You're only the Junior Deputy of Hope County, but somehow everyone expects you to do something big - for better or worse. Do you choose to challenge your burden and do what you think is right or do you fall in line with your ties to the Seed family and accept your fate?

This is a Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) fic where you will be given multiple options that will change your story experience and outcome.

- The Seed Family/The Deputy (Reader)*
*NB/Optional Choose Your Sex
(Additional scenes/paths for revamp outlined as of 03/06/19)
Quick self-promo for if you read this and end up liking my work, you can check out my blogs - the personal one is just memes, but the writing one I post fandom stuff and occasionally requested quick fics -, or you can check out my ko-fi and fund my tea addiction for while I'm writing.
[Tumblr (personal)], [Tumblr (writing)], [Ko-Fi]

This is a Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) story that essentially functions as a text-based game. Throughout the course of this story you'll be given opportunities to make choices that will impact what happens to you, the Junior Deputy, and those around you. **The choices you make will lead to different outcomes** including the events that take place, options you'll have available, and the relationships you have with the characters you interact with. For this to work, though, we'll have to rely on a point based system.

**You will gain or lose points (or items/status effects) depending on your choices.** You will personally need to keep score of your effects and points as they will dictate which paths are available to you, the events that happen, and the type of relationship you have with the characters. This also means that you will be in charge of how you want your story to go - so, while you might technically be able to cheat (i.e. pick a choice path that you don't have available due to not having enough points), you will miss out on events that had happened previously, run into plot holes, and spoil yourself for the things that happened in other paths. For the best experience, I'd suggest **going with the choices you make and sticking with them** until you reach an ending, but, of course, it's your call how you choose to read this fic.

You will need to **take note of the points you gain or lose** as well as **effects on your stats**, your **items**, or **other events** that you may come across along the way.

You will know when you need to take note of something - add or subtract a point, heal an injury, or use an item - as **each interactive event will be stated in italicized parentheses and emboldened** somewhere in the scene (usually at the end, but an event notice may occasionally be at the beginning or middle of a scene). I suggest keeping a notebook and pen/pencil, a notes app/program, or something else that will allow you to keep track of your status in the story as your stats will have an effect on what you experience.

- **YOUR STARTING STATS:**

**HEALTH:** 10

**FOCUS:** 5

**STRENGTH:** 5
**SKILL:** 5

**DOUBT:** 0

**BELIEF:** 0

All *interest points* (also known as relationship points) with the Seeds and others start at 0.

- You, the Junior Deputy, will be mostly nondescript and non-binary (they/them) for the majority of the fic - there will, however, be optional smut scenes in which you can choose your sex. *THIS IS STILL 100% A DEPUTY X SEED FAMILY FIC*, so expect some crazy wild sexual tension. It's important to note that this fic contains a similar theme to the game, so if you have triggers or squicks, make sure you periodically check the tags and chapter summaries.

If you have any questions, feel free to comment.

Enjoy!
You had just gotten comfortable after nursing a warm beer for a couple of agonizingly boring hours of insomnia when your phone buzzed on your coffee table. With blurry vision, you force a yawn and sit up from your couch, your blanket bunching at your hips as you reach for your phone. The caller I.D. tells you that it's "Work". You're the Junior Deputy of Hope County, a job title you've gained both through your own merit and the good word of your older cousin who had been a former deputy of the county himself. Though you've been working at the sheriff's department for going on four months, now, you don't particularly feel like answering the call, considering it's one in the morning and still - technically - your off day since your shift doesn't start until six.

You let the call go to voicemail, planning on finishing your beer before you turn in, until your phone goes off a second time. You roll your eyes as you check the screen, though this time the call is from the Sheriff's personal line. Tipping the bottle away from your lips, you answer the Sheriff's call with a cough and a dry "hello". The Sheriff, similarly, doesn't sound too happy to hear from you, though you come to realize it's not you the Sheriff is annoyed with when you hear Deputy Pratt in the background shouting for you to "hurry the hell up, Rookie", and then something about a "flight out to the county".

The Sheriff tells you to come down to the department, so, of course, you tell him you're already on your way and hang up before your slight buzz encourages you to mouth off and comment how you'd really rather stay home. Your job pays well enough to help keep your attitude in check, but damn what you wouldn't do for a chance to stay inside. With as much energy as you can muster, you strip from your pajamas and tug on your uniform. Since it's late in the summer and the evenings are getting cooler, you also decide to pull on a black jacket and slip your work gloves into your back pocket before you head out.

When you pull into one of the parking spots at the back of the department, you see an unfamiliar truck, Nancy's car, both the Sheriff's and Deputy Hudson's trucks, but not Deputy Pratt's. Since Hudson and Pratt live near each other, it's not much of a surprise to you that they would choose to carpool, but you know you'll probably get an ear full of gossip from Nancy the moment you walk through the door.

As you enter the department you're instead greeted by a tense atmosphere and the grim face of the Marshal glaring pointedly at both the Sheriff and Nancy. It seems like you just missed something big.

You look around and see Deputy Hudson standing off to the side leaning against a desk and looking through a manila folder intensely, her dark brows furrowed in concentration or maybe frustration. Deputy Pratt is near the coffee machine, uncharacteristically quiet as he stirs the liquid inside of a styrofoam cup with a sort of uncomfortable scowl.

Neither the Marshal nor the Sheriff take too much note of your arrival, though the Sheriff at least gives you a nod before he clears his throat and returns to speaking with the Marshal while Nancy occasionally gives her own hushed input. It seems you're left to your own devices for the time being.

You could go find something to do while you wait for the Sheriff to explain what's going on, or you could talk to one of your colleagues.

You decide it'd probably be best to...
[TALK TO DEPUTY HUDSON]

[TALK TO DEPUTY PRATT]

[FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO DO]
You decide it'd probably be best to talk to Deputy Hudson.

Although you haven't been in the department for long, Deputy Hudson has always made you feel like you belong. She's easy to talk to and treats you with respect, despite your lower rank. She's dedicated and intelligent and, honestly, if it wasn't for the fact you work with her you might have asked her out for a drink, though you doubt she'd accept anything more than friendly conversation for more than one reason. She's mostly a closed book to you, though you suspect that has more to do with the fact that you're new rather than anything personal. She had known your cousin before he transferred and got work in a different department a few counties over. She sometimes asks about him and he sometimes asks about her, but you generally make it a point to mind your own business - a fact you're sure both your cousin and Hudson are grateful for.

Hudson doesn't look at you immediately when you come to stand near her, leaving you feeling awkward for a few moments before she bumps the toe of your boot with her own. She doesn't look at you, still focused on the manila folder in her hands as she gestures for you to come closer. She tilts the folder she's looking at open to you and points to a small, waxy photograph of four people against a dark gray background. You barely get a good look at them before Hudson flips the page where a larger photo of one of the men is pinned to the corner with a paper clip, his yellow tinted sunglasses and sharp blue eyes focused forward.

"That," Hudson says, jamming a single digit against the photo, "is the guy the Sheriff called us in for. The wack job cult leader of 'Project Eden's Gate'." Hudson looks to you then, something like annoyance and disbelief etching her features. She gives you the folder and crosses her arms over her chest, "He likes to think of himself as some sort of savior. He started out friendly enough, but recently he graduated from preaching to full-scale militarized control of nearly all of Hope County."

Hudson rubs the back of her neck and sighs, "Over the past few months, he managed to take over the area past the mountains and we didn't even notice."

You look through the folder, flipping through the surprisingly few pages without much interest, though you do skim most of it. You return to the first paper and look over the photograph of the four people, all posed, but not made up. Hudson scoffs, "You'd think it's a one-man operation with the way the Marshal tells it, but no, there's more of 'em - the Seed family." Hudson leans towards you as she points at the men, "Three brothers: Joseph, Jacob, and John," and then the woman, "And their sister, 'Faith', - though the records don't show them having a sister or even anyone in the county named 'Faith', that's what the locals call her."

Your eyes wander over each of the siblings, though you remain mildly curious at best. You close the folder and place it on the desk behind you before you turn to Hudson, "If they're already militarized and have taken over the county, what exactly does the Marshal expect us to do?" you glance over at said man before returning your gaze to Hudson, "Shall we be calling in the National Guard or somebody?"

With a shrug, Hudson steps away from the desk and pulls her phone out from her back pocket, "That's what me and Pratt were saying when the Marshal handed the Sheriff the folder. But the Marshal is convinced we can just swoop in, grab this guy, and turn him over to the feds." She messes around with her phone for a few moments before pocketing it just as your own phone buzzes. You raise a brow, though Hudson just nods and crosses her arms, again, "A video you might wanna
check out on our way there. It's... enlightening to say the least - apparently someone's been out there documenting the cult, but I hadn't even heard about them until the Sheriff told me and Pratt the deal about two weeks ago."

"That's because we didn't have enough solid evidence against him to make an arrest," the Sheriff chimes in from where he's standing beside the Marshal, "Now we do, even if we'd do best leaving well enough alone."

The Marshal rolls his eyes, "Yeah, well that ain't your call, Sheriff."

You give Hudson a look which she returns, only with somehow more attitude, as she walks over to where the Marshal and the Sheriff stand. Nancy, you've noticed, is no where in sight. You follow Hudson's lead and end up standing between her and Pratt while you wait for whatever bullshit explanation the Marshal is going to give for why you're all here at one in the morning, not that you can't already guess. He's probably going to say something about becoming a hero when you make this arrest. Forget the fact that you're not a hero and you don't want to be one - you'll be forced to pretend as long as the Marshal has his way.

When he starts speaking, pep-talk inbound, you realize you should have finished your beer when you had the chance. You have a feeling this is gonna be one hell of a long night.

( +1 interest with HUDSON )

( +1 doubt )

[>>continue]
Prologue

[TALK TO DEPUTY PRATT]

You decide it'd probably be best to talk to Deputy Pratt.

Maybe you can even convince him to make you a cup of coffee - not that you're fooling yourself into thinking he'd do it since he's so hung up on the fact that you're the newbie and he's technically in charge of you. Still, he's never been anything but kind to you, mostly treating you like a younger sibling instead of a subordinate. He's a good guy, if lacking in seriousness, but hearing his banter with Hudson during what are usually tense situations tends to help you feel better when you're on the job.

Your approach brings Pratt out of his sour mood, though his eyes linger on the Sheriff and Marshal a beat longer before he takes a sip of his coffee and turns to you, "Hey, Rook," he says, though the usual teasing quality of his voice wavers slightly. Pratt clears his throat and leans against the counter, a small smirk on his face, "Nice of you to finally join us. Seemed like you were busy or somethin' with the way you took your sweet ol' time gettin' here."

You roll your eyes with a dismissive, "uh-huh", and move to pour yourself a cup of coffee. You're too tired to mix in any cream or sugar - not that it'd make the crap you get here taste any less like a gym sock - and knock the cup back easily since it's barely lukewarm. Despite the taste, you can at least rely on it keeping you awake while you wait for the Marshal and Sheriff to tell you what you're supposed to be doing. Pratt laughs a little and bumps your shoulder with his.

"Hey, now... I'm just havin' a little fun, Rook. No need to be gettin' all serious with me or nothin'." Pratt finishes his cup, takes both your empty cup and his and tosses them into the trash beside the counter. With a strained breath, he stands to his full height and stretches his back, sighing with a mixed in yawn after he does so. Pratt rolls his neck and looks at you with one of his hands massaging his shoulder, "I know you ain't really know much about what's going on, but the Sheriff's been keep this information on the low-down 'cause he didn't want to cause a panic, not because he doesn't trust you, alright?"

As if on cue, the Marshal shouts something in frustration before he quiets down, animatedly pointing at the ground as he leans towards the Sheriff. Hudson scoffs and stands from where she had been leaning against a desk close to the Marshal and Sheriff. You watch as she approaches you and Pratt and promptly walks by, handing Pratt the folder she had been looking through with a dismissive, "Catch the Rookie up, I'm gonna get some fresh air."

You hear the back door open and close while Pratt opens the folder and moves, once more, to lean against the counter. He motions for you to come closer, so you do, peaking into the folder as he flips through it nonchalantly. He sighs and unclips a photograph of four people posed in front of a gray background before offering the folder to you with a gentle "here". He lets you look through it, though your disinterest and confusion make it so that your skimmed reading is probably as useful as the first few sentences of a Sparknote's summary. When you're finished, you hand Pratt the folder of which he simply tosses somewhere on the counter behind him.

"So, the main thing you gotta know is that we're going after the leader of a cult that's militarized itself and taken over almost all of the area of Hope County past the mountains." Pratt leans closer and holds the photo in front of you with one hand while the other points at a man with 70s shades and a man-bun. "That is the almighty douche himself - Joseph Seed," Pratt says, glancing at you, but you're still focused on the picture, "He fancies himself as some sort of Noah reincarnate. Goes by the
name 'The Father'." Pratt moves his finger to the other two men, "Jacob Seed and John Seed," he says, "Older and younger brother of Joseph, respectively." Pratt then points to the woman, "That's their 'sister', Faith Seed, but we know that's not her real name even if we don't know who she actually is. She's not their sister, not by blood, but the locals tell us she's been adopted into their family all the same."

Pratt then fishes in his pockets for his phone, "I know that doesn't really cover all of it, but Hudson sent me this video you might want to catch up on on our way there." He messes around with his phone for a few moments before sliding it back into his pocket just as your own phone buzzes.

You thank him, but still you're confused, "Why the hell are we going to arrest this guy if his cult has already taken over Hope County? What does the Marshal expect us to do if - and probably when - things get out of hand?"

"Beats me, Rook," Pratt says, "I say we call in the National Guards since it's too late, now. I'd have thought we would've taken him when the Sheriff told me and Hudson the news a few weeks ago, but-"

"We didn't have enough solid evidence against him to make an arrest," the Sheriff chimes in from where he's standing beside the Marshal, "Now we do, even if it'd be best to leave well enough alone."

The Marshal rolls his eyes, "Yeah, well that ain't your call, Sheriff."

You give Pratt a look which he returns with a smirk and a roll of his eyes as he walks over to where the Marshal and the Sheriff stand. Nancy, you've noticed, is no where in sight, though Hudson returns from her short break from the department and taps you on the shoulder as she passes. You follow Hudson's lead and end up standing between her and Pratt while you wait for whatever bullshit explanation the Marshal is going to give for why you're all here at one in the morning - not that you can already guess. He's probably going to say something about becoming a hero when you make this arrest. Forget the fact that you're not a hero and you don't want to be one - you'll be forced to pretend as long as the Marshal has his way.

When he starts speaking, pep-talk inbound, you realize you should have finished your beer when you had the chance. You have a feeling this is gonna be one hell of a long night.

(+1 interest with PRATT)

(+1 focus) [>>continue]
You decide it'd probably be best to find something else to do.

You don't really feel like talking anyway, though you're sure both Hudson and Pratt wouldn't mind. You wouldn't go so far as to call them close friends, but they have been nothing but friendly to you since you started working at the department. Hudson is more of an authority figure than an equal, not that it's surprising considering your age gap. She treats you as a subordinate, but always with the amount of respect and care as someone like, say, an older, distant sibling would treat you with. Pratt, on the other hand, treats you almost exactly like a younger sibling - you're sure if Hudson wouldn't chew him out for it, he'd noogie you whenever he had the chance. He loves teasing you, and though he'd probably do well being more serious once in a while, his generally cool and casual demeanor helps lighten the stress of most tense situations, so you appreciate when he's around.

Still, it's too early for conversation, so you simply give both Hudson and Pratt a nod as you walk past them to your desk and begin rummaging through it for a quick and easy way to pass the time. At the top drawer, you find one of several practice locks and picks and decide now's as good of a time as any to get some training in. Since you were a teen, lock-picking has been something of a hobby of yours - that and close-combat, but that's a different story entirely. It's sort of ironic how an adult who started as a trouble making kid who used to go around starting fights and breaking into places they're not wanted, becomes the Junior Deputy of probably one of the most boring, peaceful counties in Montana.

You've broken through two locks by the time Hudson walks up to you and places the folder she had been looking through on your desk. She gives you a small, uncomfortable smile, "Figured you should read this so you'll know what we're about to do." She thumbs behind herself towards the exiting door, "I'm gonna go get some fresh air; have fun, Rook."

You thank her and turn back to what you're doing. You open a third lock before you decide to glean through the folder. It's only a few papers, but you're not exactly in the mood to read through all of it. You read enough, however, to understand that this group, "Project Eden's Gate", is bad news, and that their leaders are even worse news. When you finish your skimming, you flip back to the first page where a photo of four people is clipped to the corner.

You pull the family photo off and look closer at it. At first glance, it looks like any other professionally taken photograph, but knowing better somehow makes it feel creepy. Joseph, Jacob, John, and Faith Seed. A freaky kind of bunch and you briefly find yourself wondering how their "sister" Faith came to be so (considering what you read on her stated she's not their blood kin), but you don't let yourself linger on it. You're more concerned with the fact you're supposed to go in and arrest one of them - a job you're sure as shit is fit more for the National Guard than three country folk and a marshal.

You manage to unlock one last practice lock before your phone buzzes. It's Pratt. He texted you a link to a short video. You see he's writing something else, so you wait for a few moments. He tells you you should probably come out since the Marshal's about to announce something - and you quote - "dum as shit". You grin a little at that and put away your items before you make your way over to where Pratt, Hudson, the Sheriff, and the Marshal are standing. You end up standing between Pratt and Hudson when Pratt catches your approach over his shoulder and ushers you in to stand front row for whatever bullshit the Marshal is about to sling. Pratt nudges you like a high school boy as if to
say "this is gonna be good".

You, however, quite doubt that, and when the Marshal starts speaking, pep-talk inbound, you realize you should have finished your beer when you had the chance. You have a feeling this is gonna be one hell of a long night.

( +1 focus )

( +1 skill )
You're pretty sure you zoned out while the Marshal was talking, but you're brought back to reality when Pratt steps forward, his stance defensive as he makes it a point to ignore the Marshal, "Uh, Sheriff, call me crazy, but wouldn't it be better to wait until daybreak before we try an' waltz into the middle their church and arrest Joseph Seed?"

The Marshal steps up, as if to overshadow the Sheriff, and hooks his thumbs into his belt loops. He focuses on Pratt with a confident stare, chin tilted up and shoulders pushed back. You would have rolled your eyes at his posturing if you weren't already expecting this outcome - he was the Marshal, and you, Pratt, Hudson, and even the Sheriff were just a bunch of scared backwater country folk who know too little to be trying to protect so much.

"If we wait until daylight, Joseph Seed could move to anywhere in the county," the Marshal remarks, "We know where he's at right now, so we have to go in there and arrest his ass A.S.A.P."

"And who gave you the intel for his location?" Hudson inquires, tone professional despite the spark in her eyes, "This could be some sort of trap. If he's as well connected as your report says he is there's no way he won't know we're coming."

The Marshal waves her off, "Doesn't matter. My source is reliable and the intel is good. The guy isn't even that much of a threat, so the longer we wait, the more time we're wasting." The Marshal begins to head for the stairs that lead to the roof where the chopper is at, "We're the authority, they're the bad guys - it's simple math; let's go." With that, he jogs up the stairs, two by two, before he's all but disappeared.

You turn your attention towards the Sheriff who says some words with Nancy who has apparently been sitting at her desk watching for a while, now. The Sheriff is obviously still not too pleased with this turn of events, but it's obvious his hands are tied. "I'll try to convince him, Nance, but if not, be ready." He says to which Nancy nods with a worried "Okay, Sheriff". Clearing his throat, the Sheriffheads to the stairs only pausing to stand beside them to motion you, Hudson, and Pratt forward, "You know the drill."

You follow Pratt and Hudson with the Sheriff just behind you as a sinking feeling begins to settle in your gut. You're not sure where it's coming from - you're not particularly nervous, though you have plenty of reasons to be -, something about all of this just feels off.

You can't shake the feeling even after you and everyone else have boarded the chopper. The Sheriff explains the situation, what he's expecting and how he wants all of you to handle it, but his words don't do anything to settle your nerves. You pull your gloves on when the Sheriff tells you you're gonna be the one to physically arrest and lead Joseph out of the church. You're not sure why he thinks you, the Junior Deputy, of all people, should handle that job, but you assume there's some sort of strategy to it since you're not much of a close ranged shooter.

That feeling is still there even as the Sheriff continues to try to talk the Marshal out of making the arrest. You know how stubborn the Marshal is, though, so you try to focus on something else by watching the video you were sent, but all that does is make the feeling worse. You'd be thankful you're landing if the thought of being here didn't make you sick.

Everything feels surreal as you walk through the compound, the juxtaposition of some unknown soft
sweet smell wafting through the air and the dirty, distrusting faces of the cultists (Peggies, the Sheriff called them) puts you on edge. You can hear muffled preaching in the background, but you can't make out the words as the Peggies level you with annoyed glares, various weapons at the ready, making you itch for a rifle, something more than just your sidearm, but you have no other choice than to suck it up.

You try not the lag behind as you follow the Marshal, Sheriff, and Hudson, but you're feeling heavy and jittery at the same time. It's like you're taking in everything and nothing at once - the warm smell of flowers and fire overpowering your senses and making you feel dizzy.

Just before you enter the church, Hudson gives you as sure a nod of confidence as she can, considering the circumstances, and for that you're grateful. When the Marshal pulls open the doors, the distant preaching becomes clearer. The warmth of the church fans across your cool skin. You look around and see the Peggies turn and look at you back, their eyes filled with hatred, though they don't do anything more than stare.

Your senses are on high alert as the tensions run so thick you can feel the massacre burning blood on your hands. The Marshal tires of Joseph's preaching, too cocky for his own good, because he doesn't see what the Sheriff sees - doesn't see what you see. The church is dusty, the floorboards, too, but just as easily as the cool evening breeze, blood could flow through this place, as it does already. This church isn't anything holy, but there is something here and it wants death. The Sheriff calms the Marshal and Joseph, too, calms his flock. You feel sick, again, when Joseph says the words, "God won't let them take me", but you chalk it up as simple disbelief at his insanity and delusions of grandeur.

Joseph's cultists walk away, still staring, hateful and daring, but they don't make a move to injure you. They just watch as do you until the last Peggie exits the church. When you turn back around, Joseph has thrown his hands up, the light coming in through the Eden's Gate insignia burning bright despite the lingering darkness outside. Joseph continues his sermon, "I saw when the lamb opened the first seal, and I heard as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying: come and see."

The Marshal cuts in, "Step forward-

"-And I saw." Joseph says, looking at the Marshal, finger pointed as though in accusation. He turns from the Marshal to look at the Sheriff, "And behold, it was white horse..." Joseph's gaze shifts from the Sheriff to you, his hands held out and palms open, and it's as if you're drawn to him. Joseph Seed inclines his head as he regards you, waiting, "And hell followed with him."

You take a half-step forward, feeling dazed, though the Marshal's command is clear; you need to cuff him. Joseph simply stares, eyes locked with yours, "God will not let you take me." It's the delivery that sends chills down your spine, that clouds your head stuffy and warm. It smells like flowers in here, sweet and calming. It's wrong. Everything is wrong.

That dazed feeling falls over you, forcing you to hesitate and blink hard to clear your mind. You swallow and glance behind Joseph, just barely recognizing the three standing behind him as his family. They're all staring at you, each with varying degrees of interest and all maintaining an air of sinister calm - almost as if they're not at all surprised by this sudden turn of events, though none seem pleased or displeased with the outcome. The word 'expectation' comes to mind.

You find yourself focusing on who you assume to be...
You find yourself focusing on who you assume to be Faith. Considering she stood among the other two brothers with the confidence expected of a leader, it wasn't exactly surprising you remembered her face from their family photo. You remember vague snippets on her and her mesmerizing charm when you had gleaned through their folder back at the department. What you read told of various accounts of kidnapping and brainwashing, some of the locals had reported that falling under her spell was a stone's throw away from being brain-dead. She was sweet and unassuming - her presence a warm pleasure that would drown you if you let it; some locals claimed she had the power to make you want to let her in and kill you from the inside out. With the coy smile she sends you, her dainty, bare feet poised and pointed like she was one cheerful bound away from sweeping you into her arms, you can see where her supposed charm comes from. She looks innocent, but you can see past the shiny veneer. You can see her and it's almost scary how well she plays her part.

Faith tilts her head, smile still curving the soft pout of her lips as she regards you, the playful edge of a secret bright in her eyes. You wonder, absently, if she whispers when she talks and if she'd graze her lips along the shell of your ear as she tantalizes you with whatever wonders she's planning. You have to tear your gaze from her when that innocent smile of hers turns knowing, curious, and you can feel the warmth of her stare as a creeping heat flourishes along the back of your neck.

(+2 interest with FAITH)
You find yourself focusing on who you assume to be Jacob.

You had seen him in the Seed family photo back at the department and couldn't help but remember him. His face was a difficult one to forget, after all, though you suspect your reasons for remembering had less to do with the molted scars along his cheekbones and forehead and more to do with the imposing, cocky glare he held. You would find it odd that he has nearly the exact same facial expression he had in the photo, if you hadn't read over his file - he isn't concerned with appearances or first impressions; just one glance can confirm that, telling you of his strength and stoicism. Though, that doesn't mean he doesn't care at all.

From what you skimmed from the folder, he was the eldest brother, though that hardly comes as a surprise. His background checked with his age, still, he doesn't look like a man three years from half of his life. He's a veteran with a spotty history regarding his departure from the Army. In the county, the locals know him for his psychological tortures and "way with animals". According to the reports, he trains people in the same way he trains his wolves, though these reports were marked as nothing more than rumors according to the Marshal's intel gatherer. Still, it wouldn't surprise you if the rumors were true to some extent - Jacob stands like a man who believes he is above the rest. He has an alpha dog complex mixed in with a troubled past, though you didn't need to read his file to see that.

It's obvious that he holds himself in high regard - rash speckled arms folded across his broad chest, feet spread apart in a heavy, fighter's stance. He's huge, a fucking wall of muscle, and when you meet his gaze it feels like you don't know as much as you think you do about him - he makes you feel small, like a kid caught staring too hard at a grown-up they perhaps would do better to leave alone. You don't breathe for a second - you don't even move, you just watch Jacob as he focuses your own stare back at you, a heedy air of intrigue clinging to the warm musk of the church air. On instinct, you lick the dryness from your lips and if you hadn't been staring at him so intently, you would have missed the flicker of something in his eyes that feels all too dark to be casual. You swallow and bite your tongue and you swear you see the beginnings of the tiniest smirk play on his lips before you force yourself to look away.

( +1 interest with JACOB )
You find yourself focusing on who you assume to be John.

He is the youngest brother of the three if you remember correctly, around Hudson's age. According to the intel reports the Marshal had gathered, John's the lawyer of the family and apparently the main source of legal protection and funding for Eden's Gate. By all accounts, he appears to be the most stable of the Seeds - or, rather, the most obviously connected to the world outside of Hope County. It's this fact and the strange emptiness you see in his eyes that makes him stand out amongst his family. It's obvious he's the black sheep simply by watching the way he falls into the background - behind his sister, behind his brothers -, though you're unsure why or what makes it so.

John stands like a man with who has power, but doesn't know what to do with it - he's unsure, yet confident, a juxtaposition just by being. On the family photo, you had seen he had a multitude of tattoos, and you wonder, idly, if you'll ever get to see them up close, though you're smart enough to realize your curiosity is misguided, impossible, and would only bring you trouble - he's one of the cult leaders for fucks sake. Still, you imagine he's be the type to have meaning for the art on his skin, a story for each mark. You want to know them, want to hear what they mean, though this urge to understand comes to you with confusion and apprehension that's promptly lulled by the sweet smell still lingering in the air.

You don't realize it soon enough, but John appears to be looking back at you, though you're unsure what he sees in you if anything at all. His expression is difficult to read, but the emptiness in his eyes is replaced with something brighter. John shifts his weight to his other foot, breaking your gaze only briefly as his posture becomes less defensive. If you had to guess, he's curious about you, but cautious - like a stray cat, though there's now an inexplicably haunted darkness in his gaze as he looks you over - every inch of you over -, shameless and daring and caution damned. A chill runs down your spine as warning bells sound off at the back of your head - there's something wrong with him, something off. You look away just as the corners of his lips dip in amusement.

(+1 interest with JOHN )

[>>continue]
The Sheriff calls your name, bringing you back to the situation at hand. It takes some willpower to focus on Joseph, the metallic cuffs burning a hole in your back pocket. You really don't want to do this, but what other choice do you have? Your fingers twitch at your sides as the Marshal encourages you, telling you to "just cuff 'im already, Rook," as if he had dragged you and your colleagues out to the middle of bumfuck no where at three in the morning for any other reason. Joseph, however, seems as tranquil as when you and your group first arrived, eyes clear and focused as he stares at you through those yellow tinted shades.

You hesitate, looking towards the Sheriff for guidance, but he's not looking at you, leaving you, once more, to focus on Joseph. This doesn't feel right. There's a strange sickness curling down your spine - the heaviness of events to come, the weight of the future resting in the click of those handcuffs still tucked in the pocket of your work pants. You glance at the siblings once more and goddammit it's all wrong. You brow furrows, They know something, but you just don't know what.

The Marshal calls you "Rook", again, the Sheriff stays quiet. You blink and try to hide the sickness roiling in your gut with a vaguely neutral, if not uncomfortable expression as you pull the cuffs from your pocket and lock them around Joseph Seed's wrists. He doesn't so much as blink, though you do catch something soft in his gaze - an understanding that makes every primal instinct in your body light up, screaming for you to run, to turn back time, to stop what you're doing fucking please stop. But, it's too late. It always had been.

[>>continue]
You felt the cultists' violence long before you exited the church and they started crowding in on you and your colleagues. They weren't exactly quiet with their distaste for your authority, after all. Still, they focused their ire on the Marshal, the Sheriff, and Deputy Hudson more than they did with you, although you aren't fooling yourself with thoughts of intimidation. If your hand wasn't clamped firmly on their leader's shoulder, you would be getting grabbed at, too. You make an uncomfortable sound as you steer Joseph Seed's pliant body towards the chopper, the pace of your group gaining as the path seems to converge in on itself with more and more violent cultists.

It seems the closer you get to the chopper, the more real the idea that you're taking their precious preacher away from them becomes. They're too far gone to see the insanity in what they're doing - too crazed and hyped up in mob mentality that they can't see how wrong every second of this is. He's just a man, a crazy son of a bitch with just the right amount of charm and circumstance to daze people into believing his righteousness, but still just a man.

The Sheriff, seeing the slowly increasing space between you and the group, encourages you to pick up the pace. The chopper is close - the taste of freedom - of this dumb shit being over a corner turn away.

You know if you encourage Joseph to hurry, he'll follow your lead, but you're unsure if you can keep your composure and grip if he suddenly decides to become difficult. It might be dangerous if you hurry, because Joseph might escape your hold, but staying at the pace you're going leaves you vulnerable to cultists who may decide to attack you from behind.

You decide to...

[HURRY]

[KEEP STEADY]
You hurry.

You just want this bullshit over with, and the sooner you're on the chopper, the sooner you can get back to being the boring little Junior Deputy with just enough spunk to keep Hudson and Pratt on their toes and Whitehorse proud you signed on when you did. Thankfully, when the crowd turns their attention towards you, they refuse to grab or throw rocks or the like anywhere close to your proximity, probably too afraid they may accidentally strike their precious Joseph instead of the intruder they were aiming for.

That doesn't stop them from yelling, however, and so you hurry even more, anxious to catch up to the Sheriff and Hudson and even the Marshal since the hand you have resting on your gun is practically useless - you would almost certainly be too slow for any cultists ballsy enough to attempt to strike you from behind.

Just as you're getting close to the chopper, you trip over a rock - debris, something - and stumble into Joseph for a second. Your grip loosens by a small margin, but it's enough for you to comprehend the danger you just put yourself in. However, instead of turning around and taking your momentary clumsiness as a chance for escape, Joseph remains still, unbothered by your body pressed so fully against the bare skin of his scarred back. He doesn't even buckle by your weight, standing stock still as you try to right your footing.

Immediately, you notice the ache in your ankle and seethe out just beside Joseph's ear. He turns his head to the side to regard you, but one harsh dig of your gloved fingers into the meat of his shoulder seems enough to deter him from trying anything. You continue to steer him, using him as something of a crutch as you march on.

Joseph hums gently as he faces forward, the chopper in sight.

( → you have gained a minor ankle injury: )

( -1 health )
You keep steady.

If this were any other situation, you would have already pushed and pulled your charge within reaching distance of the Sheriff and Marshal. As it is, you understand the kind of danger that would put you in, so you maintain the speed you're going at, even if the cultists seem to close in on you as you inch your way ever closer to the chopper. You grunt under your breath when you're nearly forced to draw your weapon when one of the cultists gets too close for comfort.

Joseph just hums, completely unbothered by your obvious discomfort, not that you would expect him to react differently. These were his people, so of course he didn't care for their proximity. They were trying to hurt you, not him. The way they were screaming and yelling for him, you'd think you were taking away their god. You curse under your breath, which causes Joseph to chuckle quietly.

You...

[RESPOND: "Glad to see you're enjoying this, Mr. Seed."]

[RESPOND: "You think something about this is funny, Seed?"]

[STAY QUIET]
You respond:

"Glad to see you're enjoying this, Mr. Seed," you sneer, jerking him more roughly than perhaps you had to to keep him on the path, "I hope you maintain your sense of humor when we toss you to the feds. I'd hate to see what a life sentence would do to that cheery preacher act you have going on here."

Joseph just laughs, again, short and airy, but there isn't a hint of humor in his tone as he speaks, "You choose to slander my words as lies, because you refuse to hear the truth," he says. You have the urge to push him, but refrain from doing so, lest his mindless cultists swarm you for offending his holiness or some equally bullshit reason to their madness. Joseph sighs, "You should have listened to your soul, Deputy. God will not let you take me," he pauses, shoulder loose and pliant in your grip, "God will not take you, either, though you may come to wish he would."

A chill runs down your spine, but you manage to keep your composure, thankful for the sight of the chopper seemingly just within your reach.

(+1 interest with JOHN )

(-1 focus )

[>>continue]
"You think something about this is funny, Seed?" your fingers tighten around his shoulder, but he stays calm, despite your annoyance, "You have these idiots running around here willing to throw their lives away for you and all you can do is laugh?" You want to say more, but Joseph's quiet sigh stops you before you can start.

"My flock does what it must, Deputy, though, as I understand it, this is a concept you know all too well," he says, tone calm despite the chaos flourishing around you. "Your mindfulness is admirable, however misplaced. Their fates have been decided, as have mine and yours, and that of those who wish to fall within our shadow.” Joseph rolls his shoulder in your grip, though not rough enough to loosen your hold, just enough to unwind the cords of his muscles there beneath your fingertips,

"Your strength may protect you for a short while from God's wrath, but his instruments are vigilant and just as strong. You should have walked away when you had the chance, Deputy. Their blood will be on your hands."

You swallow down the lump in your throat and jerk Joseph around the corner, ignoring the pit that coils tightly in your gut at his words. He hums, unbothered by your reaction, probably having expected it, but it doesn't matter, anymore. You see the chopper in the short distance and all you have to do is get to it.

(+1 interest with JACOB )

(-1 focus )
You stay quiet.

It's easy to ignore Joseph Seed's little chuckle; he's batshit fucking crazy, of course he'd find something humorous about his cultists foaming at the mouth and threatening the county authority. Still, you find it difficult to keep your hold on him as his mirth seemingly builds, a low hum to the tune of "Amazing Grace" replacing his briefly held silence.

"C'mon, Rookie!" Hudson yells over the chatter of screeching cultists, her shotgun poised and ready to shoot, "We're almost there!"

The Marshal and Sheriff are too busy attempting to watch all of the cultists at once to bother with encouragement, not that you need it much. You see the chopper just around the corner, and damn... You've never been happier to see it or Pratt more than you are right now.
Prologue

continue...

Getting into the chopper with Joseph Seed, the Sheriff, Marshal, and Hudson is a blur of limbs and too much panic. Everyone is shouting and screaming, limbs flailing as cultist after cultist flings themselves at the chopper, grabbing onto anything and anyone they possibly can. The Marshal is nearly thrown from the chopper when Pratt starts taking off, the threat of cultists climbing in and over the chopper, getting more hostile with the moment overtaking any sense of protocol or safety. You barely have time to buckle in as you try to help keep the Marshal inside of the chopper when a cultist grabs him. His gun goes off, and like that, it's over.

You're grabbed, but you manage to toss the woman from you and try not to think about how high up you are when you did. Everyone is still yelling, but you can't tell who is saying what or what is being said beneath the volume of the rotor blade and the blood rushing in your ears.

You see a cultist slide up from the outside glass of the cockpit - they were there and then there was blood, crimson and fresh and Oh god, you're all going to die. The chopper dips and it's clear that this flight was a bust, that this entire thing was a mistake and couldn't be made worse even if whatever karma bent entity tried.

As the chopper begins losing altitude, wavering before spinning and spinning and fuck, oh fuck, you're gonna die, you hear Joseph's soft voice over the chaos and your own silent terror.

"I once was lost, but now I'm found..." he sings, and you can't help but stare even though you don't want your last vision to be him and his stupid fucking craziness, you can't move and everything else is moving too fast. You feel the downwards pull before everything goes black, "...was blind, but now I see..."
Getting into the chopper with Joseph Seed, the Sheriff, Marshal, and Hudson is a blur of limbs and too much panic. Your ankle throbs, but you're too terrified to focus on it - though the adrenaline burning in your veins is live enough to keep you focused on your task.

(+1 focus)

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Prologue

continue...

( -- you have gained several minor injuries that are currently making it difficult to move: )

( -7 health )

( -2 strength )

( -2 focus )

You come to even though your head is spinning and every muscle in your body is telling you to succumb back to blissful darkness. Your brain, however, the unmerciful bastard it is, is too stubborn to give you such a reprieve. Your vision is blurred and you can taste the blood in your mouth from where you nearly bit your own tongue off. You swallow, the feeling thick and dry as fire crackles and dances in your peripherals around the wreckage.

You see doubles of the Marshal and Hudson on your right, both the Marshal's and Hudson's arms are limp from where they hang above their heads and sharp fear pours over you like cold water. You can't tell if they're breathing or not, but their eyes are closed and they're so, so quite. You can barely make out the shadows of Pratt and the Sheriff in the cockpit, though their silence is more than telling enough. You swallow, again, this time the taste more blood than saliva, but it's enough to keep you from losing yourself to despair. They might still be alive, and you can hear Nancy on the radio, so there's still a chance you can make this right.

Nancy is crying out through a pair of dangling pale blue headphones, her voice worried, a single breath away from hysterical crying. You inch forward to reach for it, but your breath is promptly knocked from you at the tight pull of your battered ribs against your skin.

It's then that you hear a voice - Joseph's voice, soft and tranquil, too close for comfort and seemingly everywhere at once. You look off to the side to check if he's there, before you try to grab for the headphones, again, ignoring the pained protest of your ribs as your fingers slide against the plastic, frustratingly just out of reach. Nancy calls the Sheriff by his name, calls for Hudson, Pratt, but her words are foggy and overshadowed by Joseph's singing as he gets noticeably closer than before.

Full-blown panic forces you to lurch forward one last time, but just when you grab the headphones and an inch of relief falls over you, Joseph is there to remind you that there must be something out there that hates your fucking guts. His grip on your wrist is firm, but not painful. His hand warm over the cool leather of your gloves.

He stares at you, searching blue eyes wide and pupils dilated in the soft warm, orange glow of one of the nearby fires. He's dirty, the right side of his face and the bridge of his nose bruised and cut, and the corner of one of his yellow lenses cracked, but he appears, otherwise, none the worse for wear. You try to frown at him, try to soothe the cracked dryness of your throat with the slick blood coating your tongue, but your gaze is stuck to his, voice trapped beneath a single swallow.

He drops your wrist, and it's as if his touch ignited every injury your body had suffered in the crash. You're breathless, still you try to open your mouth to shout for help; to beg Nancy to alert the fucking National Guards for fucks sake, but you don't. Instead, you fall backwards into your seat,
head hitting the hard leather headrest behind you as Joseph grabs you just beneath your jawline, his thumb and middle finger digging into the sides of your jaw so hard you can hardly do anything but clench your teeth.

Joseph shifts forward and you reflexively try to lean further back, but there's no where else you can go. He smiles, just slightly, and you watch the corners of his lip twitch, his haunting gaze still too focused on you when you glance back up to meet his stare. There's something in the way he looks you over, something exalted and almost thrilled - as if he found what he was looking for - that almost makes you want to lean forward. His emotions are subdued, but you can see what he's thinking, you can feel it compelling you to follow your instincts, your gut, your soul.

You...

[LEAN FORWARD AND FOLLOW YOUR SOUL]

[LEAN BACKWARD AND FOLLOW YOUR GUT]

[STAY STILL AND FOLLOW YOUR INSTINCTS]
[LEAN FORWARD AND FOLLOW YOUR SOUL]

You lean forward and follow your soul.

You're not sure what's come over you, but you decide to go with the strange feeling clouding your mind and lean forward, head tilting to the side slightly, gently, and you feel Joseph's grip on your jaw loosen. He's open to you, heart and mind and body and soul and you think you might like it, though you can't be sure. He seems surprised by your reciprocated gesture, but not put off by it. If anything, his eyes grow darker as everything begins to feel like you're swimming.

You're lost in his gaze, lightheaded and breathing shallowly through your barely parted lips. You're so close to him that you can smell him, the faint scent of cologne and sweat and your own blood as you try to lick the sudden itch of pain at the corner of your mouth. Joseph watches the motion of your reddened tongue with rapt attention, his thumb sliding from your jawline to the bottom of your chin as he tilts you and leans closer still.

Your eyes fall half-lidded as his lips graze over the sticky, blood wet cut in the most gentle kiss you've ever been given. Your cheeks warm and your breath stalls in your chest when he pulls away, leaving you feeling conflicted and wanting. This is wrong, this is wrong... Isn't this wrong? You don't know how to feel, mind warring with itself on why you did that, why the fuck did you do that? Joseph, however, seems wholly pleased with himself, though vaguely unsatisfied.

It's only when you hear Nancy call out, again, that you're able to snap yourself from his gaze and back towards the headphones, but Joseph's grip on your chin keeps you from moving or crying out. Your eyes are once more focused on him and his on you as he reaches for the head phones, leaving you with no where else to run.

(+2 interest with FAITH, +1 interest with JOHN)

(+1 belief)

[>>continue]
You lean backward and follow your gut.

You jerk back, breathing hard as you try your best to keep your distance from Joseph. He's hardly surprised, as if he expected this reaction from you, but your annoyance and aversion to him only makes his gaze grow darker. He keeps you focused on his face as he searches your own once more. You have no idea what the hell he's looking for, but you try your best to ignore him, try to blink him away from your vision, but every time your eyes linger closed for too long he squeezes your jaw hard enough to force you to grind your teeth.

The sides of your tongue get caught between your molars where they dig in harsh enough to make your vision blur with tears, the pain stinging and red. Your tongue is already fat with your first accidental bite, but Joseph's forcing you to worsen the wound, create more puncture holes in the warmth of your mouth until all you can taste is your own blood. You reach up to grasp his wrist, to try to lessen his hold on you, but you're too weak to do anything substantial.

You whimper and force yourself to stare at him through the pain. He smiles and leans forward to slide his nose along your cheek. This time, he doesn't have to make you clench your jaw, you do that just fine on your own. He hums a line of "Amazing Grace" just beside your ear, hot breath tickling the sensitive skin beneath the lobe.

His thumb slides from your jaw to your chin and up to your bottom lip where it catches and tugs down until the bottom row of your teeth are exposed. Joseph noses along your jawline and you have to fight yourself from trying to pull away from his grip. He plants a single, soft kiss beside his thumb at the corner of your chin and you try not to think about how that makes you feel. Instead, you focus on the distant sound of Nancy worrying over the radio.

Noticing your shift in interest, Joseph pulls back, thumb no longer pressing your lip open, but swiping gently over the injured flesh, absentmindedly, his gaze focused on you and you alone. He barely even looks at the headphones as he grabs them and just like that, any hope of escape is gone.

( +1 interest with JACOB, +2 interest with JOHN )

( +1 doubt )
You *stay still and follow your instincts*.

As much as you want to move, something inside of you tells you to stay still and quiet, to not risk any danger Joseph can deliver, especially considering he has everything going for him except the fact you’re alive. Still, he doesn't seem too upset by your lack of response, not that if he did, you'd do anything different. You're quite content watching him from a healthy distance, not trusting him or even yourself well enough to do anything else.

He sees in your eyes the doubt, and something in him softens. You imagine that if he was the cooing sort, he'd do just that as he traced his thumb and forefinger from your jaw to your lips, but he's not. Instead, Joseph slides his grip to your throat, a fair and subtle warning as he leans forward to block your vision of anything but his hypnotic gaze. You bite the insides of your cheek to resist the urge to headbutt him, knowing that you'd probably do yourself more damage than him since you're practically on the verge of passing out with how hard your head throbs.

As if reading your mind, Joseph leans even closer and presses his cheek to your sticky temple, his beard scratching your skin as he rubs against you, a gesture you suppose he probably thinks is comforting, but is, in all honesty, probably one of the weirdest moments in your life. You don't notice, however, how loose your shoulders have gotten until Joseph presses a chaste kiss to your cheek and all of your muscles constrict in shock and confusion.

Tense and closed off as you are, Joseph pulls away, the inklings of a smile tugging the corners of his lips as he reaches out for the long forgotten dangling headphones Nancy had been crying over. Joseph's gaze doesn't leave yours as he responds, and you can actually feel your hope of leaving the county dwindle into the negatives.

( +2 interest with JACOB, +1 interest with JOHN )

( +2 doubt )
Prologue

Chapter Summary

Luxuria, (latin): lust
Illecebra, (latin): enticement, seduction

continue...

There are a whole host of emotions coursing through you, right now, but the first and most obvious is disbelief - betrayal. Nancy - *that fucking bitch Nancy* - sold you and your colleagues out - sold the Sheriff out and he was one of her closest friends. Or, at least so she had led you to believe. God, you're so stupid.

The connection ends before you can shout anything less than holy at her, not that you probably physically could. Joseph keeps his gaze locked with yours and leans forward until he's all you can see, "No one is coming to save you," he whispers, voice soothing and final - a promise. Your breath stalls in your chest, your heart thrumming rapid and harsh, the loud rush of your blood flourishing heat across your face as he runs his hand until it cups your jaw and he closes the distance between you. The kiss is soft, too kind for the fear making your hands tremble.

"Luxuria," he mumbles against your lips with a small laugh, "illecebra..." He goes in for seemingly a second kiss, but stop himself short, "Your sin tempts me, my child, though I suspect I'm not the only one who has been captured by your lure..." he says as he pulls away, a smile too teasing and light for this situation playing on his lips. You don't have much time to contemplate any of it when you hear the approaching sound of a truck engine and the rustle of leaves and bushes being parted. Joseph doesn't pay them any mind, however, as if you're the only thing in the world that matters. He tilts his head, an unnaturally blissful sadness crossing his features as he ghosts the pad of his thumb over your lips, "I told you God wouldn't let you take me..." he whispers, "Before the End, you will return to our family, Lamb, and we will welcome you as one of our own. Such is the way you have always meant to be - a savior."

With that, he turns to greet his flock, the beams of their headlights shining bright into the wreckage. Joseph climbs out towards them as you watch, dazed and uncomfortable, unsure what you're supposed to do - of what's going on.

You see the Marshal stir, then Hudson, and you even spy some movement in the cockpit. Relief falls over you, but it's short lived when you hear Joseph's preaching. He shouts about culling, about harbingers of doom, and his words seem to clear the fog in your mind. The Sheriff mumbles, "We have to get outta here... We have to-", but it's too late.

"Begin the Reaping!" Joseph's shout echoes through the forest and tears you from your daze, panic shooting down your spine as his followers begin to converge on the wreckage. "We have to get outta here..." and for one of the first times since this excursion occurred, you agree with something that's been said.

Hudson manages to unbuckle herself first, though before she can do anything else, they grab her.
You snatch Hudson back and try to keep your hold on her leg, gloved fingers digging into the meat of her calf only to slip down to her booted ankle when one of the cultists gives a hefty tug. You’re too weak to stop them, and you’re forced to watch in terror as they pull her and Pratt and Whitehorse from the chopper. You turn to look at the Marshal, but he’s hardly focused on anyone else. You don’t see the Sheriff in the front anymore, and just as you turn once more to look for Hudson and Pratt, flames engulf the wreckage.

Through the smoke and fire, you see the outline of Joseph standing tall, watching. Waiting. He tells his followers to let you burn, but he's a fool if he thinks you're gonna go down that easily.

The Marshal manages to escape before you do, running out into the darkness of the forest and practically disappears. You, too, manage to get loose, but it seems Joseph has different plans. You hear a shout behind you, demanding that you be caught. You're not sure who says it with your blood rushing loud and fast in your ears, but you know they wouldn't move without Joseph's say so.

You keep running, determined to make it out of this alive, but your vision is blurry.

[if you HURRIED to the chopper and your FOCUS is at 4 CONTINUE HERE]

[if you HURRIED to the chopper and your FOCUS is at 5 CONTINUE HERE]

[if your FOCUS is at 2 or 3 CONTINUE HERE]

[if your FOCUS is at 4 OR 5 CONTINUE HERE]
Your vision darkens at the edges and you can feel yourself hyperventilating. You can't keep running, not with your ankle in pain like this. Someone fires a shot and you feel the air of it pass just by your shoulder. You turn to glance over your shoulder, but you can't see anything - you're still moving, limping slightly from the pain, and the foliage is too thick for the moonlight to shine through it. You can feel eyes on you, however, and the shouting, egging you closer doesn't stop. You're so distracted in getting away that you don't notice you've reached the end of a shallow cliff just a bit too late.

Your injured side falls through air and then you're falling, a few feet through the air and into a shallow pond. It's just deep enough to keep you from breaking your neck, but the splash was loud and you can hear the approach of footsteps as you drag yourself from the pool. You're drenched and covered in mud by the time you've gotten out, but the sound had alerted the Peggies to your location. The moment you look up, you see two Peggies glaring down at you. You barely register the butt of a rifle as he slams down against your head, forcing your world into darkness.
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Luckily for you, during his fall, he grabs onto the man beside him, forcing him, too, to the ground. You have just enough time to scramble away, hand sliding over a rock that you grab and slam against one of the Peggie's heads as he tries to stand. The other you kick in the face, though not without him raising a gun and shooting off a couple of rounds. One catches in your shoulder, forcing you to fall back, searing pain clouding your vision white and dark at the same time.

You cry out, though you attempt to stifle your sounds by grinding your teeth, you're in so much pain you can scarcely breathe. You head throbs and you don't even realize it until you feel yourself moving - or, rather, someone else moving you. Words are being said, hushed and calm, and though you can't see them, their presence calms you until you fall unconscious.

( +1 interest with JOHN)

( +1 interest with JACOB )

( +1 interest with FAITH )

[>>continue]
Prologue

Chapter Summary

WARNING: Physical Violence

continue...

Your entire body is in pain, your vision dipping in and out as you try to dodge trees and rocks and uneven ground. You don't make it any further than a few more feet from the wreckage before you're tackled to the ground. You try to wrestle the Peggie off of you, but they're too strong. They pin your hands on either side of your head, sitting on your kicking legs as they shout, "They're here! They're over here! I found 'em!"

Growing desperate, you grunt, turn your head, and sink your teeth into their arm where they hold you down. They release you for a few critical moments, though you're too weak to push them off. Your hand slides over a rock, but before you can grasp it, the Peggie clocks you in the jaw. Your ears ring, and as you attempt to look back up at them, they hit you in the face again. And again. And again. You don't know how many times they punch you, but your hearing is muffled like your ears are stuffed with cotton and the entire left side of your face is hot and tingling.

Their weight shifts off of you, and for a few moments you wonder if they're going to just leave you for dead alone and injured in the forest. However, you feel yourself being picked up and moved, your sudden lack of equilibrium making you just dizzy enough to pass out. You think you hear people talking, but you can't be sure. Everything is dark, and for once, you're grateful for it.

[>>continue]
Your entire body is in pain, your vision dipping in and out as you try to dodge trees and rocks and uneven ground. You don't make it any further than a few more feet from the wreckage before you're tackled to the ground. You try to wrestle the Peggie off of you, but they're too strong. They pin your hands on either side of your head, sitting on your kicking legs as they shout, "They're here! They're over here! I found 'em!"

Growing desperate, you grunt, turn your head, and sink your teeth into their arm where they hold you down. They release you for a few critical moments, though you're too weak to push them off. Your hand slides over a rock, and you manage to grab it and slam it against the Peggie's head hard enough to jar them off of you. You drop the rock and scramble from their limp body before pushing yourself up off the ground and stumble away from the area. You slide into a grouping of thick bushes and try to get your head straight.

Nearby, you hear the rustle of footsteps and one of the cultists shouting, "He's dead!" and then, "Oh, Father, he's dead! The Deputy killed him!"

You don't wait around to hear anymore, a sharp pang twisting your gut at the thought of having killed someone. You swallow, and try to focus, looking carefully around the area for any chance at escape. You see a high, woven wire fence topped with circlets of barbed wire. You sneak towards it, hoping that if you follow it you'll find an opening or a locked gate you can try to break through. Carefully, you creep along the edge and find yourself near a dilapidated house.

You grip the wire fence and figure if you might be able to find something to cut through it if you went in there. You don't see any Peggies around, so you figure it might be clear enough to check inside for bolt cutters or the like, or at least a weapon to arm yourself with.

You decide you're going to...

[GO INSIDE THE HOUSE]

[PLAY IT SAFE AND KEEP FOLLOWING THE FENCE]
Prologue

Chapter Summary

WARNING: Physical Violence

[GO INSIDE THE HOUSE]

You decide you're going to go inside the house.

From where you're at you can see an opening in the bottom of the house, sort of like a crawl space between rock and the broken wood floorboards. You sneak up the rocky ledge and peak through the cracks you can see and hold your breath at the pair of muddy, booted feet that cross by in front of you near the stairs outside of the house. You watch them for a few seconds more before you decide to crawl up through the opening you're hiding in, wincing at the creak of the floorboards though the Peggie doesn't seem to notice.

Slowly, you creep behind him, thankful he's standing in front of a window opening and grab him by his shoulders and pull him back and through the window. He's a heavy bastard, but you use his weight against him and slam him against the wall you pulled him through. He looks up at you, dazed, but before he can say anything you slam your booted foot in his face hard enough to hear a crunch that causes his body to go limp. You wince at the sound, surprised by your own strength and violence. You didn't know you could do that... When you were younger, you used to get into fights all the time, but never had you thought you could ever just kill someone in such cold blood.

You stare at the corpse - a man - and feel the misty fog in the back of your mind you hadn't noticed up until now clear just slightly. This isn't you. You don't just kill people. You're not a monster. You fall to your knees in front of the man, though more out of self-pity and guilt from not feeling anything. You don't feel bad for killing him, you feel bad that you were able to kill him without so much as a second thought. You move to stand, shaking your head as you try to snap yourself out of it, you need to snap out of it. You don't have time to worry about this, besides, he was probably going to kill you - no, he was going to kill you, but you got to him first. After all, you killed one of theirs, why would they hesitate to kill you?

(+1 skill)

You turn away from the body, a cold feeling of resolution falling over you. You will survive, no matter what you have to do. As you look over the items in the house you go to grab and test the weight of a wooden bat when you feel someone at your back. You try to get a hold of the bat, but you're thrown halfway on top of a counter, tools and other items scattering as you try to push yourself up right. Your wrists, however, are caught and pulled together behind your back. Your head slams against the counter top, stunning you for a moment, as your assailant ties your wrists together with a zip-tie. You feel the harsh edges of the plastic digging into your skin as they yank it tight, but unfortunately not tight enough to allow you to easily snap them open.

You're turned around, shoulder blades aching. You barely have enough time to register what's going on when something hard smashes into your face.

Everything goes black.
When you come to, your vision is blurry, and you don't know how long you've been out, but you feel yourself moving and you can see the ground as you pass by. Your vision dims black, again, and you would have thought you just blinked, but you're no longer moving, but lying down on something soft. Your eyes won't open, too swollen from whatever injuries you sustained, but you feel a cool towel covering them, soothing the ache. You hear people talking somewhere close by and you immediately recognize one voice as Joseph's, but there are others. You try to listen in on their conversation.

"...dangerous. We'd be better off just killin' them." an unfamiliar voice says, gruff and displeased.

"They deserve redemption, Brother Jacob. Don't let your sin cloud your judgement." Joseph says, and silence fills the room, "The Lamb is but God's tool, just as I am your Father I am the Shepard of His Chosen. You are my children and the Heralds of the End Times. God's will works through us and His Will works through the Lamb and it is our burden to make them realize their duty to God and to the survival of all His children so that we may pass through Eden's Gate free of sin." He continues, "Blame the Lamb not, for the stones to be cast are decided by the Lord and communicated through His Shepard. No one else shall bring judgement upon His child. My child, and as my family, you will not question my word."

It's silent for a few tense moments, and then a soft, sweet voice speaks up, "Father," she says, "Will they not resist? Blessings can only be bestowed upon those who accept them. How can we convince the Lamb to walk the path to Eden's Gate among us if their presence brings only death?"

Another voice chimes in, an unfamiliar man, though different than the first - more nervous and even-toned, "Y-yes," he clears his throat, "Joseph- Father, I have to agree with Faith. How can this sinner be saved if they do not wish to be? They may be 'the Lamb', but what if they're not? They arrived here with four others. How do we know that they're not just-

"Do not question my judgement, Brother John." Joseph commands, "God speaks to me on things you may not believe, but I see the paths our family may take - the lives that will be lost if we fail at this task. The End Times are upon us, my children, and we must prepare." He says, "If we do not save the Lamb from the temptations of Hell, you, the Heralds, will surely die and Eden's Gate will be lost to you." A heavy pause, then, "I cannot lead you if you stray from the path. God's mercy does not extend to non-believers. Make them believe."

There are murmurings after that, but your consciousness begins to fade.

(+1 interest with FAITH)

(+1 interest with JOHN)

[>>continue]
You decide you're going to play it safe and keep following the fence.

You don't know what or who is inside of the house, so it's really no contest. At least out in the forest you have a chance to run. As you follow the fence, you hear, in the distance, the howl of wolves and remember what you gleaned through the files. One of the brothers is rumored to have been able to train them, but that's all it is - rumors. Still, a big, angry wolf isn't something you want to deal with - trained or not, especially since you're already on the verge of passing out.

You see a figure in the distance milling around, but it's too dark to tell if it's the Marshal or not. They give you a weird feeling, their head drooped as they shuffle, and the longer you look, the more you can tell it's not the Marshal. The person appears sickly, moping and dragging their feet in a way that suggests they don't particularly know what's going on. You wonder if this is one of the locals Joseph and his family managed to capture and torture, but just in case it's not, you pick up a near by fallen branch.

The moment you do, you see a pair of eyes peeking at you through the bushes. You barely have enough time to lift the branch to defend yourself when the wolf springs out from where it was hiding and lunges at you. Its jaws snap around the branch and yank, and, instinctively, you let go and begin running. You hear the pad of footsteps behind you and ragged breathing and, foolishly, you turn to look. It's not too close, but it's gaining on you-

You run straight into a tree, knocking yourself out cold.

When you come to, your vision is blurry, and you don't know how long you've been out, but you feel yourself moving and you can see the ground as you pass by. Your vision dims black, again, and you would have thought you just blinked, but you're no longer moving, but lying down on something soft. Your eyes won't open, too swollen from whatever injuries you sustained, but you feel a cool towel covering them, soothing the ache. You hear people talking somewhere close by and you immediately recognize one voice as Joseph's, but there are others. You try to listen in on their conversation.

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There are murmurings after that, but your consciousness begins to fade.

( +1 interest with JACOB )
Prologue: END

continue...

( ++ you have rested and had the worst of your injuries tended to: )

( + all minor injuries have been healed )

( +8 health ) - if you have an extra health point, your strength has increased by +1

Your awakening is a rude one. You're shaken from your dreamless sleep and made to sit up before a dark colored sack is pulled down onto your head - completely obscuring your vision. Your hands are pulled together behind you and shackled, probably with the same handcuffs you had slapped on Joseph - that would, after all, be just the right amount of irony you'd expect from a situation like this. As it stands, everything that's happened to you so far has felt like a nightmare. Might as well attempt derive some comedy from it.

Without so much as a warning, you're yanked from the bed and forced to your feet before being steered somewhere. You can't tell where you're going, but you can feel the muzzle of a gun pressed into the middle of your back, so you believe it's be safe to assume it's probably no where good. You're jerked to a stop by a harsh hand tugging you back. You hear what sounds like a door open in front of you before you're "encouraged" to step in, muzzle still digging into the flesh beside your spine.

You stop - or, rather, are made to stop and forced down. You stumble, knees colliding with the concrete floor harsh enough to make your teeth clink together. Irritated and already imagining all the ways you could be tortured and killed, you shake whoever made you kneel off, though your attempt is ignored. You hear a scoff and maybe a light chuckle somewhere in front of you, but before you can say something smart, the sack over your head is ripped off - strands of your hair coming with it. You hiss, blinded for a second by the light - your eyes throbbing at the sudden brightness while you adjust. When you can finally see again, you find yourself at the mercy of the Seed family, and you wonder if you'll have a slow death.

Joseph stands at the head of his siblings with his brothers and sister on either side of him. He gives you a soft smile and opens his arms to you, "Welcome, my child," he says, voice serene as always, "Welcome back to your family."

Having already resigned yourself to death or worse than it, you roll your eyes and you look off to the side, but the moment you do, whoever is behind you snatches your hair and yanks your head up until you can't help but stare up at Joseph and his kin. Each Seed regards you with a different emotion; Faith appears curious, though wholly unimpressed. John is interested and disgusted in equal measures. Jacob simply smiles, but it's a cruel smile, amused by your pain, more than likely, or perhaps whatever his family plans to do to you. Joseph is difficult to read; he stares at you just as he did in the church and as he did in the wreckage of the chopper. He searches your face. Always searching.

The person gripping your hair digs their nails into your already sore and bruised scalp, making you wince and grit your teeth. At the sound, Joseph looks from you to whoever is behind you and motions at them gently, "Do not give into your Wrath, Brother Carlyle," he says, "Control your sin and release your family from your grasp."

You hear a demure, "Yes, Father," and the grip on your head disappears so suddenly your head
snaps forward with the force of it. You know "Brother Carlyle" did that shit on purpose, but you can't do anything more than scowl, eyes now focused on some spot on the ground. You imagine it's probably old blood, but try not to think about it as you take a breath and look at Joseph once more.

Surprisingly, Joseph for once has turned his gaze from you to the man behind you. You can't really tell what Joseph's thinking, but his simple, "You may leave," sounds cold and disappointed. Brother Carlyle gives another, "Yes, Father," and exits, the door closing behind him with a heavy sound.

It's quiet while you gaze at Joseph, waiting. Out of habit, you move your tongue to wet your lips only to feel a strange, vaguely painful tug. Curious, you press the muscle against the roof of your mouth and feel stitches where you had nearly bitten through it. This prompts you to look yourself over, ignoring the Seeds for the time being as you come to the realization that you've been bandaged up and your uniform is still - mostly - in tact.

When you look up again, you're almost startled by the fact they're all staring at you, not that you should be shocked - that's all they've pretty much done since you entered this room.

"Are your wounds bothering you, my child?" Joseph inclines his head to you.

You open your mouth to say something probably smart, but your throat is so raw and dry that you can barely manage the weak cough that squeeze out of you. For now, you tilt your head to the side and give him a neutral expression.

"The Father asked you a question, Rook." Your nickname feels venomous coming from John, but with the way he glares at you, you would have expected nothing less. You look at him a brow raised in quiet annoyance and you see a flash of anger tighten his features into something like a disgruntled pout. Jacob scoffs and in your peripherals you see Faith shift slightly. You wonder if this is when Joseph will drop his holier-than-thou preacher crap and just beat the ever living shit out of you for disrespecting his family. Instead, he steps forward and gives you a strangely calm smile. When he reaches for you, you flinch, but his hands are gentle as he helps you stand.

Your knees buckle and you can't help but shift awkwardly in his hold. Your legs are weak from both lingering exhaustion and having been sitting on them for so long. Still, Joseph keeps you upright and looks you over once before settling his intense gaze on your face, "I assume you must be starving after such a long recovery." His kindness is eerie - it makes your hair stand on ends. Why is he being- acting so nice? This has to be some sort of game. Joseph's soft expression remains as he pats your shoulders, "It's settled, then," he says, "As a prospective member of our family, your needs will be met, first and foremost, before we decide which region you will be assisting your brother or sister with while we prepare for the End."

You must have made a face, because Joseph laughs, light and airy, and it makes your stomach twist. He sounds so normal for someone so unhinged. Carefully, he turns you, ready to usher you from the room until you're suddenly grabbed - large, rough fingers digging in your bicep and forcing you still. You turn and see that it's Jacob, but he doesn't look at you, his gaze is focused only on his brother.

"Let me lead our little lamb for now, brother," Jacob says, emphasizing 'little lamb' with an air of distaste, "Since they're still new, I think it'd be best for me to keep an eye on them - at least until we get back to the church."

Joseph regards his brother coolly and releases his grip on you, "Of course, Brother Jacob."

Said brother simply grins, watching as his siblings begin exiting the room before he leans down so close that his beard brushes your neck, "If you try anything - if you even think about trying anything, I won't hesitate to skin you alive and feed you to my wolves. You may have my brother fooled with
your innocent act, but I know what you really are." It's a cryptic message, but one you find easy to deflect. *He doesn't know shit,* and you'd tell him such if your damn throat wasn't so dry. Still, Jacob is bigger than you, stronger, and when he drags you out of the room, you can't help but follow. When you stumble, he pulls you back before you fall onto your face. You prepare yourself to continue being pulled along, but Jacob's voice stops you, "I almost forgot," he says as he comes to stand in front of you, vicious smile in place, "Welcome to the family."

PROLOGUE END

ACT I IN PROGRESS
Hi! I just wanted to make some things clearer about the stats function of this fic/game and give a quick update. All stats have a level cap. Below is the list of the level caps for each stat.

Health: 0 to 10
Focus: 0 to 10
Strength: 0 to 10
Skill: 0 to 10

**IMPORTANT NOTE**: In the final chapter for the prologue, you were given 8 total Health points. If you had an extra Health point (one over the level cap of 10) then that Health point turned into a Strength point instead, leaving you with 10 Health and 1 extra point on Strength.

Interest points also have level caps that will effect what paths you will have available. It's important to understand that negative points are also considered "romance" points, though in a somewhat different light. Like positive points, they are a deciding factor in how the Seeds treat you, how much they trust you, and what ending you will eventually get. Negative points can yield a hate/love relationship, while positive points can yield an obsessive love relationship.

The romances presented here will be dark and at best bittersweet regardless of positive or negative paths. Neither path are without their fluffy moments, but it should be remembered that the Seed have dark views of the world and are technically the villains of this story. Though your Dep may have the opportunity to change things, the Seeds are who they are and will retain aspects of their darker sides even if the Deputy manages to win their hearts. "Best endings" will be achieved through points closest to -30 or 30. Gained interest points between those values will also result in different endings. More info on how to achieve the ending you want will be provided at the start of Act II.

(CHANGE: FUNCTIONALITY OF NEGATIVE POINTS HAS CHANGED AS OF 12/24/18 ALL OF THE ABOVE IS A WHOLE ASS MESS I'M SORRY; A MORE SOUND GUIDE AND INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE MADE AT THE BEGINNING OF ACT II; FOR NOW, JUST KNOW THAT NEGATIVE POINTS WILL AND CAN, AFTER ACT I, LEAD TO GAME OVER ENDINGS)

Jacob Seed: -15 to 30

John Seed: -15 to 30

Faith Seed: -15 to 30
Joseph is a special case, because his "interest points" are directly tied to your doubt and belief points. The level of your doubt and belief will effect how Joseph (and as an extension the cult as a whole) treats you. This is similar to how interest points affect his siblings, however these points affect you even if you're not actively pursuing him:

**Doubt: 0 to 30**

**Belief: 0 to 30**

Hudson and Pratt's interest points function the same as the Seeds'. You will have more interactions with one or the other if you're in either John or Jacob's territories, respectively. There will be no interest points for the Sheriff, the Marshal, nor any of the Guns For Hire though your interactions with them may effect their attitudes/actions towards you. The caps for Hudson and Pratt are:

**Staci Pratt: -15 to 15**

**Joey Hudson: -15 to 15**

They are not main love interests - although you may have optional romantic and/or sexual interactions. There will not be any Deputy x Hudson/Pratt endings, however they can help or hinder you depending on their interest in you.

This fic is going to be very, very long due to the amount of choices and outcomes I want to implement. Act I is where canon fully diverges from the original narrative. It's much more interactive in the sense that there are options for your options - which was a bitch to write and edit (although I had a lot of help from my beta reader/editor Buttercup-bee), hopefully the additional choices add more weight to the decisions you make. In Act II you will officially have the "choice" to join any one of the Seeds in their territories and interact with them and others while in their territory. **The Seed you choose will be your main love interest for the remainder of the fic for that path.**

Before Act II, I will also release a notes chapter like this one giving a quick, spoiler-free guide on how you should proceed if you want a specific type of ending. All of Act II will most likely not be posted on this particular fic since keeping track of four different plot lines in one story would be actual hell. I will post the first half of Act II here before your Dep chooses which Seed they will continue with and then provide links to bring you to the Seed CYOA of your choosing. The points gained and/or lost here as well as any status effects will determine events in those stories, so keep your points handy.

I am planning on writing, give or take, a total of four acts and an epilogue. For Act I, I am going to be releasing it in parts that way you'll get to actually read the finished parts without me being tempted to overhaul the whole damn plotline for months on end. This, unfortunately, means updates from now on are going to be somewhat short and will stop at cliffhangers that won't be resolved until the second part is finished up and edited.

I'm hoping this is going to help elevate some of the stress of waiting to update this story, since trying to write/post/edit thousands of words at a time is really tiring, especially since I'm currently attending college and working on my own personal projects. Updates here are fully dependent on how much time I have to write for this fic, though I will make an effort to release snippets/teasers on my writing tumblr (doodwrites) in case anyone wants to stay updated on this fic's progress past the percentage updates in the summary. Be forewarned though, I am a dumbass and as such I tend to shit post there more than talk about writing so.....
Act I part I will be released either today or tomorrow.

Thank you for reading and for your support! If you have any questions, feel free to comment here and I'll try to answer them as best as I can.

--

I want to give a more personal shout out for my beta reader and editor Buttercup--bee! They've been a huge help through this act and I could not have gotten through all of this without their help! They have a tumblr and an AO3 filled with awesome fics that I suggest you guys check out! Thank you Buttercup--bee for your help!
Act I: START

Chapter Notes

Check out the editor: Buttercup-bee
Their Tumblr and AO3

Some paths are A LOT shorter than others for this part of act I. Sorry! Act II has a lot more detail and is much longer. Stay tuned.

( ++you are feeling focused and determined: )

( +5 focus )

( +2 strength )

True to his word, Jacob doesn't allow you to stray from his side as he leads you through the mysterious bunker he and his siblings had kept you in. You try to remember the twists and turns of the place, hoping, for some stupid reason, that you'll be able to commit something useful to memory - something you could use against the Seeds -, but there isn't anything you note as useful.

Cultists pass you and the family by, nodding and bowing to Joseph and his siblings and muttering the occasional "praise be the Father" while they simply glare at you. If you had less of an understanding on what the Peggies had commit themselves to, you may have found it funny how obsessed and blind they are. As it stands, you read the reports in the department that mentioned kidnappings and threats that the Seeds used against the locals in order to corral them into joining Project Eden's Gate. Of those who accepted, you wonder how many truly believe the madness they immerse themselves in and how many are simply doing as they're told.

You're pulled from your thoughts when Jacob grabs your shoulder with one hand and yanks you to a stop. You see three armed Peggies, though they're dressed differently from the other cultists you've encountered. These cultists are well armed, decked in dark camo and red hoods. Two hold assault rifles while one carries a heavy sniper rifle. You glance them over and can't help but let your mind wander through impossible scenarios of heroically disarming one of them, taking their weapon, and escaping the bunker. Of course, it wouldn't be that simple; you would probably be pushed to injure, if not just outright kill one or two people, but it would be justified. You're not a killer, but you're not scared of getting your hands dirty to do what you have to to survive.

Jacob's grip tightens on your shoulder, as if sensing your violent calculations. He leans down beside you, face close enough that you can feel his beard grazing your shoulder, his breath warm on your neck, "Remember what I told you, Rook." Jacob says, fingers digging into your sore limbs just shy of painful. You frown, trying to remember what the hell he supposedly told you just as a soft tune begins playing behind you. You feel a tingling sensation at the front of your forehead, but also somehow deep inside, behind your skull. Your mouth waters and your arms and legs begin feeling restless, your muscles aching for activity.

A jolt of panic run shoots through you, at the wavering sound of a man singing. The words "only you" echo in your head, and you move to face Jacob and surprisingly he lets you. You face him,
breathing heavy as you search for the source of the sound. Jacob watches you, head tilted slightly and lips quirked in the tiniest of smiles. It isn’t until you spot the little wooden box in his hand that Jacob reaches forward to grab your arm with one hand. You wince - not at the bruising force with which he holds you, but at the sudden throbbing pain behind your eyes forcing you to clench them shut. Jacob shushes you, though you don’t think you’re making any sound. You can’t hear anything past the song echoing in your head. But then Jacob speaks, his voice loud and clear through the remnants of the fading tune, “Breathe, Deputy...” he says, "Breathe nice and slow."

You do as he says, gritting your teeth as the pain rises to a crescendo before ebbing into a low thrum of heat and the urgency to move. Your thighs are taut, your back rigid as if you’re ready to pounce. You see flashes of meat and sinew and try to blink the images away, but there’s only darkness and bright, sharp pictures of meat ripped from clean white bone by wolves matted in blood. The sight makes your own jaw ache with the tension and desire to gnash and maul. It’s disturbing. It feels wrong, but you can’t help the way your stomach clenches with familiar pangs of hunger.

"Breathe." Jacob demands again, and you swear to god you thought you were, but your lungs burn when you next take in a deep breath. "Good, kitten," he praises, "You're doing so good." His words make you dizzy and you feel your cheeks flourish with sudden heat.

You can't tell if you're exhausted or something else entirely, but a shiver runs down your back at the ghost of Jacob's touch sliding from your shoulder, across your collarbone, and up your neck. The firm flex of his fingers along the column of your throat feels comforting; you melt into his rough hand, eyelids fluttering dreamily.

"I need you to do something for me..." Jacob says, his voice an even-toned echo. You blink hard against the darkness, a rush of adrenaline making your head spin like a bout of vertigo. When it stops, you open your eyes and find yourself in a dim, red tinted room.

A .44 Magnum lies on a wooden table, highlighted by a bright white light. Two men sit in chairs in front of a projector screen, their backs towards you. The room - this… situation feels familiar, but not at all. Jacob’s words come to mind: “remember what I told you” , but what does he mean? What did he tell you?

You aren’t given long to contemplate the thought. Jacob’s harsh voice awakens you to your situation. You need to survive. You need to listen. "Prove your worth," Jacob challenges, "Cull the herd."

You look at the sidearm on the table. It's detailed in dark gunmetal, stripped cleanly with crimson. It's Jacob’s - you know it's Jacob’s, but you don’t know why you know it it or why you know he details his weapons in red and matte black. You stare at the weapon, hesitant to touch it, but the two men who had been sitting begin to turn towards you. Their faces are blurred to a horrifying degree, but you feel like you see their rage and hatred despite not being able to make out who they are. If you don’t do something, they’re going to kill you.

You...

[GRAB THE GUN]

[MAKE A RUN FOR IT]
[TRY TO KNOCK THEM OUT]
Act I

Chapter Summary

WARNING:
Graphic depictions of violence, blood and gore

[GRAB THE GUN]

You grab the gun.

It feels so natural in your palm and you hear Jacob's low purr of approval as if he's standing right next to you, "Good," he murmurs, "Now, get to work."

You shoot the first man in the back and then the second in the head just as he reaches at his waist for something. Both men explode into dark smoke, leaving you alone in the room. You hear Jacob hum, pleased, "Excellent," he says, and you can feel something like rough fingertips running warm along your jawline, "Continue..."

Your feet move of their own accord through to a short hallway, but you're not fighting it. Your blood burns in your veins and you can feel the hatred and aggression bubbling up in your lungs. You try to distinguish these feelings from the panic echoing in your head, but it's all so overwhelming. You see an SMG-11 on a nearby table, red and black and bright under the white light shining over it.

You pick it up and move through the hallway into the following room. You don't have time to take in anything before you're being shot at. Immediately, you take cover behind high piles of broken wooden floorboards and walls, ignoring the chunks of dry wood and splinters floating in the air above your head like they're suspended in jelly. An eerie calm falls over you, and almost dreamily you count the seconds between their shots as you wait for an opening.

You peek over the cover and catch sight of where your enemies are standing just before you're forced to duck again. You hear Jacob scoff, and the thought of his potential disappointment makes your gut twist in on itself. You have to move.

Keeping low, you sneak through a door way to your left and take aim at your two targets. They don't notice you until it's too late. You're not quite sure when you became so proficient at using a handgun - you had always done better with heavier weaponry, but for some reason it feels right. This feels right.

Your targets disappear in smoke, though not before you're able to register how precise your aim was - both, head shots. You think you should be worried. You can't help but be stunned; something in the back of your head nags at you that as right as this feels there is something terribly wrong happening. But then Jacob's voice echos in your head with a pleased "Good job," and the warm shiver you feel run down your back at his praise is enough to make you want to ignore your instincts and make him proud.

Wood splinters to the right of your head pulling you from your thoughts. You dive to hide behind the cover closest to you and wait, wracking your brain for where the shots could be coming from. You watch bullets embed themselves in the wall in front of you, creating jagged holes that seemingly
fade only seconds after they're made. From the trajectory, you can assume they're being made by someone standing higher than you and to your right. Confirming this, you hear someone shout above you during a lull in the shooting. Now is your chance.

You sprint out of hiding and lunge for the bottom of the ledge the person is standing at. You can hear them struggling, probably trying to reload their gun, though you can't see them. You wait until they're ready, until they walk right up to the edge of the ledge and poise forward to shoot where they thought you still were. And then you strike.

You grip their ankles and tug, sending them crashing and falling down, back sliding against rough wood as you drop them to your level. The gun falls from their hand and goes off, but you can't even bring yourself to jump. The moment their back hits the ground, you flip them and pull them up by the back of their collar. You can feel them trying to recover from the shock, but it doesn't matter. Brutally, thoughtlessly, you slam their head into the wall in front of them - over and over and over. There's a crunch that briefly snaps you from your daze - you're outside, it's dark, but the stars are bright and there's a gentle campfire burning and crackling behind you. There's blood and dead bodies surrounding you. You can't see any of their faces, either obscured by shadows or faced down in the dirt, but you can tell they're not Peggies by their clothes.

The man at your feet gasps and pleads for mercy with a mouth full of blood. He cowers in on himself, back turned towards you and howls, cries, whimpers... You think you may be sick. You take a step back and see the way his blood glistens against the bark of the tree you smashed him into. A hand touches your shoulder.

You're back in the room, and it's as if someone flicked a switch inside of you. Whatever horror you had been feeling is squashed and it feels like nothing when you pull your gun out and angle the barrel down directly at the back of the man's head.

You stop and your stomach twists, acidic and burning. The hand on your shoulder squeezes, "Rook," Jacob's voice is low - a warning. "Cull the herd."

What do you do?

[SHOOT]

[DON'T SHOOT]

[TURN THE GUN ON JACOB]
Act I

[MAKE A RUN FOR IT]

You make a run for it.

Something about all of this just doesn't feel right. You bypass the Magnum, but before you can even step foot into the next room something hard smashes against the backs of your legs, forcing you to your knees. You feel a hand grip the back of your head, short nails digging into your scalp. You know it's Jacob, but you can't see anything. The two men are gone and the room has dimmed, no longer crimson.

"You're weak," Jacob growls, pulling your head back and bearing your throat, "And you of all people should know what I do to the weak."

You feel the cold, smooth glide of the barrel of his gun slide up to your temple. Jacob presses his rough cheek to your own, opposite of the gun, "I told you a long time ago, little lamb," he starts, the sound of your so-called title stinging your ego like an insult, "You will obey me, one way," he whispers, and you hear the click of the safety unlock, "Or another."

(-3 interest with JACOB)

(-1 skill)

(-1 health)

[>>continue]
Act I

[TRY TO KNOCK THEM OUT]

You try to knock them out.

Although you truly don't want to kill anyone, the rage coursing through you edges you towards violence. Still, you're in control. Working on pure instinct, you launch yourself over the table, passing over the gun to kick the man closest into the wall. Upon contact, he explodes into a cool, dark mist, allowing you to land on your feet in his spot.

You turn to the other just as he pulls a gun out on you. Without thinking, you knock the weapon from his hands, ignoring the echoed  
BLAM  
of the sidearm firing. The man is stunned, giving you time to pull your arm back and slam your elbow into his face. There's no satisfying sickening crunch, nor the hard impact of his cheekbone molding to the point of your arm - only the feel of a breeze as he, too, turns into smoke.

The room is all at once silent, save for the buzz of the projector casting bright white light against the screen. You look around, dazed, confused, but most of all, scared.

You don't know how you did all of that. You used to get into fights all the time as a kid, but you have never, ever done anything this aggressive, coordinated, or otherwise well performed. You hear Jacob chuckle, the sound echoing off of the walls until it all focuses just behind you. He grips your shoulders before you can turn around, "Stop," he commands, all of the excess energy running through you is sapped away. You feel yourself go limp in his hold, your head throbbing as you try to wrap it around whatever the hell is going on.

"I forgot you had a knack for getting up close and..." He leans down, lips grazing your shoulder, "personal." Jacob sighs, fingers massaging your lax shoulders with precision, "Still, you didn't do it for the right reasons, but that's fine." He stands straight, and though you can't see it, you know he's grinning, "You're just a little off your game. I'm sure we can fix that right up." Jacob tenses, digging his nails into you where he once seemingly comforted, "I will be seeing a lot more you, Rook, no need to worry..."

( +3 interest with JACOB )

( +1 skill )

[>>continue]
Act I

Chapter Summary

**WARNING:**
Graphic depictions of violence, blood and gore

**[SHOOT]**

You *shoot*.

He doesn't disappear. You watch as he's thrown forward by the force, the back of his head blown open into a macabre display of brain matter and blood. The redness of the room flickers, and with one hard blink you're outside in a dark forest with the smell of blood being carried by the warm Montana wind. You hear someone curse behind you - quiet, disbelieving. You become distinctly aware of the stickiness of the blood and... *pieces* that had splattered on you. Your throat feels thick.

There's a shuffle of boots in dry grass approaching you from behind, though you don't turn away from the man at your feet. He's motionless. Silent. There's a dark pool spreading around him and you watch in confusion as it begins seeping closer towards you, turning the fine dirt dark and thick. You don't move until it nearly touches your booted feet. Jumping back, you feel as if your senses are coming back to you.

You just killed a man and you don't even know how you did it. You weren't... this isn't what you remembered. You were in a bunker and then you were here... Where even is 'here'?

Before you can look around, your back is met with someone's chest and their arms enclose around you. You startle and in your haste drop your gun as you frantically try to remove yourself from their grasp. When it becomes clear you're trapped, you have no choice but to calm down to preserve your energy. Your back goes rigid, however, when you hear a deep, familiar grunt. Jacob presses his rough cheek against your own as he hums that song that makes your brain itch.

Rocking you gently, Jacob presses his lips against the shell of your ear, "After all this time, you still haven't changed..." you feel the rumble of his chest against your back and smell the heedy scent of gunpowder and trace hints of plain soap mingled in with the blood and dirt. The smell makes you nauseous. You hear more than feel Jacob pressing a chaste kiss just beneath your ear, but can't be sure. Nothing feels real and your head is throbbing.

"Can't wait to see you back in action, kitten..." Jacob muses as he moves his chin to rest on the top of your head, still refusing to let you go. As much as you know it's wrong, somehow his presence is comforting. He's so warm and big and all you want to do is go to sleep.

Jacob continues to sway you back and forth, humming softly until your panic and the rising threat of sickness in your stomach ebbs. You want to think that it's your sudden headache that has you closing your eyes and falling back further into his chest, but you know it's can't be that simple. Even as you feel yourself drifting to sleep, a small part of you tries to claw its way back into your consciousness to try to warn you. The message, however, falls on deaf ears.

( *+5 interest with JACOB* )
( -3 focus )
Act I

[DON'T SHOOT]

You don't shoot.

The man trembles, still curled at your feet, and you can feel the anger inside of you fizzle until it's all but snuffed out. You kneel and touch him on the back-

You're outside somewhere, unknown to you, surrounded by dark trees and rustling brush. The light emanating from the moon and the fire behind you cast tall shadows on the dry dirt ground. You can hear the man at your feet whimpering, pleading in low, raspy sobs. He's thin, all bones and skin, clear signs of starvation - his shirt is torn, covered in dirt, and dank splotches you can probably assume is old blood.

Guilt begins to eat away at you - your stomach turning in on itself as bile threatens to rise. You take a deep breath, soothing yourself as you recall what you've been through. The last thing you remember is a red room and Jacob’s deep, even voice. You were trapped, just following orders, trying to please through mindless slaughter. Jacob brought you here, out in the open...

You glance down at the injured man and debate briefly whether you should help him or escape, but before you can do either, you notice three shadows behind you through the light of the campfire. You see one reach towards you.

This might be your only chance.

[RUN]

[FIGHT BACK]

[SURRENDER]
Act I

Chapter Summary

WARNING
Graphic depictions of violence, blood and gore

[TURN THE GUN ON JACOB]

You turn the gun on Jacob.

You’re not even positive he’s with you, but when you turn around, you fire off three rounds regardless. The red room flickers and then you find yourself in a darkened forest lit only by a campfire. There are two men on either side of Jacob, one of whom dives to the side while the other tumbles drops to the ground, clenching his arm with a muffled shout.

Jacob’s face twists in disgust and fury, a riptide of rage painted against the scars across his face. Both men struggle to find their footing and decidedly stand tall on either side of Jacob once they find their courage as well. Though, smartly, they give their leader a wide berth. The uninjured cultist steps towards you, nearly crossing in front of Jacob before he remembers his place.

“The other traitor,” Jacob states without taking his eyes off of you. Needing no further prompting, the Peggie walks past you, and you can’t help but watch, both confused and frozen in fear.

Standing over the still cowering man beside you, the Peggie points his rifle down and fires one quick burst before you can even react. You feel something wet fleck against your cheek, ears ringing from the proximity of the gunfire.

Still, you have enough sense to remember horror and recognize it as it floods through you. The man’s head is no longer recognizable. Everything is raw and ragged and splashed across the tree trunk in chunks of meat and skin and so much fucking blood. You stumble back and away from the scene, only to trip and fall onto your ass. Your stomach churns and you can’t help yourself - you turn onto your hands and knees and begin dry heaving onto the ground.

Spit and sour liquid are all the come out, but it doesn’t help the sickness roiling in your gut. In your peripherals, you see Jacob too late to react properly. Sure, you manage to lift your gun, but Jacob easily grabs your wrist with one hand, pulls you up, and wrings your limb until the bones crackle against each other and your grip loosens. You cry out as it drops to the ground and Jacob hulls you up and back with a hand pressed beneath your ribs. In a short few moments, you’re pulled into his hard chest and trapped between his arms.

You’re standing inches before the corpse, and as badly as you don’t want Jacob to hurt you, you also don’t want to have to look at the mangled body any longer. You try to turn your head, but then the muzzle of a gun presses under your chin, expectant, forcing you to stare ahead. You shut your eyes and stomach churning, but the sight is already burned into your memory.

"I should have known you were going to disappoint me, Rook." Jacob says, voice dangerously calm, "You were weak when I first met you, and you're weak now." His words hurt for some reason, though you can't for the life of you imagine why you care what he thinks. Bile threatens to rise again,
frothing at the idea of yourself engrossed in his command; you twitch, the need to run multiplied in its urgency.

"Let go of me!" You thrash, all growl and no bite, and disproving your own bluff of strength by hesitating when Jacob burrows the firearm further into the hollow beneath your chin.

“I should kill you, Rookie,” Jacob growls, “I shouldn’t waste anymore of my time coddling you, but Joseph... The Father wants you." You barely have the time to register his words before he tosses you to the ground, forcing a muffled grunt from your lips as your nose collides with wet dirt. Oh fuck... No, no, no, no - desperately, you scramble to gather yourself from the bloody dirt, but someone kicks you in the side hard enough to turn you on to your back.

Your vision blurs as you try to lift your arms up to shield yourself, but the Peggie that had shot the man is now on top of you, one hand held tight over your throat while the other rears back with a closed fist. Behind him, you see Jacob glare down at you with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Don't disappoint me, again, little lamb."

(-5 interest with JACOB)

(-2 focus)

(-1 health)

[>>continue]
Act I

[RUN]

You run.

You don't care how easy it would be to capture you - you just run. Ducking past and behind the tree you begin your panicked sprint through the woods, jumping over fallen logs and ditches, skirting past tree trunks and bushes. You don't chance looking backwards, though the desire is palpable. Just when you think you have enough time to stop and think, you hear the echo of a gunshot somewhere behind you. A coldness numbs your limbs, mind blanking in horror. The hunt has begun.

You swallow down your fear, the lump thick in your throat being replaced with calculated terror. Thoughts of wolves chewing through meat flash through your mind, but you force them into silence. You have to be strong.

You start back up into a sprint, glancing backwards only once to note the distant shadows of two men gaining on you not too far back. They don't seem to notice you directly, but they are following what has to be your obvious trail. You keep running.

Losing them is your top most priority, almost blinding you to any other dangers as you weave through the shadowy forest like water carving through rock. Your focus and momentum can only carry you so far, however. You are not water, and running without a destination in mind is haphazard at best. The temptation to keep an eye on the cultists chasing after you wins out against your common sense and steers you from your path.

You end up smacking face first into a wide berth of a wall, possibly a tree? But the warmth and the arms that enclose around you, suffocating you against worn, thin cotton, tells you otherwise. You fight against the force, flinging what little you can at the man restraining you, but he just picks you up and drops you on the ground hard enough that your teeth click together as you're pressed face first into the dirt.

Before you can turn over, the man straddles your back, knees pinning your arms at your hips. With a grunt you try to roll and catch sight of muscled, rash covered forearms moving to wind thick fingers through your hair. Jacob. It's Jacob! The words “oh, no” don’t do the dizzying hysteria building in your chest any justice.

You want to scream and cry, force him off of you, but all you manage to choke out are a few strangled gasps and sobs. Jacob settles half of his weight on your spine hard enough to render you motionless. "Looks like someone needs more training." There’s a vicious growl in his tone, blended in with a bitter, mocking chuckle.

One of his hands keeps your face pressed down while the other moves up from the ground beside your head and out of your line of vision. Everything falls silent, and then you hear it:

"Only you~"

Your vision dims, dyed a deep crimson. Your chest constricts in tight, wrenching breaths. You snarl, trying to battle the oncoming storm, but you’re only a deputy - only a lamb, struggling against torrential waves of hypnotic music. The song grows in intensity, leading you away, back into the red
rooms.

"...Can make this world seem bright," the song continues until you can’t differentiate the sky from the ground, "...Only you, can make the darkness bright."

There’s a pull somewhere in your head, making everything grow louder and louder until it snaps, cutting everything out - the song, your vision - everything is quiet, without light. Then you hear him,

"Time to come home, Rook."

( -5 interest with JACOB )

( -3 focus )

( -1 health )

[>>continue]
Act I

Chapter Summary

WARNING:
Graphic depictions of violence, Physical abuse

[FIGHT BACK]

You fight back.

Turning on your heel, you manage to get in two shots before someone clocks you in the jaw. You stumble backwards, falling on top of the man, who in return yelps in distress. You roll off of him, but you're immediately kicked in the stomach and forced onto your side, gun falling from your hand as you try to catch your breath between waves of sickness.

Adrenaline flows through your veins, granting you a relatively quick recovery. You continue to play the part of the distressed and helpless, waiting until the shadow of the man nearly eclipses your entire body before you launch your legs out in the same motion as flinging your arm around in a clumsy punch. You best effort is quickly put down. It's a blur of limbs until a sorted few grab both your arms and legs, flipping you fully onto your back.

You continue to struggle, though it's an exhaustive, strenuous battle between a relatively inexperienced lamb and a determined, vicious wolf. You can’t win, and the fact is quickly reiterated by one huge hand grabbing you by the chin and slamming your head into the packed dirt. You bite through the sides of your cheeks unintentionally, though the blood pools in your mouth nonetheless.

You’re just trying to refocus your vision when you’re hauled upwards by your throat and then immediately thrown to the side by a hard fist slamming into your jaw. The bottom crevice of your lip splits at the impact. You groan, head throbbing, blood and spit dribbling out of your mouth as you panic is drowned out by fatigue.

Again, you’re brought up, and again you’re sent sprawling into the dirt by a very precise punch rocketed into the same bruised cheek the first had landed before. You moan when you’re picked up once more, this time by the back of your shirt. You’re turned in someone’s rough grasp and can’t help but cringe and clench your eyes shut as you prepare for a second hit. This time, however, you’re pushed - tossed away by the wolf that had seemingly deemed your sudden lack of reaction boring. You stumble backwards and fall into a broad, warm chest.

"It was a good try, honey," Jacob soothes, and you can feel the rumble of his voice in his chest. Lifting your chin, Jacob looks down at you with ice in his gaze, so cold it hurts, "But you have it all wrong, Rook. You'll only leave when I want you to leave."

You blink hard and try to make the ache in your temples lessen, but it doesn't stop. Jacob, with his harsh brutality, throws you to the ground. Your head collides with the floor with a solid THUD, and you can’t help, but succumb to the weakness in your limbs begging you to just stay down - not that it matters anymore. You can’t even muster the energy to open your eyes.

"Pick them up," Jacob's voice grows distant, barely an echo as you feel yourself slipping away, "It’s
almost time for the reunion."

( +5 interest with JACOB )

( -1 focus )

( -3 health )
Act I

Chapter Summary

WARNING:
Graphic depictions of blood and gore

[SURRENDER]

You surrender.

You’re wise enough to know when you’re beat. Jacob has a hold on you, a leash made of thorns, and you yearn for the pain to come; to follow his lead despite not knowing why and to cower when he desires your fear. You don’t have to look to know it’s Jacob who approaches you first. The dark shadows that make up his frame are distinct to him, the move of his arm and the dark outline of gun bringing forth a part of you that acknowledges, willingly, where this action will end. The barrel of his gun aligns with the back of your head.

"Drop the gun, Deputy." Jacob warns, clearly seething under the mask of cool control he displays. You follow his instructions and drop to a knee to set your weapon aside. “Up,” he commands, and like a loyal dog, you obey and stand with an ease you fear will set him off. In your peripherals you see a Peggie quickly approach, pick the sidearm up, and then step just out of view.

The sound of Jacob’s solid footsteps almost makes you want to cringe away, but you remain unmoving as he rounds you, gun still pointed for a swift execution, until he stands just in front of you. His gaze practically pierces through your soul; all the armor you have built up over the years, the false nonchalance and blasé outlook on life - all of it burns into ash under the scrutinizing blaze of his glare. Jacob doesn’t just demand respect, he exudes a presence that makes every other alternative appear fruitless. There is nothing beneficial to gain by disobeying to Jacob. Whatever he wants will either find its place in his hierarchy or it will be culled. Against your better judgement, you wonder where you stand in his animal kingdom, if at all.

You don’t realize you’re shaking until he grabs you by your shoulders and pulls you into his chest. Under a tight fear and need to please him, you follow the compulsion without thought, you reach wrap your arms around him. It’s the wrong move; it’s so obviously the wrong move that when he pries you off of him, and man-handles you into turning around, you’re not even that surprised. Still, Jacob keeps you close, your back to his front and his arms caging you in. You’re facing the man still cowering on the ground and watch as Jacob places a gun in your head and guides you until its end is level with the man on the ground.

You can’t breathe.

"The weak have no place among us after the Collapse, Deputy." Jacob nuzzles your temple, the coarse hair from his beard irritating your skin, but the gesture is hardly affectionate - he's mocking you. Coddling you because you're- "Weak." Jacob clips, and it takes you a moment to realize he’s not talking to you anymore.
The man on the ground takes a deep breath, his sobs turning wretched, desperate. Still, he does not turn to face either of you, and that seems to only make Jacob angrier. "Pathetic. A cowardly waste of meat. You couldn't protect your family, your friends - you can't even protect yourself." There's a silence filled with nothing but the nameless man's muffled weeping, the rustling of the trees, and the crackling campfire. "At least turn around and face your death like man."

If anything, Jacob's words make the man curl further into himself. Jacob scoffs. You want to throw up. There is no way you can watch this… You turn to look off to the side, eyes closing, but Jacob is quick to grab your chin and force you to watch. A single warning - one that won't be given again. Jacob tilts his head down until his beard brushes against your shoulder, his lips against your ear, "The herd will be culled. The weak will return to the ground and the strong will inherit the earth."

Jacob shoots the man before you can close your eyes. The sound echoes in your head, the viscera - the dark sheen of blood, chunks of what you suppose is brain, and fragments of skull are splattered everywhere. The scene imprints itself in your mind before you can try to forget.

"I don't tolerate incompetence, Deputy." Jacob’s voice is measured, but little more than a growl. He releases you, roughly, as if holding you makes him sick. You want to turn around, itching to do something - attack him maybe, but one of the Peggies knocks the backs of your knees, forcing you to the ground.

They grab at you, all rough hands and uneven strength - one tugs a dark hood over your head while the other ties your arms behind your back. When they're done, you foolishly think that's it, but the slam of something hard at the back of your head reminds you of the cruelty you had somehow forgotten.

(-4 interest with JACOB)

(-3 focus)

(-2 health)

[>>continue]
Act I, Part II

Chapter Summary

Thank you so much Buttercup_Bee for editing both part I and II of act I! I really appreciate your work and the time and effort you put into helping me with this fic. Please check out their fics by clicking their name or go to tumblr to check out their blog! <3

Other places you can find me:
Tumblr (personal) || Tumblr (writing) || Ko-fi

Thank you for reading and I hope you guys enjoy the update!

continue...

Everything is dark and suffocating - like you're trapped in an ice box - hopeless and cold and isolated. It doesn't help that you can't even tell if you're awake or not - the dark is thick and as blinding as a mask over your eyes. Are you dreaming? Is any of this real? There's seemingly only empty space around you. In some ways this is worse than anything you've experienced so far. Even Jacob's red rooms are better than this nothingness.

Suddenly, you hear a gentle rustling behind you - the sound of a low, familiar hum and when you turn to look, it's as if your eyes have been opened.

A few feet away, Jacob stands in front of a chair, face shadowed by the bright cast of a single, focused light bulb hanging from a wire. You look around confused, for the most part, as you can't exactly make out the details of this new place. It's different from the Jacob's rooms - the trials that filled you with so much anger and hate. Here, in the darkness, you feel at ease.

Passively, you watch as Jacob approaches you and takes hold of your shoulders. His touch is rough and firm as he guides you, urging you wordlessly to sit in the wooden chair. When you're seated, the light cuts out and he disappears from sight. You aren't given any time to react or panic. Something binds your arms and legs into place, like snakes coiling around your limbs. They're rough and scratchy, and somewhere in your mind you recognize them as rope. As your mind slowly comes back to you, you feel the echoes of a person standing behind you - their presence warm, breath tickling your neck, heedy cologne filling your lungs.

"Time to come back home..." Jacob whispers, lips ghosting your ear, "Come back-"

"-Deputy."

You jerk in your binds, eyes snap open and meet bright blues. Disoriented, you jolt forward in an attempt to stand, but are held still by the pull of your wrists tied to the arms of a chair. You look around, frantic, your heart beating violent enough that you can feel the rhythm in your throat. A hand guides your gaze forward with a low "shh" followed by a humorless chuckle. Your eyelids flutter and then you see him: John Seed. He grins and reaches forward, thumbs digging into the meat of your shoulders, "Oh, Jacob really did a number on you, didn't he?"
A chill sprints down your spine, prickling your skin with goosebumps as you try to recall your situation. You had been captured after trying to evade the cult Marshal Burke wanted to put down. You’re not sure where he is or where the sheriff and your fellow deputies are, but it looks like you're on your own for the time being.

You try to remember more, but your memories are fuzzy and disjointed. Pieces are missing, you think, but from what you can recall, Joseph Seed called you "the Lamb" and gave you and his siblings a lecture about his bullshit religion. After that Jacob dragged you out and- a sudden sharp pain cuts your memory short. You try to blink against it, cringing as the ache radiates throughout your skull.

You blink, again, and see glimpses of something that feels like it came from a dream: raw, tears of meat and dead deer flash on a bright white screen while a soft tune plays in the background. Only you. Only you. You shake your head. Jacob Seed. Fucking Jacob Seed did something to you, didn't he? His touch still lingers in the back of your mind - invasive, violating, but you can’t lose focus.

John regards you with a half-lidded stare, almost appearing bored while he watches you struggle to climb out of his brother’s mind tortures and back to reality. He releases his hold on your shoulders with a little wistful sigh before stalking off somewhere out of your visual range.

After a few moments, the headache subsides and you find yourself exhausted - muscles lax, but aching as if you had been exercising for hours. When you feel the last vestiges of your now completely lost memories flow from you, you find that you barely have the energy to turn your head to look for John, so you decide to take in your surroundings.

You’re in a barely lit bedroom with a closed door to your left and a closed window to your right. From what you can tell, it’s dark outside; the faint hue of blue moonlight filters in through sheer, drawn curtains, contrasted by the yellow glow of what you can assume is a lamp somewhere behind you.

The scrape of wood on wood pulls you from your observations, making you jump and steady yourself just as John rounds you with a chair in hand. None too gently, he drops it in front of you before taking a seat close enough that your knees almost touch. Your eyes meet and his reaction is both irritating and anxiety inducing. What exactly is he planning for you?

The corners of John’s eyes crinkle and his lips tilt in a smooth curve, devious with a certain eerie kind of glee. He reaches forward and smooths your hair back - a would-be affectionate gesture if not for the sadistic smirk he’s giving you. "You’re back," John murmurs, tilting his head at you innocently, "I'm surprised."

Before you can respond, John’s once soft touch turns rough. He clutches the back of your head, grip brutal, and tugs you forward. In your peripheral, you see him brandish a large knife and your stomach drops.

John dances the tip of it along your cheek, teasing you with the possibility. You hold your breath, bracing yourself for whatever for the inevitable, but just as he runs the sharp blade down beneath your jawline, he releases his hold on you and sits back.

You release the breath that had stalled in your chest and lean back too. You eye John warily. He continues to grin at you, "Honestly, I’m glad you came back when you did.” John admits in a tone that sounds so easy he might as well be discussing the weather, “I thought I was going to have to call Jacob back in to wake you up, but you appear to be more resilient than most."

Swallowing deep, you force yourself to remain calm. It takes everything in you to focus and collect
your thoughts. You think John wants a conversation, but would it be wise to play into his game?

You decide to...

[STAY QUIET]

[ASK: "Where am I?"]
Act I

[STAY QUIET]

You decide to stay quiet.

You're unsure how John will react if you say the wrong thing, so you opt for the safest decision and keep your mouth shut. That, however, doesn't seem to please John. His playful smirk turns vicious, and, in one swift movement, he stands with a force that sends his chair clattering behind him and that knife you hoped he pulled out for show is pressed back beneath your chin.

There is something bemused in the way John looks you over, as if he's trying to figure you out. You don't move; you scarcely breathe - all you can do is wait... Is he going to kill you? Or does he want something from you? You don't know what you could possibly offer him, but you're willing to put just about anything on the table so long as you get to keep living.

The tense moment is cut when John lets out a quiet, plaintive sigh and moves to pick his chair back up and reposition it in front of you. This time, when he sits in front of you, he keeps his knife flat on his lap, one elbow dug into his thigh as he props his cheek up to casually challenge you to meet his gaze.

"Y'know..." John feigns curiosity, shyness, and grabs his knife to tap, tap, tap the flat of the knife against your knee, "If it wasn't for my trust in Joseph's plan, I would have had you and your friends killed a long time ago." He pauses as if he expects you to interject, but you remain neutral, hiding your reactions as best you can despite the sudden sickness curling in your stomach.

"What, you're not even going to try to pretend to be bothered?" John's question isn't so much a question as it is a mockery, "Do you truly care so little for your fellow law enforcement officers that you won't so much as flinch at the mention of them being alive? Would you care if we killed them?" Again, you refuse to answer, and even go so far as to avoid eye contact now that you know, without a doubt, that he's fishing for a reaction.

John grabs you by your jaw, forcing you to face forward, "You will look at me when I'm talking to you, Deputy." He growls through clenched white teeth. You take a mental note of his rapid shift in mood. John doesn't seem stable. Maybe you could use that to your advantage?

When he's sure you're not going to look away, John releases you like he's tossing away garbage, nearly sending you falling backwards. You grunt, watching as he picks up the knife, again. Kicking his chair back, John stands to his full height so that you have to look up at him. He appears to enjoy the little flex of power he has over you, grin returning and his shoulders loosening.

John regards you coolly, like you're nothing but a bug to be squashed beneath his heel. His long-tailed coat flutters as he straightens it before once more stepping into your personal space, right between your bound legs, "Tell me; what are your sins, Junior Deputy?" He asks.

You, however, respond as any normal person would and look at John with the appropriate amount of confusion his question deserves.

John chuckles, the sound trailing off into a bitter sigh, "Oh, don't look at me like that, Deputy... It's just a question," he muses, "And a simple one at that."

You remain silent, watching, waiting. John's amusement wears thin, his teasing grin hardening into a
scowl. With one step, he's toe to toe with you. John's gaze never once leave yours, even as he twirls the knife once between his fingers and stabs down.

There's a dull 'plunk' of steel impaling wood that has you flinching, but you don't look down, refusing to break gaze with John. There isn't any pain emanating from where he plunged the knife. He hasn't hurt you... yet. He just wants a reaction. Don't give him a reaction.

John leans forward, hands clasping your bound arms, allowing him to rest some of his weight on you. He seems conflicted; expression flitting between irritation and something almost admiring. Lifting one hand from your arm, John takes your chin between his fore and thumb fingers, not guiding, but keeping you steady.

"All I want to know are your sins, Deputy. That's all." John's eyes are bright, imploring. In this light, he seems human, and you can almost forgot merely seconds ago he threatened you with a knife. He wears vulnerable and sincere well, but can you trust his expression to be anything more than a mask?

You...

[STAY QUIET]

[ASK: "Why?"]

[RESPOND: "I don't know."]

[RESPOND: "I'm not telling you jack shit."]
"Where am I?" and try your best not to feel too annoyed by the way John snorts and gives you a look as if saying 'you can't be serious'. Still, he doesn't seem mad, so that must count for something.

( +1 interest with JOHN )

"You're in Hope County, Deputy. Where else would you be?" John says, his tone teasing. He squeezes your shoulder gently, though the situation and who he is makes the action more menacing than playful.

Then, he laughs - the sound quiet, almost forced, though certainly mocking. You stare at him, growing increasingly uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as you find yourself when he stops laughing and tips his knife down, running the edge of it along the front of your green work shirt.

John shakes his head and peers down at you with a twinkle in his eyes, "Out of all the questions, Rook," he says, "You pick the one you already know the answer to?" John flicks the knife up and the button on your shirt flies off. You feel your chest tighten as he continues to cut the buttons away, working down until he reaches just above your belly-button, exposing your black undershirt to his piercing gaze. You can see your chest rise and fall in short, rapid breaths as you look down, though you try to remain calm.

You really don't like where this is going.

The silence in the room makes the sick feeling curling in your gut more prominent - it's unnerving. It doesn't help that John won't stop glaring at you, either. You're starting to think he might have a problem, but you think you'd feel a lot less... exposed if he just stopped looking at you like he wants to devour you.

"I can't see why Joseph-" John stops himself to smile, "The Father believes you can save us." He trails the knife down your undershirt, letting you feel the cold metal through the cotton, "You're nothing special, just a Junior Deputy in a county no one except God cares about." John captures your gaze again, and you're unsure how you should feel about the creeping heat flourishing your cheeks, "Yet," John drawls, knife halting its leisurely pace down your front to rest in your lap, "You're just as He said you would be. Quite the coincidence, don't you think?"

You both sit quietly for a while after that, looking at each other, though one of you is obviously much more uneasy than the other. It feels like an eternity has passed before John decides to move away and stand to his full height. He plucks his knife from your lap and sheathes it at his hip, looking you over after he does so with a small smile that feels like you're missing out on some grand secret that only he knows.

Breaking the tense atmosphere, John clears his throat, "I suppose it doesn't really matter, now, does it? You're here, and no matter my disappointment, I guess we'll just have to make do." John smiles at you, tilting his head, "I am curious, though... Tell me Deputy, what are your sins?

You raise a brow, but refrain from commenting before you've given his question some thought. Something in the back of your mind is telling you to avoid answering his question directly, however,
you're unsure how to go about doing so.

You decide to...

[STAY QUIET]

[ASK: "What do you want from me?"]

[REPLY: "I'm not sure what you mean."]
Act I

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

[ASK: "What do you want from me?"]

You ask:

"What do you want from me?" And try your best to meet John's stare with the hope that maybe he'll back off if he thinks you're not scared of him. Unfortunately for you, your defiance seems to only amuse John, and that knife you had been so keen on keeping at a healthy distance suddenly comes to rest beneath your jawline.

(+2 interest with JOHN)

Reflexively, you crane your neck back, brows furrowed and teeth clenched as John watches your reaction. He leans in with that same disturbing smile, knife poised dangerously close to slicing open your throat, "Don't you think I should be the one asking you that, Deputy?" He says, voice lilted and teasing as if he isn't threatening you with a blade pressed against your neck. "Were you not the one who flew into our county with the intent purpose of disrupting the peace?" John tilts his head to the side, "We were doing so well until you and your horsemen came and brought about the apocalypse."

With his free hand, John makes a wide, grand gesture before settling his palm on your knee, "However, I guess I should thank you for what you're going to do for us." John smiles, "The path to Eden's Gate has never been clearer than it is, right now."

When you don't immediately respond, John lets out a soft sigh and pulls the knife away. He sheathes it back in its hold on his hip and readjusts his position, hands cupping your cheeks, forcing you to look him in the eye, "You are the key to our salvation, Deputy. The world's fate rests on your shoulders - humanity's rebirth - its path an outcome of your making." John's smile is almost reverent, blue eyes wide as if he has been enlightened, though you're unsure by what.

One of his thumbs begins caressing the apple of your cheek, but before you could think of a way to react to it, he pulls away and stands to his full height. John gives you a toothy grin, "You ask what I want from you, Deputy, because you don't see that what I want doesn't matter. You, on the other hand, have choices. You can follow the path you are meant to take and assist in building humanity's last chance for survival, or you can help us destroy ourselves."

You find yourself falling quiet, trying to process everything John has said. Does he actually believe what he's spouting, or is he trying to mess with your head? As you look at him, he doesn't appear to be trying to mislead you - his trademark smirk enigmatic, though not malicious. For now, you believe you can trust that his words are, at the very least, the truth to him.

(+2 belief)

Clearing his throat, John folds his arms across his chest and regards you with a mild grin, "But, you led me off topic... or perhaps you were trying to avoid my question." John chuckles at the look on your face surprising you once more with the fact that he doesn't appear to be mad. For a man who enjoys cutting up your clothing and pushing a knife against your throat, he sure is patient. Or, maybe you just caught him in a good mood? Regardless, John doesn't do much more than smile at you fondly, "You're not so boring, are you?" John pauses only for a beat, not giving you a chance to
respond, "Well, I suppose we'll find out sooner or later."

Reaching for his belt, John unclips his radio and clicks it on. "We're done here. It's time to get the Deputy ready for our family dinner." John glances you over as he clicks the radio off and hooks it back on his belt. He crosses his arms, "Since you've been somewhat reasonable, I suppose I can give you a choice. I can assist you in preparing for the dinner, or Sister Faith can. Who would you prefer?"

Understanding how fickle an opportunity this is, you can't waste too much time in deciding.

You decide to...

[GO WITH JOHN]

[GO WITH FAITH]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
part iii to be released sometime in 2019 (sorry for the cliffhanger)
happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
[STAY QUIET]

You stay quiet.

You don't know what's going through John's head, but the fact that you're tied to this chair at his complete mercy doesn't exactly make you feel like being the most cooperative hostage. John inspects you for a few moments more, as if he's trying to be patient - giving you time to answer -, but after a while he realizes you aren't going to play along.

With an aggravated growl, John pushes away from you with enough force to send you and the chair skidding backwards. One of the legs catches, and suddenly your falling. You bite down, jaw straining and teeth grinding when your head slams against the oaken floor. Your sight dances with white spots, blackening at the edges.

Before you're able to collect yourself, you're hit with a wave of nausea when John grabs your knees and sits you right side up. The moment your feet hit the floor, John rips the knife from the splintered wood and points it at your stomach, "You must really have a death wish," he growls, "Here I am, trying my best to be the gracious host the Father told me to be and you just... keep acting like you. Don't. Care."

John stares you down, fingers twitching around the handle of the blade poised against your midsection, ready to disembowel you with a simple dip and flick of his wrist. It would be easy, wouldn't it? To just dispose of you, here and now, but John knows easy won't get him through Eden's Gate. He has to wait. He has to try harder. John grins and digs the knife in just enough to make you gasp - enough to slice through the material of your shirt, but not enough to cut flesh.

"...Or maybe you just don't understand, yet." John concedes, gently kneeling in front of you, "Maybe you just need a helping hand to lead you to the path." He doesn't even look at you as he moves the knife up and tears through the rest of your shirt. The sound of ripping fabric echoes in the quiet room. You freeze, eyes wide, heart hammering. What the fuck, what the fuck?

John shakes his head, more to himself than to you, and continues tearing through your shirt until it falls open, exposing your stomach and chest. Your ears and cheeks warm, the cold edge of embarrassment and fear feeling far more tangible than the knife he rests against your thigh. This isn't really happening, is it?

"Don't worry, Deputy," John looks up at you, blue eyes practically sparkling in the moonlight - determined, fearless. Then, he stands, and that once almost admirable gaze turns sinister. John's - no, Jacob's knife glints, and John's smile is downright vile, "I know how to pull confessions from even the most contemptuous souls..." John steps forward, you shrink back, and he just. Keeps. Smiling, "You will be saved, Deputy - whether you want to be, or not."

( -3 interest JOHN )

( -1 focus )
end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
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happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

[ASK: "Why?"]

You ask:

"Why?" and watch as John's soft expression drops. He almost looks offended.

"Why?" John repeats, "What do you mean 'why'?" His grip on your chin is harsher, almost equaling that of his hold on your arm. You're sure you're going to bruised by the end of the night, but that's perhaps the least of your worries. "Deputy, I know that my brother put you through some trouble earlier, but I find it exceptionally difficult to believe you can't comprehend why you need to confess your sins."

You would roll your eyes if the remembrance of Jacob's tortures didn't flash through your mind, making your temples ache. Still, you manage a sarcastic scoff, blinking rapidly to disperse the thought, "Oh, so that's what you're calling it, then? 'Some trouble'?"

You feel your muscles tense, then relax. A shot of anger - empty, blinding fury - surges through you. Meat, blood, dead, pathetic carcasses of the weak- no, stop thinking about it. Stop. Thinking.

John lets out an exasperated sigh and tears himself away, taking his knife with him and almost toppling you over with the frantic strength of his exhaustion. He begins pacing, blade held so tightly in his fist his knuckles blister white. After a few moments, John eases himself, but instead of appearing sympathetic or at the very least amused, he faces you with a tight-lipped glower.

"You need to confess in order to be accepted into Eden's Gate." John approaches you, arms open, though his shoulders remain rigid, lined with aggression, "I want to help you see your wrong doings and assist you in correcting them. I want to help you realize your potential, I want-"

This time, you roll your eyes before you catch yourself doing so and John's preaching halts. In the face of your blatant disrespect, John is forced to restrain himself.

He takes a deep breath and waits one moment. Two. He closes his eyes and breathes in and out. When he opens them, the look on your face is maddening - amused and- you're laughing at him. How dare you fucking laugh at him! John's on you before you can blink, his hand constricting your throat, with the other carelessly digs the knife into your shirt and rips up through the cloth. Your undershirt and uniform shirt both being torn in his aggression.

You shake, struggling to remove yourself from his hold, "Hey, what the-!"

"You must think this is a joke, Deputy!" John bellows, a tone much lower than his normal speaking voice, nearly distorted by the growl that wrenches through it. John deepens his cut, rough hands working through cotton and skin alike - shallow, uneven cuts paint sharp lacerations along your stomach and rib cage. "You must think I'm crazy - that Eden's Gate doesn't exist, but it does and you will burn if you don't seek absolution!"

You shout when the knife slips up from your shirt, John's hand moving too quickly and causing him to not only cut part of your collarbone, but your jaw as well. You struggle, grunting, "You-" you start, but John is quick to cover your mouth, smearing blood along your cheek. The knife clatters to
the ground somewhere as you fight against his hold. With one hand on your throat and the other silencing you, John is able to quickly gain leverage by pressing his knee against the seat of the chair between your legs and pull you forward.

"Shut up! Just shut. Up!" He forces you to look up into his eyes, their depths swirling with hatred and disgust, "This isn't a game, Deputy. If I don't- if you don't confess your sins to me I cannot guide you down the path to Eden's Gate. And if I don't guide you, you will burn and die with nothing but your sins to comfort you."

John's pupils are blown wide, gaze hyperfixed on your own. He breathes hard, almost panting, but it's not like you're faring much better. With his hand pressed so forcefully against your mouth, you can't even try to bite him to alleviate his hold. You're trapped, and for once, without an exit in sight.

( -4 interest with JOHN )

( -3 health )

( -2 focus )

[>>continue (2)]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
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happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
You respond:

"I don't know." Your brow raises, conveying the same question, "How would I know what my sins are? It's not like I keep track." You're unsure if what you're asking is legitimate or if you're just trying to get on John's good side - either way, he seems to pause at your commentary, even going so far as to release you from his grasp.

John stands and considers you; tilting his head, his eyes narrowing, "Are you truly asking, or are you trying to be smart?"

You can see this interaction going two different ways depending on your answer. You could tell John off, as he would rightly deserve considering your current position, or you could get more information that could benefit you later on. Or maybe... maybe you are actually curious about what he has to say. Regardless, you need to pick a tactic.

You...

[REPLY SARCASTICALLY]

[REPLY SINCERELY]
Act I

[RESPOND: "I'm not telling you jack shit."]

You respond:

"I'm not telling you jack shit," you snarl, "So, you can tell the 'Father' that he can go fuck himself." You glare, anger clouding your better judgement. You know this isn't exactly the smartest thing you could have said, but you're too pressed to care.

"Ah, well..." John trails off as if he had been expecting this reaction from you. With a gentle sigh that rolls into cheap laughter, John pulls his radio off of his belt and clicks it on, "The Deputy is being uncooperative. I need you here." You watch him in silence, determined to not show any fear or remorse for your outburst despite his words setting you on edge.

After he's done, John tucks clips his radio back and stares at you quietly. He approaches you to yank out the knife he embedded in the chair, sheathe it back on his hip, and then return to where he stood before.

A few moments pass where neither of you speak, then you hear the distant echo of heavy footsteps approaching. You turn, watching the door as it creaks open, revealing two armed cultists. The biggest one steps forward first, giving John a respectful nod to which John responds by motioning towards you, "Well?" he says, "Get to it; we don't have all night."

You open your mouth to say something, but are cut off by the sudden collision of a huge, meaty fist slamming into your cheek. The impact sends you and the chair clattering to the ground, your head cracking against the wooden floor hard enough that your ears begin ringing. You aren't given time to adjust before you're hauled up, still tied to the chair.

There's a distinct sense of vertigo when you're finally right side up. That, however, doesn't last long. You're punched, again, though, this time his fist slides and connects with your nose. A sickening crunch sounds, followed by an unholy, searing pain. Your vision goes black, and you wonder if you were knocked unconscious, but you feel yourself being lifted and sat up, again.

A pair of hands grab your shoulders and shake you. It takes a few moments, before you're able to open your eyes, vision refocusing. The entire left side of your face feels warm and tight, aching as the bruises form. Through your blurred vision, you make out blue eyes, though not an ounce of regret lingers in them.

You look from John's eyes to his lips; they move, but you his words a muffled, like you're underwater. Your temples throb, and something wet trickles down your lower lip. Reflexively, you try to lick the spot to itch away the feeling, but the attempt only causes you to hiss. Every inch of your jaw aches, throbbing through tight muscle and radiating outwards through your inner ear.

( -3 health )

( -3 focus )

John takes your chin between his thumb and forefinger and roughly tilts your head up to look at him. He turns your head from left to right, your hearing clearing up just as he says, "-come on, Deputy. He didn't even hit you that hard."
You can't help but scoff, frowning as the steady pounding in your temples gets worse and worse.

Uncaring of your pain, John pats your injured cheek mockingly, ignoring your sharp hiss and subsequent groan to instead look you over with an unimpressed scowl, "Well, this is... disappointing." He says, though he doesn't sound disappointed in the least. If anything, he sounds like he's having a damn good time. Fucking asshole.

When your head drops, John grabs your cheeks, purposely putting pressure on your swelling jaw and cheekbone as he forcibly brings your attention back on him, "You know, Joseph said you would either be our destruction or our salvation, but maybe he overestimated your worth." John flexes his fingers, digging his nails into your swelling cheek and reveling in your pained expression, "I mean, how can you do anything even remotely destructive when you can't even take a few punches."

Your blood boils at his words. What you wouldn't give to rip into his smug face and give him a taste of his own medicine, but would potentially hurting yourself worse be worth it?

What should you do?

[STAY QUIET]

[REPLY: "What the hell do you want from me?"]

[REPLY: "Funny. You talk tough, but don't even do your own dirty work."]
Act I

[STAY QUIET]

You stay quiet.

You know there's something off about his question. Call it intuition, call it your sixth sense, but you don't think there's an answer you could give him that would satisfy his curiosity in a way that wouldn't risk bringing bodily harm on yourself.

Project Eden's Gate is, after all, a radical religious cult, and a violent one at that. Though, you're unsure of their exact doctrine, you also feel that it's safe to assume that they're based loosely on Christianity and from what you understand, sins aren't exactly good. For now, it seems it would be wiser to see how this plays out rather than make a foolhardy assumption and get yourself injured, or worse.

John waits a few moments, giving you time to say something, but you stick to your guns. Upon accepting your silence, John takes a deep breath and clasps his hands in front of himself, "So, am I to take your silence as an admittance to your wrong doings?"

Again, you stay quiet. Though, maybe this isn't any better, if this is how he's going to play it, saying something else would probably be just as bad.

The atmosphere around you is tense, and you think you can see agitation flash across John's face before he manages reign himself in and once more don that vaguely amiable grin. "Deputy," John moves his chair closer, making sure your attention is on him as he reaches forward and almost reassuringly grasps your knee, "From your silence I can only assume your life is rife with sin." His blue gaze flickers with darkness - pointedly staring into your eyes as if he's trying to glare into your soul, "If you were clean, you would have said so, and since you have remained silent..." he allows his words to drift off and hang in the air between you.

Still, you refuse to speak, daringly staring back even though your heart hammers in your chest. You're not sure what you should or could say at this point that would make this situation better. John appears to be fishing for an answer, but which is the right one? Would it even be smart to play along with his request?

Sighing, John pats your knee and sits back to look you over. He seems disappointed, but not entirely off-put by your lack of response. Perhaps he saw this reaction coming. This can't be the first time he has asked someone this question - he's too calm about this. You try to wrack your brain for information regarding John's position in the Project, but you only really know that he's a lawyer and that he has money. Shit. Maybe you should have really tried to read through those documents instead of messing around.

John clears his throat, bringing you out of your thoughts, "I don't think you understand how dire this situation is for you; if you don't allow me to help you achieve absolution, you won't be able to walk the path towards Eden's Gate." He leans forward, still staring, trying to suss you out. "Is that what you want? To be left a bare corpse for the vultures of this world to pick at once the Collapse happens?"

John pulls out the knife, again, but he doesn't point it at you. You're almost positive by now that his use of it is mostly an intimidation tactic, but you're not really going to risk your life betting on it remaining so. "I suppose I have to guess then." John hums thoughtfully, running the knife up and
down your thigh before suddenly stopping, letting out a vague "mhm" noise, and staring you down, "You've spent your youth in filth - gambling or perhaps distracting yourself with sins of the flesh. You've poisoned your body with drinking or drugs, or both, and have otherwise marred any and all chances you have of reaching Eden's Gate." John smiles and resumes running the tip of his knife along your jean clad thigh, "Am I right?"

You glance from the knife to John. You don't suspect you have the luxury of staying silent this time. You need to answer him, even if what you decide to say is a lie.

You...

[REPLY: "No."]

[REPLY: "Yes."]

[REPLY: "Fuck off."]
Act I

[REPLY: "I'm not sure what you mean."]

You reply:

“I’m not sure what you mean.” Though, in all honesty, you’re more unsure whether or not you’re just saying that in a desperate bid to stave off the inevitable or if you’re truly curious. Either way, John doesn’t seem pleased or displeased with your response.

Instead, he hums thoughtfully, looking you over for a long while before finally sighing and scooting his chair closer, if that were even possible. "Yours sins, Deputy," he says, practically hissing the word as if that would make his meaning clearer. When you just look at him appearing as confused as you are unsettled, John takes a deep breath, "Are you trying to tell me you don't know what sins you've committed or that you don't know what sins are?"

You feel your face heat up. Is he calling you stupid? Who doesn't know what sins are? Forget the fact that billions of people around the world adhere to some form of religion, but pop culture is full of references to ideologies that involve sinning. There are even entire shows and movies that depict the effects of sinning with those ideologies in mind. You would literally have to be living under a rock to have never heard what sins are - that, or you just don't have a freaking dictionary. You think you might be a little offended.

How do you respond?

[REPLY SARCASTICALLY]  

[REPLY SINCERELY]
Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[REPLY: "No."]

You reply:

"No." He did say that if you admitted to not having any sins, you'd be deemed clean. Maybe he was being straightforward?

John's smile curves cruelly, and, all at once, you feel distinctly like you've made a terrible mistake.

(-2 interest with JOHN)

"Lying will get you no where, Deputy," John coos, "Do you really think you, of all people, are free of sin? Do you think that you're better than me? Better than the Father?" John stands, grabs the collar of your shirt, and uses his knife to begin cutting through it, "Your flesh may be unmarked, but your sins must be identified and accounted for so that you may reach atonement." When your undershirt has been flayed open, John grins and tips the knife down, cutting just lightly into the skin just beneath your collar bone. "We'll leave this space here for your most pervasive sin, Deputy, though I already have an idea as to what that will be."

John leans back and looks you over, humming to himself thoughtfully. You squirm under his gaze, feeling much too exposed to try to remain calm. John looks up from your abdomen after a while and meets your eyes with a slightly less conniving grin. "I must confess myself that I assumed this would be much more difficult, but you haven't been nearly as unruly as your other officers." John puts his knife back into the sheathe at his hip and then moves to pull his chair back in again.

When he sits down, he levels you with an understanding expression - not quite a smile, but also not a glare. "In fact, your Sloth is, in a way, soothing. You're predictable for such a supposedly destructive force... perhaps Joseph picked the wrong deputy."

You frown, "What's that supposed to mean?"

John looks you over briefly before calmly standing, ignoring your question to pull his radio off his belt and click it on, "I believe we're done here." he says, not bothering to wait for a reply before he clicks the radio off and begins walking towards the door.

"I'll see you at dinner, Deputy." John grins, "Dress in something nice. I hear the Father is particularly fond of white." With that, he makes his exit, passing by two cultists who file in directly after.

You struggle, trying to move, but it's all in vain. You're tied too securely to the chair, and when the cultists converge on you, you're helpless to do anything but let them do what they were called in to do. One grabs your shoulders, steadying you, while the other shoves your head into a rough burlap bag. You feel soft things fall around your face, like petals - flowers. Why the hell did they put flowers in this bag?

You take a deep breath, trying to calm yourself when the cultists begin grabbing at you. Maybe if you relax a little, you can pretend that you're pliant and wait for a chance for escape. However, even before you devise your plan, your muscles begin relaxing, almost going limp in their hold. Your head is swimming before long, vision dimming and fading in and out. The scent of flowers is heavy, sweet
and distracting, but somehow pleasant. You feel more tranquil than you've felt in years, but... that can't be right, can it?

Your head lolls back as you begin to feel like you're floating, no longer trapped, no longer held captive in a room all alone. Green mist falls over your eyes, and for a brief second, you think you see rolling grassy hills and a sea foam sky. The last thing you remember before passing out is a gentle giggle and a soft, cool hand stroking your cheek. "Don't worry, Deputy," a woman whispers, "I'll take care of you. We're going to have so much fun."

[continue (1)]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
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happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
You reply sarcastically.

"Well, I was never particularly interested in religion growing up..." you sigh, giving John a small smile that comes off every bit as mocking as its meant to be. You readjust how you're sitting, feigning confidence and comfort as you meet his gaze, "I was probably too busy doing literally anything else and must have missed that lesson in school."

( -3 interest with JOHN )

John is silent, expression flitting between rage and disbelief before finally settling on amusement. He pulls out his knife and presses it against your collarbone, "You must think you're funny, Deputy," he starts, dragging the knife along your skin and drawing out blood. You hiss, but that just makes John laugh, "You must think you have it all figured out," the blade deepens and twists on its descent, slicing through cotton, and you can't help the whimper that escapes your clenched teeth. "But I think you just revealed to me one of what I'm sure are many, many sins..."

"You asshole!" You growl, shuddering when he pulls away, your undershirt half way torn and dotted with blood. John ignores you and momentarily drops his knife to tear the rest of your shirt apart.

( -2 health )

"I'm not technically supposed to hurt you just yet, but if Jacob can have his turn," John flashes a grin up at you before returning to rip the fabric completely. "That's better," John says, sounding almost dreamy as he grabs up his knife and hovers it over one of the cuts he had dragged from your collarbone, "Why don't we map out where we'll be putting your sins, hmm?"

You lean back, trying to escape his weapon, despite knowing how useless it is considering your position. Somehow, you manage to tip so far back you fall backwards and John is forced to catch you. When he rights you, it seems like all of the previous righteous anger from before has faded, leaving him with nothing but quiet discontent.

Quickly, John stands and exits the room, and, not long after that, two armed cultists enter. You try to fight against them when they descend on you, but it's a lost cause. One of them ties a bag around you head, though the bag was filled with soft, sweet smelling things that make your head dizzy as you float among pale green mist.

[continue (2)]
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Act I

[REPLY SARCASTICALLY]

You reply sarcastically.

"No, actually, I really do wanna know what my sins are, Brother John," you mock, cocking your head to the side as you glare at the dark haired man, "I'm just absolutely dying to hear the crazy wack job religious bullshit you and your hipster brother are-" You're suddenly cut off by John seizing your nose and mouth, his grip suffocating as he snatches up the knife from between your legs and digs the serrated edge beneath your jawline.

"For someone with so much to lose, you sure are a mouthy one, aren't you?" John's faux question is practically spat out from between pearly white teeth, "I could end your pathetic life in a second and no one - not a single person on this planet would care." He shifts, and you flinch when the knife slices, cutting through only the topmost layer of your skin, but it's enough to sting - enough to bleed.

John smiles, but the way he looks at you is anything but friendly. His eyes are dark, the upward twitch of his lips uneven and vicious, like he would tear through you with his teeth if he could, but there's something holding him back.

"No one would care about your death, Deputy. Not Deputy Hudson, not Deputy Pratt, and certainly not your precious Whitehorse."

You know his words aren't true, but you can't help the sharp pang you feel in your chest. For so long you've been dragged through this hell alone, and, at the mention of the familiar, your co-workers' names... No, you have to focus on staying alive. You can't think about what-ifs.

You hear more than you feel your ears pop. Your vision wavers, but you can't do much more than choke and struggle weakly against the chair. You feel something wet drip down your neck, but it doesn't burn any more, it just feels... warm.

( -2 health )

Your fingers twitch where they clutch the armrests, clawing, frantic, and then weak. Your grip loosens as you lose oxygen. For the first time in a while, you realize you might die.

John watches you, gaze flickering over your face with sadistic glee. You think your eyes begin to roll back before he finally lets go of you. You startle, mouth dropping open and empty lungs stalling for just a moment before you heave a long, rasping lungful of air, eyes watering and throat burning.

Your skin feels clammy, damp, and cool. There's a chill to the air you didn't notice before now. Your head throbs, tongue feeling heavy in your mouth as you pant, trying to catch your breath.

John waits patiently, having stepped back to observe you with a calm you haven't seen from him since this whole escapade started. When your eyes begin to droop, John takes one step forward and shakes you back awake, but just barely. You're not sure you can take much more of this.

Playing with the tip of his knife, John stares down at you, bland amusement playing over his empty features, "I'm going to give you one chance to apologize, Sinner. One chance. That's all you get." John glares when your eyes begin drifting shut. He reaches down, shaking you once more with vigor and hatred. He wants so badly to hurt you, to see you broken and bloody and pleading... but that can wait. Right now, he needs an answer.
But are you willing to provide? John slips his hand from your shoulder up along the side of your neck and forward, until his rough palm cradles your damp throat. It stings where he holds you, but the pressure is enough to keep you awake, unwilling to drop your guard when he could so easily kill you.

You have no other option but to speak up, but what do you say? Anger and frustration boils to the forefront, but so does fear. What if you die? John could kill you and... and maybe he's right. Would the sheriff, Hudson, and Pratt even know? Would they care? The logical part of your mind says 'of course they would', but you're so alone, and as far as you know, you've been alone this entire time.

Did they manage to escape like you did? Did they just leave you here?

John's fingers dig into the tender column of your bruised neck, snapping you out of your thoughts. "I'm waiting..." John sing-songs.

What should you say?

[REPLY: "I'm sorry."]

[REPLY: "Go fuck yourself."]
Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[REPLY: "I'm sorry."]

You reply:

"I'm sorry." The words taste metallic on your tongue, or maybe that's just the blood from your still healing tongue? Who knows... as it stands, you're distracted by the small laugh John lets out at your apology. His grip loosens and you hear the sound of him sheathing the knife. You try not to look at him - try not to show how much of a blow this is to your ego, but it's difficult when you can feel the victory radiating off of him at your surrender.

(+6 interest with JOHN)

John's gentleness is not something you expect. From what you've come to understand about the man, he's anything but gentle. He's cruel, and mean, and a sadist to the core, but the way he tilts your chin up is so tender it almost hurts worse than if he would have cut you, again. His change in action - in tone is such a whiplash you find yourself confused on how you should continue.

Humming, John sweeps his thumb over your bottom lip and gazes down at you with... adoration?

"See, Rook," John whispers, voice soothing and low, "See how much easier things can be when you just cooperate?"

You swallow hard, throat bobbing and aching from the bruises he dug into your flesh. The discomfort must show on your face because the once soft and sweet tilt of his brows turns to furrowed concern. John takes your face in both of his hands and strokes the apples of your cheeks with the pads of his thumbs. "I'm sorry you made me do this to you," John drops one hand to run the back of his index along the column of your throat, his touch so light it gives you shivers, "I don't want to hurt you, Rook. I just want-"

John sighs, frustrated and tongue-tied, but not because of you. He stares at the ground, hand still holding your cheek, palm warm and comforting. This change of events is so confusing, you can't even really think of anything past how nice it feels for him to hold you like this.

"You must be tired, Deputy," John says suddenly, standing and dropping his hand from cradling your face. He straightens out his leather coat and smooths his hair, careful of the blue tinted shades he has perched on top of his head. "Unfortunately, you won't be allowed to rest until after dinner, but I can help you until then."

Your brows shoot up at the suggestion. Is this something you should worry about? John moves close to you and bends at the hip so that his face is mere inches away from yours. Without the distraction of fear clogging your senses, you can smell the cologne he's wearing and the faint scent of mint on his breath.

He grins, and it's charming and predatory and dangerous, and you'd be a fool to fall for him- it! To fall for it.

"There's a bath in the hall I can assist you with if you'd like to freshen up before dinner with the family." John drawls, and there's no way he's not hinting at something dubious, but can you trust it to
be that simple? What if he's trying to trap you? At your hesitation, John stands back to his full height and gives you a more polite smile, this one rated-PG and much less dramatic. "Of course, I can always call in Faith and have her assist you. She's the one who usually handles these sorts of things, after all."

You apparently have options. None of them are freedom, but maybe you can work with what you have so far?

What do you decide to do?

[GO WITH JOHN]

[GO WITH FAITH]

Chapter End Notes

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Act I

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

[REPLY: "Go fuck yourself."]

You reply:

"Go fuck yourself." And it's almost like a switch is flipped - you see it in John's eyes. Unadulterated rage sears through him, his emotions flashing like the flicker just before the grand flame of a bonfire. John snatches your throat in his hands and squeezes so hard you feel the pressure in your eyes. Your ears pop, your face feeling hot and tight, and holy shit, you can't breathe. This is it. John is really going to kill you this time.

( -6 interest with JOHN )

Your vision begins to waver, blurring until John's face twists in fury, marred and blurry, and god he looks like such an asshole, right now. If you weren't being choked to death, you might actually laugh at how ridiculous he looks. For emphasis, John leans forward, knee falling between your parted thighs to steady himself as he gets a good grip - or, rather, a better grip around your throat, hell bent on making your end as painful as possible.

You shake and struggle, your need for air outweighing any previous and brief amusement you may have had. Your upset is enough to knock John off balance, and the one foot he had steady on the ground lifts, tilting him forward and consequently you backward. The chair balances on two legs for a split second, just enough for John to panic and loosen his hold around your throat to try and regain his footing.

It's in that second that your self-preservation instincts kick in. If you can get him to let you go fully, you might be able to live a little longer. Maybe the fall will shock him enough that he'll leave you alone or throw you to one of his other siblings and allow you a chance for escape. Your plan may not be fool proof, but it's the glimmer of hope you've been waiting for since you were first captured.

Sliding your heels up the legs of the chair, you dig the balls of your feet into the ground and give the biggest push you can manage. John yelps, hands flying from your throat to the back of the chair, but his awkward flailing does nothing more than further your plan. In an attempt to catch himself, John leans to the side, trying to lessen his fall, but his leg catches on top of yours and he inadvertently brings you down with him. The crash is devastating, though more so for John than you.

He shouts, shoving at you desperately with his free arm, his other pinned beneath the side of the chair you're sitting in, bearing your full weight down across his bicep. You blink hard, struggling in your seat to move when you notice that one of the arms of the chair is loose, and, with a wiggle, one of the legs is as well.

"Get off of me!" John yells as if you could follow his orders if you wanted or tried. In a last ditch attempt, John grabs one of your bound arms and thrusts both you and the chair off of himself.

The force of his aggravation sends you upwards, flipping you back upright where the leg and arm loosen once more, just enough for you to tug and break through the flimsy wood. Your leg is free first, then you manage to slip your arm out from the splintered chair part. Quickly, you disentangle the rest of your limbs, ignoring the rush of your blood in your ears and the quickened beat of your
heart. A wash of relief and hope fall over you.

Can you escape? Did you actually manage to free yourself?

"Oh, no you don't!" John pants, stretching forward to reach you where you're still sitting on the ground, surrounded by broken wood. However, you're still running high on adrenaline. Clenching your fist, you muster as much strength as you can gather and slug John in the jaw. He falls silent and then back with a dull thud.

You hope to God you knocked some of his teeth out.

Unwilling to let this opportunity go to waste, you wrestle yourself further out of the rest of the chair parts, uncaring of the bruises forming under tender skin. You get free just in time for the door knob to turn.

You need to think quick.

[if you have 4 SKILL CONTINUE HERE]

[if you have 5 or 6 SKILL CONTINUE HERE]

[if you have 7 or 8 SKILL CONTINUE HERE]

Chapter End Notes

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Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[REPLY SINCERELY]

You reply:

"I'm serious," your voice steady, though you fear it might waver. John is more or less at the advantage at the moment, the blade he has pointed between you a clear, physical reminder of his power. Playing nice is really your only option. "I don't know what my sins are. I don't even really know why I'm here."

(+6 interest with JOHN)

The admittance is a little too truthful to keep you completely safe from his ire, but you hope that with the truth he can't find any fault in what your saying and therefore can't reasonably hurt you under the rules he set at the start of this.

Still, you don't break eye contact with John, fearing that - like his brother - he might find weakness in your words and use it to his benefit. Then again, John could be the type to demand respect through intimidation - "Did I say you could look at me." It's a statement of fact more than a question, and Jacob makes that abundantly clear by the way he grips your wrist as if he's trying to snap it. And you have no doubt that he could and would if he so desired, but for now you're more useful to him whole than bloodied and broken.

A tool. You're just a tool to be used. That self-distancing doesn't stop you from choking up at the pressure. If you don't respond, Jacob will send you back through the trials. Say something. Say something! "Do I need to send you back to your cage?"

You're meat. You're an animal. You're a tool. You're meat. Meat. MEAT. Jacob grabs your jaw and locks gazes with you like you pose a challenge or any kind of threat, but he knows better. And now, so do you. "You will speak when spoken to, Deputy." You see him reach into his back pocket before you can respond, throat closing up, drowning you in red - like blood. All those innocent people, dead. By your hand.

"Let's try this again, shall we?"

John sighs, snapping the memory in two, his presence soothing the burn left in the wake of events you don't remember happening. Or, maybe you do. Your thoughts are so hazy it hurts. "Make it stop..." The words leave your mouth before you can quiet yourself, the weakness bubbling to the surface, the parts of you Jacob tried to stomp into the dirt resurfacing.

A sob catches in your throat, and John hears it. How can he not? You probably look pitiful. You hang your head low, refusing to look at him. Are you scared? You're not sure, but you're shaken - shaking. God, Jacob would skin you alive if he saw you like this.

"I see..." John approaches you with gentle caution, kneeling in front of you like he's scared you'll run away if he moves too fast. He removes the knife from the chair and sheathes it back on his hip before placing both hands on your knees. He keeps his touch feather light, careful, calming. You resist the urge to wretch, to shudder, and cry, because this isn't you. This broken, pathetic, shell of a monster.
John's touch glides up your thigh, and your thoughts derail into something tragic. Your eyes widen, mind numbing, forgetting the horrendous things you think you may have done for something far worse. John's kneeling between your spread thighs, his breath warm even through the denim of your jeans.

Is it odd that in your position, a hostage beaten and tortured, that your mind has traveled down such a path? Is it vile? Does it make you worse than the creature you may have become? It doesn't help that John is contemplating you with an open, innocent gaze. For the first time, you're tempted to tell him anything he wants to know if only he'll tell you it'd all be okay in the end.

"Deputy," John's voice is smooth, barely above a whisper, "The path to Eden's Gate is not an easy one." His voice is soothing to listen to, and you do your best to hear him well, though the way his thumb is circling your inner thigh has your mind wandering, "To reach it, you must... participate in trials. You must overcome what tempts you."

You worry your bottom lip between your teeth, his explanation bringing you more anxiety than it alleviates. If you hadn't been staring at him, you would have missed the long gaze he directs towards your mouth. It's a fleeting bit of infatuation - so brief, you wonder if you may have just imagined it.

John rocks back to his heels and stands. Where you expect him to turn away, he moves closer - the space between you almost nonexistent. He's drawn into you, not quite touch but gaze so focused with emotion you feel raw beneath the weight of his curiosity and something else you can't quite pinpoint.

If you didn't know any better, you would say he wants to kiss you. All signs point in that direction, after all: from romance novels, to movies, to those messed up porn vids on DVD, but none of those are real. John can't possibly want to do anything of the sort with you... right?

John wavers forward, barely a centimeter closer - just a tilt of his head or yours would bring your lips together. Do you want that? You should want to push him away, but you're not sure you could if you tried. John catches himself just at the last second and pulls back quick enough that it makes your head spin.

In the same movement, John yanks his knife from your chair, sheaths it, and straightens his shirt, collar, and coat, fiddling with the long leather sleeves as if they could ever possibly be wrinkled. You watch him, dazed, weary, and maybe even disappointed, but he refuses to meet your eyes.

"You should freshen up before the dinner," John picks at imaginary lint on his vest, "I can call in Faith to assist you, she is, after all, the more gentle one of us..." John hesitates, as if he's trying not to say what he has next in his mind, but the moment he looks up and into your eyes, all of his resolve crumbles, "Or, I can assist you."

You try not to think too deeply into his words, fearing what you might find in them, and instead gather your thoughts in order to make a decision.

[GO WITH JOHN]

[GO WITH FAITH]

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happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
Act I

[STAY QUIET]

You stay quiet.

There's no sense in getting knocked out or worse in your current situation, no matter how badly you may want to mouth off. You can't afford to lose any edge you may have if you want to escape and find your friends. Still, it takes an incredible amount of restraint for you to stay silent, especially with the enigmatic smirk John gives you at your sudden bout of obedience.

(+3 interest with JOHN)

"Oh, Deputy," he breathes, delighted, "I believe we just unveiled your true nature in almost record time." John flashes you a wicked grin, "Congratulations; you're the first of your group to give in so easily. There may be hope for you yet."

You bite your tongue, trying your best not to let him get to you. He's baiting you, daring you to give him a reason to sic his men back on you - to give him a reason to let them really hurt you, maybe even kill you. You refuse to go down like that.

John steps forward until the tips of his polished boots touch yours. It's a miracle you manage to clamp down on your rebellion long enough to avoid moving and scuffing his shoes - you have no doubt that that is what he's waiting for. He needs a reason to hurt you, even if it's a small one. John bends ever so slightly, until his face is lined up with your own. He stares you down, deep blue eyes peering into your own. Then, he stands up, steps back and clasps his hands together thoughtfully.

"Your sin is 'Wrath'," he says, as if that is supposed to mean anything to you, "It's a rather apt term for the Lamb destined to usher in our destruction, wouldn't you say?"

Again, John tests you, but you refuse to rise to his challenge. You know the repercussions and you know that you can't afford to suffer them while so sorely disadvantaged. As if seeing the cog-wheels turn inside your head, John chuckles and reaches forward to smooth his hand through your hair - the motion making you feel like a dog being pat. "You're so quiet all of a sudden, Deputy. What happened to all that raging hellfire you unleashed a few minutes ago?"

John's so close to you that you can see the darkness of his pupils, the sapphire hue almost black, and focused solely on you. He's enjoying the game - enjoying toy ing with your mind and prodding you like you're a caged beast. He might even be enjoying the way you defy him. It will bring you temporary satisfaction if you play into his game, but if he decides to have his men get physical, again, you're not sure you'll be able to take it.

How do you respond?

[SPIT IN HIS FACE]

[LOOK OFF TO THE SIDE]

[HOLD GAZE; SAY NOTHING]
[SPIT IN HIS FACE]

You spit in his face.

Though what little saliva you have is mostly blood, your message is received perfectly clear. John flickers from shock to broiling rage, his lip twitching into a snarl as he takes a handful of your shirt and hauls you forward. Your back arches as he wipes away your blood, but he doesn't do much else except scowl down at you.

(-7 interest with JOHN)

Tossing you back, John adjusts the sleeves of his coat and closes his eyes briefly. He takes a deep breath, pausing as if to meditate, before once more motioning for his men to approach you.

"Our little Lamb here seems to want to be welcomed into our flock the hard way," he turns on his heel and makes to walk past the men, "See to it that you don’t disappoint." Just before John makes his retreat, he catches the larger cultist by the shoulder and leans into him conspiratorially, "Lead them to the light brother, but do not kill them. Unfortunately, the path to Eden's Gate cannot be traveled by the dead, but we will drag this sinner, willing or not, into the Father's light."

As the cultists converge on you, you notice John stop by the door and look you directly in the eye, "I shall pray to the Lord for the swift cleansing of your soul. May you return from the blinding darkness of your sins in better understanding, and if not..." his grin turns malicious, "I'll be sure to provide the next readjustment personally."

With that, John wrenches the door open and walks through, slamming it closed behind him. You open your mouth to shout something obscene, but a fist connects with the side of your head, forcing you to go blank for a second. You're picked up, punched, and dropped, again. Blow after blow throws you deeper into unconsciousness, leaving you seeing nothing but black.

(-5 health)

(+3 doubt)

[continue (7)]
Act I

Chapter Notes

cult member be like "is that allowed? is this allowed?"

[LOOK OFF TO THE SIDE]

You look off to the side.

You're not scared of John... at least, you don't think you are, but you also don't particularly want to keep up with the macho staring contest either - you're beginning to get a headache. John backs off, taking your response as an admittance of fault. He hums, thoughtful - perhaps even pleased, though not entirely calmed. At least you suspect now he and his cultists will leave you alone.

(+3 interest with JOHN )

John's rough palm guides your gaze to his, appearing all at once soft and somewhat regretful. He looks at you with something akin to understanding and pity, as if he knows something about you that you had unintentionally revealed within the short amount of time you have interacted with him.

"Rook," John begins, voice subdued and gentle, his hand migrating from your bruised jaw to caress your chin. He tilts your head up, "I'm only doing this to help you. That is all I want to do."

His admittance sounds like a confession, but whether or not you believe it is a debate that hangs unanswered within the silence surrounding you. You lick at your lips, the feeling of dry, split skin a reminder that you are alive - the metallic hint of blood bursting along your tongue. John's eyes flicker down, catching the movement, before returning to focus his gaze. The light of his interest makes something at the center of your chest constrict, stirring emotions you can't, at the moment, comprehend.

It's as if the longer you stare into his eyes, the more of him you're seeing - the real him trapped behind a fragile, frosted glass patterned with ill-content and defeat. You wonder if he has been where you are now - trapped, beaten, desperate - and if what he claims he's doing is truly because he wants to help you.

There's such an overwhelming darkness in him that you almost find yourself hypnotized in his gaze. You're unsure how long you both end up looking at each other, but it's long enough that one of the cultists John summoned clears their throat, as if to remind you both that they're still present.

You're the first to pull away, yanking yourself back from your tumultuous thoughts before they can lead you down a path much more confusing than simply getting out of here alive. Again, you look away from John, peering over his shoulder at the two cultists behind him, refusing to see the man who claims he can help you.

John drops his hand from your chin and stands, but doesn't step away. He wants you to look at him again, but should you?

"Um, Sir?" one of the cultists starts, shifting awkwardly from one foot to the other, "Do you need us
for anything else?"

John is quiet, still staring at you pensively, "I suppose that depends on our guest." At being mentioned, you look up and John meets your quizzical with a smile, "Deputy, are you going to cooperate or are you going to be a problem?"

He waits patiently for your reply.

[RESPOND: "I'll cooperate."]

[RESPOND: "I'm not going to help you keep me here."]
Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[RESPOND: "I'll cooperate."]

You respond:

"I'll cooperate." your voice hoarse and small, sounding distant to your ears - as if it's someone else speaking and not you. You don't miss John's compassionate appreciate, the small smile he gives you that feels like warm blossoming in your chest - that tight wad of anxiety detangling at his gentleness.

(+3 interest with JOHN)

Maybe it's better this way, maybe if you get him to trust you enough he'll let you go, or at least be less likely to have you hurt later on down the road. Right. That's the only reason you're cooperating. It's the smartest choice. It has nothing to do with what you may or may not be feeling.

Your agreeable attitude seems to brighten John: his shoulders relax, and his gaze loses some of its sharpness - no longer scheming. Clasping his hands together, John nods to his men and they descend upon you. That calm that surrounded the room is immediately dissipated, your heart hammering in your chest as you try to prepare yourself for violence.

You clench your eyes shut readying for the worst, only to have one of the cultists pull a woven cloth bag over your head while the other carefully releases your legs and arms. You struggle, mind racing with the possibility. What should you do? Can you fight them off? Where are they going to take you?

Soft petals touch your face, lovingly drifting their scent around you, tempering your frayed nerves. It's dizzying, the blossoms the bag was filled with. There are dozens of them, pressing your face into its heedy, floral scent. Your head spins and your muscles relax.

"Where... are you-" your head feels heavy, body tilting this way and that. Are you moving or are you being moved? "Where are we... um..."

A hand touches your shoulder, the only solid and grounding force in your world right now. It's warm and firm, you like how it feels. "Calm yourself, Rook," John coos, "Just breathe in deeply and let me guide you. Let me take care of you."

"Uhm..." You murmur, limbs feeling like jelly, your body floating higher and higher, but always with John holding you close - one hand anchored to keep you from flying off into space. You giggle, and John squeezes your shoulder.

"Breathe..." he says, and you do and watch as your world swirls into pale green mist.

(+2 belief)

[continue (2)]

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happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
You respond:

"I'm not going to help you keep me here." It's probably the most foolish words you've said thus far, but bitter contempt guides you, yet again. It's royally stupid, you know, to be so compelled to tell the truth, even under the obvious threat of bodily harm, but... you don't want to give him the satisfaction.

(-5 interest with JOHN)

Shaking his head, John clicks his tongue and turns towards the cultists. "It appears that our little Lamb refuses to surrender to the gentle hand of the Father. My brothers," John claps his hands over each of the men's shoulders, "It is with a heavy heart and even heavier guilt that I must lend this burden to you." John twists and faces you fully, gaze dark and locked with your own, a final showdown of sorts, though you'll be the only one fighting, "By the grace of the Father, you will come to see the light and woefully regret your defiance."

When you don't respond, merely stare at John his carefully clamped anger swells and bursts to life. He crosses the short distance between you with three long steps until you can feel the heat radiating off of him.

He snatches your chin and demands your attention, "You will walk the path or I will drag you along it. You will be broken and bloodied, but alive and grateful for the mercy I will have shown you. The Father may want your fighting spirit, but I want your soul." John throws you back, and you grunt, still looking at him. He sneers at you, straightening out his sleeves before pointing at you, index inches from your face, "You will play your role."

John stalks away then, snapping once, startling the cultists he left you with into action. The moment he opens and closes the door, you turn to ready yourself, but a fist rams into your cheek before you can so much as blink. You're knocked onto the floor, chair clattering, before you're pulled up and sat straight.

You're given a second to breathe in maybe half a breath before you're being punched again. Over, and over, and over. Your face swells, eye drifting shut, until one particularly hard punch sends you crashing back to the floor. You blink up at the men, and catch the glint of a small pocket knife reflecting in the moonlight before you black out.

(-4 health)

(+3 doubt)

[continue (2)]
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Act I

Chapter Notes

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[HOLD GAZE; SAY NOTHING]

You hold John's gaze and say nothing.

If you've learned anything from your time as a captive - particularly during what little you can recall from your experience with Jacob - it's that weakness will not be tolerated. Though you suspect John may be different than his brother, your pride doesn't afford you the piece of mind to allow you to be cowed so easily.

(+2 doubt)

However, you aren't fooling yourself into believing you're doing this only to save face. You understand well enough the position you're in. If you were to attempt to defy John, again, you would risk getting injured even worse and potentially ruin any future plans for escape.

John doesn't appear pleased or displeased by your lack of verbal response, but having your undivided attention? That's enough to bring a self-satisfied grin to his face. John takes a single step away from you and nods, "Very well, Deputy," he says, crossing his arms, "I suppose you can be forgiven for your silence. After all, I did have one of my men hit you; it's only fair I should be given the silent treatment, right?" His smirk grates at you, his words lilted as if he's telling some kind of lighthearted joke. You try your best to keep your expression neutral, but you can tell that John senses your displeasure.

Motioning for his cultists, John tilts his head in your direction. You hold your breath, struggling as they converge on you. Gritting your teeth, you struggle, shaking and pulling, snarling at the cultists while John laughs in the background. One of them seizes you by the throat, holding you still, while the other pulls up a rough, woven bag and secures it over your head.

Soft petals - flowers flutter around your face and gather around your neck where the bag is tightened. Why the fuck did they fill this bag with flowers? They smell nice, but there's something off about them. Their odor is strong, cloying and suffocating - unlike any flower you've ever smelled before. It's pleasant... calming.

Your muscles begin to relax, the anger that had once clouded your mind dissipating. You feel like you may be floating. That... that cannot be good. You try to maintain your sense of self, but it's difficult. All you can manage is a muffled groan and a lazy tilt of your head before someone cups your jaw through the tight bag.

"Oh, don't worry, Deputy." John's voice filters through the cloth, amused, "It's just bliss - a little taste of heaven to keep you nice and compliant for this next part."

Even half out of your mind, you still find John as smarmy as you did before. You don't need to see his face to know he's smiling. The hand on your cheek, however, is just about the only thing grounding you. You feel like you're flying, being lifted and unchained. John hushes you when you make a displeased sound, your stomach lurching into your throat. "Just breathe..." his hand drifts from your jaw to your shoulder, "Just take one deep breath, and I'll take care of the rest."
You scoff, your head lolling, limbs loosing all control. Something nags at you, telling you to let go, to let John Seed lead you, but you know better than to follow. You try to hold your breath for a long as you can, but your head is already spinning. Warmth floods through you, surrounds you, blankets you like sunshine during a spring morning.

Despite your attempts to resist, you already inhaled too much. Your vision wavers, blurs, and then fades into pale green mist.

( +2 interest with JOHN )

[continue (1)]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
part iii to be released sometime in 2019 (sorry for the cliffhanger)
happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
Act I

[REPLY: "What the hell do you want from me?"]

You reply:

"What the hell do you want from me?" Your voices rasps low in your throat, your head throbbing. As it turns out, pissing John off enough for him to call in his dogs may not have been the best idea, but at least you could feel vindicated for a moment.

John snorts at your question, "I have already explained what I want, Deputy." John steps away from you and tilts his head, "I want you to be freed from your sins; I want you to walk the path towards Eden's Gate a new person with a new life." He throws his arms out, preaching in a way that reminds you all too much of his brother, Joseph. God, his voice is giving you a headache. "I want-

"Shut up already with the P.E.G. indoctrination crap," you clip, your temples aching and jaw twinging in pain. You squeeze your eyes shut for a second, waiting for the agony to lessen before you can muster the strength to glare at John, "If I wanted to be part of your cult, I would've asked for a fucking pamphlet."

John rolls his eyes, "So, a comedian, then?"

You scoff, "I only see one joke here, Johnny, and it isn't me."

John strides up to you and snatches your throat, and you're shocked by how unfazed you are by it. You look at him, barely flinching even though his grip is anything but gentle. His eyes are dark and narrowed, lip curled in a tight scowl as his gaze flits across your face. "I would have thought you'd learned by now what happens when you test my patience."

John's hand around your neck flexes, tightening just hard enough that you can feel the bones in his hands cutting off your air. Instinctively, you choke, arms twitching, trying hard to move, but John just constricts your throat harder, "Hm?" he mocks, leaning his head forward so your mouth is right by his ear, "Speak up, Deputy. I can't seem to hear you."

And he says you're the one trying to be funny. Your vision begins to blur, the edges darkening as white spots flicker in and out of your line of sight. You wonder if he's going to kill you. Then, as if reading your mind, John lets go of you and steps back. You gasp, swallowing down as much air as you can, while you can.

(-2 health)

When you finally calm down, you look up to see John staring at you. He seems less angry than before, though still somewhat irritated and maybe even a little frazzled - on edge. Running a hand through his hair, John turns away from you and clears his throat before facing you once more and giving you an award winning smile. "I regret that this couldn't go any other way, Deputy, but you..." John shakes his head, pointing at you, "You are something else. You just don't know when to quit and play nice, do you?"

Perhaps in any other situation your mouthiness would have killed you, but for now it seems like John isn't capable of murdering you - or, rather, he isn't allowed to. Maybe you can use this information to your benefit later on.
"Let's start over," John suddenly declares, approaching you with a disarming smile, but there's an edge to it that has you suspecting this is just another trap, "Are you willing to start cooperating with me, Deputy?"

You glare at John, but you know better than to ignore his question.

[RESPOND: "I'll cooperate."]

[RESPOND: "I'm not going to help you keep me here."]
Act I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[REPLY: "Funny. You talk tough, but don't do your own dirty work."]

You reply:

"Funny. You talk tough, but don't even do your own dirty work." Running your tongue over your teeth, you taste a faint metallic flavor, undoubtedly your still healing tongue having split open, again. You spit off to the side before you can make yourself sick with the taste.

( -6 interest with JOHN )

( +5 doubt )

John watches you with his arms folded over his chest, blue eyes wide and almost sparkling at your resistance. His grin is vicious and unpleasant - all straight white teeth and dark intentions. There is no happiness in his expression, only fury and a promise that feels like he's going to do everything in his power to make your time in Hope County as painful as possible.

"The fuck are you looking at?" you growl, skin prickling under his attention, "What? You gonna get your men to hit me again, or are you finally gonna get your hands dirty?" You swish saliva and blood in your mouth and spit it out once more. "Can't fucking face me one on one so you have to hide between dick and dumbass over there? Is that it?"

John sneers, veering off to the back of the room. The cultists straighten as John's attention falls on them. With a crooked grin, John nods to the door, "Go." He orders and begins carefully removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves.

One of the cultists frowns, "Sir, the Father said-

"The Father isn't here, right now, is he?"

Both cultists stiffen, eyeing John warily as he taps his foot, agitated. He waits, daring them to speak up, but no other protests are made. The cultists hesitate one moment longer before nodding and moving to exit the room. One of them glances over their shoulder, and you swear you see pity behind all of that religious "understanding". John follows after them, and locks the door. Immediately after, he starts towards you.

You watch him, curious as to what he could possibly do to you since it doesn't seem like he's allowed to kill you, but then he's pulling out the knife, again. Fuck. He reaches out and snatches your jaw, nails dragging along bruises as he tries to steady you, forcing you to meet his gaze, "I want you to know- I want you to know that you've brought this upon yourself, Deputy." He sounds crazed, almost out of breath beneath the low growl of his voice, "I tried being civil. I tried giving you a chance." With each word, his grip on you gets tighter. Out of your peripheral vision, you see him raise the knife. "But you just can't take a hint."

Without warning, John wrenches the knife all the way up and then thrusts it down, deep into the meat your thigh, just barely glancing bone. You shriek, the sudden agony eclipsing any previous bravado or attempts to throw him off his game. John is quick to cover your mouth. He glares, hushing you. The force with which he tries to silence you, however, sends you falling backwards.
Hurriedly, John tugs you right side up, though in the struggle the blade drags causing you to release another hellish scream. John takes you by the throat, just barely stalling your tormented shouts. Behind all the terror, you almost think you hear footsteps approaching, but the dizziness of losing so much blood and the lack of air is making it difficult to think.

John mutters, though you're unsure whether or not he's talking to himself or you, and with each passing second, it begins to matter less and less. Your vision clouds, fading to quiet, blissful darkness.

( -6 health )

[continue (7)]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
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"Yes." Though, logic would dictate admitting to any wrong doings would end badly, John seems surprised and... pleased with your agreement. For once, the smile he gives you is genuine and kind - a complete 180 to what you've come to expect since you've been captured. John puts his knife away, again, and regards you quietly, eyes sparkling with curiosity - impressed with what you assume he believes to be honesty.

( +5 interest with JOHN )

Gently, John grabs your knee and grins up at you, "Your truth will be rewarded, Deputy," he shakes your knee slightly, "I promise." You stare at John, not exactly sure what you should do, but you're glad that he put his blade away - it makes it a lot easier to think when you're not being threatened.

From what you've learned thus far, John appears to be something of a gate-keeper of sorts? You suspect he manages the new recruits, or, in your case, captives, and deems them either worthwhile additions to their cause or not. It looks like John appreciates when you cooperate with him; there's a softness to his touch that almost has you wondering if this... gentleness is customary for all his captives or if it's just reserved for you. You're unsure how you would feel if it was - your gut twisting into knots, though not in its more situation appropriate anxiety.

( +2 belief )

You glance down at John's hand on your knee, feeling the heat radiating from his palm, and wonder if you should say something to get him to move it. Do you even want him to? It's strange, but not wholly unwelcome to feel something other than pain and uncertainty, and John seems perfectly content to keep his hand where it is. Following your gaze, John laughs a little and retracts his hold. Clearing his throat, he pushes and stands from his chair then turns away from you to unclip his radio from his belt and click it on. "The Deputy needs to get ready for the dinner soon," he says, glancing over his shoulder at you once before turning back to face the wall, "I'll take care of it, just come."

Without another word, John clicks the radio off and pulls his chair away from you. He leans down until your faces are at level and the only thing you can see is him and his endearing, sympathetic smile. You think he's being sincere, the expression different than any he's given you before, but you haven't known the man long enough to be sure. "I apologize for any stress this may cause you, but we have to be cautious with you until we can be sure where your loyalties lie." John pats your shoulder then steps away, "You'll understand, soon."

It's not long after that that two cultists enter the room, both heavily armed, and one holding a woven bag in his hand. They approach you, and you flinch, expecting for violence, though all that happens is one of them grabbing your shoulders, keeping you still, while the other pulls the bag over your head. It tightens around your neck, though not painfully, and you feel soft things flutter around your face, smelling distinctly of flowers and warm honey.
The scent is calming, even as the cultists begin grabbing and pulling and your mind screams at you to fight. Your anxiety is quickly quieted when someone takes hold of your hand and hushes you softly, "Breathe deep, Deputy," John says, thumb stroking over the top of your palm, "It'll all be over soon, just leave everything to me."

In no way do you trust John, but you're not exactly given a choice. His voice and touch soothes you, leaving you feeling comforted even as you're seemingly lifted into the air - floating. Your vision blurs with pale green mist and a world you never would have imagined. Then, everything turns to darkness.

[continue (3)]

Chapter End Notes

end act i, part ii - posted on december 24th 2018
part iii to be released sometime in 2019 (sorry for the cliffhanger)
happy holidays and i hope you have a fantastic new year!
[REPLY: "Fuck off."]

You reply:

"Fuck off." And revel in John's confused, then immediately furious reaction. His dark brows furrow, hand tightening around his knife, though he makes no move to stab you with it, regardless of how badly he seems like he wants to.

( -3 interest with JOHN )

John pushes away from his chair quickly, and faces away from you to pull his radio off of his belt and click it on. "It appears the Deputy isn't going to cooperate just yet, however due to the Father's current restrictions..." John trails off, and you hear a giggle followed by a soft feminine voice.

"Allow me, Brother, to make sure they're ready before our dinner..." the woman says, and you think you recognize the voice- Faith! Why is he speaking to her?

John turns to you then, eyeing you distastefully, "Of course, Sister Faith. They're all yours," he says, but doesn't appear particularly thrilled with the prospect of handing you off. John clips his radio back on his belt and strides towards you, when he's within arm's length, he snatches the front of your undershirt and pulls you up, the chair you're tied to scraping against the wooden floor, "You're lucky my interest in you is waning thin. Otherwise..." John trails off, grinning like there's a joke you missed. When you only glare up at him, he inhales as if trying to calm himself, drops you, and takes a step back. "The Father doesn't want you too disheartened before our dinner, but I must say, I look forward to assisting you in your journey for atonement."

The way he stresses "atonement" sounds and feels like a threat, but, before you can say anything, two heavily armed cultists enter the room. You try to move, switching between glaring at John and trying uselessly to escape from your binds. It doesn't matter, however, as the cultists descend upon you quickly, allowing you to just barely glimpse John's form as he exits out of the room, stomping past Faith who glides in behind him.

A bag is quickly thrown over your head and tightened at the neck before you can see anymore. Soft little things, feeling somewhat like flowers, fall around your face and gather at your chin. The smell is cloying and sticky, but somehow calming. You try to move, but a small, gentle hand catches your arm and trails down until it weaves its fingers between yours. "Breathe, Deputy," Faith coos, almost as if she's right beside your ear, "It will only take a second, then we'll have all the time in the world." She sounds much too joyful to be so enigmatic with her words, still, her voice relaxes you enough that your muscles go lax and you begin to feel as if you're flying.

Your vision dips as a blanket of cool, pale green mist floats past your eyes. Faith laughs, her hand squeezing yours, "Breathe deeper, Deputy!" she sings, and you do. You can't help it. You're not sure if you should care when you find yourself no longer trapped in a room, but flying in the sky. Everything feels wrong - you know it's wrong, but with Faith by your side, it feels almost right.

( +2 interest with FAITH )
Chapter End Notes

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You reply:

"I know what sins are, but why do you want to know mine?" you explain as calmly as you possibly can, though you can feel the beginning inklings of irritation gnaw at you.

(+6 interest with JOHN)

John's expression softens at that, and he leans back to look you over again, as if searching for any indication of how genuine you're being. When he finds what he's looking for, he takes a deep breath and clasps his hands together in his lap, "Deputy, understand that I am only trying to help you," he says as if describing something simple to a toddler, "You aren't prepared to cross through Eden's Gate - not yet, but I can cleanse you and help usher you along the path."

Your brow quirks, "Cleanse' me?"

John nods, "Everyone is born of sin. Those who have not atoned cannot pass through Eden's Gate." John pauses, looking off to the side thoughtfully before returning his gaze to yours, "The path is- can be painful, but if you can accept your faults you can achieve enlightenment, and enlightenment can only be achieved through atonement."

(+3 belief)

You're unsure if you like the sound of what he's saying, but it's a far cry from being threatened with a knife, again. At least now, you have some information about the inner workings of the cult and potentially a better understanding of how John fits into all of it. You have a feeling your knowledge will come in handy.

"The family dinner is set to start soon and you need to be ready..." John says, bringing you from your thoughts. He looks you over, makes a face, then sighs. "Unfortunately, I may have gotten a little overzealous and wasted some of your time, but I am more than willing to help you prepare for the dinner." John pauses, perhaps thinking better of his offer, "That is, unless you would prefer a more gentler hand to assist you for the evening? Faith is usually the one to handle these things, but you intrigue me, Deputy. However, it is your choice."

The sudden offer of autonomy is unexpected, though not unwelcome. It means that he trusts you, somewhat, and you're not willing to let that go to waste.

You decide to...

[GO WITH JOHN]

[GO WITH FAITH]
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