Ryan’s badge cooled her skin.

It was only when her head stopped spinning and Rick leaned closer that she realised the familiarity. His brown eyes clouded by trust, his smile just a little too guarded and his aroma just a little too commanding.

She looked at him as he leaned in to kiss her and saw Ryan.

Before his lips could touch hers, she tilted her head to the side and let him kiss her cheek. She tried closing her eyes and screamed in her mind that it wasn’t him, it couldn’t be.

The cold kiss of the badge bit against her skin.

“I remind you of him, don’t I?” Rick said, though he already knew the answer. “Did you love him?”

“…I should go.”

She twisted out of his grasp and hurried away. The cold night brought her firmly back to reality. How could she be so stupid to come into the community and ask like a part of their happy family? She was an assassin, a terrorist and she had got the only man she had ever cared about killed.

She made it to Daryl’s house before she slowed down.

“Didn’t think you were his type.” A voice called out.

She turned and narrowed her eyes at the darkness, trying to figure out where he was. Her eyes found a trail of smoke and followed it to the powerful redneck.

“Why? Are you jealous?” She smirked.

Daryl shook his head and took a step towards her.

“Nah. I know you’re not interested in him.”

“Someone’s been drinking…” She said in a sing-song voice.

“What of it?” He demanded.

“Just saying. How do you know I’m not into him?”

Suddenly, Daryl marched across to Artemis and grabbed the back of her hair. Her yelp was immediately cut off as Daryl slammed his lips against hers. Her lips must have been parted in shock because his tongue tasted hers and a soft moan left her throat.

But the smell of alcohol on his breathe was stronger than hers. Begrudgingly, she broke free of the kiss and pressed her hands firmly on his chest.

“Daryl…”

He grunted and grabbed her hands tight, forcing her against him again. This time Artemis didn’t give in. She kicked his knee cap just hard enough that he knew she could easily kick the legs from under
him and scrambled away as soon as he released her.

“Enough!” She demanded. “You can’t decide you want me just because someone else does! You made it very clear what you thought of me the other day and I have no intention of being some competition prize between Rick and you! Especially not when you’re drunk!”

She huffed past him and stormed into the house.
I know I've put this work as explicit but as a quick heads up, if you're uncomfortable with smut you may want to skip this chapter.

yours,

Al :)

Ryan didn’t do press ups with her no matter how much Artemis tried. She was furious and humiliated but she refused to let it get the best of her. There was so little she had control over nowadays that she had to focused on what she could control- doing push-ups. She was on 50, barely breaking a sweat, when there was a quiet knock on her door.

“Go away.” She called out without stopping her stride.

The door burst open and crashed into the wall. With a groan, she jumped up to her feet and swung around. Her mouth was open ready to hurl some insult until she spotted the bottle of whiskey and two shot glasses in the hunter’s hand.

“Drink?”

She huffed and crossed her arms but didn’t say no. Her head was still buzzing from the party and she was sure she could stomach a few more drinks before it started to show.

“Fine… only because I like whiskey.”

He smirked and sat down on the floor besides her. He poured out two shots and handed one to Artemis.

“Let’s play never have I ever!” She suggested, toying with the glass rim.

Something flashed in Daryl’s eyes which she didn’t recognise. Maybe hurt? Regret?

“Can’t you just drink?”

“I can’t drink in silence.”

“Doubt you could do anything in silence.”

She laughed and tucked a stray curl behind her ear. “Are you insulting me or flirting with me? Besides you owe me an apology.”

“I ain’t apologising.” He stubbornly snapped.
“Then we play!” She beamed. “I’ll start. Never have I ever missed my favourite football team’s match… when they weren’t walkers.”

Daryl drank his shot without hesitation and poured himself another.

“Never did like football. What was your home team?”

“Go FC Spartak!” She replied with a fake cheer. “The spirit of Moscow!”

“Alright. Never have I ever been stabbed.”

She shrugged and gulped down her shot. Biting back a grimace, she wiped her mouth and poured out another shot. A puzzled look was on Daryl’s face which she resisted the urge to laugh at.

“Hey, even assassins make stupid mistakes. And I was a kid once too. Never have I ever… been shot?”

“You’ve been stabbed but not shot?” Daryl asked as he drank.

“You’ve been sloppy enough to get shot?”

He shrugged. “Fair enough. Never have I ever revealed to a bunch of strangers that I have a priceless cure and was a cultist assassin.”

Artemis grinned and drank. “In my defence, there are still some blood types I can’t cure.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, like Rick and Carl’s. A positive, Rick told me. Do you know 35% of Americans are? If they got bit, I could only turn them into versions of Ryan. But Carl won’t. He’s got a good head on his shoulders.” She smiled and part of her even believed it. “Never have I ever been to jail?”

“Nah, not me. Never have I ever kept a walker as a pet.”

She chuckled and drank her shot. The alcohol burnt the back of her throat and she barely managed to keep it down. In a hazy circle, the room began to spin.

“Why do you keep him? Rick keeps saying you think he’s still alive.”

“Don’t try to psychanalysis me. I keep him because he’s good protection and he’s useful. The real Ryan died, I know that. This Ryan just won’t fuck off.”

“You don’t need protection. Even if you did, you could just get any walker. And you don’t like it inside here. I’ve watched you eye up the gate like it’s a prison cell.” "You do the same?" She pointed out. "Why’d you stay?"

She shrugged and inched closer to him till she was straddling his waist. His hands hesitatingly landed on her hips and held her tight.

“Have you ever been homesick for a place you’ve never been?” She replied, tracing the stubble on his cheeks. “Have you ever missed people you’ve never met? I saw this place and I saw you and I wanted to call this place home.”

He let his eyes drift close, even so familiar to how Ryan had.
"I shouldn't be here." He whispered. "We shouldn't be doing this."

His grip tightened till she felt his fingers dig into her thighs through her dress. When he kissed her, she didn’t pull away. She bunched his shirt in her hand and yanked him closer to her, her tongue joining his and moaning into his mouth.

Artemis wasn’t sure how they got onto the bed. She remembered Daryl lifting her off the ground and wrapping her legs around his waist, pushing her panties to the side and his finger sliding into her all the while their tongues fought for domination until he bit her lip. She remembered gasping as another finger made its way inside her and twisted while his other hand pulled down her dress. But not how she was ended up underneath him or when she had taken off his clothes.

His body was as hard against her as she imagined. His muscles were as shaped as marble and he was easily as strong if not stronger than her.

She gasped as his teeth connected with her nipple and arched her back, moaning for more contact. When he pushed her back down, she clawed her nails along his back.

“Fuck!” He shouted loudly. “After this, I’m gonna make you regret that.”

Suddenly she was flipped onto all fours and Daryl pressed himself hard into her. He slid into her with a grunt and slowly started to build a rhythm inside her. A shallow gasp left her throat as his fist tightened around her hair, yanking her back on his cock.

“Fuck! Where have you been hiding that?”

He withdrew before forcing back into her harder till she was sure she couldn’t breathe. One of his massive hands clutched her hair while the other left red marks on her hip. When he had taken himself in his hand, thinking about being buried inside her, it hadn’t been anything compared to how wet and tight she was surrounding him, drawing him further and deeper inside her.

He lost control and resolve as he grabbed her hips and buckled inside her one last time before his hot pleasure shot inside her. He stayed inside her for a long moment before they both collapsed on the bed. Somehow he managed to move the quilt so it covered both of them and snuggled her into his arms.

For the first time since Ryan's murder, Artemis didn’t have nightmares.

Daryl was silent after.

The bedding sheets were still crumpled around Artemis’ naked body when she reached over and found Daryl’s spot empty. She searched the dark room for him and eventually found him stood by the door.

“Daryl.” She groggily called out, sitting up while trying to hold the sheet to her chest.

When he didn’t answer, she called out again louder.

“I heard you.” He grumbled.

“Come back to bed then.” She teased. "I need a bed warmer."
"We've got stuff to do."

"Stuff can wait till later."

He paused and finally turned to her. His eyes were hooded and refused to look directly at her. He was dressed fully including his leather jacket, somehow making her aware of her own lack of clothing.

"I can't do this with you." He finally said.

He kept his head down though- he couldn’t quite meet her eyes. She clenched the sheet tighter to her body and laughed shakily. Something deep and cruel whispered inside of her 'coward'.

"You're joking. You can't do what?"

"Be with you."

"You didn't have a problem with it last night." She pointed out. "If this is your way of saying you just wanted me in bed, you're doing a shit job of it."

"It ain't like that. I ain't like that."

"Then why? You didn't have a problem while you were fucking me. Now suddenly you've had a clash of conscious? Realised who you were fucking?"

"We have too much riding on us. I shouldn’t have let it get this far... where are you going?"

Artemis yanked on her underwear, almost falling over in the process, and grabbed her dress from the side.

"As far away as I can from your bullshit."

"You can still stay here." He said quietly.

A scoff left her throat. "Do you think I need your charity? You're not some martyr helping poor me. I don't need you to put me up and I don't need your stupid help!"

"I never said you did."

His tone never raised or changed. She could be screaming at him at the top of her voice till her lungs were bursting and he still wouldn't flinch. Her hands were shaking so much she struggled to zip up her dress. Thankfully, he didn't offer to help. Still she could feel his eyes burning into her back as she covered the last part of her skin. She didn't wait before grabbing her stained bag and shoving the few possessions she had into the bag. There was embarrassingly little stuff. Daryl watched her silently from the doorway.

"You can stay here. No one's making you go." He added so quietly she wasn't sure if she was supposed to hear. "I don't want you to go."

The words stung more than his rejection. She could hear Ryan dragging his feet up the stairs, moaning every time his ankle caught on the wooden edge

She would leave the conversation in the bedroom with the remnants of the night and try to ignore the aching pain in her gut. Last thing she wanted was to have it carry on outside the house.

Daryl grabbed her arm, yanking her towards him. His touch was like being whipped. She reeled
back, bursting out of his hold.

"I said I didn't want you to go!"

Suddenly, her palm smacked into his cheek.

The sound echoed in Artemis' ears as Daryl released her.

"That's enough!" She yelled. "You can't- you just can't decide you don't want anything to do with me one second and then the next beg me to stay! It's not fair! Say I deserve, say you don't care! You can't do this to me, Daryl! Tell me you think I'm some monster that you just wanted to fuck and get rid of! Tell me!"

"Fine!" He said, slamming his fist into the wall. "Is that what you want? Then fine! You were a challenge! Just some competition prize I wanted to win from Rick! Does that make you happy?"

She held up her hand to stop him. Judging by his heavy sigh, he was more than happy to not carry on. She refused to cry but a couple tears broke free.

“Just… I’ll go.”

He hesitated before nodding and leaving the room. She knew Morgan’s old home was free since he had left so it wasn’t like she would be homeless again. She almost laughed at her own naivety. She was still an assassin and a murderer- how could she be so stupid into thinking she could have a happy family life with Daryl?

Obviously the hit to her head had been harder than she imagined.
Artemis groaned as the sunlight hit her from behind the flimsy curtains. She curled into a ball and debated if she could pretend she didn’t exist for a while.

It was a nice idea until Ryan tugged the quilt from her.

She opened her mouth, ready to shout at the walker, but the look on his face shut her up.

“What’s wrong, Ryan?”

The walker groaned and tugged on her arm hard enough to drag her out of bed. She cursed under her breath and quickly dressed. The entire time, Ryan paced around the room.

She tried to listen in to the walker but all she could sense was hunger.

*Hunger, hunger, hunger…*

It wasn’t coming from Ryan.

She allowed the walker to lead her out of the house and down the street till they got to the fence. Eugeen was on guard while Sasha, as always, was on watch in the church tower.

“Hey, Sasha!” She shouted up. “Have you seen odd happening out there?”

The shooter shook her head and went back to looking down her rifle. Eugeen came down from the watch and nervously glanced across at Ryan pulling on Artemis’ arm.

"Your walker went out for 22 minutes and 35 seconds during the early hours of this morning. Not to be showing my cards, but the kind of behaviour gives me the heebie jeebies."

“He doesn’t bite, Eugeen.” She sighed, trying not to lose her temper.

With Ryan tugging insistently and Eugeen refusing to get out of her way, she was finding the task next to impossible.

“I am well aware that you exhibit a large amount of control over it and other walkers but one cannot help but wonder what would happen if your back was turned.”

“Then make sure you’re not around him when my back is turned. Let me pass you.”

Eugeen finally broke eye contact with the walker. “I have limited experiment vials but enough to start taking samples. If you will allow me-”

“Not now, Eugeen.” She replied through gritted teeth.

She shook her arm, trying to shake free the walker. Ryan growled and pulled so hard she stumbled forward.
“If you just give me 10 minutes-”

Growl and a harder tug.

“Later, please!”

“I need samples from both the walker and yourself. If I can see any common denominators in your blood or spit-”

“Enough from both of you! Eugeen, I am coming back, okay! You can take all the samples you want but you will have to wait!” She shot around to Ryan and pointed her into his chest. “And you! What is so important it can’t wait 10 minutes while I’m clearly talking to someone?”

“What’s going on here?”

Rick’s booming voice somehow quietened both Eugeen and Ryan. His hand hovered over the kolt python strapped to his hip as he stormed over to the small group. Artemis huffed at Ryan and cross her arms.

“You see? Now we’re both in trouble.”

Ryan gripped the gate with both callused hands and started pulling it open.

“What is he doing?” Rick questioned. “Walkers can’t open fences. Where is he going?”

“Something is out there that’s got him riled. If I’m not back in an hour, assume it was a bear.”

“You think this is some kind of joke? Take Daryl with you at least!”

“No!” She said fast. “I mean, Daryl’s busy.”

“No, I'm not.”

Artemis cursed under her breath as Daryl came up from behind Rick. Caught in an obvious lie, she could only stand and stupidly stare at Daryl. He hadn't changed since... the night before. He hadn't slept after she had left judging by the bags under his eyes.

"Can you just humour me?"

"Alright, where do you find a dog with no legs? Wherever you left it.”

She turned away to help Ryan. The walker barely had the gate open enough to slid open before he was on the other side. She followed him, tapping her knife and gun on her holsters.

“Wait!” Sasha shouted out after her.

Artemis held out her hand, ordering Ryan to stop. The woman ran up to them and stood before Artemis. Her rifle was tucked over her shoulder, a pistol tucked into her shoulder holster and a knife on her belt. She looked more armed than the entire community put together.

“I got the guns from Hilltop.” She stated, following Artemis' curious glance. “The saviours don’t know about them and they won’t ever. If you’re going out there, I want to go. You need the back up.”

She tilted her head and frowned. “I don’t know what’s waiting out there.”
“I don’t care.”

“Sasha is one of our best shots.” Rick added. “If you run into trouble, Sasha will have your back. Take her with you.”

Artemis gave in and let her come. She doubted she could have stopped her following and Ryan had already set off. It wasn’t till his back was turned that she noticed the blood on his sleeve.

It took over half an hour of slow trekking before Artemis saw another walker. She gently placed her hand over Sasha’s rifle and pointed it at the ground while they approached the mutilated walker. There was less urgency in Ryan’s steps. Once free of Alexandra, the walker stumbled through the woods on his own path.

The walker in front of them had been dead for a long time. Her face was a mess of loose skin and one of her cheeks had been bitten off, leaving a hollow bloody hole. Artemis had long grown used to seeing the dead in various states of decay but there was something different about the walker.

Artemis paused in front of the walker and waved her hand in front of her face. The walker didn’t move or flinch, even when Artemis’ hand slammed against her cheek.

“What are you looking at?” She whispered.

She followed the walker’s dead stare to the distance. The trees whispered in the breeze, the last rays of sun disappearing into their forage. Ryan groaned and shuffled forward in the direction of the walker’s stare.

“What is it?” Sasha asked cautiously.

Artemis shrugged and gripped her knife tight in her hand.

“How can you tell that in a walker?”

Artemis shoved the tall grass out her way as she followed Ryan. “When I’m close, I can feel what they would if they were alive. She was terrified of something or someone.” "What-" Artemis quickly hushed her and ducked. Sasha ducked down next to her and gripped her rifle with both hands. There must have been a dozen, if not more, walkers all gathered around a burnt circle in the grass. They circled it almost predatory. Their eyes didn’t move from the patch as Ryan slowly walked in between them. Artemis signaled for Sasha to stay behind.

In the middle were two corpses, flesh still sizzling and dead hands trying to crawl their way up.

Artemis crouched down and ghosted her hands over the burnt grass strands.

It might have been a camp fire if it hadn’t been for the bodies. The damage had been recent, the embers still clinging to the ground and forming a lazy smoke circle around the area.

“What are they just stood there like that?”

“They’re trying to tell me something that I can’t hear cause you’re so goddamn loud.” Artemis replied, letting her eyes close. “They’re trying to show me who did this.”

The burnt body moved in the ashes. Judging by the tufts of hair and mutated shapes of breasts, it had
once been a woman. Artemis shuffled to the side and laid down in the burnt grass besides the walker.

“Show me.” She whispered.

Sasha watched in horror as the walker pointed into the distance with a trembling hand. She had never seen a walker stare at a human with anything other than hunger but the look in the burnt woman’s eyes… it was desperation. Artemis whispered something to the walker and took its dead hand into hers.

“They won’t get far. I will do ten times worse to them- I promise.”

She gave the walker’s hand one last comforting squeeze before she stabbed her in the side of her head. While she put the other walker out of his misery, the other walkers kept their eyes glued on Ryan. She wouldn’t have been surprised if they didn’t see her at all.

The assassin jumped up, dusted off her top, and set off in the direction the walker had pointed. The gentle rustle of walker feet soon followed her.

“Where are we going?” Sasha questioned as she stayed a few steps behind her.

Without looking back, Artemis answered: “To teach a lesson in cruelty.”
Sasha kept as much suspicion of Artemis as she did the walkers. Her fingers itched around her knife and her eyes constantly flickered between Artemis and the walkers following. For all her hatred, the walkers didn’t glance twice at her. Instead, they quietly stalked through the long grass looking for whatever prey Artemis was leading them too.

It repulsed her. She hated Artemis for everything she was. She hated her for being a killer even before the outbreak and for getting away with it. She hated her for not being punished. She hated her for being flirty and friendly. She hated her for being the cure and arriving too late to save her brother. She hated her for being an assassin and arriving too late to save Abraham.

Suddenly, the walkers stopped. Artemis held up her fist in a pause signal and the walkers broke from their group, separating in a slow shuffle. Artemis went ahead without them. Only Ryan still followed.

Sasha scanned the forest area for whatever she had seen. Her eyes fell on a flash of colour and she pinpointed a man amongst the trees. Her grip tightened when she realised who he was.

"Who-

"Stay low and shut up." Artemis whispered.

Before Sasha could object, Artemis strolled into the clearing, weapons tucked out of sight.

“The forest is a dangerous place to be.” She announced, drawing the attention of the dozen men. “Even in the day, there are all kinds of monsters out here.”

One of the men carried a glistening machete still wet with blood in his hand while the others had guns, rifles or knives. Their perfect clothes and cocky smiles gave them away immediately as Saviours. No one on the outside worn more than rags unless they had somewhere to call their sanctuary.

“A pretty girl like you, all alone, no weapons, no clue, shouldn’t be out then.” One of the men snarled.

“I found a body.” She shrugged. “I wanted to know who did it.”

The burly man with a machete took a step towards her, mirroring her movement. He pointed the glistening tip in her face till it touched her nose.

“What’s it to you, little girl?”

Artemis grinned. “It is everything to me. Burning someone alive… unnecessary. That wasn’t done for a reason. It was done out of cruelty and that’s breaking the rules. What was you gonna do? Leave the body outside Alexandra? Remind fucking everyone what dicks you are?”
The man chuckled darkly, revealing a mouth of teeth stained with nicotine.

“Let me guess, this is the first time outside of Alexandra for you? You’re a virgin to the outside world. Coming out here, to me, to get fucked? Sweetheart, you picked the wrong guy to kiss nicely. Like you said, there’s all kinds of monsters out here.”

“Do you want me to show you a monster?”

The men laughed loud, boisterous laughter. Sasha checked the corner of her eye but the walker Ryan was gone. A layer of sweat broke out down her spine and on her palms. The knife she held felt heavier. Her head snapped back and forth, searching the long grass for any sign of the walkers.

She heard the screamed before she found the walkers.

A blood curling pained scream pierced through the forest air sending birds scattered in every direction away. Another scream, and another, and then came the sound of flesh tearing.

Sasha couldn’t look away.

Walkers tore the men apart, going for their guns first before they could even fire, ripping off their arms when they refused to release their weapons. Sasha could never have imagined walkers with such strength cut through a group of armed like wheat.

Artemis had the machete man on the floor, her boot pressing into his throat. He could only gurgle and struggle while he listened to the screams stop one by one.

Sasha finally stumbled into the clearing. Vomit curdled at the back of her throat but she couldn’t take her eyes off the mess of human bodies lay in a pool of blood and guts. The walkers feasting didn’t look up as she approached a kneeling Artemis.

“Go back to the compound.” She ordered.

Both stared at the man pinned under her boot. Sasha had done horrible, cruel, things in the past to survive but nothing compared to what she knew Artemis would do to the man.

“Rick said-”

Artemis shot around to Sasha and she could have sworn she heard her growl.

“It doesn’t matter what he said!”

“What will you do out here?” She nudged her head at the walkers. “What will you do with them?”

Artemis sat down on the hard ground and crossed her legs. The machete man’s breathing had quickened to hyperventilating and sweat soaked his shirt.

“That ‘trespasser’ you burnt alive? Her name was Marie. She wasn’t from Alexandra. She didn’t know you but you murdered her and she died screaming and alone. What kind of monsters are you?”

She slammed her shaking fists into the ground, her teeth bared and a tremble in her lip.

“You should look away.” She told Sasha.

She didn’t. She watched Artemis sliced off the man’s ears and feed them to her pet walker. Then she was attacking the man herself. Her teeth latched into his shoulder and tore out a chunk of his flesh.
Sasha couldn’t hold back the bile anymore. She spun around and ran to a clearing free of walkers and promptly vomited out her breakfast.

Artemis wiped the blood from her mouth to across her cheek. She spat out a ball of skin and flesh.

“You think you’re the scariest things out there? It’s a big world. There are plenty of bigger, scarier, monsters.”

“There’s going to be more walkers.” Sasha gingerly warned as she stumbled back to her.

“Let them come. I want them to see what these people did to theirs.” She said as she licked the sticky blood from her fingers. “But first, I’m going to wait till he turns. It could take hours, Sasha. You should go home.”

“Then what?”

“Then he’s going to tell me everything I want to know about Negan.”

“He’s bleeding to death!”

“There are other ways the walkers talk to me.”
Sasha left eventually. The assassin was glad to see her walk away. Something about Sasha reminded her too much of herself. Plus, there was a hunger in her stomach that twisted her insides and made it impossible for her to keep her temper at bay. As soon as Sasha disappeared, Ryan crouched down next to her. His hands were cupped around a lump of a fresh kidney.

Her stomach growled loudly. Ryan held the meat to her lips, pushing into her mouth. Begrudgingly, she dug her teeth into the meat and took a bite of the flesh. Immediately, her hunger lessened and pleasure shot through her like a brand. Her eyes flew open and a moan left her lips.

She didn’t stop till the meat was completely gone and her hands were licked clean of blood.

“I used to be like them.” She stated, stumping into a sitting position besides machete man. “I was an unwanted kid tossed on the streets, alone and scared, raised in a brothel by some prostitutes that took pity on me. Then one day men like you came into my home and slaughtered everyone in their sleep. But they didn’t see me in the attic. I was taken in by the cult and raised to be the Commander’s daughter. Funny how fast things can change.”

A soft groan left the man’s lips. His finger twitched and his foot scrapped across the ground. Artemis flicked her fingers on his cheek and the man’s eyes burst open in response.

The machete man- no, he was a walker now- ground his jaw together, his teeth grinding together in what she could only assume what an urge to bite into her. In life he would have gone to hit her, maybe even try and kill her. But he was undead.

So he was hers. And there was a story she wanted to hear.

After she heard the story of Negan, she looked down at the man with his mouth full of blood and grinned.

“Good… this is… very good. It seems like you have someone you need to find for me. Can you do it?”

The walker grunted and nodded his head. Of course he would because she would be at his side. But she would need supplies that he didn’t- food, water, and more importantly, flesh.
The guard looked twice before he let her into Alexandra. Artemis could only imagine she looked like a pale, blood soaked wild woman banging on the gates with a walker circling behind her.

Rick came running out and took a long look at her before letting her in.

“You want something over Negan? You want to stop being his bitch- a chance to win this thing?” She demanded, marching straight into his compound and pointing her finger in his chest. “I have it. If you want this, I can give it to you on a silver platter.”

“We do.” Sasha stated from behind her. “I can do what you need.”

There was something in her eyes that Artemis recognised. Something she had seen in a glass reflection of herself after Ryan’s death. She wondered if one of the men who Negan had murdered had been Sasha’s.

“It means taking Ryan with you. You won’t like what you see, in fact it was revolt you, but it needs to be done. You can’t leave your car.”

“I’ll do it.”

Artemis tilted her head to the side and licked her lips, trying to salvage some of the blood still there.

“Get your shit together then. You leave tonight.”

“With just… the walker? I can take Rosita in case I run into trouble there.”

“Whatever makes you hard but you won’t be fighting. Ryan is just going to walk right in and take what we need.”

“Will that work?” Rick asked. “Can we trust it?”

Artemis cupped Ryan’s cheek. The walker immediately leaned into her touch and closed his eyes.

“Yeah we can trust him. It’s humans I worry about.”

Sasha stiffened but didn’t say anything.

“Ryan was stolen from me by a man very similar to Negan. Everything I wished I could be was in Ryan. He was my best and only friend and I lost him! Now, I’m going to make them all pay. He stole my love from me once. Now he will lose his a thousand times.”

Rick found her later teaching Ryan how to dodge a knife outside Daryl’s house. She swung at him, knife in her grip, and yelled at him in Russian when he didn’t dodge fast enough. She could move faster if she wanted. The knife could slice through the air so fast he wouldn’t have time to dodge. Rick knew she was taking it easy on the walker while he was still learning.

When Artemis caught Ryan distracted by Rick, she kicked the legs from under him and left the walker face down on the grass.
“He’s slow and sloppy but he has potential.” Artemis commented as she grabbed Ryan’s hand and helped him up. “Maybe he remembers being the real Ryan or at least some of his fighting training. Either way, he can lead the mission with Sasha. He’ll stand his own ground out there without me.”

“Was there others out there with Ryan and you?”

“You mean, when he was alive?”

“Yeah. It couldn’t have just been the two of you.”

Artemis sucked in a deep breath between her teeth and aimed a left hook at Ryan. The walker narrowed avoided it and matched with his own jab in her ribs.

“There was plenty.” She grunted. “Some of them thought I was magically going to save them and cure the world. They died. Others watched to experiment on me and use Ryan. They died too—eventually.”

He nodded as if he could have any idea what she had been through. As if he knew how she had made those men beg for their lives and then beg for death. It didn’t need to be asked if she had tortured them.

“It didn’t dawn on me that there was other with the cure that were just as deadly and were following orders—just like I used to. I was an idiot. Stupid, stupid girl. I got hurt—bad. There cure wasn’t working and I was turning slowly. Ryan said there was no other way than to go back to the assassins. So we did. They saved me and they…”

She gulped and turned away from Ryan. She couldn’t bear to see his pale skin and dead eyes. He had once possessed a smile which could lighten her heart even during the worst of times. Now the only thing he did was growl and gnarl flesh.

“They took Ryan from me. Tortured him. Beat him. Locked me in a room with his body and a dozen guards so they could beat to death and he could eat the remains. Thankfully, before they could properly get the party started, my bastard brother chose that moment to launch the power play he always wanted. I bit Ryan trying to save him but then there an explosion and I don’t know how he ended up dead… but he did.”

“Your brother is immune?”

“Yeah, we all are. There were… are 13 of us. They took the strongest, meanest of us and made us into a monstrous hungry cure. Why do you think I jumped off the building when my brother came after me? Between my brother and me, we have the main components of the cure— if one of us dies, the cure dies with us. I didn't jump to get away.”

“He’s not Ryan, Artemis.”

She scoffed and swung her knife again.

“I know that. Being a walker doesn’t mean he’s started to look like the real Ryan at all.”

“I wasn’t talking about the walker.”

She frowned, knife still held mid-air in her fist.

“You think Daryl reminds me of Ryan?” She laughed humorlessly. “That isn’t a goddamn thing those two have in common. Ryan was kind, forgiving and showing me how to use mercy but he was
also naive. Daryl is… a survivor. I have a feeling he was even before all this.”

“Did you love Ryan?”

“Sharing time is over.” She replied harshly, swinging hard at Ryan, catching his cheek.

As soon as she saw the blood gush from his cheek, Artemis dropped her knife and ran to the walker. She tore a piece of her shirt off and quickly pressed it to the wound. Her fingers were trembling as she tried to stop the bleeding.

“Shit, Ryan. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean-”

*I didn’t mean to get you killed. I didn't mean to take you away from everyone. I didn't mean to want you to myself. I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't mean to get everyone killed. I didn't mean to kill you.*

A sob caught on her lips before she could stop it. The walker didn’t finch but Rick quickly rushed and pulled her into a hug. She quickly passed a rag to Ryan. He sniffed it, rubbing his nose in the dirty fabric, and slapped it on his cut cheek.

“We were so fucking close to the cure! I have it *inside* me and I couldn’t save him! I couldn’t save him when it mattered…. I couldn’t save him. Even when he saved me so many fucking times, I couldn't save him.”

“I won’t ask. But if you want to tell me, I’m here.” He offered.

His hand gently cupped her cheek. She didn’t know why, but she wanted to tell him. She wanted to tell him all about Ryan and their days together. She wanted to tell him what she had done. She wanted to apologise, to face the punishment, to finally speak out loud what had followed her for so long. Somehow she couldn’t do it justice though. She couldn’t tell him about the anger she felt at everything she had done to get Ryan only to lose him again and again. Yes, she loved him. She loved him so much it burnt and curdled inside her. Her love had been so strong, so consuming, it had turned into a wild beast.

"There's too much to tell."

“Hey.” He said gently, cupping her cheeks. “I get it.”

Her face lit up in a way which Rick couldn’t help but smile at. Before he could even consider pushing his luck, two rough hands wrenched her out of his arms. Rick shot around ready to punch whoever laid a hand on Artemis before he saw it was Daryl.

“What the hell are you doing?” He demanded as he stared down at Artemis, shaking her slightly.

“We were just talking, Daryl.” Rick replied for her.

"Get the hell off me!" She exclaimed.

She snapped out of his grip and almost fell before Rick caught her.

Daryl turned to Rick, his eyes narrowed. If looks could kill, Alexandra would need a new leader.

“You were the one who said she was unstable! That she was gonna run! Now you want to fuck her? You can't just take her from me!”

“You ended it with her!”
“That doesn’t mean I don’t fucking like her! Everything relies on her making this cure.”

“You guys thought I was going to leave without making the cure?” Artemis piped in.

If either heard her, they had no problem ignoring her.

“Well, if you like her so much, why did you break it off with her? Everyone fucking knows Daryl. One second you’re following her about like a lost puppy, having her move into your house and making out with her on the street and the next you’re not talking and you kick her out to fucking Morgan’s place?”

“That’s none of your business!”

“You shouldn’t have treated her like that! No wonder she doesn’t want you out with her anymore!”

“You think I don’t know your high and mighty act is bullshit? What, you don’t think she knows about Michonne and you? She ain’t gonna fuck around with you behind another girl’s back. She chose me so back the fuck off!”

“I’m not saying I want something with her, Daryl.” Rick said as he lowered his voice. “All she needs is a friend right now.”

“You said you wouldn’t try anything.”

“That was before-”

“Before you saw your chance?” Daryl demanded.

Rick shook his head and gripped his friend’s shoulder.

“It ain’t like that, Daryl. I ain’t gonna lie and say I didn’t want something with her but she chose you. She never looked twice at me and she still doesn’t.”

“She didn’t chose me. She ain’t with me, is she?”

“That’s your choice, man. I don’t know what happened-”

“Don’t give me that bullshit. You were probably waiting outside the fucking house-”

Suddenly Artemis’ fist flew through the air and crashed into Daryl’s cheek. The shock knocked him back a few footsteps and for a second he was sure she was ready for another attack.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Daryl? You told me to leave! You said it was ‘a mistake’ and ‘you didn’t mean for it to happen’. So now cause Rick helped me once, you want to throw a fit? You’ve no right to act like you’ve got any claim on me!”

“She's right, Daryl.” Rick stated. “I wasn't trying anything and besides, she's not here for that.”

“Well, she’s stayed, ain't she?” he shot around to Artemis. “Why haven’t you gone away chasing after the others with the cure?”

Artemis eyes widened. She gently placed her hands on Daryl’s arms, pulling him away from Rick’s grasp and into her warmth.

“I’m not leaving.” She whispered to him. “I am never running away again.”
...Who you were...

... Who you were...

2 year and 9 months before

The bodies were faceless. A mass of meat suits stacked high and covering the floor. The first few had been mourned, the first dozens had been a shock but now they didn’t matter. Blood painted the room’s walls a sickly crimson and overrun the floor, a lake of it running over the glass to the abyss below.

Artemis wasn’t sure when she stopped caring if the glass floor would crack.

It might have been when the knife had lodged in her side, taking with it a good chunk of her blood. Or when her shoulder had been yanked so hard she had heard a pop. Or when her leg had been twisted and came back loose and unable to bend. She had survived it though and carried on fighting. She was exhausted, beaten and broken but so were her brothers.

Dragging herself off the floor, Artemis grabbed her guns in sloppy, bloody hands. The room spun for a second before she saw her brothers. One stood at the left of her, the other at the right, and both had guns trained on her and each other.

There were so many injuries on the siblings that the only thing separating them from the bodies was the fact that they were standing. Blood was pouring out of Lucas’ chest and left a crimson path down her shirt. Had she stabbed him or one of her men? Did it matter?

Yes.

Her other brother hadn’t faired any better. On his left hand, an empty bloody hole marked where his little finger should have been and his breathing was laboured and raspy, probably from her dagger pierced his lung.

In between the siblings stood a proud glass pillar. On it held a thick needle full of a sickly black liquid which made all the deaths worthwhile.

“There’s no way we can all make it out of here alive.” She panted, spitting out a mouthful of blood onto the glass floor.

“I can keep going till you’re both dead. The medicine is good, it’s got me this far.” Lucas pointed out in a hoarse voice.

“Not your men though.” Daniel grunted.

“We’re all hurt bad. If we inject ourselves with the cure now, we know we’ll each be healed. We can walk away.”

Lucas chuckled but it came out more of a pained groan. His fingers trembled around his guns, his
grip slick with blood.

After a moment pause, he nodded.

"Eloise, come over here." Daniel called out.

From behind a wall at the far end of the room, a tiny blonde hair popped out. The girl didn’t move for a few seconds. Instead she stared at the bodies on the floor.

"Eloise, it's okay. We're not going to hurt you." Artemis cooed.

Then she walked over to her siblings.

Artemis didn’t take her focus from her brothers. The girl stopped besides her and looked up, her big green eyes landing on the gaping wound on her side.

“Eloise,” Artemis began, gritting her teeth to stop herself from screaming. “Go to the needle and get it.”

“But daddy said-”

“That doesn’t matter. Not now. We're too far gone. Go get it and inject it in our arms. Do you remember how to use a needle?”

Eloise nodded her head. She tiptoed through the blood, making sure not to stand on anyone’s arm or leg. The sound of her tiny shoes echoed on the glass.

Artemis watched with narrowed eyes at Daniel and Lucas was injected with the black liquid in their hearts. When it was her turn, she kneeled down and let the 7 year old push the needle into her chest.

“Should I have some?”

Artemis shook her head.

“If it kills us, someone needs to tell the others.”

"She should have some. She's our blood." Daniel said.

"No. No. I won't do that to her. Run now, Eloise. Go straight to daddy, okay? I love you more than anything.”

With every hurried step Eloise took as she ran out of the room, Artemis’ heart broke. She could feel the cure inside her, already turning her into one of them.

If it didn’t work, she wouldn’t remember Eloise.

She would be faceless, nameless and alone.

“We’ll finally be immortals at war.” Lucas said with a bloody grin.

“Don’t make war sound like an exciting and thrilling game.” Daniel growled.

Blackness started to creep into the corner of Artemis' vision. She wobbled, corrected herself, and then blinked away the stars. She couldn’t faint- not while they were alive.

“You ready?” She crooked.
“Ready.”

“Ready.”

Then the shots rang out.
It still felt foreign for Artemis to feel the scars on her back. She stayed sat on the bedroom floor of Morgan's empty house, and traced the indentations in her flesh. She tried to remember how her back used to feel but all that came back were images of the wipe tearing her back to pieces. Someone must remember how she had felt. Ryan would but he was far away now. She was alone with her scars. Shaking her head, she pulled on her tank top and grabbed the needle besides her. It was simple enough task Eugeen had given her. 4 blood samples. She had taken Ryan's before he had left and the rotten blood was in the fridge besides the cheese.

Daryl had been with Eugeen when she had gone for the needles. It had been awkward enough for both Eugeen and her when Daryl tried talking to her. The conversation had been easily dodged when Eugeen explained he needed the samples urgently.

The tip pierced into her arm but before a drop of blood could leave her, she withdrew the needle. Her ears peeked up like a German Shepard and her head shot around to the window. People were crowding onto the street, hurdling together. The roars of tires told her immediately why. The needle tipped from her fingers and tapped onto the ground. She was out of the house before she saw the small glass vital smash.

Negan grinned at the furious woman. When he had last seen her she had been just as furious, a fire behind her eyes and fists ready to strike. Judging by what he had to show her, she wouldn’t be getting any happier.

“Sweet little kitten! I’m not gonna lie, I wanted you to come in that towel.”

“Go fuck yourself, Negan. Why are you here?”

He boisterously tipped his head back and laughed.

“Because I own this shit so I can come and go as I please.” He added with a grin. “Though, if you’re involved, I do believe I’d rather be coming.”

She grimaced and balled her hands into fists.

“Now, now. No need to making this even harder on Rick the Prick here. He’s already in a shitload of shit!”

“What do you mean?” She demanded. “We haven’t done anything. We’ve met your demands at every turn and done your dirty work for you.”

He tutted and pointed his bat at the large moving van behind him. There was a pained grunt and Simon shoved an injured man out of the boot.

A gasp left Artemis’ lips when she recognised the man’s leather jacket.

“What have you done?” She screamed, running to Daryl.
A tight grip yanked her waist, stopping her in her tracks. Negan laughed as he held her away from Daryl. With every struggle to get free, Negan’s grip tightened till her feet was held off the ground and breathing was nearly impossible.

“You calm?” He asked impatiently.

She huffed and slapped him hard across the face. His cheek immediately went red much to her pleasure.

“I said, are you calm?”

“Very.” She spat out.

He released her, barely giving her enough to get her footing before pushing her away.

“Daryl here had a run in with my men. Thankfully, he’s unhurt but he’ll be coming back with me.”

“That’s bullshit!” She exclaimed. “He had a ‘run in’ but none of your men have a fucking mark on them?! That’s fucking bullshit!”

“Wow! I like me a woman with a dirty mouth! But I’m still taking him. He should consider himself lucky. Anyone else would have met Lucille! But you don’t kill a weapon like that till you’ve had chance to use it.”

Her eyes narrowed and her finger itched.

In her head, she heard the voices of the walkers around waiting to attack on her word.


Daryl’s eyes begged her not to try anything. Simon’s grip on Daryl was no doubt leaving bruises on his already bloodied arm. Broken arm? Probably.

“You’re not taking him.” She growled.

The saviours watched her with narrowed eyes and itchy trigger fingers. Simon tossed Daryl to another saviour and marched to her.

“I suggest you talk softer.”

The threat only made her angrier. She looked behind Simon and narrowed her eyes at Negan.

“I suggest you stand your men down before I put them down.”

She saw Simon reach for his gun before he even had a chance to raise it. Her hand shot out and grabbed his wrist, twisting it at such an angel he either moved to her manipulation or snapped his arm.

She twisted him around till his body shielded hers and his own gun in his hand was pointed at his head.

Safe behind her body shield, Artemis cocked her head to the side and stared down Negan. "Let him go," She ordered. "Let him go and I don't have to kill you all."

“Look at me.” Rick calmly ordered. “You can’t take them all down. All you’re going to do is get people killed. You’re going to get our people killed.”
“I can kill enough of them. You know I can!”

On que, the sound of the walkers pounding on the gate grew more aggressive. Rick shared a look with Daryl.

“Artemis, don’t.”

Daryl’s voice was quiet and soft, so unlike the survivor she had known only a few hours ago.

Walkers pounded on the gates, more than a dozen now. Negan’s eyebrows knitted together and an amused grin covered his face. He walked up to her close enough that she could smell his cologne.

“Is that you?” he whispered.

She curled up her lip and said nothing.

Rosita appeared with blood on her shaking hands and stopped behind Negan.

“He killed Spencer!” She screamed.

The shock rippled through the group. There were murmurs too quiet for the saviours to hear but the fear was obvious.

After a pause, Negan backed away and turned to Rick.

“You really should have more control! I mean, first Spencer tries to convince me to kill you so he can take over and then little Miss Ninja over here threatens my men! This is un-fucking-acceptable, Rick!”

“Do it, Artemis.” Rosita whispered. “Do it. Do it!”

“Artemis- don’t!” Daryl objected, trying to free himself.

"Kill them, Artemis! Kill them!"

The walkers demanded to be let in, their dead voices whispered in Artemis’ mind. With a defeated sigh, she pushed Simon away and dropped his gun. She immediately raised her hands.

Negan winked at Artemis. “You think you can take down all of us?”

“I have my hands up, don’t I?”

“Something tells me you’re still dangerous. But there’s something you can do to make it up to me- marry me.”

It shocked her more than a blow. A punch to the stomach would have been something she could laugh off, stand back up, and grin about. But his offer caught her off guard and it showed.

“I want to murder you! I would kill you in your sleep, you arrogant son of a bitch!”

“Not while I have your Daryl.” He said in a sing song voice. “You’re his girl, right? You two been doing the freaky deaky? I see the way he looks at you. I bet he’d had a nice slice of that ass pie.”

Rick immediately stepped in between the two and pulled Artemis behind him.

“She’s mine, Negan. I already told you that she’s mine.”
“Well then claim her before I do. In front of us all, Rick.”

Negan boisterously laughter made her skin crawl. Rick must have sensed it because his grip tightened on her arm. He spun her around before she had chance to object and locked his lips with hers. She gasped and froze under his assault until he finally released her.

Negan watched the entire thing, grinning. It wasn’t Artemis’ obvious discomfort or Rick’s obedience- it was the fear rippling through the others at seeing their two most powerful people helpless. Michonne watched from Rosita’s side, looking ready to cut through the saviours. The only one looking angrier was Daryl.

“I gotta ask, what kind of stupid name is Artemis?”

“What kind of stupid name is Lucille?” She shot back.

Negan whistled and the saviour holding Daryl swung him back into the truck. Before Rick or Negan could catch her, Artemis sprinted across to Daryl and wrapped her arms around him as tightly as she could without hurting him.

“I will come for you, I promise. I will make him suffer.” She whispered before he was dragged out of her arms.
Famine- The Black Horse

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Famine- the black horse

Negan never left her side. When Rosita pulled out a gun and pulled the trigger, Artemis was next to him.

The wood splinters from Lucille’s bat caught her cheek. She closed her eyes for a second and covered her broken skin just long enough to know that Rosita’s bullet hadn’t hit its mark.

She stood helpless as he ordered another saviour, a woman with cruel eyes, to kill someone.

She half expected to be the one.

But the gun didn’t turn on her. There was no bright light or gun muzzle. Her world didn’t flash before her eyes. The bullet didn’t tear away her life.

It did for Olivia.

He kept her at his side when Olivia’s body hit the floor.

He dragged her by the hair across the road as his men took everything Alexandra had besides the bare essentials.

“Marry me and I’ll make this a whole lot easier on Daryl and Alexandra.” He offered again. “You won’t find it terrible. Hell, I’ll make it very enjoyable for you. Even seeing how much you hate me right now is making my jeans snug.”

Artemis would have stumbled back if his grip on her hair hadn’t already forced her to her knees.

“I’d rather get fucked by a walker.” She growled.

He ignored the disguise in her words and carried on.

“Why don’t you give me the tour of your boyfriend’s bedroom? I can take the pretty arse of yours and I’ll even cover your mouth so your boyfriend doesn’t hear. If it makes it better, Rick and I can tag team you. I’ll fuck your arse and he can cum in your mouth.”

“You’ll pay for all this, Negan.” She said from between gritted teeth.

“Famine.” Negan said out of the blue. “I looked and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice saying, “a quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not damage the oil and the wine.””

Artemis kept quiet. She didn’t need to say anything. She had watched through the saviour’s eyes once he had turned as he spoke about the war horseman to Negan.
“You know your bible, Artemis?”

“I’m an atheist.”

“Of course you are. You can’t see the kind of things you and me have seen and still think there’s a God coming to your rescue. Rick doesn’t get it like you do. I bet all these fuckers here still believe in heaven.”

“No such thing.” She added bitterly. “There is no heaven- or hell. All the demons are right here.”

Rick could have cut the tension apart with a knife in the church. Not long ago, he had gathered them all there to discuss taking down the saviours. One simple hit and the honeypot was theirs, Abraham had said.

They had been so, so wrong.

That had been before Glen and Abraham had been brutally murdered. Before Artemis had walked into their lives with the cure. Before Negan had ripped Daryl from them.

That was before Negan had humiliated their assassin by dragging her around like a dog.

He spotted the assassin at the back of the room. She stayed in the corner, hidden as far away from others as she could. He was surprised she had come to the meeting. After she had watched Negan drive away with Daryl, she had stayed outside the gates for hours until Ryan had come for her and guided her back inside.

It wasn’t till everyone had left that Artemis finally stepped out of the shadows and sat down on the back pew. Her cheek was still red from splitters which Ryan had dug out with dirty hands. Rick had offered but she had harshly forced his hand away and refused to let anyone touch her besides the walker.

“You alright?” She asked quietly.

“I should be asking you that.”

She nodded and rubbed at her eyes.

“I’m sorry for the way I acted before. I’m not used… I’m not used to be people not being scared of me.”

“Next time, you’ll trust me.”

“I’ll try.” Artemis crossed her arms. “Michonne looked furious before.”

“Not at you.” He immediately defended. “She found our mattresses outside on the road- burnt in a heap. They just took them to show us they could.”

“The saviours don’t give a shit. That’s why they take your stuff and burn it. They’re nothing but bullies.”

He sat down on the pew besides her. If she closed her eyes, she could imagine she was back with the assassins, sitting down planning the next hit.
"What would you do?"

She took a deep breath. "I was never a leader. I lost my chance at that."

"Don't say that. You don't know the other Liberators are gone. What would you do if you were leading them right now?"

“I think about that a lot.” She sighed. "Men like Negan build their armies on fear. But you take down their backup, their lieutenants and cause a bit of internal doubt- you can take them down from the inside."

“Do you still think you can lead the assassins?”

“It isn’t down to me. Some of them still believe in the cause. I just need to remind them of that.”

When he stood up and walked out into the cool night air, Rick didn’t have to check to see if she was following him. The assassin had a way of always being where she was needed lately even if it was a bit late.

“Do you still think you can lead the assassins?”

“I’ve done it before with a lot less.” She added quietly. “You have a community here- something to fight for, people who you’re willing to die for. I never had that and I still managed to take down a lot of sons of bitches. Imagine what we can do together.”

When he stood up and walked out into the cool night air, Rick didn’t have to check to see if she was following him. The assassin had a way of always being where she was needed lately even if it was a bit late.

“Do you still think you can lead the assassins?”

“It isn’t down to me. Some of them still believe in the cause. I just need to remind them of that.”

She started coughing and had to stop walking to spit out blood.

“You alright?”

“I’ll be fine.” She replied.

When she straightened up again, she had to resist the nausea and the urge to vomit.

“Come on, come inside. You don’t look well.”

“I said I’m-”

Rick held up his hand to ward off her objections.

“I heard you the first time and I’m calling bullshit.”

“I need to show you what I have in Morgan’s basement, Rick. I need you to know what you need to be prepared for with me.”

Rick followed the assassin to Morgan’s old house. The peaceful man had long left for the kingdom and left his cell free for Artemis to use. She didn’t doubt now that Daryl was gone she would spending most of her time there.

She switched on the dimmed lights and led him down the stairs to the basement. There was a chill and a disguising smell that got stronger with every step he took down the stairs. With Ryan constantly around, Rick had learned to ignore the smell of death. But the smell was stronger than just Ryan.

She paused at the bottom of the stairs and released a shaky breath.

“This is what I can do… if you let me.” She stated as she switched on the light.
Rick couldn’t take his eyes off the grey metal gurney chained down to the floor. There were medical instruments surrounded it—white bags full of red liquid and a tray of scalpels and knives—and open on the table was a black body bag.

Instead it, a leather strap covering her mouth, laid a terrified woman.

Her head was shaved and her blue eyes wide with panic but nothing got his focus more than the tubes disappearing through the strap and into her mouth, blood pumping through the clear plastic.

Artemis stood beside him and gently strapped the woman’s cheek.

“Rick, I would like you to meet Lucille.”
Meet my trojan horse

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Meet my trojan horse

Neither leader spoke for what felt like an eternity. The woman cried and sobbed beneath her leather bound and the chains holding her in place were so tight blood was dripping onto the stone floor. Rick didn’t raise a hand to help her.

“It used to be Negan’s wife.” Artemis finally explained. “His first wife, that is. She had cancer, before the apocalypse kicked off. Negan was too chicken shit to put her down so asked a kid to do instead. Kid couldn’t do it either so Lucille here has been walking those hospital halls just waiting for Ryan to scoop her up, pop her in a body bag, and bring her to meet the cure. The cancer cells are still here and the virus, obviously, but she’s alive. And leverage.”

The woman’s breathing was becoming heavier and faster the more she heard. She was crying freely now and hyperventilating. Artemis hushed her and pushed a switch up on one of the IV bags which were filled with a clear liquid. Within seconds, her eyes were closing.

“Luc here has been telling me all about Negan. Apparently he was an asshole even before the end of the world gave him an excuse. He ran about cheating on her with every piece of pussy he could find and then didn’t have the balls to put her out her misery when she turned- something I’m betting he’s still feeling guilty about today.”

“She told you all that?” Rick said in disbelief.

“She used to be a walker so I own her. Doesn’t matter if she’s cured now. I can turn it back whenever I want and she knows it. So, yeah, she told me a lot.”

“You said there wasn’t a cure.”

“I said I had killed a lot of people trying to cure.” Artemis corrected. “This was a gamble that paid off. Next time it might not work out so well.”

He stepped closer to her, his back to Lucille. Every step he took towards her, she took a step back till her back hit the basement wall. He didn’t say anything. Instead he grabbed her hands tight in one of his and forced them above her head, slamming her wrists against the wall.

“I thought you would be happy!” She exclaimed.

“You had been doing this ever since Daryl left you?” He suddenly asked.

“How did you know about that?”

Rick laughed humourlessly and squeezed her wrists tighter earning a yelp from her.

“His display before when he saw us together wasn't the first time.” ”He said I was some competition between him and you. " She pushed her away from her but he caught her by the elbows and pulled her closer again. "Soon as he saw you, he got it in his head you were going to solve everything.
You're not some prize. He just wanted to push you away. "And you?" She asked quietly. "What do you want, Rick?"

Suddenly she was lifted off the ground and held in Rick’s arms. His hands cupped her arms, digging into the soft flesh as his lips connected with her neck. She wrapped her legs around his waist automatically and gripped his strong shoulders.

She wracked her brain furiously for some explanation or demand for him to get out but the reason part of her brain was silenced by the pleasure of his kisses biting down on her collar bone.

“Rick.” She moaned. “We shouldn’t.”

“Doesn’t mean we won’t.” He replied in between laying kisses on her neck. “You liked it when I said you were mine, didn’t you?”

“Rick, we can’t do this to Daryl.”

“Do what to Daryl? He made the worse fucking mistake of his life and left you. I’ve wanted you since you walked through that gate. You’re not sure the cure or what you used to do. And right now, all I can think about is having you on all fours with my dick inside you and I know you want me too.”

Rick’s words sent shockwaves through her. She hadn’t ever known him to swear, to dominate, but it electrified her. He moved his hand down to the waistband of her jeans and undid them with a flick of his wrist.

“What makes you think I want you?” She grinned.

“You saying if I put my fingers down your jeans right now, you won’t be soaking wet?”

"You're too confident."

"You're too stubborn."

Before she had chance to answer, two of his slender fingers plunged inside her. She gasped and bite down on his shoulder as he twisted and pulled out his fingers before forcing them back in. The torturous slow pace punctured her lungs and she screamed out, not caring if the entirety of Alexandra heard her.

“Liar.” He scolded into her ear.

The first time with Daryl had been gentle like he was scared to touch her. His hands had been wanting but always holding back just a little from hurting. Rick was nothing like that. His mouth was demanding, biting her lip hard enough to draw blood when she refused his tongue entrance and his jeans failed to hide how hard he was the closer she got to her released. She buckled against his hand as his fingers thrust inside her harder and his teeth bite the sensitive spot on her neck.

“You don’t look at another man, you hear me?” He growled into her ear.

“Fuck… Rick!” She gasped as he added another finger inside her.

“Say it. Say you’re mine.”

Artemis sighed shakily and let her head fall back. There was no way she could refuse him. Her body
ached for him so much she felt she could orgasm just from the feel of his bulge pressing into her core.

“I’m yours.” She whispered.

Suddenly she touched the hard ground and Rick forced her onto all fours. He stopped only long enough to stripe off the rest of his clothes before he rubbed his cock against her wet slit.

“Say it louder.”

“No.”

“Scream it or you don’t get to cum.”

“Rick!” She moaned louder. “I’m yours- now fuck me!”

Without hesitation, he grabbed her hips and slammed into her. His pace was immediately hard and slow, every thrust sending her closer to the blissful edge.

“God you’re so fucking tight. He clearly ignored you. Maybe I should brand you with my name so everyone can see you’re mine. Would you like that? A big fucking ‘Rick’ on your ass cheek? Or maybe I’ll just fuck you so hard you can’t walk.”

“Yes!” She cried out, grinding her ass back on him, her legs shaking from his ruthless pace inside her.

Screaming his name, Artemis let her eyes closed and her orgasm rolled over her, her toes circling and her wetness squeezing around his member. He pulled out only to thrust back in her harder. With a grunt, he thrust fully in her and she felt his warm released inside her.

They stayed like that for a few moments before he softly pulled out and lay on the floor, pulling her into his chest so they were side by side. A shiver ran up her spine now the heat of two bodies was being to cool.

She laid her head down on his chest and listened to his fast heartbeat.

“Hershel was right.” He sighed.

“Who’s Hershel?”

“He was Maggie’s father. He used to keep the infected in his barn because he believed there was a cure.”

“Odds are I wouldn’t have given it them unless there was point.” She hummed.

He kissed the top of her head and held her closer.

“It was one of your bioweapons, wasn’t it?”

Without hesitation and tracing circles in his shoulder, she answered: “Yes.”

He squeezed her shoulder in what she assumed was reassurance.

“The others don’t need to know.”
“Know what? That my people are the reason their friends and family are undead or that we’re fucking?”

“Both.”

She smiled and kissed him.

“I’d appreciate that.” She said against his lips. “If people find out I can cure walkers, they’ll be asking me to cure every one of them which I can’t do without attracting a mob. And you and me…”

“It’s not ending.” He said, his voice stony and leaving no room for argument.

Her smile widened and she trailed kisses down his chest.

“I never said I wanted it to but I should see to Lucille for now. This war… you need to rise up.”

He nodded and stood. She didn’t take her eyes off his body as he slowly dressed again. She slipped on her underwear and hastily threw on her t-shirt but walking over to Lucille. She didn’t need to turn around to know Rick was behind her, studying the woman just as much as she was.

“What are you going to do to her?”

Artemis placed her two forefingers on the woman’s neck and felt the gentle pulse which she had given her. It was her life to give and take as she pleased. If it wasn’t for her, Lucille would still be in the god forsaken hospital, brain addled and body slowly rotting.

“She’s going to be my Trojan horse.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry guys :(
There was a bite mark on Artemis’ inner thigh. It wasn’t a loving bite mark. The teeth had torn into her skin and nearly ripped out her flesh. It left an ugly scar that Rick hadn’t noticed before. When he asked her about it as they walked out of Morgan’s basement, she shuddered and shook her head.

“It’s an ugly story to match an ugly scar.”

“Tell me anyway.” He instructed gently.

“When my brothers and I took the cure, we were all punished in different ways. One of the punishments was my brother was forced to scar me. He could either use a knife or his teeth. He chose knife so my father made him bite me. It’s all a bit sick right?”

“You weren’t having sex with him, were you?”

She elbowed him in the ribs and cringed, pretending to gag.

“That’s disguising! Call me a serial killer, assassin, a terrorist, a walker lover but you dare call my taste in men!”

“True. You did just sleep with me, after all.”

A heat spread from her neck to her cheeks and she barely resisted the urge to rub the redness away that she knew was there.

“Is the world’s deadliest assassin blushing?”

“Shut up!” She snapped, trying to rub the blush away from her cheeks.

Laughter trailed behind the most deadly assassin in the world and she couldn’t help but think how lovely the moment was.

Michonne watched Artemis stroll through the streets without a care in the world. The others in the community had adjusted to her presence even knowing what she was. They no longer looked away when she walked past. Michonne had even seen someone in the community talking to that walker and it listened! They hadn’t noticed her midnight escapes out of the fence or the way the undead moaned louder when she got closer to them. She had freely confessed to being every kind of evil yet everyone seemed to forget that. That was the difference between Artemis and her: Artemis was charming. With her million promises and sweet smile, it was impossible to hate her.

Not even when she saw Rick laughing freely with her. It had been Michonne’s decision to move out, to take a break until Rick finally stood up for him, but seeing them together made her blood boil.
Tobin came out of his house and said something to Artemis which made her laugh. He snapped his hand on her shoulder and laughed. It would be nothing to her to reach out and snap his neck like a twig. She knew it. She saw it in her eyes. She saw it in the walker’s eyes.

And just like that, Michonne snapped.

Hand twitching for her sword, Michonne stormed up to the group. They were still talking when Michonne barged her way through and pushed Ryan to the ground.

“Why is it here?” Michonne demanded.

“Well, Tobin was just accusing Ryan of eating his grass so…”

Michonne raised her hands to push Artemis but the assassin quickly raised her hand and grabbed Michonne’s wrist. Her shouting had brought attention and an audience had started to gather around them. They were either waiting to witness a fight or to see if Rick could handle the situation. Rick quickly ripped Michonne’s wrist from Artemis’ grasp and stood in between the two.

“Ryan isn’t doing any harm here, Michonne. You’ve seen that Artemis can control him?”

“Him?” Michonne repeated. “She’s brought a walker into our home! It’s not a he! It’s a thing, a corpse, a disease!”

Ryan growled low in his throat despite Artemis hurried attempts at shushing him. The crowd ignored him, used to his moaning and growling at nothing, but Michonne’s hand flashed to her sword handle.

Before she could even free the sword from the shaft, Artemis had her gun pointed at Michonne’s forehead.

“You’d be dead before you could hurt a hair on his head.”

“It’s not alive.” Michonne spat out. “It’s dead! It doesn’t have feels or names! You couldn’t save him and now all it is it a walking corpse. If you cured it, like you claim to be able to do, it wouldn’t be decaying!”

“Do not talk to me of the cure as if you know anything about it! You have no idea what the cure costs! Do you have any idea what I had to do to get the cure!”

“Murder dozens of innocent people?” She guessed with a carefree shrug. “Blow up children?”

Suddenly Artemis launched at Michonne. Her hands went immediately to her throat, her leg bashing into her stomach. A gasp left Michonne’s throat before they crashed into the ground.

“The cure took everything from me, you bitch! It took everything! I had to carve my way through my own fucking family!” Artemis screamed as she wrapped her hands around Michonne’s throat.

Every set of eyes was glued on Rick as he grabbed Artemis and lifted her off the ground. Michonne leapt off the ground and immediately was held back by Tobin.

“If she’s the cure, why was she not there when Audrea was bitten?” Michonne demanded, spitting out blood. “When T-Dog was torn apart? Bob, Tyreese, Aiden, Noah, Carter, Enid’s parents and Deanna- they’re all gone because it was only her given the cure! They all died because she wasn’t fast enough!”

“Where was I?” Artemis exclaimed, chuckling madly. “I was watching my home get burnt down. I
was being tortured, betrayed and experimented on. The people who relied on me, the people who I found and called family, were being eaten alive. I was torn apart and re-pieced together into someone I didn’t even recognize! I was a fucking animal being hunted and kept as a pet.”

No one dared talk. Even Michonne kept silent though she refused to look down from Artemis’ eyes. Breathing heavily, the assassin didn’t stop despite the stony silence.

“You think you know cruelty because you made it here? That you’ve seen the worse the world has to offer? You had family. You lived years without knowing pain! The torture here is nothing compared to what happens to little children of brutal murderous dictators—I was fortunate the apocalypse happened. My father would have tortured me to death if it hadn’t! You want to know was I was before this? I was nothing! I was an experiment! I was a toy my father could break and fix as many times as he wanted. That thing you talk about, that fucking corpse, is the only thing which kept me sane. So I’m sorry if you think me hard. I’m sorry if you don’t like Ryan. I’m fucking sorry if you the cure isn’t gentle or soft enough for you but the world isn’t gentle and soft. The world is hard and a merciless killer and that’s what it needed its cure to be.” She stormed up to Michonne and said quietly. “Take a good hard look cause you’ll become just like me. This is what the future looks like. This is what you need to be to survive.”

Ryan stumbled next to her and slowly put his hand on her shoulder. It was only a small gesture but it made Artemis shiver. There she was, surrounded by strangers, offering her up for them only for them to turn their back on her.

She turned back, shaking, and walked back to Morgan’s house. She knew there were stares glued to her back. Her arms itched like there were bugs underneath her skin but she made it back to the chill of Morgan’s house before she raked her nails down her arms.

Taking a deep breath, she turned to Ryan and ran into his arms. The stench of decaying fresh filled her nose. It never went away, never would, despite the showers she forced him to have or the aftershave she dotted on him. But his skin was healing. His arms were tight around her, his eyes focused and his hands gentle.

"Artemis?"

She considered ignoring Rick and hiding in the basement. With Lucille and Ryan as company, the idea soon lost its appeal.

"Artemis, I know you’re in there." Rick announced. "Open the door."

Sighing in defeat, she swung the door open.

"Can I come in?" He asked.

"Nope."

"Alright then." He hummed, leaning against the door frame so his body filled the space. "We’ll do this right here."

"If you’re going to tell me that Michonne didn’t mean what she said back there, save it. We both know she was just saying what everyone was thinking."

"Maybe but it needed to be out in the open like that. You know you and Ryan represents to everyone?"

"Walkers can still get the hots?"
He rolled his eyes and stated, "You mean hope... You mean to them a way they can get their old lives back. They'll fight for more than themselves- they'll fight for a future with a cure."

"Will you? Will you fight?"

He took a shallow breathe and released it slowly. There was anger and fury in his eyes and then something she didn't expected to see- determination.

"This new world is ours."

From besides her, Ryan took her hand and held it in his. His grip was cold but familiar and loose.

"He would have been proud." Artemis stated.

"It looks like he is."
3 years ago

The army camp was supposed to have been a challenge. It was supposed to have kept Artemis and her team of 6 assassins busy for at least a month. Instead, a 2 day observation had quickly told her the soldiers were sloppy and over confident. They thought no one would notice what they were doing to the women in a god forsaken land in Africa.

But someone high up with heavy pockets had noticed.

Someone who had friend in the liberators.

Artemis had killed most of them with a poison in their water supply. The rest she had left to her men. A message must be sent, her father had ordered. And there was no one like her and her brother to send a message.

The sergeant had been crucified. Daniel had sat him down on the sofa and was currently using the delicacy of a surgeon to remove his eyes. His mouth was open in a silent scream but the delicate cut on his throat stopped any sound. Artemis strolled in and whistled to the other assassins in the room.

"Go make sure there's no one left over. Put the cleanser in the taps to flush out the poison. Let’s give the local police department a run for their money."

"Immediately, Sister." One of the assassins said with a sharp head nod.

"Don't call me that.” She snapped. “Get out of here!"

They left hastily, filtering out the door as silent as they had arrived. Daniel didn't take his glare off his task until he had gouged both eyes out of the man's skull. He put them on the ground besides his feet and began writing in blood underneath them.

"They call you that cause you're family." Daniel said without taking his eyes of the convulsing general.

"I don't remember seeing any third grade petty killers at the dinner table on Sunday."

"Family doesn't have to be blood, kiddo. Anyway, father wants a souvenir. We could bring the eyes back but then my message wouldn't look nearly as good."

Artemis smiled and shook her head. She sat down besides the propped up body and Daniel sat on the other side. She held up her fingers behind the man's head and grinned, her tongue out.

"Jesus isn't going to be happy about this." Daniel moaned as she took out her phone and started snapping pictures.

"Jesus can blow me."
Daniel shook his head and carefully cut a long strip along the General’s throat. It wasn’t deep enough to kill him. Artemis noticed it was only about a penny width deep. It would take time for him to bleed out. It would be slow, just like what he let his men do to the women.

As they left, the blood was just beginning to dry. The words Daniel had left were clear and haunting.

*We see everything.*

**Present**

Artemis wiped the stray tears from her eyes as she stared at the photo. It had been unfolded so many times that the creases were ready to tear. Still the smiling faces were still clear, propping up that rapist General’s body.

She quickly folded it back up and placed it behind Ryan's badge when she heard the front door open.

"I'm in here." She called out from the kitchen. "I hope you like chilli surprise because the supply closet is running dry."

Rick chuckled as he wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and kissed her neck.

"Where's Ryan?"

"I don't know. He probably headed over the fence. Something over there has been giving him the creeps recently."

"You’re not worried?"

"Not in the least."

While she dished out the food, making sure to leave a fair portion for Ryan and shadow, rick poured out two glasses of wine.

“You said you would fight.” Artemis gently stated as she sat down on the opposite end of the table. “You said this world is ours.”

“It is.”

“We have to take it first. You could just let me do it.”

He chuckled until he saw the seriousness on her face.

“Hey, listen. If we do this, nothing is guaranteed.”

“Then let me do it. I can do it alone.”

“That’s not an option.”

His answer left no room for question. She gulped down a swig of her wine and stuck her tongue into her cheek.
“I can’t have you ending like Ryan.” She said softly under her breath just loud enough for Rick to hear. “I can’t carry your body with me too. I can’t save you. If a walker gets to you or Carl...”

Rick held out his hand and gasped hers.

“I have these dreams. Nightmares, more like. I see Carl and Ryan running. I try running after them but I just can’t run fast enough and I can’t pass a certain point. I try calling out to them but they just run faster. Then I realise they’re running from me. They’re terrified of me and I just get so angry! When I look at Carl and you, I see everything I couldn’t save. I see Ryan. Everything I destroyed, everything I couldn’t fix, all the faces of people I tortured and killed and I get why in my dream they’re running away from me.”

Suddenly the front door burst open and heavy footsteps stormed through the living room. Artemis already had her hand on her knife when a desperate pained scream burst in her ears.

"Artemis!” Michonne shouted.

"What the-"

"She's been bitten!"

Tara, Michonne and Aaron ran in, covered in blood, and carrying a little blonde figure between them. Someone was screaming at her and shaking her shoulders. But she didn’t- couldn’t- hear them.

The little blonde’s eyes were closed. Blood speckled her long hair and her body curled in on itself as if she was trying to hide. A brutal, large bite mark on her neck stained her pale skin crimson. The name Erin rang out, screaming in her face, but there was a different little girl in Artemis’ eye.

"Eloise.” Artemis whispered and reached for her little sister.
Rick immediately swept the dishes and glasses off the table. They smashed on the floor, shattering porcine in every direction. The sound managed to snap Artemis off of whatever daydream was in and she reached for Erin whispering a name he had never heard before. She quickly helped lay Erin down on the table.

"I-I found her outside the fence." Aaron shouted. "She must have been going out alone again! I got the walker but I was too late! I was too late-"

"Stupid girl!" Artemis cursed.

Father told you not to go outside! You aren't like us!

But Artemis! It isn’t scary out there!

Yes it is! It’s scary and it’s bloody and you can’t protect yourself! You’re just a baby. You’re not like us!

"Artemis! She needs you!" Rick shouted.

Eloise stared up at her, her entire body convulsing.

"I told you you're not like us." She whispered, dropping her face into her hands. "You didn't have to be like me. The cure isn't in you!"

Rick’s hand tightened on hers. She turned to him and tried to blink away the tears.

"This is Erin." He calmly reassured. "Whatever happened isn't going to happen here. You're going to save her."

Michonne narrowed her eyes at Artemis. She knew without asking what they had been doing. Her eyes were swollen and a purple bruise was forming on the side of her neck… the two dishes and two wine glasses... but there were more important matters. And they needed Artemis.

But I want to be like you!

No, Eloise, you don’t! You want to be scarred and cut up? I told you was happens to fucking stupid kids who go out there! They’re never seen again and if they are, they’re fucking monsters! Do you understand? Do you understand?!

"I can't..." Artemis sobbed.

"Are you kidding?" Tara demanded. "This is the only reason you're here! You're the fucking cure so fucking cure her!"

"I can't! I can’t, okay? Not her!"

"Do it, Artemis!" Rick ordered.
"You don't understand!" She argued. "I'll lose control over the walkers! They'll swarm the place! They'll want her and me!"

"Do it!" He screamed. "Aaron, get everyone on the fence! Tell them to expect a mob of walkers."

Aaron fled out of the room.

For a pause, Rick was sure Artemis was going to run. Her hands trembled he felt the shakes through his hand. Lead weights drown at the bottom of her stomach and no matter how much she swallowed her mouth was dry. Her feet were rooted to the ground. She wanted to run. God, she wanted to run.

Her teeth sunk into the bite mark on Erin’s neck.

Erin's scream was unbearable. Her entire body lifted off the table and even Artemis struggled to hold her down with the convulsions shaking her body. Blood spilled from Artemis’ mouth like a vampire feeding. Her blood was cold, frozen in her body, spraying its chill down Artemis’ throat.

"Ryan!" Rick shouted.

The walker responded immediately. He lunged forward and grabbed Erin's arms, pinning her to the table, abandoning all care the humans put into her treatment.

Artemis took his moment of undead strength and released Erin just long enough to run her blade across her palm. As soon as the blood gushed from the cut, Artemis pressed her palm into Erin's open wound.

Thankfully at that moment Erin passed out.

Her body still jolted.

Ryan looked across at Artemis and, in her pain and devastation, she could have sworn she saw him smile.

It was an hour before Artemis was sure Erin wouldn't turn. She was dizzy and sick, both from the sudden blood lost and the sight of Erin. After a while, Ryan had to pull a chair up for her while she let her wrist bleed into the girl's mouth.

This time when the door opened it was just Toby who came running in.

"We're being overrun! There's a horde coming about a mile away. There must be 40-50 walkers!"

Artemis grunted in frustration and pushed Tobin out the way. She grabbed her machetes from besides the door, tossed a spare blade into Ryan's hand, and kicked the front door open.

“Can’t you fucking do anything?”

Rick called after her but she ignored him. Artemis pushed her through the crowd, not caring who she passed, and stormed up to the gates. One of the Alexandra women was on the top, looking down nervously.
"Open the gates!"
"But Rick said -"
"Open the fucking gates before the walkers crash them down!"

The woman hesitated till she saw Ryan behind her. Seeing the walker must have brought the fear of God into her because she quickly opened the gates.

"Wait!" Rick shouted out.

She didn't.

She stepped out with Ryan, not caring if Rick followed or not.

The walkers attacked immediately. Artemis swung her machete at the first one and took off half his skull in one stroke. She elbowed a walker behind her, the blow sending his head snapping back, only for him to meet her machete. She swung wildly, cutting down walker and walker.

You don't like it, do you?

Like what?

Killing the walkers. You don't hesitate in killing humans but walkers, there's something different when you kill them. You look sad.

Two grubby hands latched onto her arm and tried to yank her but she quickly sliced them away. A warm liquid exploded on her face and dripped down her top but she turned to the next walker and sliced the top of her head off.

"I told you. It's no fun when they're dead."

"Not that. You think I don't notice but you try not to kill them. You flinch when you kill one."

“Stop making this something it isn't, Ryan.”

Teeth hovered next to her neck, ready to piece, while she awkwardly pushed a walker off her. A knife stabbed through the walker skull but it wasn't Ryan's.

She didn't have time to thank Rick. They both swung around to the next walker and then the next. Slowly, more faces appeared in the crowd of walkers.

Tara.

Michonne.

Aaron.
Tobin.

Even the priest, Gabrielle, had picked up his weapon and had started cutting down the herd.

The last dozen fell at Artemis' and Rick's feet. Ryan gorged on the remains of a fallen brunette. Brains and bodies mashed together on the grass to make a gooey mixture which dragged Rick’s boots down. Artemis rested her hands on her knees and took in deep shaky breathes.

"There's worse to come." She warned as she struggled to catch her breath.

"We can take it." Rick stated. "You and I are a pair to be feared. Mainly you though. You did most of the work."

She chuckled and wiped the blood from her mouth.

"What do you mean most?" She grinned.
Meet Artemis Wilde

Chapter Notes

hey guys

Quick heads up, you've probably figured this already but the story is a little gritty. Please be careful about the scenes of sex and torture.

love, al

The same song.

Over and over and over again, they played the same song.

Daryl hadn't a clue how long it had been since they had taken him, no doubt another thing they were using to try and break him. Maybe 3 days? Could have been a week for all he knew. The only sign of life outside his cell was the record of easy street and someone occasionally giving him dog food.

The image of Artemis was the only thing keeping him sane. He knew she wouldn't stand for the way Negan had treated her. Even when she was clearly outnumbered, she had come close to bringing the walkers down on the saviours. Why had he told her not to? A reason sat in the back of his head but it disappeared when the music stopped.

The door swung open and an explosion of light hit his eyes. He cringed away, shielding his eyes from the figure blocking the doorway.

"Good morning, sunshine!"

The overly cheerful voice could only belong to Negan.

"Shit, I bet you didn't know it was morning! Sat in this shithole not seeing daylight is a bad way to be." He mocked with a big smile. "Have you been missing Rick's big titty girl? Man, I have."

Daryl didn't respond. He knew Negan was just trying to get a reaction. Anyone with eyes could see Artemis was beautiful but something about Negan noticing made his fists clench.

"So obviously there's something going on. You been screwing her behind Rick's back? Come on! I'm bored shitless here! Give me the juicy details! Wait, you didn't kick her out of bed, did you?"

Daryl stayed silent. Last thing he needed was to have Artemis and his night together brought back into his traumatized mind. All he wanted to think about was her smile, her snark, and how she had held him before he had ripped from her.
Negan threw out comment and insult after the other about what he was going to do to Artemis. From tying her up, screwing her in front of Daryl, sharing her with his men to filling her with some much cum she couldn't walk. Each one was met with a stony silence. After 20 minutes, he gave up. The door slammed shut and the song began again, drowning out the images with the same repetitive words. For once, Daryl was glad.

Negan was furious and horny. The newest Alexandra resident was vicious and held a fire to her he hadn't ever seen. Not in his saviours or Rick's group. Something about her dared him to try attacking, to try something which would give her an excuse to rip out his throat. He wanted that fire in between his sheets while Daryl watched powerless. He didn’t doubt she’d give in eventually if he got her. He could get her to orgasm again and again. All it would take was one little push.

But there was something not else in Artemis' eyes besides fire. Hatred, anger and resentment but something else as well.

He barged into his wives' lounge and immediately went to Sherry. The latest in his harem hated him almost as much as Artemis. She didn't need to be told to follow him into his bedroom and close the door behind her. He wrapped his arm around his waist and pulled her into a possessive kiss.

"What's got you riled?" Sherry mumbled as she allowed Negan to pull her dress over her head.

"A sweet piece of arse named Artemis. Stripe for me, dearest wife."

"Stupid name. What's that the name of that serial killer?"

Negan paused and took his eyes of sherry's tits.

"What did you say?"

Sherry shrugged and vainly tried covering her bare breasts.

"There was a serial killer named Artemis something who got caught before the outbreak. It was all over the news. Artemis... something."

"Artemis Wilde?" Negan finished for her.

Sherry nodded her head. Negan threw her dress back at her and stood up so he towered over her small frame.

"I don't remember hearing about it."

"My sister’s boyfriend... he was killed w-when Wilde blew up this power plant. They said she was working with some terrorist organisation. They caught her when she blew up a bunch of cars filled with kids and women. She just handed herself in. That's all I know, I swear."

Negan watched as she dressed and hurried out the room. No doubt she was relieved she would have the night off. Normally he would drag her back and fuck her arse as punishment but tonight he had more rewarding things to do.

William Shifton just needed to finish his shift and get back to his room. Before the outbreak he had
been a computer programmer and one of the finest out of Princeton. When the saviors found him, they had put him to use hacking surveillance cameras and other programming issues. He had grown used to the dimly lit four walls caging him in with 4 outdated computer screens. They called the room the basement for obvious reasons. Still, William was happy enough there. People rarely came down and he was left to his work most of the time.

Until that day.

He didn't turn when he heard footsteps marching down the basement steps- something he later regretted. Aftershave hit his nostrils and he near enough jumped out his seat.

"Sir!" William stuttered as he hastily got down on one knee and trained his eyes on the ground.

Negan yanked him up by his collar and threw him into seat.

"Do your nerd thing. I need you to find me someone in the FBI database."

"After the outbreak m-most of the files were destroyed-"

"Does that mean you can't get in, arsehole? That's the only reason you're goddamn here!"

"I didn't say that." He huffed defensively.

A few minutes later, the FBI logo graced the large computer screen. His fingers flashed over the keyboard and soon a new image was on the screen.

William didn't recognize the handcuffed woman posing with a smirk during her mugshot. The name sounded familiar but he couldn't pinpoint where he has heard it from. Judging from the sparkle in Negan's eyes, William was in for serious reward.

"Meet Artemis Wilde." William stated.

He clicked through the photos. Even in black and white, the woman's confidence and beauty was
obvious. One photo showed her being escorted by a dozen armed guards, her eyes and distracting smile aimed at a tight lipped young man besides her. Another showed Artemis grinning at the same agent while he shoved her down a corridor. The agent looked pissed off in each photo though it didn't suit his boyish good looks. With his curly blonde hair and blue eyes, the boy looked like he belonged on a runway rather than escorting an assassin.

"There's not much here," William started, adjusting his glasses slightly. "Most of its corrupted Besides a few things on her."

"I can read. Get out here." He ordered.

William shuffled out of his sanctuary. Negan immediately took his seat and started reading.

Artemis Wilde- assassin with unknown origins and affiliations... 50-60 confirmed kills though the number is possibly higher.... obsession with agent Ryan can be exploited. Subject refuses to speak to another besides agent Ryan and is a considerable risk when agent Ryan is not present. In a fit of rage when another handler approached her and refused for her to see Ryan, Artemis escaped her restraints and injured several agents, handler included. Subject bit handler, severing his finger, nose and ear and stopped assault. Subject had eaten most of the severed body parts by the time she could be restrained…

unsure of reason why subject surrendered...

Handler is currently in care…

agent Ryan resuming duties....

subject shown to be extremely manipulative and unstable...

live strain of virus found in subject's blood...

subject reveal organisation known as the…

Headquarters to be found in Richmond…

relationship with agent Ryan to be used in order to extract more information of other 'assassins' from subject.

Underneath the crackled text was a small audio extract. The header told him it was from agent Lois-the handler who had attempted to take over from Ryan and ended up missing his ring finger and his nose.
As he listened to the pitiful voice and screams play, Negan studied the photo of Artemis grinning at Ryan. Had he known what her fixation would do? With his naive FBI trained mind, could he imagine what she would do to keep them together? It didn't matter. Soon everyone would know what kind of monster Artemis Wilde was.
Rick woke early, his hand automatically seeking out Artemis’ warmth. There was only a cold side of the floor waiting for him and a small note with four neat words strolled on.

**Down comes the king.**

It took a few seconds for Rick's sleepy mind to make sense of the words. The conversation he had with Artemis only hours ago hit him like a brick.

The basement was where Rick searched first. Next to tried was Morgan's house where Lucille was still strapped down with a note pinned to her chest.

**Feed twice daily- vegetarian only.**

**I’m sorry I didn’t say goodbye. I couldn’t let you get hurt. Please trust me.**

**If the saviours come, release her. She’ll find me.**

There was panic in Rick's run now. He asked every person he went past if they had seen the assassin or her walker and was only met with shaken heads or blank expressions. He barged into the medical room half expecting to see Artemis sat next to Enid, clutching her hand.

He found Enid but no Artemis. She was rubbing the bandages on her neck and staring blankly at the wall.

"Where is she?" Rick demanded.

Enid shrugged and turned on her side.
"Far away." She muttered. "So far I can't hear her anymore."

There was a stupid rumour stumpy Alfie haunted the fence. In a world full of the walking dead, somehow some idiots still believed in ghost. Carlos couldn't blame them for being scared. The few saviours who had seen Alfie turn, shouting some bible prophecy out, had quickly told everyone. Some thought it was the new resident of Alexandra who was crazy even by their standards. Others thought it was a mutation of the walker virus.

Carlos didn't care what it was. He hated fence duty already. All he had to do for wait a few more hours for the next shift of guards and then go home to warm up his leftover stew.

The walkers stilled at the fence. The usual choir of moans and chains rattle stopped completely, leaving only Carlos’ heavy breathing. A shadow moved in the corner of his eye but when he shot around it was gone.

Another movement too fast but closer.

He didn't see the second shadow before she was on him. He didn't have time to scream before the knife sliced open his throat.

Artemis silently dragged the saviour's body into the same secluded bushes she had hid in moments ago. She threw his body behind the biggest bush where he could turn in peace.

It didn't take long for the assassin to invade the compound. Negan had doubled the night guard in hopes of deterring more Alfies but Artemis had taken down bigger and better.

She easily took down a guard with his back turned to her at the fence. His face was a mixture of hatred and shock even in death. After a moment thought, she stabbed her knife through his skull.

Quickly, she sliced a small hole in the fence separating her from the walkers. They roused immediately at the sight of her but she batted them away. She held the separated fence up and Ryan crawled underneath. The sight of the tortured walkers rubbing against Ryan made her sick. Some of
them had a crown of molten silver covering their heads attaching them to the fence. She heard their voices above the others.

Ryan stared at her from behind the fence.

"I... I'll be back soon, I promise. You'll be ready, won't you?"

Of course he would. He was her Ryan.

"Don't put yourself in danger. No matter how tempting it is, you don't put yourself in a situation you're outnumbered in. Just... don't die. Again."

*I don't know if I can do this without you*, she wanted to say. But she didn't. Even with his flesh rotting and his pulse gone, he knew he couldn't leave her alone.

The two saviours didn't have chance to see the dark figure appear out of the shadows before she had a gun pointed in their faces.

"What's your name?" Whispered her silky voice.

"Negan." One of them spat out.

She tutted and pulled the trigger. His body hadn't hit the floor before she focused her gun on the only saviour left.

"What's your name?" She repeated.

"Derek! Please don't kill me! I'm just one of the guards!"

A soft grin curled her ruby lips.
"You know what? I don't believe you."

Before he had chance to scream, her razor teeth tore into his throat. He tried to scream, to shout, but nothing came out. She didn't take out a chunk of his neck like she was tempted to. Instead she left him in a pool of his own urine and blood and walked into the sanctuary.

She just couldn't wait to get to know the other saviours.
Simon had sworn there was a new girl in the camp those past few days. Normally he made a habit of introducing himself to all the girls who Negan didn't take for himself but he hadn't seen her in the market or canteen. All he had seen was a flash of red hair disappearing around the corner and the feeling of being followed. No one else had seen anything. There was bigger focused anyway since one of the night shifts had discovered one saviour dead and another missing. To make it worse, someone had cut a large fucking hole in the fence.

He wasn't naive enough to think it was the missing saviour trying to escape. He gulped down his drink in one go and turned to the conversation going around the table. The canteen was full considering it was still early morning. He had been waiting for Sarah, one of them new look-outs, for 20 minutes and there was no sign of her. Even as a patient man, he was growing annoyed.

"Fucking new girl is late." He grumbled to one of the men eating what looked like ground beef.

"Maybe she's ill. She had been pretty creped out when I saw her. Muttered something about waking up and seeing someone watching her. She swears up and down someone keeps following her. I told her to get over herself. Her tits aren't even that nice."

"Bitches really do be crazy."

Their laughter was cut off by the woman in question stumbling into the canteen. The man was right-she looked like she had the plague. Her pale skin was coated in a thin layer sweat that left her top damp and her eyes were a murky red. She pushed saviour's out her way till she stood at the foot of Simon's table.

It was then he saw the bite mark on her arm and the gun in her hand.

"S-sir..." she cried with trembling lips."She wants Negan."

Simon stood immediately and reached for his gun but she was faster. She turned her gun and aimed it at the side of her head.
"N-no one e-else needs to get hurt."

The others were beginning to notice the commotion now. He heard someone shout to get Negan.

"Put the gun down, Sarah." He said calmly.

"It's not me! Please I d-don't want to... I don’t want to die..."

Her words turned in sobs.

"She doesn't care about us but she'll kill us all anyway. She just wants Negan!"

"Can't do that." Simon argued. "Who is she? What are you talking about?"

No! Please don't make me do this! Please! No, no, no-"

She pulled the trigger.

Simon could barely believe his eyes. Sarah's body crumpled to the ground, blood and brain matter covering the saviour unlucky enough to be stood next to her.

Someone laughed from the staircase. His head shot up and he stared at bulky man stumbling down the stairs. But the laughter had come for a woman he was sure.

"Hi, Simon!" A gleeful voice called out from behind the saviour. "I bought you a present!"

The saviour rolled a bottle along the floor. It stopped at Simon's boot.

His blood went cold when he picked it up and stared down at the label.
"Tequila." Simon read out. "How did you know?"

"I have a good memory."

Though he couldn't see her, Simon didn't doubt that she was grinning.

"Why don't you come out from behind him and we can talk this through with a new understanding."

"I already have a good understanding. I don't like your games and your cruelty. I can't stand for this."

"And what do you intend on doing about it?" Negan called out as he strolled into canteen with Lucille hanging as an extension of his arm.

"Negan! Glad you joined us. I was just about to wipe out your men while I was waiting for you."

"Where's Ryan, Artemis?"

She smirked behind her human shield. "Where's Lucille, Negan?"

The shock on his face sent a gleeful bolt through her. She heard Ryan's voice in her mind telling her it was cruel and unnecessary but she pushed it away like she had done so many times.

What use were the words of a dead man?

"You come in here without any backup and expect to walk out? Excuse my fucking French to a lady, but that is fucking bullshit."

"I don't need back up." She laughed, clicking her tongue. "You let me in here for a week."
The vile words had barely left Artemis' lips before a piercing scream filled the canteen. Someone launched at the saviour besides Simon, the right hand man ducking barely in time, and attacked his face with razor sharp teeth. The man screamed and tried to bat away his attacker but the saviour tore mercilessly at his flesh.

In a matter of seconds, saviours who had been eating breakfast attacked each other with more savagery than Negan had ever seen. He shot around to Artemis but she was gone and only a bloodied mess of a man remained where she had stood. Gunshots rang through the air.

Artemis didn't realise she was smiling until after she overturned a table and ducked behind it for cover. The saviour unlucky enough to be on the same side of her was quickly muzzled by her knife. Even with the roar of gunfire and the dozens of people trying to kill her, a mad grin covered her lips.

She loaded her semi automatic machine gun and fired back.

"We can be friends, Artemis!" Negan shouted.

"I don't need any more friends. I just want back the one you took." She shouted back, firing the last of her rounds at the empty spot he had stood in seconds ago.

"Stop shooting, you fucking morons! We need her alive!" Negan ordered his men.

The gunfire immediately stopped.

She cursed under her breath and stood up. She hide her Bowie knife behind her back and waited for Negan to get her.

“Come get me.” She purred.

Negan turned to a burly man with thinning hair and nodded to Artemis. “Bring her over here.”

More bad luck, she cursed.
Shouldn't rely on luck, Ryan's memory echoed.

She smiled and braced for the 6 men approaching her, guns raised.

As soon as the burly man was close enough, she kicked the table. With a sickening crunch, the metal edge collided hard with his knees. The sudden blow sent him reeling forward- straight into Artemis' blade. Before the others had chance to reel back, Artemis jumped from the top of the table and landed straight onto another saviour, her teeth immediately sinking into his throat. She released the man, leaving him gurgling and clutching his throat and tackled another saviour.

They landed in a tangle of limbs and fists. With one hand on the saviour's throat, she flung her knife into the last saviour's eye.

She grinned down at the saviour and bared her teeth.

Before she could bite him, something cold and hard stabbed her knife. She stumbled back, landing on her back hunches. She felt with numb fingers for the object lodged in her neck. She didn't have to look- she recognised the numbness flooding her body.

She yanked out the thin metal spike and used it to stab the saviour in his throat. Even with the thin metal, Artemis knew exactly where to stab to paralyse him. It wouldn't kill him but make him wish I had.

"Fucking pussy... fucking coward." She slurred. "Your arse is mine."

She got up only to stumble and fall back down. Her brain was quickly becoming foggy and her vision blurred till she was sure she was seeing 4 of the same saviour.

But she wasn't done yet. She waited stilly as the saviour who had shot her hovered over her. Carelessly, he assumed the drug had worn her down. It was supposed to only take few seconds but she had fought it longer than she should. He assumed she was down.

His mistake.
As soon he leaned closer to pick her up, she struck. The needle lodged all too easily in his throat. There was nothing he could do to stop her. The drug acted too slowly for her enhanced blood. By the time the tranquiller claimed her, 25 saviours were dead. Artemis was still smiling, blood dripping from her lips.

"Get up."

Artemis didn't stir for a few more minutes. Maybe if she ignored him long enough he would go away and let her sulk in peace.

"I said get up."

Three hard kicks to her bed later and Artemis stormed up with a face like thunder.

"What?" She demanded.

Ryan didn't flinch or move. Despite knowing she was an assassin who had been in their capture only a few weeks, he knew she wouldn't attack him.

Truth be told, Artemis hadn't expected to wake up.

"Agent Louis is in critical condition, you'll be fucking pleased to hear."

"Oh, I am. He was an arsehole."

"He was covering for me while I was on a mission! I can't be here every fucking time!"

She scoffed and rolled her eyes. If she hadn't been in a bulletproof glass cell she would have dramatically walked out.
"Yes you can and you will. No one else talks to me, am I clear? I could wipe out every fucking federal agent in this shithole if it so pleases me."

"Why did you hand yourself in?" Ryan questioned, breaching her personal space that he knew she liked. "You're lucky my superiors don't just fucking muzzle you and send someone else in!"

She tipped her head back and laughed.

"Let them muzzle me. If only so I can see the horror on their faces when I tear them apart with my hands."
Artemis woke with a head full of cotton wool as the drug slowly released its hold on her. Of course she woke up. She had long stopped hoping she wouldn't.

She found something heavy covered her face when she tried to lick her dry lips. She tried to reach out but her hands were tied tight behind her back and trying to move them burnt her skin. The horror flooded through as she released what was covering her mouth.

A large metal muzzle covered the entire low part of her face, fully preventing her from biting anyone else. Even if she could free her hands, she couldn't see the catch for the muzzle. She took in several shaky breathes and tried to steady her breathing.

After a few minutes, she started to laugh. She must have looked like Hannibal Lecter! If only her father could see now what the precious cure had done!

She was still laughing when the metal door creaked open. She didn't recognise the 3 women with clean manicured hands wearing short black dresses and heels but she could take a good guess as what they were.

She sat up and crossed her legs, tilting her head to the side and staring at the main woman with long brown hair.

"Negan doesn't know we're here." The woman stated. "My name's sherry. This is Amber, Tanya Frankie."

She grinned but the muzzle stopped her from talking. The blonde refused to meet her eyes and was nearly shaking. Her fear was delicious for the assassin. The red head was more courageous, occasionally glancing at the terrifying figure but what really puzzled her was the complete lack of fear in Sherry. She didn't know if it was because she was bound and muzzled or because Sherry had seen worse.

"We didn't tell Negan we're coming here because we... we need your help."
Artemis’ eyes filled with laughter.

"If we take off that thing from your face, can we talk?" Frankie added quickly. "You won't get far if you attack one of us. This place is crawling with saviours."

Artemis stayed still, laughing at the girls with her eyes. Sherry was the one to release the muzzle, exactly as Artemis predicted. The red head was brave but not near enough ready to go near a serial killer's mouth.

Sherry stepped back as soon as she released the clasp holding the muzzle in place. Free of the constraints, Artemis licked the dried blood from her lips and grinned widely.

"Whores, right?" Artemis guessed. "Your manicured nails, the smell of strawberry shampoo, cheap perfume, and clean dresses? You sell your bodies to Negan?"

"Don't you dare judge is." Tanya demanded. "Being Negan's wives works for us."

"Negan's wives." She purred with a sly grin. “Did you get like the full getup with a white dress, church, priest and kiddie ring bearer? That is the funniest shit I’ve heard in a long time.”

"Can you help us or not?"

"It depends what you want, Negan's wives."

Amber gulped loudly and raised her head as she stroked her arms.

"The man you... bit who was on guard. He was my... friend. Please, I know you can cure him if you wanted to. I'm begging you to. He's all I have left."

"Where's your loyalty?" Artemis scoffed. "I suppose you wouldn't be whores If Negan is so powerful, tell him to raise the dead. Oh, wait..."
"You can turn by biting people, you can turn them back." Sherry demanded.

"Terrible fucking logic."

Sherry ignored her. "If you do this for us, we can talk to Negan about getting you out this cell. Everyone knows he wants you as a wife."

Artemis chuckled and shook her head.

"Sweetie, try harder."

"Please!" Amber begged. "He's all I have left! I'll do anything."

"Anything?" Artemis repeated. "You'll do anything?"

Amber hesitated but then nodded in defeat.

"Get me human live meat."

The little girl's eyes widened to a hilarious degree. Sherry stepped forward and took Amber's hand.

"Deal."

"You won't say a word of this to Negan?"

Amber shook so fast little blonde hairs fell out of her bun.

"If we did, Negan would throw us out."
“Or worse.” Tanya said.

"And we couldn't have such pretty princess running out there in that nasty, dirty world, could we?" She mocked.

While Tanya cut away her bounds, Artemis stared at Sherry. Something was so familiar about her. She would have guessed she had seen her before, in her past life. The world couldn't have been that small yet.

Artemis fit in with the beautiful women more than she was proud of. The women didn't need to sneak around the sanctuary. No one dared approach them and run the risk of Negan finding out. The woman with her head down, crimson locks hiding her face was just another woman belonging to Negan.

They stopped outside a heavy wooden door. Amber unlocked it with shaking hands. The 3 wives and assassin hurriedly crowded inside the small bedroom and locked the door after them.

"Shit, I remember this guy!" Artemis laughed as she looked down at the walker strapped to the single bed.

He looked a lot more... dead since she had last seen him. She remembered he had been outside with a cigarette dangling from his lips before Artemis had bit the back of neck. He tossed and turned on the bed trying to snap away his bounds and attack Amber who sobbed quietly.

Artemis flicked her hand and the walker stopped struggling. His eyes remained glued on Amber but they were no longer full of hunger.

"Get me a knife and a needle. If you can, find me a transfusion kit. Bandages would be great. And iron tablets... wait, fish would be better. And my meat, if it so pleases you. I prefer boneless."

"H-how did you do that?" Frankie asked with widened eyes.

"Magic. Off you go now."
"How do we get human meat?"

Artemis smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Personally, I like to stripe it off their arms. Like I said, I prefer boneless."

Sherry cringed and unlocked the door. The wives shuffled out till there was only Sherry left.

"I'll find a way to get the stuff. The door will have to be locked in case anyone-"

"Don't worry, honey. I'm sticking around."

"Don't call me that." She snapped.

"Why? Dwlight doesn't anymore."

The look on the whore's face was delightful.

"How did you know?"

Artemis winked. "We see everything."

It didn't take them long to bring the equipment to Artemis. It would have been quicker if Amber hadn't had a panic attack while bagging up an arm from a recently deceased saviour. Artemis was waiting in the room, sat in the corner with her legs crossed and eyes closed.

"Took you long enough." She commented without opening her eyes.

"It wasn't easy to sneak out an arm from the morgue." Sherry snapped.
"Really? I would have accepted a leg."

She stood up and pulled up a seat besides the man. With a surgeon's precision, she set up the IV and blood bag so one end was lodged in the walker's mouth and the other needle was draped into her arm. She sat down and plopped her legs on the bed.

"It's going to be a while." She said in a deadpan voice.

"What do you want us to do?"

Artemis shrugged and grabbed the arm from the bag. Using the knife, she began slicing pieces off the bone like it was ham.

Amber barely made it to the bathroom before she vomited. Frankie hurried after her but Sherry stayed.

"Are you really the Butcher?"

"Sure am, honey."

"Why do you admit it? You'd get further if you pretended to be something else."

Artemis picked at dried blood flakes she knew she wasn't going to get from underneath her fingernails. "We don't get to hide from what we are. It doesn't work that way."

To her credit, Sherry stayed while the cure slowly took a hold of the man. Artemis fed him little bite size chunks of meat and Sherry helped move his jaw when he refused to chew himself. All the way he spoke to Artemis. He told his name was Mark. He had been Amber's boyfriend before Negan took a fancy to her and Amber had needed meds for her family. And she had got it while Mark had got the iron and lost half his face.

Sherry helped Artemis unhook the IV cables and gingerly remove the needle from her hand. Mark
stirred a little and opened his eyes.

"S-sherry."

"Oh god! You did it!" Sherry exclaimed, leaping up. "stay still dead. I'll go amber!"

Artemis smiled to herself and put her hand on Mark's. She kept it there until the other wives burst in and Amber wrapped Mark in a massive hug. The blonde wife was still sobbing but happily, whispering empty promises into Mark's ear.

Artemis stood back and chewed on a small piece of meat.

"I’d take him and leave, if I was you." Artemis warned. "I'm going to burn this entire place down."

"Is it permanent?" Amber asked so fast Artemis thought she had misheard. "Is the cure permanent?"

"Everything is temporary." She laughed. "Life is temporary!"

Amber hugged her previous lover again but this time he stared at Artemis with half closed eyes. The assassin placed her hand on Sherry’s arm and yanked her closer so her lips were next to her ear.

“I know you. I see fucking everything and I fucking see you. Do you want to die? Run because I'm here now."
And burn them down

A flooding light exploded at the back of Artemis’ eyes, forcing her out of her peaceful sleep. She gasped in pain and tried to cover her eyes even though her hands were bound back. She had managed to unclick her muzzle anyway, rubbing at the floor until the latch clicked open.

Hunger had kept her away for most of the night. Her arms were stretched awkwardly behind her, rope digging into her flesh and nothing but the cold floor as comfort. She had still managed to get some sleep. Even bound and cold, it wasn’t the worse place she’d ever slept in.

She had only got to sleep when her cell door swung open and a large man blocked most of the light.

She chuckled and lifted her body so she was sat up.

“Run along, errand boy, and tell your boss he can see me in my cell. After booking an appointment.”

His hand shot out and grabbed her bare neck, lifting her off the ground. Air rushed out of her body so fast her kidneys burned.

"You think this is a fucking joke?" The man demanded.

He gave her one last threatening squeeze before he let her drop like a crumpled puppet. Black stars danced across her blurred vision as she gasped for air.

“Now I see you, I’m not that convinced you’re that bad. Tied up like that, what can a little girl like you do?”

He kneeled down beside her and pressed her face into the floor. He was so close Artemis could smell his blood and flesh. Her teeth automatically started to grind.

“You hungry? Bet I can make you up a nice sandwich if you play nice.”

His finger grazed her cheek and it took everything in Artemis not to snap around and bite it off. God, her stomach was already growling. She looked up at him and grinned.

“Come closer. I’ll show you how I play nice.”

The large saviour tipped his head back and laughed. But he took the bait. He grabbed her up by her hair and his face was almost in reach of her teeth when suddenly the door slammed against the wall.

“Now, what do we have here?” Negan said in a sing-song voice.

The saviour immediately dropped Artemis immediately.

“Negan, I was just getting her. like you said.”

“I do not remember telling you to try and rape her.” he stated. “Besides the point that she would have bitten off your face, we do not rape people here.”
“I’m so sorry, Negan.” The man trembled.

Negan placed a hand on his shoulder. “We are not monsters here. We are saviours.”

Negan turned to the two bulky saviours behind him and nodded. They grabbed the other saviour and tore him out the room, dragging him down the hallways. He begged the entire way.

“Didn’t want to lose one of your rapist pals?” Artemis growled.

Negan guided his arm around her waist and pulled her to her feet.

“He deserved whatever you were going to do to him. Would have let you but I gotta make an example here. Now, I’m going to have put that muzzle you’ve weaselled your way out of back on. Much as I like you, I can’t have you tearing pieces of my men out again.”

She grumbled under her breathe and rolled her eyes as she was fastened once again into the muzzle. Thankfully, Negan grabbed her by the arm and led her out of her cell.

Men and women paused in their daily tasks to stare at the assassin who had single handed taken down so many of them. She heard the whispering as well. The short snaps of murmuring accompanied by people quickly darting out of her way.

They passed the room where she had cured amber's ex and stopped a few doors down. Negan swung open the door and yanked her into the room. He swung open the door and pushed her inside.

Artemis stumbled on the soft carpet but quickly corrected herself. Around her was soft furniture, leather conches and even a bar. It was the kind of room her father would have relaxed in. There was no hardship in the room, no death. It was no place for an assassin.

Sat at the bar, sherry quickly turned her head at the intrusion. She spotted the muzzled assassin and immediately grabbed Amber's arm, yanking her behind her. There were other women around, all of them looking equally pampered and clean. They fidgeted with their painted nails and twisted and avoided looking at Artemis.

Why so protective, Artemis mused. What was she done wrong?

Negan pushed Artemis through the room and into a separate bedroom.

"Welcome to my humble sanctuary.” Negan greeted with a toothy grin.

Artemis was forced into a seat around small table opposite Negan. Two plates, glasses and a bottle of wine waited. Artemis' stomach growled automatically at the sweet smell of steak and roast potatoes. She couldn't remember the last time she had even seen steak.

"Let's get that shit off your face." Negan announced.

He stepped behind her and undid the strap and ropes. Artemis wiggles her fingers as she tried to get some of the feeling back.

"I know you're not eaten since... well since you ate one of my boys. Go on!"

"It could be poisoned."

"Why would I poison your food when I could have just bashed you over the head with Lucille? Eat!” He urged.
She watched him devour half the steak before she dared take a bite. As soon as the meat touched her tongue, it turned to gravel. What once was her favourite food tasted of dirt and filth. She forced another forkful down her throat, swallowing every dry bite. Her throat threatened to throw it up but she ground down her teeth and quickly washed the taste away with a gulp of wine.

“I’m not hungry.” She said finally.

A part of filled with gladness at the thought of not eating any more. Another part of her warned her not to give too much away.

“You’ve not eaten anything.”

“Take that up with your chef.” She stated before pushing the plate away and replacing it with the wine bottle.

"You know what I just don't get about you, kitten?" Negan asked as he washed down a mouthful of food with wine. "Why you chose Rick and his dick bridge. Here, with us, you can do some good. You could save people. We’re the same."

"I am nothing like you!" She snapped.

“Go ahead. Bare your teeth at me- I’ll rip them out one by one. Can we have a nice meal without shouting?” He sighed.

"Why?"

"Because I want to get to know you. And I like to get to know a girl over dinner. Besides, I don't really believe you're Rick's girl." He said confidently.

"Why not? He's everything you're not."

"Exactly why I don't believe you're his. See, Artemis, you're a killer. You like killing people. For the right reasons, of course. To save people in the long run, just like me, but Rick? He's too chicken shit to make the tough calls. Now, Daryl on the other hand..."

He trailed off, knowing she was clinging onto his last sentence.

"I want to see him." She finally burst out. "Let me see him and I won't cause any trouble."

"Maybe later if this goes okay. For now, tell me about yourself."

"You know everything about me." She replied.

"Not everything. Is that your natural hair colour?"

She smiled before she could help it.

"Somewhat. The blood is additional highlights."

"Do you have a favourite band?"

"I used to."

"What were they called?"

A flicker of memory flashed by her eyes of a band fronted by a cute boy with slicked back black
hair. She had listened feverously to them when she was a teenager, falling head over heels for them like every other teenage girl.

The rolling stones.

They had been her favourite. She had told that Ryan almost braggingly and named their top 30 songs off by heart.

"Don't do that." She said as she pushed her plate away. "You wouldn't have liked me before the outbreak. I was even worse back then."

"I find that hard to believe." He grinned.

"We both know you can't win this- not when I'm on Rick's side. Are you trying to make me seem more human, so you can break me? Pathetic."

"I'm just as capable of murdering your people."

"Oh, I don't think so. You'd have to kill a lot to do any damage. As proven, for every 1 of my people that die, 10 of yours die. It'll take time to break us. Time you don't have." She smirked. "I just need one dead saviour. Then I can take it from there."

"But not while Rick keeps you in check."

"Oh, I don't think that's much of a comfort to your men." She smirked, taking another bite of tasteless food. "Why are we talking? Why haven't you killed me?"

He leaned back in his chair and studied her for a pregnant pause where Artemis wasn't sure whether he was going to kiss her or stab her. After a few minutes, he grinned.

"Take your shirt off, Artemis."

She scoffed and crossed her arms.

"I thought the saviours didn't do rape?"

"Who said anything about rape? I just want to see."

"You want your kicks?" She sighed as she yanked her shirt over her head. "Take them."

She could feel his sickening glare studying her like a bug under a microscope. There was nothing sexual or attraction in his stare. She was a nothing more than something to be examined. She chewed down on her trembling bottom lip.

"Shit..." he finally drawled. "They really did a number on you didn't they?"

She stayed silent and went to grab her shirt. His hand slammed down on top of hers, pinning her shirt to the table.

"Where did the whip marks come from? Who hurt you?"

A bolt of pain shot up her spine from memory. Negan must have seen her flinch because he let her put her t-shirt back on.

"My father wasn't happy with my performance once. He made sure I knew about it."
“He whipped you? He scarred you?”

“You would have liked him. He was the charming sort until he was mad as well.”

“No wonder you're a little psycho! Coming in here, killing my men, and expecting to walk out! But these are my men. Cure or not, I will do what I have to protect them.”

“That's what happens when you're responsible for lives other than your own, isn't it? You do what you have to do.” Artemis stated, and a careless smirk curved her lips. "But I don't have to kill all your people- just enough. One shall stand, and one shall fall."

“Tell me how you got those scars. What did you do to make him do that?”

“No, thank you."

The table shook under his fists, nearly sending her wine glass toppling.

“You cannot come into my house, shoot up my shit, kill my men and not be punished. Tell me the fucking story.”

Artemis refused to let her bottom lip tremble. A ghost of pain spotted in her wounds and she was sure she could hear the crackle of a whip slicing through the air.

“When my brothers and me found out there was a cure, we thought our father would give it to us first. We each had men we led, teams who followed us, and we promised them the cure would be shared. But my father had a different endgame. Never intended to give it us but intended to use it as leverage to keep us in line. He didn’t give us much choice except to take the cure. My brothers and I fought badly for it. We... it didn’t end well. Thought we could take the punishment- that it would be worth it.” She added quietly under her breath. “We were wrong.”

His eyes were something else. They were mocking but there was a hint of compassion there too. Maybe it was pity. Either way, it repulsed Artemis.

“The offer still stands if you'll join my wives. I would never hurt you, Artemis. You can produce the cure here with all the tech you need. You can right every wrong here. You might even grow to love me. I already stopped one of my men from hurting you. Give me chance, Artemis, and I will show you real power.”

“Show me David’s body.”

He frowned but didn’t look shocked.

“Why would I leave his body to stink up the place?”

“A guy like you? I’d bet you’d want send a message to everyone about what happens when someone breaks your ‘rules’. Get one of your guys to bring him body and I'll join you. I’ll fuck you right here.”

He leaned forward, a smile still on her lips. Her confidence almost slipped the longer he stayed silent.

“I can’t do that.” He finally said.

“You can’t, you monster. You can’t because you can’t kill someone for following your orders! Let me guess, you were going to try and Stockholm syndrome me?” She leaned forward and grinned. “My father once locked me in a coffin for 3 days without food or water when I was 12 years old.
Believe me when I say that you don’t know a thing about torture. You don’t even know pain. You make me sick. You walk around here thinking you’re the devil, a monster, thinking that you’re the big bag wolf but honey, I carved my way out of the wolf’s stomach. And I will cut you apart from the inside and dig my way out of guts if I have to.”

Now it was her turn to laugh. She laughed and laughed till her stomach ached and her throat was hoarse.

"You remind me of him, you know? Always ready with a sweet smile. He had whores like you. They would sell him their bodies for safety, comforts, the luxuries that came along with warming the Commander's bed. And you know what happened during the uprising?" She leaned forward and grinned. "My brother and I slit all of their pretty throats. I’ll do that to yours as well, Negan. I’ll kill everyone here and drink their blood. Because that’s what a monster does."

Negan ordered her to be dragged out of his room, his face almost pale. As she was dragged out through the wife's lounge, she turned to Sherry and spat at her feet.

"You think you're safe here?" She turned to Negan and smirked. "He couldn't even protect the wife he loved."

She didn't feel better after bringing up Lucille. She felt sick, dangerous and threatening but no better.

They threw her into a new cell. She landed with a thump on the ground and let them strap on the muzzle. The guard caught her eye. He wasn't scared of her but that would soon change. From the back of her mind, the dead softly whispered to her.
No one really noticed Mark anymore. Even before the iron had taken away half his face and Negan had reduced him to shit underneath his boot, the other saviour had labelled him as Negan’s wife’s ex. Now they gave him a wider berth. Someone had spotted him talking to himself a few days back and now rumour was the scarring had left him insane.

He couldn’t tell them that it was something else entirely which was driving him mad. The voices weren’t his ex-girlfriend’s but another, more troubling, voice.

One of the few who still acknowledged him, a newcomer called George, approached him as he stood outside the makeshift prison cells. He slapped his shoulder in a friendly welcome.

"Hey, man. What you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be on the fence?"

He turned, and George could see how pale and hollowed his face looked. In a few days he must have lost a stone of weight. His clothes hung from his once muscular frame and his nails had been bitten low enough to make them bleeding.

"You okay?"

“Yeah... erm, I’m good. I thought, I just, I need to erm see Artemis.”

George chuckled and shook his head.

“Believe me, we all want a piece of that, but Negan’s given us strict orders. No one is-”

Without hesitation, Mark snapped his neck in between his two massive hands. Before the body had dropped to the floor, Mark was marching forward into the cell rooms. He closed the door behind him just enough that the two men stationed outside the cells couldn’t see the body.

“Hey!” One of them called out. “What the hell are you doing down here? You know Negan doesn’t want anyone down here!”

Mark didn’t answer. The guards didn’t raise their guns.

“Hey! I’m talking to you.”

A soft smile was his response. His front teeth were stained red.

“Do you want to lose the other half of your face or something? I said what the fuck-”

It didn’t take more than 10 seconds for Mark to kill both. He launched across, teeth exposed like a wild animal, and tore into the face of one of the guards. The other tried to dislodge him from Mark but the dead saviour was too strong. He easily stabbed the other guard in the throat as he tore the other apart. There, with the song easy street blaring, no one heard the guards scream.

Once they were both down, Mark stole the jail keys and unlocked the cell door. The woman kneeled in the middle of the room, hands tied behind her back and a muzzle covering her face, head down. She tilted her head to the side and waited till Mark gently released her.
He dropped a gun in her hand and a knife in the other.

“’It’s good to be out of that thing!’” She chuckled, stretching out her tired arms. “You did well, Mark. I’m proud of you.”

He beamed like a son getting his mother’s approval. He helped her to her feet and followed loyally as she stepped over the bodies to open the next cell door.

The sight of Daryl after 3 long weeks nearly crippled her. She dropped to her knees in front of him and wrapped her arms tight around his shoulders. The shock kept him almost in an almost catatonic state as she took in the bruises and filthy on him.

When she pulled back there were tears in her eyes.

“Come on, I’m getting you out of here. Follow the walker by the door to a bike and get out of here.”

“What are you gonna do?”

The worn yellow tracksuit made him look like he had lost even more weight. His skin was a painting of black and yellow bruising. On the cell floor was a Polaroid picture of a corpse with his skull beaten in.

“One dead saviour can do a lot of damage.” She replied simply. “In more ways than one.”

Amber was bawling and wailing now. She trying to snivel snot back in her nose while huge hiccupping sobs left mascara running down her face. If Negan had seen her looking like that then he would have kicked her out but she didn't care. If sherry was there, she'd know what to do. She would save her. But Sherry wasn't there. The last anyone had seen of Sherry she had been talking to Mark and then... gone.

The other wives were just as terrified as she was and scattering in every direction. They were all asking how walkers had managed to get inside the walls but everyone knew. They just couldn’t bear to hear the answer out loud. She saw them run out the door, taking their chances with the walkers. But not her. Shivers held her in place and even her throat refused to scream. A loud pound on the door stopped her if she was ever considering going the same way as the others.

She jumped up with a yelp and scrambled into Negan's room. She would just wait for Negan to come back. Yes, she would wait for him to save her.

As soon as she closed the bedroom door, she realised her mistake.

The window was wide open, a soft drift stroking the curtains. There was something innocent about it unless you knew Negan. Amber did. Amber knew Negan would never leave the window open.

She wasn't alone.

Sat at Negan's desk, her legs crossed and feet on the table was a grinning assassin.

She tried to run back to the lounge but the door was slammed in her face. Mark slammed his hand on the door and growled at her. A shudder raked her entire body from her shoulders to her legs.

"I told you to run, Amber. I warned you what would happen if you told Negan. I’m sorry, I know you didn’t mean harm but now I must send a message. Your life of luxury ends here."
Amber was so terrified of the blood-soaked Mark and she didn't notice Artemis stride up behind her. Before she could blink, Artemis' teeth were sinking into Amber's neck. The wife's screams were turned into terrified gurgles as Artemis wrapped a long chain tight around her neck.

The last thing amber saw was the cold emptiness in the assassin's eyes.
Negan's barbed wire bat cut through the walkers like butter. He didn't know who had cut the fence again, or why someone would be so careless about what lives were lost, but he intended on making them pay. Luckily only a few had got through. Unluckily the few that did seemed to be faster and more vicious than their docile counterpart. No doubt it was the assassin's doing. Still, there had to be someone on the inside who had cut away the fence.

One of the walkers on the fence reached out for him. Negan raised his bat, ready to strike, but stopped with Lucille in the air. There was something about the walker that didn't sit right. For starters, he looked to be wearing a new red shirt. There was something in his eyes, something human enough to be anger, And his face was so familiar Negan was sure he had seen it elsewhere.

He raised Lucille over his head ready to strike over the walker's head.

"Negan!" A loud voice shouted.

The dozen saviours still cleaning up the mess of walkers all looked up. On top of the roof, sun behind her framing her like a statue, stood Artemis Wilde. Next to her was a blonde-haired woman in a black dress. The blonde haired woman stood limp besides Artemis, only stood up because of Artemis' hand on her arm.

Amber.

It wasn't till he spotted the dark shadow of chain wrapped around her neck and attached to the roof that he knew there was no saving her.

"Long live the king!"

Then Artemis kicked the legs out from underneath amber.

Time froze. Every set of eyes watched powerlessly as Amber's feet tumbled off the roof edge. She stayed suspended in the air like a portrait before gravity kicked in.

Artemis fled before a single bullet could touch her. Negan was sure he could hear her laughing.

Left in her wake was amber's body, swinging lifelessly from the roof.

The image of Amber's lifeless body stayed with Artemis as much as it did Negan. As she drove silently along the back roads away from the sanctuary, alone and without Ryan for the first time, she furiously wiped away the tears from her eyes. Amber had been terrified of her. She had died, in agony, and alone. She had been terrified of Artemis in the same way Artemis had been terrified of her father.

After a few minutes, she calmed down and told herself it was the right thing to do. She had to in
order to protect the Alexandria community. She could make sure what happened to Ryan never happened to anyone else.

*My partner's name was Tobis Davis.*

"Terrible name." She whispered.

*I told him that. Didn't feel so daft when I had to speak at his funeral.*

A frown creased her forehead and her hands tightened on the wheel. Ryan wasn't there, a soft voice whispered. But his voice was so clear and his words so real-

"Shit, sorry to hear that." She replied without taking her eyes off the road. "What happened to him?"

*He was in investigating Green planet on 22nd November 2004- part of the squad who killed your friend, Jacobs.*

"Then he got what was coming to him."

*You think so? His squad killed an eco-terrorist and you slaughtered them all in revenge. When you were finished with Tobis, those parts you left for us to find, we had to identify him by his dental records. His wife and two children buried an empty coffin.*

She stopped at a crossroads on instinct and took in a shaky breath.

*That's how I found you.*

She glanced up at the dead traffic lights. They were nothing but a memorial to a lost world yet she looked at them.

*That's how I'll always find you.*

“I’ll always find you too, my love.” She whispered and she let her eyes close just for a second.

The traffic lights stayed red.

That was how she didn't see the car speeding across the crossroads.

Her head shot around at the sudden squeaking tires, but she could only watch in horror as the car smashed into her.
"Oh god, oh god, oh god..."

A million tiny glass shards covered Artemis' body. Metal crushed and caged her in, trapping her in her seat. She hadn't been lucky enough to be knocked unconscious for long. A few minutes maybe. She woke bleeding, crushed, upside down. Her seatbelt still held her in place and no doubt had stopped her neck from snapping. The smell of burning metal and gas made her eyes water.

Using her swollen and bruised forearm, she smashed out the rest of her front window.

The stranger was someone she never expected to see again. Neither was the container of gasoline in his hand. The smell hit her again expect stronger this time. She followed the tank in his hand to the long messy of gasoline leading... right up to her car.

For a few desperate seconds, Artemis met her brother's eyes as he held the light to end her life.

"Tell my father I'm coming home." She whispered.

Daniel Wilde dropped the lighter. It seemed to suspend in the air, giving him just enough time to watch her struggle, before the flames burst to life. She had sliced away the seatbelt but the flames were speeding along the road too fast.

Then there wasn't anymore struggling. The entire car exploded in an amazing display of amber and crimson flames, leaving nothing but the scream of metal molding into something new.

23 years ago

Moscow, Russia

The only thing that ever changed was the reason. Sometimes it ranged from the affairs to assassins bringing their 'trophies' into the Wilde home to something as simple as Natasha Wilde's drinking habit.

Since he had adopted the most beautiful, bubbly, baby girl with a head of curly red hair, The Commander hadn’t paid much attention to his wife, Natasha Wilde who, in turn, hadn't paid much attention to her children. She hadn’t even paid attention to Artemis. She didn’t even notice Daniel and Artemis sat on the bottom step of the glass staircase watching their parents fight.

Artemis was happily drawing in her colouring book as she used Daniel’s lap to store her colours. She hadn’t got the idea of straight lines yet. She occasionally held up her scribbling for Daniel’s approval and rewarded him with a toothy grin when he told her it was brilliant. It wasn’t till his father’s first punch was thrown that Daniel took his 2 years old sister's hand and led her outside. He could only
find his two pairs of his own boots so he tucked her in a pair and helped her into her fur coat. The boots looked ridiculous on her and went all the way up to her chubby thighs. She was only wearing a pair of pjs. Daniel put their pet wolf on a lead and closed the door behind them. The arguing couple didn't notice the kids leave.

As soon as the cold autumn air hit his cheek, Daniel regretted not bringing out gloves for Artemis. Still, she was thrilled when he let shadow of the lead and the giant puppy pounced in the ankle-deep snow. It was time she toughened up anyway.

He followed her to the woodland area behind the back of their house, gun nestled safety in his coat pocket just in case.

The girl didn't care much about safety. She ran after shadow, only stopping to throw a handful of snow at Daniel and run away screaming and laughing.

"Babies shouldn't be out in the snow!" His brother's annoying voice chimed in.

"Then you shouldn't be out!" Daniel shot back as he took his knife out his pocket and began carving away a piece of wood.

They were 12 and should know better than to argue but it didn't stop them. It didn't help that they were both in line to be the next Commander.

"Babies catch hypothermia!" Lucas said- very proud of himself for using such a big word.

"She's not cold! I put her coat and boots on."

"So? Papa is going to be so pissed."

"Are you going to grass? Papa doesn’t even want you. He’ll send you to America!"

Daniel smugly carried on carving. It was a known fact that Daniel and Artemis had been chosen by their father. While Artemis was the apple of her father’s eye and Daniel was set to follow in the Commander’s footsteps, Lucas had been forced on him. Though their father never said it, everyone knew Lucas' mother was an American model who had escaped back to her country on the condition she left their child with the assassins. Daniel never pretended otherwise.

A soft yelp stole his attention away from Lucas. Artemis landed on her bum in the snow thanks to shadow chasing her in a circle too fast. Daniel ran to her and picked her up. The little girl sobbed but quietened as she tucked herself into her brother's arms.

"Here." He said, giving her the small coin he had been working on carving. "One day, I'll teach you how to carve as well."

"You never taught me," Lucas huffed.

"Artemis is going to be smart when she grows up.” Daniel stated. “I’m going to teach her everything.”

“I'll teach her as well!”

Artemis blew wet raspberries at Lucas, much to Daniel’s enjoyment.
Commander

Commander

Present day

The coin already had sparks dancing along the wood. It had been engraved with something Lucas couldn't read. Even with an eye patch covering one of his eyes, he could see it dangling on a chain around Artemis' exposed neck along with that stupid FBI badge. Artemis unconscious and blood body didn't flinch as Lucas reached into the crushed car and ripped it off her.

Smirking, he walked past Daniel as he spread gasoline along the road from the car. He tossed the necklace and badge to a woman with tied back blonde hair and tattooed neck. She smiled but he didn't return it.

He climbed into a massive Jeep. The engine was still running. Inside were two other people though it was impossible to see them clearly through the wall of smoke. Blowing the massive Cuban cigar in his mouth around his asthmatic wife didn't seem to bother the Commander of the Liberators.

Seconds later there was an explosion that rocked even the Jeep. When Daniel climbed into the Jeep besides Lucas, the blood had completely drained from his face.

"She died without honour." The assassin said weakly. "The others won't be happy about this."

"If you care so much about the ritual, you can go back and rip out her heart from her charred body yourself." Lucas added bitterly. "She's your sister, after all."

Daniel ignored his brother's gip and gently put his hand on his mother's knee. The tiny woman shivered and clutched the cross around her neck like a lifeline.

"Are you okay, mama?"

His father's hand grabbed his hand and ripped it off Natasha's knee. Under normal circumstances, Daniel was stronger than his father but the Commander's arms were covered in a silver metal that even Daniel struggled against. They were the metal armour of the assassin Commander passed through the generations. Someone had once told him it was to remind the assassins who ruled with an iron fist.

The assassins had expected Artemis to be the one to wear them next.

As soon as they arrived at Alexandria, the Commander’s cars were greeted by the other Liberators bowing obediently. Daniel couldn’t look any of them in the eye. None of them spoke, but he knew everyone wanted to know what happened to the Commander’s daughter.
Natasha had to be carried inside. The Commander shouted at her to walk instead of relying on leaning on Daniel but it just made her worse till she collapsed. Daniel didn’t say anything. He picked her up bridal style and carried her into Alexandra.

“She isn’t great with this stuff, is she?” Negan laughed.

“She’s just lost her daughter!” Daniel snapped. “Show some goddamn respect.”

A built man with the beginning of a grey beard and an empty gun holster on his hips marched straight past the assassins and squared up to Negan.

“What are you doing here?” The man demanded. “Who are these people?”

Negan tutted and his grin somehow grew bigger.

“Rick, is that anyway to talk about your new house guests?”

“They’re not staying here.” Rick replied firmly.

“Someone needs to keep your people in line since you clearly aren’t up to the task!”

The panic on Rick’s face couldn’t have been faked. His eyes widened, and his hands clenched by his side. He turned to an eye patch wearing kid as if asking what he had done but the kid just shook his head.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, Rick, are you missing a certain hot piece of ass? If so, I found her! Shooting up my camp and killing my guys!”

Rick took a step back with horror showing clearly on his face.

Negan leaned forward and grinned at rick. “Now, you might have got one crazy assassin but I get them all. Admittedly, none of them are as hot as her but life’s a compromise!”

“You can’t do this! We’ve done everything you’ve asked of us. No one here knew Artemis was going to do that! She wasn’t one of us and she’s gone now- I promise. If she returns, we’ll bring her straight to you.”

Negan laughed boisterously. “I don’t fucking believe you will. Want to know why? Cause her burnt corpse is on some dusty back road outside of the Sanctuary.”

Rick’s fist immediately curled and rose to hit Negan in the face. Daniel grabbed his shoulder in a quick and hard grip, yanking him back.

“You really like your odds right now?” He whispered into Rick’s ear. “Not now. This isn’t the time.”

Daniel stepped back and looked from Negan to the Commander.

“I need to lay mother down to rest somewhere, if that please you. There is a church here? She would like that.”

He gave one brief head nod to Rick and left carrying his mother. He hadn’t gone two feet before a courageous voice called out,
“Where’s Artemis? Is it true?”

The voice was familiar. He couldn’t lift his head to meet their glare but he knew it was a Liberator. Their eyes would be glued on him, pinning him down with guilt.

He forced his feet to keep walking towards the church.

“Is the Commander’s daughter dead?”

One by one, more voices joined in.

“Did she die with honour?”

“What happened?”

“But what about the cure?”

“No! The butcher would not die! That would mean the cure doesn’t work!” Another voice snapped, full of hope and denial.

Daniel made it into the church and slammed the doors shut before he collapsed onto the cold floor, his unconscious mother besides him. He screamed into his palms as he tried to drown out the painful questions.

She said she was going home.

They both just wanted to go home.

But Daniel knew if Artemis had gone home, he would soon follow.

It wasn't the small army that followed Negan which made Daniel's skin crawl. Negan was similar to the Commander he supposed. Both believed in corporal punishment. Both had people they had to leave.

It wasn’t even the way he had threatened them- them! The assassins! - or how he had killed the few who had objected.

It was how easily he had swayed their Commander into killing his own daughter.

End Notes

So... What do you think? :)

This is my first work and it's a work definitely a work in progress but I hope you've enjoyed reading! Let me know if there's any details I've missed or what you think! At a heads up, I've already written the story down so the updates will be pretty fast as I just need to edit it on my way.

-Al!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!