Always had a Feeling
by fistitout

Summary

Zed is dealing with his own demons. Eliza is learning what love is. Bonzo is making it work in whatever way possible.

Bucky wants to change. Addison wants to change the world. Bree wants to make everything alright.

And Zoey just wants to cheer.
This is the Beat of my Heart

“I just remembered, there was a story my mom would tell me, about a Zombie falling in love with a human.”

Addison grinned slightly. She turned her head to look at him. “You’re kidding?”

“How could I forget? It was one of my favorites. All they ever wanted was their happily ever after. Their…” he grinned and nudged her shoulder. “…someday.”

Addison gave a hearty laugh. “That’s so cute!” she gushed. “Oh my god, our relationship mirrors a bedtime story your mom told you. I literally love it!”

Zed smiled at his girlfriend’s excitement. “How does it end?” Addison asked.

“Movies and long walks in the park,” he sang, soft and slowly. “Handing out anywhere we want.”

Addison smiled at him. “I like the way your thinking, I can almost see it.”

“I love how every date we go on, we always end up singing ‘Someday’,” Addison said with a smile. “Favorite song, tops. I wish we could record it so I could listen to it when you aren’t around.”

“We could try,” Zed said. “Before the outbreak, Bonzo’s parents had a small recording studio that ended up on the human side of town. They’ve still got the deed and everything. I’m sure we could work some Zeddison magic.”

Addison grinned and squeezed his hand. “I like the sound of that.”

“Zeddison magic?”

Addison smiled brighter and shrugged. “Or just the sound of your voice,” she said in a sort of shy voice. “I feel like it’s been forever since we’ve done something like this.”

She leaned her head on his shoulder and sighed happily. “I just love you so much,” she went on. “I wish there was a stronger way to say I love you.”

“I worship you,” Zed offered meaningfully. “I’d trade my life for yours. I’d give up everything in my entire world just to have five more minutes with you.”

Zed walked around so he was standing in front of her. He took her hand in his and placed it on his chest, pressing it against his heartbeat.

“Do you feel this?” he asked quietly. Addison nodded slightly. “This is the beat of my heart. My heart beats for you and only you. I love you because you make my heart beat.”

“My heart beats for you and only you,” Addison repeated, her voice strained from choked back tears.

She stepped forward and tilted her head up, just as he tilted his head down and they kissed, soft but passionately, like nothing else in the world mattered but each other.
Zed's alarm clock annoyed Addison on a whole different level. It meant more than 'Hey! It's 5 o'clock! Time to get ready for school!'

Zed's alarm clock meant getting out of the warmth of her boyfriend's arms and the covers that smelled just like him. It meant they had to go to school and only see each other a few periods out of the day, and still they were in class and couldn't talk or snuggle.

Zed's alarm clock meant having to share him with the rest of the world, something Addison didn't want to do but knew she'd have to.

But on the bright side, Zed was adorable in the morning. He left his alarm clock on the other side of his room so he'd have to get up to turn it off. For a few minutes, he'd just lay there and try to hide behind Addison. She wouldn't even turn around anymore.

"You gotta get up, Babe," she said with a small laugh.

"I fucking hate Mondays," Zed grumbled. "I wish we were still on winter break."

"It's the first day back," Addison pointed out.

Zoey came into the room, still dressed in her pajamas and rubbing her tired eyes with Frankie "Puppy" Necrodopolus trailing her heels. Addison watched her pull a chair up, climb up and turn off the alarm clock.

"I'm using the bathroom first!" she called as she left, closing the door as she went.

"Would you look at that," Zed said, his words muffled by Addison's shoulder. "Seems to me like we've got a few minutes to ourselves."

Addison giggled as Zed moved over her. They made out in bed for what felt like a few seconds, but was actually close to a half hour, before Zoey came in and announced that the bathroom was empty.

Every day for the past few days, Addison took Cymbalta—her antidepressant—along with her birth control. One tablet equaled to 60 mg, which meant she only had to take it once a day.

For the first few weeks the dosage was low. Dr. Janikowski said it was to get her body to adjust to the medication. At her visit the previous Thursday they had increased it to 60 mg. It was harder to swallow but she managed.

The new year provided lots of changes in Seabrook. One of the most notable changes were the amendments to the The BROCA-S68 Gene Mutation Clauses—the section of laws pertaining to Zombies.

"Someone looks handsome in his street clothes," Addison noted as her boyfriend came down the stairs Monday morning.

Zed grinned and did a little spin, showing off his all pink outfit. He then went over and kissed the top of his sister's head, then Addison's. "Something smells delicious," he noted as he sat in his
"Daddy's making bacon," Zoey said, practically vibrating in her chair. "He said no more after today though, because we still have a budget to keep to."

"That's right I did," Zevon said as he brought the still steaming pan to the table. "I let you kids eat whatever all break. Just because you're all out of season, doesn't mean you shouldn't be concerned about your diet. Addison is the only one who consistently eats healthy."

Addison grinned and lifted up her bowl of fruit.

"She's human," Zoey argued. "How often do we get to eat bacon? And how often does she?"

Zevon laughed and slid into his chair. "So what are your plans for today? It's hard to keep up with all your after school activities since it's not just football and cheerleading."

Addison grinned slightly. "I'm meeting Chief Dale after school for some driving practice," Zed said. "He wants me to try and get a license like the day after my birthday."

"Bree and I are making plans for her half birthday," Addison said. "It's not a real thing but it's the only way she could get her parents to fund a sleepover this weekend."

Zevon pointed his fork at Addison and asked, "Can you walk Zoey home after school?"

Addison nodded. "Is it okay if Bree comes over? We could just work here instead of going back to her house."

"That's fine with me," Zevon said with a shrug. Then, to Zed he said, "I should get off early enough to make dinner tonight."

Zed nodded with his mouth full. They ate in comfortable silence for a few minutes. Then there's a loud and insistent knocking at the door, to which Zed gets up to answer.

"Bucky?"

Addison turned at that, seeing her cousin duck under Zed's arm and walk into the house. "It's freezing out there," he grumbled under his breath.

Zed doesn't waste a second, asking the cheer captain, "What are you doing here?"

"A duh, I came to take my baby cuz to school," Bucky stated.

Addison cleared her throat and nodded her head at Zed. "And her boyfriend, of course!" Bucky added. Zed raised an eyebrow. "And…and his friends too?"

"May I ask why?" Zed asked. "Like, it's a little weird that you're here…in Zombietown where you never go."

"I've come here before!" Bucky said defensively.

Zevon chuckled heartily. He got up and walked over to the cheerleader. "You don't have to prove yourself to us. Would you care for some breakfast?"

"My mother would kill me if I ate Zombie food." After a second, Bucky added, "That was insensitive. I apologize."
"Uh," Zevon said, glancing nervously at his son. "You're trying, I guess."

"To be fair, Aunt Janet would actually kill him," Addison said with a shrug. "She's kind of a nutty geez if you know what I mean."

The Zombies laughed at her joke, making Addison grin slightly. "We'd better get going," she said as she got up. "See you guys later."

"So is there a reason Bucky offered to pick us up?" Zed whispered to his girlfriend.

"Stacey got a car for Christmas and the Aceys dropped him as their ride to school," Addison stated. "He doesn't want to tell Aunt Kitty that all his friends dropped him."

"I thought your aunt was Janet?"

"She's my aunt. I can call her whatever I want." Addison said with a shrug. "Anyway, Bucky is being a big baby and pretending like he's picking up the Aceys."

Bucky just rolled his eyes. "I can't do something nice for my cousin and her friends?"

"No," everyone in the car said in unison.

Bucky sighed. "You guys, I'm trying to have this huge personal growth this semester," he said. "It would be great if I could get a little support."

"His parents would never support him in a conquest like that," Addison whispered to Zed.

Zed nodded in understanding. "You know how you can grow? You can work with Eliza, Mayor Missy, and City Council on revising The BROCA-S68 Gene Mutation Clauses."

Eliza shot him a threatening look.

"What's that?" Bucky asked curiously.

"It's the Laws about Zombies," Addison explained. "You know how over break, they stopped funding Zombie Containment to issue uniforms. In layman's terms, Zombies could buy their own clothes."

"I don't need his help," Eliza stated.

"You asked for my help," Zed pointed out. "But I can't, because Addison's dad is teaching me how to drive. I give you Bucky."

Eliza groaned and Bucky just shook his head. Addison looked over at him, seeing his cheeks red and his fingers tapping at the wheel. "It's okay, you don't have to take me on as your pity project, E," he told her.

"Are you okay? You don't look so hot."

Addison bit the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. "Ouch," she mocked.

Zed cracked a smile but remained serious. "I'm serious," he told her. "You're all pale—paler than usual, at least."
"I'm not pale." Addison closed her locker and turned around to face her boyfriend. "I'm okay, I guess. My stomach kinda hurts but it's nothing to worry about."

Zed raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure? I don't wanna let it slide and then come and find out you're dying."

Addison nodded and took his hand. "Don't worry. Just walk me to class."

"Why do you guys hate me?"

Addison raised an amused eyebrow. "Is that a serious question, Buck?"

Bucky rolled his eyes. "Please don't call me 'Buck'. It sounds stupid. And yes, it's a serious question."

"Bucky, you've been taught to hate Zombies since you were born. I know you're trying to change—be more open minded and accepting. Zed knows you're trying to change. But to Eliza and Bonzo and literally every other zombie, you're the same guy who hacked their Z-Bands and nearly cost them their lives. The same guy who 'purified' his cheer team. The same guy—"

"I get it!" Bucky interrupted.

He sighed and Addison just looked at him sadly. She reached up and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I don't think you should help them on the rewriting project," she told him honestly. "You don't really get Zombie politics. But you should try to connect with them. They're like us, with a little gene mutation. Eliza can be really nice, if you pick apart her words."

Bucky just shrugged childishly.

Addison sighed. "This weekend, we're having a girls' weekend—me and Bree and Eliza. Maybe try connecting with Zed and Bonzo."

"Zed already likes me though," Bucky argued.

"Zed tolerates you because you're my favorite cousin," Addison stated. "I'm pretty sure he still kinda hates you for ruining his life."

Bucky sighed defeatedly. "Win over Zed and Bonzo, Eliza won't be so hard," Addison told him. "I know you can do it. You're the man."

Addison punched his shoulder when he didn't respond. "Who's the man?" she demanded.

"I'm the man," Bucky grumbled.

"Say it loud and proud!"

Bucky grinned slightly. "I'm not gonna scream 'I'm the man', Addy Cat."

"Whatever Buck, I need to go to class." She closed her locker and turned away. "See you later!"

"Why are you squinting? You're like five feet from the board."

"I have a headache," Addison stated in a pained voice.
"Did you take some Advil or something?" Zed asked.

Addison shook her head. "I'm not supposed to take anything other than my birth control and the antidepressant."

"So you're just gonna spend the whole day with this headache?"

Addison nodded. She looked over at him and shrugged. "It's not so bad, it's mostly just a pressure headache. Not a pounding one. I can make it until I get home."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded again, smiling slightly. "Stop worrying, it's just a headache," she told him.

Zed just shrugged cheekily. He leaned over and kissed her cheek. "It's good I worry, you get a little reckless sometimes."

"Hey!"

All the athletes had the same last period class—gym—in case they needed to leave early for a school event so as to not miss any core classes. The class was split into two groups that typically met in separate parts of the class—the first semester sports and the second semester sports. Bucky had rounded up every cheerleader he had kicked off the team in a blind rage that afternoon near the end of eighth period.

"As you all know, you were all…dismissed, from cheer for slightly unfair reasons."

"Slightly?" Addison asked with a raised eyebrow.

Bucky just shot her a look before continuing. "I…I want to apologize. I was acting out of anger and you all are amazing cheerleaders. I want to invite all of you back to the cheer squad."

"There's a catch, isn't there?" Addison pointed out. "If I know you, there's always a catch."

"Addison," Bucky said in exasperation.

"What's the catch Bucky?" Jessica asked.

Bucky rubbed the back of his head nervously. "Uh…I need a team for a surprise pep rally Friday," he admitted. "We haven't done one of those since the beginning of the year so I figured I could go a few more months without having to apologize."

"Look, you guys are awesome cheerleaders," Lacey chimed from beside Bucky. "You may hate Bucky for being a dick to you all, but this is a huge pep rally. And plus, if you guys come back, you get to go to the championship banquet next weekend."

Addison felt her nasal passage tighten like she was congested. She touched the skin under her nose and pulled her finger back, seeing it covered in blood. 'Oh,' she thought.

"We'll let you think it over," Tracey added. "Come see one of us tomorrow with your decision. Or show up at practice tomorrow."

"But the longer you take, the longer we'll have to practice and less free time you'll have this week, so I'd decide fast," Stacey added. "If you all decide now, we can start practice like, now."
Addison left the cheer lounge after that. She couldn't put her finger on it, but she didn't feel right. Her head felt fuzzy and full with thousands of throats racing through, completely out of nowhere; she was a little lightheaded and nauseous and moved quickly through the halls.

She could vaguely hear someone calling her name—Bucky, maybe. It sounded like she was in water, his voice warped and distant. She turned and felt her head spin and her lunch rush up her throat. She hunched over and vomited right there in the hall, her stomach twisted and her hair falling in her face, blood droplets falling from her nose. It was all bile and nothing more.

Who she presumed was Bucky ran up and held her before she could fall to her knees. The sound came rushing back to her at an alarming speed and sound. Everything was too loud, too fast, too bright. Bucky's voice was too loud for her to distinguish anything he was saying. She could hear her heartbeat pounding in her ears overbearing it all.

The hallway was too bright and her eyes stung in the worst way possible. Her face was wet and she couldn't figure out if it was her nose still bleeding or crying or bile that had dribbled onto her chin.

Addison found herself turning and hiding her face in her cousin's chest, where she blacked out a minute later.

Bucky noticed when her nose started to bleed, a little dribble of blood in the middle of the Aceys coming to his rescue. Not even a minute later she ran out.

Bucky excused himself from his own meeting, much to the confusion of the Aceys. He found Addison stumbling down the hallway, muttering to herself and holding her stomach.

"Addison!" he called.

She heard him for sure, and when she tried to turn to him she vomited. Bucky's eyes went wide with panic and he ran over. He collected the falling strands of hair and pulled them back. Then when he felt her knees wobble like she was about to fall, he wrapped his arms around her torso and eased her to the ground.

"Bucky!" He looked up and saw the Aceys and Bree rushing over to him.

"What happened?" Bree asked in panic.

"Call for help!" Bucky demanded. Tracey nodded and pulled out his phone, dialing for emergency services.

Addison turned her head into his chest, sobbing into his shirt. "And find Zed!" Bucky added after a second. Bree nodded and ran off down the hall in search of the Zombie.

Bucky tossed his phone to Lacey. "Call her doctor too," he said. "Uh, Jankowski."

Bucky looked over at Stacey and told her to go back with the cheerleaders. "I don't want them seeing this," he said before she left.

"What happened to her?" Tracey asked.

"Um, she was complaining about a headache earlier, and she had a nosebleed," Bucky said. "And she left and I think she got dizzy. She threw up and—oh my god she's blacked out!"

"Lay her on her back," Lacey instructed.
"Her nose is still bleeding, she might choke on it!"

"Do the nosebleed-thing then! I don't know!"

"Lay her on her side," Tracey instructed. "Pinch her nose to stop the nosebleed but make sure she's breathing through her mouth."

Bucky nodded and moved Addison off of him and onto her side. Her nose was still dripping blood but not as much as before.

"I need a mirror," he said. "Tracey? Lacey?"

Lacey nodded and pulled out a little mirror from her backpack. She passed it to Bucky along with his phone. "I called twice and there was no answer."

Bucky cursed under his breath. He put the mirror in front of his cousin's open mouth, watching it fog up with her breath. "She's breathing," he said with a sigh of relief.

Lacey got down on the floor next to them. "Ten minutes," Bucky told her. The blonde nodded and pinched the soft part of Addison's nose just as Bucky set the timer.

"Shouldn't we call her parents?" Lacey asked.

"We can't, they don't have guardianship over her anymore," Bucky told her. "I need Zed so we can call his dad."

They sat in a tense silence for the next few minutes. Bucky was glad Lacey was holding her nose and not him. He was freaking out on the inside and out, practically shaking and worried about what was going on with his cousin.

As the time ran out, Zed came running from down the hallway. Stacey and Bree were a few paces behind him.

He skidded to a stop in front of Bucky, taking a second to catch his breath before asking, "What happened? What did you guys do!"

"What did you do!" Lacey exclaimed. "She's living in your house!"

"Stop!" Bree shouted. "This isn't the time to throw the blame! Addy's sick." She came up next to Zed and told him, "She threw up and she passed out and her nose is bleeding."

"Bucky says she was dizzy," Tracey added.

Zed muttered in Zombie what sounded like a curse. He reached into Addison's pocket and pulled out her phone, tossing it up to Bree. "Call Dr. Jan," he told her.

"We tried, she didn't answer," Lacey said.

"She'll answer if she thinks Addison is calling," Zed said. He looked at the hallway floor in disgust.

"Did you call 9-1-1?" Zed asked.

Tracey nodded. "They're on their way."

Zed got down on the ground near her head. Bree passed him the phone once the psychiatrist answered. Zed and Bucky relayed the information over the phone. Zed hadn't realized he was
stroking her hair and her cheek. As they finished, Addison started to stir from her unconscious state.

Zed ended the call and put the phone in his shirt pocket a moment later. "What happened?" Bree asked.

"Her body's is reacting badly to her meds," Zed stated grimly. "Dr. Jan said to take her to the hospital for an official diagnosis."

"We're gonna have to get Addison through the gym and into the parking lot," Tracey told them, though he was looking at Zed. Zed was the only one strong enough to carry Addison long distances without any help, and they all knew that.

Zed put his arms under her knees and her upper back. Addison, in her hazy state, managed to wrap her arms around his neck and hold on as he carried her out and into the faculty parking lot as the ambulance pulled in.

Addison wasn't in the hospital for long. "It's a side effect," the doctor had told her. "Your body is reacting badly. Considering you took two tablets instead of the prescribed one, you got out really lucky. We'll return you to your prescription from last week for the time being. We've already contacted Dr. Jankowski to inform her of the change."

Zed had heard this part through the grapevine. The hospital hadn't let him inside because he was a Zombie. They were so strict with their policy, that they sent a security guard outside with Addison's discharge papers for his dad to sign, even though both Dale and Missy had shown up. Zevon was her guardian at the moment, to the point that her parents weren't even allowed to see her.

Later that day while her parents went to the garage to get their car with Zevon in tow, Addison and Zed and Bucky sat on the curb outside the front.

"That was terrible," Addison muttered.

"All that matters is that you're okay now," Bucky told her.

Addison just hummed in acknowledgement. "Sorry about your shirt."

Bucky shrugged. "It's what I'm for," he joked. "I'd rather you bleed on me anyway."

Addison sighed and leaned against her boyfriend's side. "I was supposed to pick up Zoey today," Addison said plainly.

"Eliza and Bonzo and Bree already went."

"I wish I was at home," Addison said miserably. "I've ruined you guys' day."

"No you didn't," Bucky told her. "I've lost a day of cheer practice. Which means that I can tell Principal Lee that we didn't have enough time to prepare for Friday, and we won't have to perform."

Addison lifted her head at that. Bucky never passed up an opportunity to shine. "Um, we're gonna perform on Friday," Addison told him. "We'll figure out an amazing routine in three days."

"We?" Bucky asked. "You aren't performing. You nearly died today."
"I have to agree with Bucky," Zed said. "You shouldn't cheer on Friday. I didn't even know you were cheering again."

"I'm fine, I just experienced multiple side effects to a strong drug," Addison stated. "I will be cheering, okay? And I'll help you come up with a perfectly amazing routine too. Pinkie swear." Addison lifted her hand and wiggled her pinkie at him.

Bucky sighed. "I don't want you working too hard, Addy," he told her. "I'll let you cheer, but don't even think about stunting or flying or anything crazy like that."

Addison wiggled her pinkie again and Bucky reluctantly reached forward and linked their pinkies. "No hard stuff," he reminded her.

"We've pinkie sworn, it's etched in stone now," Addison told him with a slight smile.

For the first time in the last few minutes, Zed spoke up. "It's moments like this where I don't doubt for a second you two are related."
Addison was sitting in homeroom when Evangeline Winslor made her first appearance at Seabrook High.

Eva was Addison's 'internet friend'. They met at the State Championship game back in December. They both lived in two different parts of New Hampshire but had spent the past two weeks of Winter Break texting and calling and video chatting. Not once did Eva mention moving to Seabrook.

"Why are you here?" Addison demanded.

Eva just grinned. "You should be happy to see your best friend."

"Bree's my best friend," Addison pointed out. "Then Eliza—" Addison pointed at the Zombie beside her and Eliza waved. "And if I'm counting my boyfriend he kinda outranks Eliza too."

Eva just smiled and sat in front of Addison. "It was a surprise for you," she said. "My mom started working at this place—Zombie Containment or some shit. She's like, a biological engineer and they're revamping the whole program there."

"Your mom is Dr. Swander?" Eliza asked with a huge grin on her face.

Eva nodded. "You've heard of her?"

"Everyone has," Eliza said excitedly. "She's like, the most accredited Zombie doctor. I heard she's been researching on Zombies since she was thirteen. She's like…she's like a god in the Zombie community."

"Are you super smart too?" Eliza asked. "It's cool if your not. Living up to your parent's legacy sucks."

Eva shrugged. "I'm just a simple girl, pretty averagely smart."

Eliza grinned. "Do you have your schedule? Maybe we have a few classes together."

"We all got schedule changes over break," Addison explained.

"Oh I forgot you were here."

Addison rolled her eyes. Eva passed her schedule back to Eliza, completely surpassing Addison. She didn't mind though. It was good for Eva to be making friends on her first day at a new school.

"We have the same exact schedule," Eliza pointed out. She smiled a little shyly at the transfer student, brushing a loose curl from her face and behind her ear.

Addison watched the exchange curiously. Eliza was being so…pleasant, in the weirdest way. She was usually so sarcastic and tough and now she was acting like a schoolgirl with a crush. It was so weird, just thinking about it gave Addison a small headache.

Eva smiled back. "Looks like we do."

Addison glanced between them with a raised eyebrow. The bell for second period rang then. "Well this has been fun," Addison muttered. She got up and shouldered her bag. "See you guys in English
"Is Eliza gay?"

Zed just raised an eyebrow at his girlfriend. "Where's this coming from? I will not let you break up with me for Eliza, if that's what you're thinking," he said, smiling so she knew he was only kidding.

"You remember Eva—Evangeline?" Addison asked.

Zed nodded. He took Addison's hand and began walking down the hallway to sixth period.

"Well she's gay, and I'm pretty sure she's been flirting with Eliza all day."

"Good for them."

Addison glanced at him curiously. "So Eliza's gay?"

"Ask her," Zed told her. "It's not my place to speak on her sexuality."

"They're both in biology," Addison told him. "So you can see what I'm talking about."

"Knowing Eliza, I doubt she even noticed."

Addison shrugged simply. She let the matter drop and savored the feeling of not worrying about flirting or crushes or boys.

She was already behind in most of her classes, especially biology. She had tutoring sessions set up after school most days, so Addison figured another day wouldn't hurt.

It was more entertaining to watch Eliza and Eva interact anyway. Eliza sat in front of her and Eva on Eliza's right—Zed was on Addison's left, but he was irrelevant at the moment. He was actually doing class work, which didn't aid in her 'Elizaline' project.

Eliza would look up every few minutes and glance at Eva and smile. And, at a different time, Eva would look over at Eliza and give her the same look Zed would give Addison when she was just doing some mindless task. A look of awe and adoration. Eliza dropped her pencil purposely and watched it roll until it stopped against Eva's boot. And when Eva returned it to her, their hands lingering on the writing utensil with their fingers brushing against each other.

"Okay, get into pairs to work on your classification system worksheet. No more than two people working together, try to stay in your general area."

Addison looked over at Zed and nodded, confirming their silent agreement to work together before Eliza could ask her best friend.

"Why don't you work with Eva?" Addison suggested.

Eliza tried her best to be casual when she shrugged. "Sure."

Addison moved her desk closer to her boyfriend. "Can I see your notes?" Zed asked. "I want to make sure I got the right information down."

"I wasn't taking notes," Addison whispered. "I was investigating."

Zed let out a long and drawn out sigh. "Drogi Z, engi mi snage," he muttered. He then looked up at
his girlfriend and asked, "What were you investigating?"

Addison smiled and nodded her head toward Eliza and Eva. "I'll show you the notes I took and the diagrams I made later, when they aren't so close," Addison told him.

Zed raised an eyebrow. "You made diagrams?"

"Mostly just comparing faces and pictures. This class was kinda boring today, probably because I missed several weeks and am very lost."

Along with Eliza and Eva and their (hopefully) blooming relationship, there was Bree and Bonzo. They went on two dates as far as Addison could remember, both of them being movie dates and walking home. A movie date made it easy with the language barrier, while Bree picked up a few terms in Zombie Tongue.

The language barrier didn't matter though. Bonzo was so affectionate it didn't matter if Bree barely got the language. She knew what he was trying to say, sometimes even before he said it.

It was amazing what the winter season did in Seabrook. It was like it was already February, with love in the air and chocolate hearts going around. Except it was the second week of January and the sky was usually grey every morning.

"I feel like all I talk about is me and Bonzo," Bree told Addison.

"On the contrary," Addison stated. "All we ever talk about is me and Zed. You can talk about Bonzo all day and night if you want. And save the juicy details for the sleepover this weekend."

Bree beamed at the mention of their weekend party. "Oh my god! I'm so excited for it!" she exclaimed. "My brother has a Wii so I've been searching around the house for all our old video games and I plan on going out today or tomorrow to buy some newer ones. My parents said we can use the basement so that Kyle doesn't bother us, so it's gonna be pretty awesome."

Addison grinned. "We gotta finish planning this thing so I know what I need to bring," she said.

"No way!" Bree exclaimed. "It's my party so I have everything covered. Just bring your sleeping stuff, clothes and shower stuff."

"Do you know any Zombie Tongue?" Bree asked.

"I know how to curse."

Bree couldn't help but laugh. Addison grinned and watched her, marveling at the perfect image of Bree laughing.

"Is that all you've learned? You've been living with Zombies for two weeks now."

Addison shrugged. "I'm pretty terrible. If you mispronounce a word, it turns out it's a different word. Instead of 'fuck' I said 'faggot'."

"They probably created that class just for you, to make sure you don't go screaming homophobic slurs," Bree said with mock sympathy.

Addison laughed lightly. She noticed Bree's attention behind her and her smiling wider. "Here come our boys," she said. "I never thought I'd say that! We should double date!"
Addison grinned. "I was considering it," she said. "First week of February is when the fair comes to town until mid-March. I've always wanted to go on a carnival date."

"Omg me too!"

Both teens laughed together. Zed and Bonzo got to their usual table, dropping their bags in their usual seats beside the two girls.

"Where were you guys?" Addison asked.

"I had to get a new schedule. Again." Zed told her. "Eliza's in there too with your friend."

"Who friend?"

"Evangeline," Addison told Bree. "She's in our third period."

"I gotta get food, we'll be back," Zed said.

"I got you lunch already," Addison said, gesturing to her tray.

"What'd you eat?" Zed asked.

"Half the cupcake."

Zed sighed. "That's your food, for you to eat."

"It's fine, I'm not that hungry," Addison told him. "Better to share with the Zed then to throw it out."

Zed sighed again but sat down next to his girlfriend. "You need to eat more than a half a cupcake if you wanna go to cheer today."

"I had fruit at breakfast."

Zed shook his head and went to work at the tray. "Why do you guys keep going in for schedule changes?" Bree asked. "It's Tuesday of the second semester."

"The new class only has a third period, and they handpicked twenty students to be in it," Zed explained. "Which means that we can't transfer out, so the rest of our schedule has to match."

"Gužo," Bonzo added.

Zed nodded. "A lot of our other class were too full of kids so they've been shifting us around," he explained.

"That one word did not mean all that," Addison stated.

"It meant 'too much'," Zed stated. He waved the fork at her and said, "Context clues are very important. Keep up."

Addison just turned her attention to Bonzo, waiting for him to finish getting his food from his lunchbox before starting. "Hey Bonzo, do you know if Eliza is gay?"

Bonzo looked shocked for a second, then opened his mouth to respond before abruptly stopping. Addison knew it was because Zed was making gestures she couldn't see. Instead Bonzo asked, "Nyze?"
"I just wanna know," Addison stated.

Bonzo shrugged a bit uncomfortably then returned his attention to his lunch. "Why are you asking?" Bree asked. "Something you're not telling me?"

"I know both of them know the answer and just won't tell me," Addison said pointedly.

"I told you to ask Eliza," Zed said. "It's not my job to tell her sexuality, it's hers. And if she doesn't want you to know, then you gotta be ready to accept that."

He then moved the tray to be between them. "That's your half, that's mine. Eat up."

Addison rolled her eyes. "I'm not hungry," she repeated.

"Addy," Zed said with a sigh. "You don't have to eat all of it, okay? But eat a little more than half a cupcake. It's not even healthy, and you're going to workout today."

"You gotta get your own fork."

Zed smiled, knowing that she meant she would eat, and got up and went to the condiments bar.

"Hey Addison!" Addison stopped in the hall and turned, seeing Eva calling after her and trying to catch up. Once the transfer student had caught up, Addison continued walking at a slower pace.

"So, what're you doing after school? You're kinda the only person I know here."

Addison was tempted to mention her and Eliza but thought against it. "I've got cheer today," she said. "We're supposed to be performing in the pep rally Friday, so I suggested we do this routine from tryouts and the Aceys didn't like it. So I'm excited to see what they've come up with in the two hours since I last saw them."

"The…the Aceys?" Eva asked with a slight laugh.

Addison stopped in the hall, gesturing up to the giant posters of the Aceys. "Lacey, Stacey, and Tracey," she explained. "Assistant cheer captains."

"Wow," Eva breathed out. "You guys really love cheer here."

"We used to be undefeated cheer champions," Addison explained. "Then they let Zombies cross the barrier and into our schools. The short story is that Bucky went batshit crazy and purged the cheer team of anyone who wasn't perfect or anti-Zombie, including me and Bree. We got second in the Cheer Championship, only because the Zombies came and saved our asses."

Eva nodded along. "There's a longer version?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'd tell you, but I actually have practice today," Addison said. "You…you could ask Eliza to tell you. She hasn't left yet, but I know she's picking up Zed's sister today."

"Are you trying to set us up?"

Addison feigned a surprised gasp. "I'm just introducing two of my friends—one of which is new to town."

"Okay," Eva said with an unsure grin. "So where is Eliza?"
Addison shrugged and turned to keep walking down the hall. "Where Zed is, Eliza is. I'll just call Zed."

"Eliza told me that Zombies don't have phones."

Addison called Zed, waiting a minute before he answered. It took a second for him to lift his Z-Band to his face, smiling at the sight of his girlfriend. "Hello Gorgeous. What can I do you for?"

"Are you going driving today?"

"I have tutoring after school for like, two hours," Zed said. "Why?"

"Is Eliza with you?"

Off screen, Eliza called, "Not willingly!"

Addison couldn't help but grin wider. "Okay, I'm sending Eva your way," she said. "I told her to ask Eliza to catch her up on what's happened in Seabrook this school year. I would, but I'm supposed to be at cheer like five minutes ago."

"Okay, we'll meet you at the gym," Zed said. "I love you."

"I love you too, see ya."

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"I have to pick up Zed's little sister," Eliza said. "I mean, if you're fine with coming along through Zombietown, then you can come with. But it's not a pretty picture there."

Eva bit her lip to hide a grin. "I'm sure you'll keep me safe, Eliza."
"You are Bucky—no. You are Benedict Arthur Davis. You can do anything. You don't have to be afraid of talking to some Zombies. You are not a wimp. You are a cheer rockstar. Go get 'em!"

Bucky breathed out and clapped his hands together. He was nervous for sure. Zed and Bonzo were nice, of course. Everyone liked them. They were the friendliest Zombies in Seabrook, along with Zoey. They would be down to hang out over the weekend, especially with the girls away for the weekend.

So why was he so nervous? It was the definite fear of rejection, of people not liking him. If Zed didn't like him, he risked losing his cousin. His cousin who he'd sworn to protect, who he'd catch a grenade for. Addison would chose Zed over him in a heartbeat. If the friendliest Zombies wouldn't even accept his company, then he wouldn't even blame Addison.

The only time Zed was ever alone—without his inner circle of friends around—was homeroom. It was, coincidentally, Bucky's homeroom.

"Hey Zed." The Zombie in question looked up with mild surprise. "So, how've you been?"

"Um, you drove me to school today," Zed said. "I'm sure you already know that I'm fine."

"Yeah, I guess," Bucky said with a shrug. Zed just smiled then went back to his work. "Uh, whatcha got there?"

"Math homework."

"Algebra 1?" Zed nodded once. "Hard stuff?"

Zed shrugged. "Addison helped me a lot, but now she's behind so I gotta figure this shit out on my own," he said.

Bucky couldn't help but make a surprised noise. It was the first time he'd heard Zed curse. It sounded unnatural and foreign to him.

"Speaking of Addy," Bucky said. "She mentioned a sleepover this weekend."

Zed nodded. "Some half-birthday bullshit."

"You don't sound too happy about it."

"Oh I'm thrilled," Zed stated. "I've been meaning to go out and do some work with Bonzo. It's been a while."

"Huh," Bucky said. "You know, I was gonna ask you and Bonzo to hang out this weekend."

Zed looked up with a raised eyebrow. "Did Addison put you up to this?"

Bucky rolled his eyes. "No, my actions don't revolve around my cousin."

"When it comes to me it does," Zed stated. Bucky opened his mouth the argue, but Zed went on anyway. "You've only ever interacted with me because of Addison. And usually I wouldn't mind, but I'm not really in the business of fake friends. I've got enough on my plate as it is."
"I—Addison didn't put me up to this," Bucky told him. "I told her that I wanted to...to try and be a
nicer person. I want to change, okay? I was mean and horrible, especially to you. And I want to
make amends. And...it'd definitely be easier to make amends with you and Bonzo, then Eliza.
'Cause she scares the shit out of me."

Zed breathed out a laugh, but didn't say anything otherwise. Bucky waited a minute before
straightening in his seat. Rejection hurt.

Then, when the period was almost over and the bell was about to ring, Zed said, "On Friday after
school, Addison is going straight to Bree's. When I get home, Zoey will be gone. Her and my dad
are taking the weekend away, doing a staycation at a motel in Zombietown. Me and Bonzo are
having a guy's weekend. You're welcome to come. If you do, you gotta bring that good human
food and booze."

"Your fourteen."

"I'm fifteen."

"That still doesn't make you old enough to drink."

Zed shrugged. "You gotta bring food and booze, those are my conditions. I'd also recommend you
bring lots of cash."

"What are you planning on doing?"

"Get blackout drunk, smash a few things, and eat." Zed glanced at the clock and began stuffing his
work back into his bag. The bell rang a second later and he got up, stepping around Bucky to get to
the door. "Don't tell Addison about that part, she doesn't need to know."

"Listen, Bucky, I love you but this routine won't work," Lacey told him. "We-we can't perform our
tryout routine."

"Yes we can," Addison stated. "Everyone already knows it. It eliminates the extra hours we'd have
to squeeze in to learn something new in three days. Plus, it was badass."

"It won't work, there's too much going on," Stacey said.

"Then we pick a focal point," Bucky said. "It'll be Addison. Not for nepotism, but because she's in
most of the tryout footage. It'd be easiest to focus on her and Bree."

The Aceys groaned. Tracey looked between the cousins and said, "How will this work, huh? More
than half the people in it were cut!"

"It's called acting," Addison said as if it were obvious. "We have enough of a team from the new
recruits this year and the returning members to have all the essential roles of the people who were
cut and made it onto important footage, and then some."

"What if they don't want to do it?" Lacey brought up.

"What if we don't want to do it?" Stacey added. "You didn't even ask us. We're your assistant
captains, not Addison."

"Unless you guys have an entire routine that is fantastic and can look well rehearsed in three days, I
don't care for your opinions on whether you like the current plan or not," Bucky stated. "And if
anyone else has a problem, I am not forcing them to show up."

"Why don't you guys want to do it?" Addison asked.

"Because we don't," Stacey snapped. "Why do we have to do everything you come up with?"

"Because I'm the only one coming up with anything!" Addison snapped. She groaned and got up, putting her books in her bag. "Do my idea, or don't. I don't give a fuck anymore. I'll be at practice today after school to see your 'oh-so-amazing' routine."

She shouldered her bag and left, making her way to the library to actually go to study hall.

Addison was late for practice by five minutes. Bucky didn't bother asking her why and had a feeling it was because of Zed. He did to her the same thing he did to anyone who was late: made her run five laps around the gym.

"It is Tuesday," Bucky stated. "We lost yesterday because the Aceys and myself were dealing with an emergency."

"What emergency?"

Bucky narrowed his eyes at the freshman who spoke up. "Just because you haven't been here in a while does not mean the rules have changed. Two laps."

He sighed then jogged over to the edge of the basketball court before starting on his laps.

"If you must know," Bucky stated. "We were at the hospital because of an emergency in my family. That's all you need to know. Now, does anyone else have any questions?"

After a quiet second, Jessica reluctantly raised her hand. "Yes, Jessica."

"How are we going to prepare a whole routine in three days?" she asked.

"Excellent question," Bucky said with a grin. "The Aceys and I were talking, as well as with Addison, and we've decided to perform a routine you all already know."

"In a way," Lacey chimed. "We put together a three minute version of tryouts and that's the routine we'll be performing. It's part of the whole 'started-from-the-bottom-now-we're-here' theme of the pep rally."

"We'll go into the cheer lounge in a minute, for now start with your warm up," Bucky instructed. "Two laps! No gaps or you run two more!"

He knew they wanted to groan but said nothing as they jogged lightly to the sidelines. Bucky then turned to his assistant captains and told them, "Lacey, make sure they're actually running with no gaps. Addison has to do two additional laps after she finishes her five," he said. "Stacey and Tracey, we need to work on the routine."

"Sloppy! Do it again, from the top!"

Bucky saw and heard their groans of annoyance. They'd been practicing for two hours with minimal water breaks. Some of them were getting better, sure, but some of them had gotten lazy since they'd left the team.
"You will not be dismissed until I see improvement from everyone!" Bucky shouted. "First formation and rest!"

The cheerleaders began walking back into their first formation. "Don't walk!" Bucky shouted.

The cheerleaders ran to their first formation places and stood in rest—feet shoulder width apart, hands resting on their lower back and heads down. The gym door opened and Bucky looked back to see Zed walk in.

"Um, are you guys almost finished?" Zed asked.

"Why?"

"'Cause I'm trying to go home," he said as if it were obvious.

"If they can get through the first half of their routine, then we'll be finished." Lacey said pointedly.

"You can't be in here either," Tracey added. "Closed practice. Bye-bye!"

Zed nodded and backed out, letting the heavy door swing shut as he left.

Bucky turned back to his team and rolled his eyes. "One, two!"

"Three, four!"

Bucky was minding his own business, walking down the hall to study hall, when he was grabbed by his jacket and slammed into the lockers. Two football players and Zed cornered him against the lockers and he felt a rush of panic. He'd never thought he'd end up in a situation like this—he had always been the star and everyone was afraid of him. Never the other way around.

"What the fuck, Buck?" the larger one demanded. "Addison is a mess right now because of you."

"Wh-what're you talking about?" Bucky laughed nervously. He glanced between them, then at Zed for help. "Zed?"

Zed wasn't smiling though. He looked at his teammates and told them, "I'll take it from here. Thanks guys."

They nodded and left, shooting Bucky a threatening look as they left. "What was that about?" Bucky asked with a laugh.

"You're working her too hard," Zed said. "Addison hasn't slept in two days. She stays up all night, outside in the dead of night in Zombietown for god sake, working on your routine. She didn't eat last night, or this morning, and she skipped lunch just now working on your fucking routine."

"What?" Bucky asked incredulously. "Addison wouldn't do that."

"It's already a struggle as it is to get her to eat something Bucky. Fix this, or you'll have a hell of a lot more to deal with than me."

"Did you just threaten me?"

Zed leaned in until their faces were inches apart. If Bucky looked close enough, he could see just how angry the Zombie was, the slight darkening of the veins running up and down his neck that disappeared beneath his shirt collar. "I will do way worse then threaten you Benedict," Zed
practically growled. "Think I'm in the mood to be fucking jerked around? Fix this. I swear to every god out there I will fuck you up without even going offline."

Zed gave one last glare before stalking away.

Sure enough she was there, in the gym practicing harder than Bucky had ever seen. He spent a few minutes watching her go and improvise when needed, going further in the routine then they had learned.

He waited until after she finished the third time before making his presence known. "What're you doing?" Bucky asked her.

Addison didn't turn to him when she responded. "Practicing," she said dryly.

"You skipped lunch."

Addison shrugged. "Big breakfast, wasn't very hungry."

"Are you telling the truth?"

Addison nodded. "I need to keep practicing. I need to get better."

"What'd you do yesterday after practice?"

"Practice some more."

"Did you eat yesterday?"

Addison shrugged. "A little, yeah."

"Are you lying to me?"

Addison sighed in frustration. "Why does it matter, Bucky? I-I'm practicing because I need to be the best. I'm not here to let anyone down."

Bucky walked over to her, standing so they were face to face. "You won't be allowed to practice today if you don't eat something," he told her with a sickly sweet smile. "And if that happens, I will find someone to take your position, and you will not cheer at all."

Addison didn't look scared at all. She just stared at him for a second before turning around and heading to the exit. She grabbed her bag and turned around giving Bucky both her middle fingers as she pushed the door open with her back.

Bucky sighed as she left. Her and Zed had become so vulgar and angry in the past few weeks it was starting to worry him.

"Zed!" Addison called as she stormed into the library. He was sitting with Eliza and Eva and was probably doing homework, but she was too upset to care.

She got to the table and dropped her bag down and said to him, "You snitched on me to Bucky."

Zed didn't bother to deny it. "Yes I did. Does that upset you?"

"No shit Sherlock," she said. "What I do doesn't concern him and it doesn't even concern you. I
chose to practice and skip lunch, that's not your business."

"Just because you think I don't care or don't notice, doesn't mean that I don't," Zed told her. "If you keep yelling at me because I care and want to make sure you're taking care of yourself then I'd suggest we take this outside."

"Bucky said I can't cheer," she exclaimed furiously. "It's your fault!"

Zed raised an eyebrow. "Really? Is that all Bucky said? Or did he say something else that you aren't telling me so you can make me feel bad?"

Addison stood there for a second with her arms crossed and her eyes on the ground. While she was thinking, Zed stood up and slowly wrapped his arms around her. Addison stood her ground for another second before sighing and leaning into his hug.

"What the heck," Eva muttered.

"Bucky said I have to eat if I want to practice today," she admitted. "And—and he said he'll replace me with someone else. I don't wanna be replaced I want to cheer!"

"I know you do," Zed said, his voice muffled by her hair. "But it's not good for you to be working out so hard without eating. It's not healthy and you're gonna work yourself into an early grave like this."

Addison nodded a bit ashamed.

"It's a good thing I saved you some food from lunch," Zed said. "We have to be sneaky though, 'cause we can't eat in here."

Zed pulled her down into his chair, pulling out a plastic wrapped sandwich for her. "I'm sorry I yelled at you," Addison said.

"I get it," Zed said. "You love to cheer, it's your thing. I played on your fear of not being able to cheer to get you to eat something, which is kinda wrong but it's what I needed to do."

Addison nodded and leaned her head against his chest. "It doesn't even feel like I've been skipping meals," she told him quietly. "You believe me, right?"

Zed nodded. He broke the sandwich in half then half again, offering her the quarter piece.

"It's a side effect of your meds. There's nothing wrong with you, so don't worry. Now there's an apple in there too, and an extra large Gatorade."

Addison perked her head up. "Orange?"

"Of course. I may be an idiot but I'm not stupid."

Addison giggled and kissed his cheek.

"Wow," Eva whispered to Eliza, making sure she was loud enough for Addison to hear. "Is it always like this?"

"Straight people problems," Eliza responded.

"Ah."
The cheerleaders' pep rally performance started off strange, to say the least. Zed got to sit in the front row with the rest of his team and Eliza and Bonzo had managed to snag the seats behind him.

The cheerleaders were sitting on the gym floor in various positions in regular workout clothes with numbers pinned to their shirts. Eliza had only been to two pep rallies but was pretty sure this wasn't how they were supposed to go. Addison and Bree moved from the middle of the group to the front.

Addison's white hair was in two French braids and she had one of Zed's pink long sleeved shirts, tied in the back. It was weird because she definitely didn't go to school like that which mean that this outfit—bland and average—was a part of the routine. She had on her white cheer shoes though and the spandex she wears under her cheer skirt.

"This year has been awesome!" Addison exclaimed with a grin. "It's been the best one ever, and it'll only get better!"

"Seabrook has truly stood out!" Bree added. "From our fall sports victories in volleyball and swimming and golf, to our winter sports crushing their seasons like boys and girls soccer and basketball, and our wrestling champs."

"And of course cheer placing second in the Regional Cheer Championship!"

The crowd cheered loudly. Addison and Bree waited for everyone to simmer down before continuing. "And football! New Hampshire State Champions!"

If it were possibly they screamed louder. Eliza kicked Zed lightly in the back and screamed in his ear.

"Now I'm sure you're all aware that we weren't always champions," Bree went on. "It took lots of hard work and dedication to get where we are."

"So the Mighty Shrimp Cheerleaders are here to show you exactly the hard work it takes to be awesome!" Addison exclaimed.

"Disclaimer: the full routine was fifteen minutes long and has been condensed into the most entertaining parts. Our cheerleaders have prepared this in a way to not reveal the identity of those who didn't make the team."

With that, Addison and Bree rejoined the cheerleaders who were starting to stand up. Over the gym speakers the school bell rang, followed by Bucky’s whistle.

"Okay, let's go! Line up." Bucky said to the cheerleaders.

He waited until they all rushed into four rows before continuing. "Welcome to cheerleading tryouts. It's nice to see so many Wannabes. I mean, we'd wanna be us, too, if we weren't already on the cheer squad." He laughed and the cheerleaders laughed a little awkwardly.

Bucky then made a hand motion for them all to stop. "You need to bring it, okay? Like my assistant captains. First up we have Stacey. Lacey. And Tracey. The Aceys."

Everyone—including the audience—applauded for them. Bucky motioned for them all to be silent again.
"Today's tryouts are going to be easy. The hardest thing you'll have to do is a back handspring, funky chicken, round-off match table split with a robot down powering finish."

The cheerleaders shifted uneasily. "Afraid?" Bucky asked with a grin.

Eva leaned over and asked Eliza, "Are all your pep rallies like this?"

"Beats me."

In the middle of the formation, Addison raised her hand. "Yes, Addison?"

"Captain Bucky, was that funky chicken cajun or shake-n-bake?"

"Well, I've never heard of cajun, so spice it up."

Addison grinned proudly and said, "We got this," to Bree but loud enough for everyone to hear.

"The Mighty Shrimp don't think small. Cheer until it hurts."

Bucky clapped as the music started up. Eliza recognized the song, not enough to put a name to it. It had a nice beat of course, and sounded Seabrook original.

The cheerleaders broke into stretches and Bucky and the Aceys moved to the end of the first line.

"Listen up it's not so tough I'll tell you how it's done. There's really nothing better than to hear your number one."

That was the first person they pushed from center stage and who disappeared behind the giant banner that read 'BE FEARLESS NOT CHEERLESS.'

"And I know how to get a crowd right up and on their feet. So if you want them in it, I'll show you how to get it."

Bucky, Tracey, and Stacey were in the front and leading the first cheer. "Ain't no mountain we can't climb, nothing keeps us down."

Then the cheerleaders went. "Got that fire in our soul, never count us out."

It was obvious who was out next. The one guy who didn't turn the right way. Lacey was right in his face. "We got one thing on our minds, call it victory." And shoved him away.

The Aceys stalked off from center court as everyone ran around to a new, triangular formation. "Yeah, that's where we're headed. And we know how to get it."

"This is Fired Up!" Eliza exclaimed excited. She looked between Eva and Bonzo and said, "I can't believe it! I actually know this song!"

Bonzo was enjoying the performance too much to pay attention to Eliza, and Eva just grinned at her excitement.

"We were made for this there's nothing we can't do. We came to play, we're here to stay and win the day 'cause—" The first guy to get kicked off was discovered, trying to blend in with the cheerleaders. Bucky unmasked him and kicked him off, taking his pompoms as he continued to patrol the cheerleaders.

"We were made for this didn't come here to lose. We came to play, we're here to stay what's left to
say when we know—" Bucky pushed the girl at the head of the formation off and took her place.

"Nothing's gonna get in our way. No! So get up out of our way. We're fired up, we're fired up, we're fired up." Everyone went down except Bucky and some girl near the back. Bucky rolled his eyes and stalked off. The Aceys pushed her off, fighting her for the pompoms as the rest continued. "Nothing's gonna get in our way. No! So get up out of our way. We're fired up, we're fired up, we're fired up."

"Small groups!" Bucky announced. Everyone threw their pompoms to the side and broke up into different small groups, Bucky's at centercourt.

He stood off to the side so the crowd could see him move his finger around before pointing to the middle, where the group separated to reveal Addison.

"Nepotism," Eva whispered, making Eliza and Bonzo laugh lightly.

"Been waiting for this day to come and it was all so clear. Since I was a little girl I saw me standing here." Addison was an amazing cheerleader, as always.

The focus then shifted to Bree. She was commanding her group perfectly. "And all the times they told me 'Walk away' I said 'Forget it'. I knew where I was headed. And I was gonna get it."

The two girls' groups merged in the middle. "Ain't no mountain we can't climb, nothing keeps us down. Got that fire in our soul never count us out. We got one thing on our minds, call it victory. Yeah, that's where we're headed, and we know how to get it."

The Aceys pushed two guys away at that point and all high fived. Everyone else lined up into a soul train with Bucky flipping down the line. "We were made for this there's nothing we can't do."

Everyone broke from the line as the Aceys sang, "We came to play, we're here to stay, and win the day 'cause—" There was a lot going on, but the main thing was the Aceys dancing up from the back as cheerleaders flipped through center court. "we were made for this didn't come here to lose. We came to play, we're here to stay, what's left to say when we know."

Two girls who were flipping got their numbers ripped off by Bucky. "Nothing's gonna get in our way. No! Come on, let me hear you say."

"We're fired up, you're fired up, we're fired up." Two more people lost their numbers by Bucky's utmost flare for the dramatics.

"Nothing's gonna get in our way. No! Come on, let me hear you say: We're fired up, you're fired up We're fired up." A girl who fell after being tossed up had her number ripped off and dramatically ripped up, the Aceys then dragged her off.

All the remaining cheerleaders ran behind the giant banner, leaving Bucky, Addison, Bree, and two cheerleaders named Jessica and...someone else Eliza couldn't remember.

"You guys got moves," Bucky said. "But can you win over a crowd? Get them to worship you. Like they worship me!"

The banner dropped and revealed all the cheerleaders sitting on three benches, changed into their cheer uniforms with a white giant banner behind them, a projection of the Mighty Shrimp logo on it. They all went wild when the banner fell and Bucky grinned proudly.

Bree didn't say anything but obviously freaked out, then ran behind the second banner. The Aceys
came up to the three remaining girls, deciding on the unnamed one and pushing her into center
court.

Her back was to the crowd but she just stood there, frozen in place. The cheerleaders booed her and
practically kicked her off the court. Then the Aceys actually kicked her off, dragging her off and
behind the giant banner.

Jessica went next, flipping to center court and making the cheerleaders and audience roar with
applause. On the other side, Bucky lifted two silver dinner covers to reveal silver pompoms.
"Welcome to the Mighty Shrimp!"

Jessica squealed, ran over and grabbed the pompoms, then ran behind the banner. Addison took a
depth breath and pranced to the center of court, facing the cheerleaders. "We are the Mighty
Shrimp!" Addison climbed up onto the bench in front, rousing up the crowd.

"It's time to show you now! We got the stuff to light you up—" Addison turned around and faced
the actual crowd. Her cheering was definitely spurring up the cheerleaders who were sitting there
mostly blandly.

"It's getting hotter now! We're getting hotter now!" Then, while flipping off of the bench, she
cheered loudly, "It's getting hotter now!"

The cheerleaders jumped up in excitement. It was hard to see with all the commotion, but as
everyone—mostly Addison—sang, "We were made for this there's nothing we can't do," she pulled
off her oversized long sleeve and revealed her cheer uniform, pulling her skirt down to cover her
shorts before leading the group of cheerleaders.

"We came to play, we're here to stay and win the day 'cause. We were made for this didn't come
here to lose. We came to play, we're here to stay, what's left to say when we know: Nothing's gonna
get in our way. No! Come on, let me hear you say: we're fired up, you're fired up, we're fired up!
Nothing's gonna get in our way. Come on, let me hear you say: We're fired up, you're fired up,
we're fired up. Fired up. Fired up."

Cue cheerleaders becoming everyone's favorite once again. And everyone falling in love with
Addison more so than before.

"Fucking Christ," Eva muttered. "Seabrook is so weird. How does everyone know this one song? It
doesn't sound like your 'high school theme' shit."

Eliza couldn't help but laugh. "You'll learn this fast: we sing and dance way more than we
probably should."

Eva laughed which Eliza barely heard over the screaming crowd behind her.

After the cheerleaders performed Addison had gone over to the football players, who had given her
a football jacket that she put on and practically lifted her into the air.

Bucky seemed peeved by it but carried on. "How was that, huh? Let's hear it for my amazing cheer
team!"

Everyone cheered loudly. Eliza leaned forward and jostled Zed's shoulder, to which he just looked
back at her and grinned.

"And our guests of honor today, the football team!" Bucky exclaimed. "Who absolutely crushed
the Warriors out west in Lebanon. Twenty-nine to nineteen, with our football MVP scoring two touchdowns back to back at the end of the fourth and bringing us to victory!"

Eliza would've kicked and jostled her best friend if every football player wasn't already. Everyone was screaming and chanting in excitement. Eva leaned in until her lips were practically touching Eliza ear which made the latter shiver. "For such a small school you guys are really loud."

"Y-yeah," Eliza muttered.

Addison dragged Zed into center court. He was obviously blushing and a little embarrassed. On the screen behind them, a video compilation of the weekend in North Carolina played with the instrumental of Bamm playing, starting when Zed and Addison got to school on Friday, through dinner and breakfast and all the meals they had had that weekend, videos of the guys dancing and goofing off on the bus and in the locker room, and ending with the game highlights. Eliza and Bonzo had made the video over the holiday break and the cheers of the crowd made the both of them feel really good inside.

The actual game footage mostly centered around their touchdowns or tackles which mostly involved Zed. Eliza reached into her bag and unlocked Addison's phone, setting it to recording. As the video ended, Principal Lee and Coach made their way to center court with a three-post trophy more than three feet tall. Addison tapped his shoulder and told him to turn around and his jaw dropped at the sight.

Even though she had a far seat, Eliza was pretty sure that Zed was crying (or trying not to). He embraced their principal in a tight hug and whispered something to her that made her laugh and smile.

The cheerleaders managed to quiet the crowd enough to allow Principal Lee to speak. "Introducing our football MVP, who's statistics this year broke every record in Seabrook history and several nationally, Zed Necrodopolus!"
Addison had walked with Bree and Eliza to their sleepover once school had let out, which left Bonzo and Zed to walk back to Zombietown alone. When they got there, Zevon and Zoey had already packed most of their bags and were getting ready to leave.

"Going so soon?" Zed joked dryly.

Zevon just nodded. "Zinnia said she'll take care of the house and Puppy while we're gone," he said. "When do you plan to head out?"

"Soon as Bucky gets here."

Zoey lifted her head from her suitcase. "You invited Bucky?"

Zed shrugged. "He wanted to hang out this weekend and I honestly don't care," Zed said. "If he doesn't want anything to do with me after, so be it."

Zoey just stared at him for a second longer, then zipped up her suitcase. "I'm ready to go," she announced.

She brought her bags to the door as well as Puppy's carrier. She wrapped her arms around her brother's legs and squeezed him tight. "Be safe," she told him.

"You too," Zed said to her. "See you Sunday."

Zoey nodded and pulled back. "I'm gonna bring Puppy to Miss Zinnia."

Zevon and Zed both nodded and watch the six year old go. Once she was gone and the door closed, Zevon moved to his son with his bags in tow.

"Don't forget to bring food with you," he told him.

"Yes Dad."

"And clean clothes. Lots of them in case you have an accident like last time."

"Yes Dad."

"And stick with Bonzo and especially Bucky. I don't know how I feel about having a human with you."

"Bonzo and I will look after him, Dad."

"And Zed, be safe. For real." Zed nodded in agreement. "If you're going to destroy property, do it
when it's dark. And don't get into too much trouble, okay? I know it gets hard around now but…it'd be terrible to lose both of you."

Zed looked down at his father's sad expression. Tentatively, he wrapped his arms around the older man and hugged him close. "I'll come back alive, don't worry," Zed whispered.

The father and son pulled apart. Zevon grabbed up his bags and moved for the door. "We'll be back Sunday before curfew. I expect you then too. Preferably sober."

Zed forced a smile. "Of course, see you."

Bucky arrived not long after Zed's family left. Once he got there, Zed and Bonzo went to work to make him 'blend in' more in Zombietown, dressing the cheer captain in some of their old coveralls.

"You're really tan, but I doubt anyone will notice," Zed said. "Try to keep your head low though. We don't want to draw any attention to ourselves."

Bucky nodded along. Once they were all ready to go, the three guys grabbed their stuffed backpacks and headed out.

"So…what's the plan?"

"Gorge magla," Bonzo stated.

Zed elbowed his side and gave him a threatening look. "He doesn't know," he said albeit harshly.

"I don't know what?"

"We're gonna sacrifice you to the almighty Z," Zed deadpanned.

Bucky paled at that. "Bucky, I'm just messing with you," Zed explained. "We're just going to hang out this weekend. Get a little drunk here and there."

"Zerven."

Zed nodded in agreement. "Bonzo gonna make a mural. I might help but…I'm not good at painting."

"Is that what Bonzo said?"

It wasn't, but Zed nodded anyway. He didn't plan on telling Bucky that the next day would be the six year anniversary of his mother's death. Or that none of them liked being near the house that day, and that he was planning on getting blackout drunk so he could forget what day it was.

They had spent the night in an old and empty warehouse and Bucky had slept on a dusty mattress. He only woke up because of the paint fumes from Bonzo's newest mural. The cheerleader felt out of place there. He couldn't talk to Bonzo because of the language barrier. And Zed…well Zed was giggly-drunk.

Bucky tried to ignore the strange feeling he got at the thought of Zed drinking so much, the same way Bonzo didn't acknowledge it. He wasn't awake for long before Bonzo declared, "Gozed," which Bucky knew meant that it was time for breakfast.

"I gotta go like this?" Bucky asked, trying to hide his disgust.
"Za."

"No shit Sherlock," Zed said, though in his drunken state it was hard to be offended. "If I don't eat something soon I'm gonna get too drunk to give a fuck. Besides, it's not like you'll even change this weekend."

"Excuse me?"

Zed laughed and slung an arm around his best friend's shoulder. "I'm so starving! To dinner!"

"Gorzing zin dez," Bonzo told him.

Zed just waved him off. To the cheerleader following them a few steps behind, he said, "Don't forget to bring the...the beer."

Bucky grabbed his backpack, which was significantly lighter than when he'd brought it the night before. "Buzabala," Bonzo said, motioning for Bucky come closer, then slinging Zed's arm over his shoulder so the both of them were supporting the wasted Zombie.

"Zulta." Bonzo said and nodded toward the upcoming staircase.

"Last year Bonzo let me fall down the stairs," Zed stated. "S'fine though, no hard feelings or anything." He giggled and hiccuped in his drunken state.

"You guys did this last year?" Bucky asked.

"Za."

Bucky raised an eyebrow. "You let Zed get this drunk last year?"

"Bonzo can't control me!" Zed shouted. "I'm outta control!"

Bonzo stopped suddenly and Zed stumbled, nearly tumbling down the stairs if not for Bucky supporting him on his other side.

Zed laughed and leaned against Bucky, who in turn leaned against the wall. "S'what happened last year," he said in lieu of explanation. He breathed out a laugh and smiled drunkenly. "I didn't break anything and I'm sure Bonzo felt bad after."

Bucky looked at the Zombie in question, who just shrugged then continued down the stairs. "Wait, you aren't gonna help me?" Bucky called.

Bonzo turned and smiled sweetly at Bucky, "Dogny," he said and waved, then continued down the stairs.

The day went on. Bucky helped Bonzo with his mural, following through on simple instructions and mostly painting backgrounds or resupplying paint. Zed lay on the floor a few feet away from them, mostly talking to himself and laughing and sounding like a crazy, stupid drunkard.

"Is it always like this?" Bucky asked.

Bonzo nodded. "Gaganza maglazo doden."

"I wish I understood what you just said."
"Today makes it six years since Zed's mom died."

Bucky turned at the sound of another person in the room. Another Zombie—one of the ones he knew goofed off in the cover band 'Bowling for Zoup'—walked over to them with a sad sort of smile on his face.

"What?" Bucky asked in disbelief. "It's...he's...what?"

The Zombie laughed. "I didn't think Zed was being serious when he said you were coming," he admitted. "He didn't even want to tell Addison, his own girlfriend."

"I am so confused," Bucky stated. "What's going on? Who are you? Why are you here? Why didn't Zed wanna tell Addison?"

"Zach," he introduced himself. "And how could you not know?" He looked at Bonzo and asked, "Zed didn't tell him?"

Without taking his attention from his art, Bonzo shook his head. Zach nodded in understanding, then called to the Zombie on the floor, "Hey, do you mind if I tell Bucky everything?"

"Who cares!" Zed exclaimed. "Life's stupid anyway."

"He is so drunk," Zach muttered, shaking his head with a smile.

"You know what's going on?"

Zach nodded. "When his mom died it messed him up pretty bad," he explained. "You know how lime can make a Zombie go rogue and they can't go back?"

Bucky nodded even though it was all new information to him.

"Well his mom had some before this information was discovered," Zach explained. "It was so bad. She tried to..." he leaned in and spoke lowly so Zed couldn't hear. "She tried to eat him and Zoey. Zombies don't ever try to eat other Zombies. And when the Z-Patrol got there, they had to kill her in the street."

"Zed was only nine years old," he went on. "Zoey was only a few months and doesn't remember and Zevon wasn't home. So it all hurts Zed way more than anyone else in his family. Could you blame him for wanting to get shitfaced? He watched his own mother go rogue and try to kill her children."

"Wow," Bucky breathed out. "I had no idea."

Zach nodded solemnly. "He doesn't like pity and only accepts comfort from Eliza and Bonzo. Paizley usually comes to make sure Zed doesn't get himself killed, but she's out with Zane so I came in her place."

Bucky closed his eyes and breathed through his nose. He only knew three Zombies and all the new names were starting to blur together. It was getting hard to keep track of who's who.

"Zora's death really hit everyone hard," Zach went on. "But like I said, Zed was the only one who saw it with his own two eyes. He hates being at home on the anniversary, but he didn't start medicating with alcohol until two years ago, when he was thirteen."

"And you guys let him do that?"
Zach shrugged. "Nobody wants to mess with Zed. He's kind of a big deal. I'm only here because I've been waiting forever for Zane and Paiz to go out and nothing's gonna mess that up."

If it were different circumstances, Bucky would have laughed.

"So we just sit here and let Zed drink himself into a stupor?" Bucky asked. When Zach shrugged, Bucky went on and said, "He could die from alcohol poisoning. Addison would kill me if that happened."

"Do you always live in fear of your younger cousin?"

"I—"

"Besides, we'll cut him off soon." After a beat, he added, "You'll cut him off. He gets violent and besides, he already hates you."

"He doesn't hate me!"

"He definitely hates you," Zach stated.

"Za," Bonzo agreed.

"I fucking hate you, Benedict!" Zed exclaimed with a laugh.

Bucky sighed but didn't say anything. Bonzo thrust a paint brush into both their hands and said, "Zerven." They continued to paint for a few hours while making sure Zed didn't do anything stupid.

At one point, Zed had started murmuring in Zombie-Tongue, which was when Bonzo and Zach decided it was time to cut him off. Zach went out after that and came back with lunch for all of them and Bucky's near empty wallet.

"It's great eating without a budget," Zach said cheekily. "Now, who's gonna spoon feed Zed?"

Bucky raised an eyebrow. "He's fourteen."

"Zed is fifteen," Zach corrected.

"All the more reason he can feed himself."

"Not when he's so wasted," Zach said. "All you have to do is make sure he eats most of it. It'll absorb some of the alcohol, then he'll ask for more. Probably pass out by five so we won't have to worry about dinner."

"You're saying this like you know I'm gonna feed him."

"Well I know that I'm not," Zach stated. "And Bonzo won't either."

"Why doesn't Bonzo have to!" Bucky exclaimed.

"Gar bruger."

Bucky groaned. He didn't care about what Bonzo had said, he just knew whatever it was meant that he had to go and make sure Zed ate. After lunch, they migrated from the empty warehouse and across Zombietown, with Bucky and Bonzo practically carrying Zed while Zach interacted with the Zombies they passed.
"Buck," Zed said in a slow and sing-song voice. "Buck! Do you…do you wanna drink too?"

"What?"

"I've been hogging all tequila," Zed went on. "S'no fun getting wasted all by yourself."

"I…"

"Don't say you don't drink, because that's a fucking lie," Zed said. "When…when we get to the…the place we're going. Bonzo! Where are we going!"

Bonzo flinched, then answered, "Ze growberlag."

"Ah," Zed said. "When we get to the Power Plant, we'll get stupid wasted. It'll be fun, trust me. Better than being…"

Zed stopped abruptly and hunched over, holding his midsection. "Are you gonna vomit?" Bucky asked.

Zed stood there for a second, then straightened up as much as he could. "No, no," he murmured. "Almost. I'm fine."

"Zorog?" Bonzo asked.

"Don't worry, I'm fine," Zed said again. "Let's just…let's go."

Bucky woke up with the worst hangover he'd ever experienced. It was worse than the time the Aceys gave him a twenty each for every shot he took and he was determined to clean them out. He did earn four hundred and twenty dollars that night (he had seven shots).

His head was pounding and it hurt to open his eyes, even though the room was still somewhat dark. He felt nauseous and his mouth was dry.

It took Bucky a minute to realize he wasn't in the old Power Plant, but in the backseat of an old Pick-Up truck. From the driver's seat, Zed told him, "If you're gonna vomit, open the door and do it in the snow."

Bucky groaned and pulled himself toward the door, already feeling to contents of his stomach already rising in his throat. He got the door open and vomited in the snow.

One he finished and sat back up, making sure to close the door to avoid the light, Zed passed him a still cold water bottle that was cloudy. "It'll help with the hangover," he explained. "Got some dissolvable pill or some shit. I don't remember."

Bucky took the bottle graciously and took a long sip. "Not drinking again?" Bucky asked.

Zed shook his head. "I have to go home today," he explained. "My pops doesn't mind so much I drink, so long as Zoey doesn't see."

Bucky nodded. "Um, where are we? Where's Bonzo and…Zach?"

"Power Plant."

"Why's it so dark?"
"It's six in the morning."

"Where are we?"

"You ask a lot of questions." Zed sighed and took a long drink of water. "Welcome to the Zombie Graveyard. I usually come here alone or with Eliza, to…to talk to my mom. Bonzo hates it here because of his own personal experience and I can't do that to him. And Zach." Zed shrugged. "We're not close enough to go visit my dead mother."

"And…" Bucky was reluctant to ask. "And we are?"

Zed nodded and shrugged. "I don't just drink with anyone."

"Whose truck is this?"

Zed pointed at himself. "Before you ask anything else, I'm seriously not up for conversation right now. Mourning my dead mother. Not good for bonding time, okay?"

Bucky nodded in understanding. All of his relatives—or at least the ones he cared about—were all still alive. He'd never been to a funeral and Zed was, so far, the only person he knew who lost someone important.

They sat in relative silence, listening to the soft hum of the truck's fuzzy radio. The sun rose and the sky went from dark to soft purple to a lighter blue.

"Ever watch the sunrise, Bucky?"

"No," the cheerleader answered.

"I'd watch it on my birthday. I was too excited to sleep. Mom knew I was awake and she'd sometimes join me." Zed took a long drink of water before continuing. "And I watched the sunrise with Addison. It was really beautiful, especially since we were on a beach and it was coming up over the water."

"In Seabrook?"

"Charlotte."

Bucky nodded in understanding. They didn't get out of the truck until both their waters were empty. Bucky hung back a few steps and followed Zed to his mother's grave.

Nora 'Zora' Necrodopolus
1935-2012

"Your mom was seventy-seven?"

"Zombies don't age when they're rogue." Zed said, a little offhandedly. "No more talking. Please?"

Zed sat down in the snow in front of his mother's grave. Bucky waited a second then sat down too. They sat there for most of the morning in silence. Bucky's phone buzzed at ten with a message from his mom, asking him where he was and when he planned on coming home. He told her that he was out with some friends and would be back before dinner.

"Hi Mommy," Zed said, his voice quiet and soft and barely audibly. Bucky put his phone in his pocket, figuring it would be a little rude to be on his phone during a time like this.
Zed went on, not paying any mind to Bucky. "Where do I start? This year has been...its been an experience. Seabrook let Zombies on their side of the barrier. I go to human high school now, and I'm on the football team. We won the State Championship. I wish you were there. You would've been so proud of me."

Zed fidgeted with his fingers. "Then you would've been so mad at me too. I...I hacked my Z-Band, so that I could win games in the beginning. It hurt a lot, and you would've given me a sufficient punishment. But, a lot of good came from it. Zombies are more accepted. We don't have to wear government issued coveralls, or be home by sundown. No, the curfew is midnight now, but Z-Patrol doesn't monitor the streets as much."

Zed laughed, sad and a bit bitterly. He ran a hand through his hair. "There's something else. Something really important. I...I met a girl. She's human, and her name is Addison. She's the most perfect girl in the world. I...I never thought I'd feel the way I do, with anyone. I love her so much. I know you'd love her too. Our story..."

He laughed a little before continuing. "You'd love it. It's like a fairytale. Remember the story you'd tell me? About the human and the Zombie that fell in love. It's like that, without the rejection from everyone in their lives and the running away to be together. Sure, people disapproved of us at first. Hell, Bucky here did everything in his power to keep us apart. It's okay though, because he's really coming around. But Addy and me, it just feels so right."

Zed looked at Bucky nervously. "Don't freak out," he told him. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a velvet black box.

Bucky's eyes went wide in surprise. "You didn't."

Zed nodded. "You don't get to see," he told him. "You and Mommy are the only people who know. I won't actually propose. We have to both be 18 to get married, or get our parents' permission. Chief Dale still scares me to death."

"And you still bought an engagement ring?"

Zed nodded. "It was...it's the most perfect ring in the world. When the time is right, there's no other ring I'd want to use."

Bucky took a deep breath. "You're kinda crazy, Necrodopolus," he breathed out.

Zed laughed, slipped the ring box back into his pocket and turned his attention back to the gravestone. "I'll have to come by during the year to tell you all about Addison," he said to his mother. "There's too much for me to say, and I gotta get back soon."

Zed was quiet for a minute, then continued. "Addison's dad is the chief of Zombie Patrol, and her mom is the mayor of Seabrook. It's such a huge coincidence. And because I'm still dubbed as the 'Miracle Zombie', I get first dibs on everything. I'm close to being the first Zombie to drive. Me and Bonzo finished up on your truck. It's up and running. I drove it here last night, even though I legal can't drive and was...intoxicated."

"Bonzo isn't officially dating, but he's been going out with Bree, Addison best friend and another human. And Eliza. She hasn't told me anything, but I know my best friend and I know she has a crush on this new girl at school. Aside from romance, she's really changed a lot. Her and the mayor are rewriting the Zombie laws."

"We all cheered with the humans at the Regional Cheer Championship. It was epic, even Zoey..."
performed. She was going to cheer with the Mini Shrimp this summer, but they're against Zombies. It's okay though, because—" Zed laughed and smiled and ran a hand through his hair. "Because Addison is starting a cheer program for Zombies. She's just waiting for approval. I can't believe how much my awesome girlfriend comes up.

"I…I almost died. Besides the Z-Band hacking. It was after we won the game, my teammates dumped the cooler onto me. If it weren't for Addison, I would've gone rogue. I don't know how she does it, but she keeps him at bay. I'm so scared of him, but she's not. He only ever behaves when she's around. It's weird, but not surprising. I know he's trying to mate with her, which means it's good that I'm in control and he's not. He hates me, as always. Nothing new there."

Zed sighed. "I don't know what else to say. I feel like there's so much more but I can't think of anything."

"I really miss you, Mommy," he said. "I…I'm barely holding on. It's so hard without you around. I —" Zed's voice broke. Bucky felt himself choking up with tears. It wasn't even his mother and he was so upset and sad. He couldn't even imagine how Zed was feeling.

Bucky leaned over and wrapped an arm around Zed, pulling the Zombie in and letting him sob into his chest. He rubbed his back liked he'd do when Addison would cry, not saying anything and just being there.

"So…what are we gonna tell Addison when we see her?"

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't tell her about this weekend," Bucky explained.

Zed laughed lightly. "Dude, how drunk were you yesterday?"

Bucky shrugged. He felt his cheeks heat up. For what, he wasn't sure yet.

"We spent all night doing stupid shit and snapping Addison on your phone," Zed explained with a grin. "When she sees it, she'll know that you and I were out drinking. Eliza will probably tell her soon what's happening. Then she'll be super pissed at me and still super caring, because she's Addison. She'll definitely hit me, but not with any force or actual anger. You'll go home, Addison and I will go up to my room and talk. I will cry and she'll hug me."

"You seem oddly prepared," Bucky muttered. "How often does this happen?"

Zed shrugged. "I know my girlfriend."

"Thanks for coming, by the way," Zed said. "It was fun. You're pretty cool. Especially when I get you drunk enough."

Bucky couldn't help but laugh. "Think about that next time you don't invite me to a Zombie Mash."

"That wasn't my decision," Zed pointed out. "But I'll put in a good word on your behalf. I'm sure Zombies would love having you around, especially the really attractive gay ones I know have been eyeing you."

Bucky's face went red and he exclaimed in surprise and slight frustration, "Zed!"
So what’d you think? Leave a comment! They make my day, even if I don’t respond! Next chapter is the girl’s sleepover, coming next week (hopefully Thursday and not a day early).
"So I set up last night and before I left for school this morning, but it might be a mess because my brother came home for the weekend to ruin our fun."

Addison just grinned. "I'm sure Kyle can't be that bad."

"Oh he's terrible," Bree stated. "I think he's out to get me! He always makes sure to ruin any sleepover I host!"

Eliza couldn't help but chuckle. "This weekend will be exciting then, right?"

Bree had drawn up an itinerary of the weekend on a large whiteboard. On Friday they were binge watching every Disney Princess movie. On Saturday they'd have DCOMs playing on the big screen while doing several activities, like board games and baking before moving onto video games. Saturday night they'd watch all the Disney/Pixar movies, starting with Toy Story and ending with Coco. Then on Sunday, they'd leave music playing and do arts and crafts.

"This is all...thoroughly planned," Eliza commented.

"It's just a guide," Addison explained. "If you don't like something we don't have to do it."

"There's room for adjustments."

Eliza nodded in understanding.

"We're making this extra special because it's your first sleepover," Bree stated. "Both of you."

Eliza grinned slightly and looked at Addison. "You've never been to a sleepover?"

"I-I couldn't sleep with my wig on, so my parents didn't let me sleep at other people's houses," Addison said. She shrugged and added, "Besides, I didn't have any friends."

"I call B.S."

"It's true!" Addison exclaimed with a laugh. "You'll see when we watch Frozen, but it's like that. Don't let them in, don't let them see. Be the good girl you always have to be."

"Conceal, don't feel. Don't let them know."

Then, together, Addison and Bree sang loudly, "Well now they know!"

The two girls laughed together. "You are so Elsa, Addy," Bree told her. "We should watch it first!"

"No way, we're watching them in released order," Addison stated. "So we can see the old stuff first and see the newer and better quality movies near the end. If we're going to culture Eliza, we gotta do it right."

"Culture me?"

"You aren't a person ever born if you've never seen a single Disney movie," Addison stated.

"I've seen a Disney movie!" Eliza exclaimed. "I saw two and a half minutes of The Lion King with
Zoey. Granted, it was the last few minutes. But it still counts."

Addison just giggled. "It doesn't, E. But whatever helps you sleep at night."

It wasn't until one in the morning when they were halfway through their movie marathon which was around the end of Pocahontas. It wasn't a decision they made, and more so because Bree's brother came down to yell at them.

"It's almost two in the morning! Go to sleep!"

"Why don't you go to sleep?" Bree countered. "We're having a sleepover!"

"Sleep is in the word!" Kyle exclaimed a bit furiously. "All I hear is your off key singing!"

"I am not singing offkey, that's Addison."

Addison grinned and waved from her spot on the floor. "It's more fun to sing along if you're offkey," she said in lieu of explanation. "The only one not singing is Eliza."

Eliza waved from her spot next to Addison. "I'm Eliza, by the way. Considering we've never met, at least."

Kyle smiled which Eliza didn't return. "So you're the Zombie that puts up with my dorky sister and her best friend."

Eliza shrugged. "I have my own loser best friends, it's not hard."

Kyle chuckled at that. Bree stood up and climbed the stairs, pushing the door closed. "Go away," she complained. "We're trying to watch movies."

Kyle laughed as his sister closed the door in his face. She turned and skipped back down the stairs, falling down into the mess of pillows. "Sorry about...that," Bree apologized. "He can be a flirty dipwad."

Eliza's face scrunched up. "Is that how you straight people flirt? Thank Z, I'm gay."

Addison grinned and exclaimed, "I knew it!" at the same time as Bree asking "You are?"

Eliza looked between the pair with an amused look. "What do you mean 'I knew it'?" she asked Addison.

"I had my suspension when I called you pretty in October and you got all flustered, but I was pretty sure when Eva transferred," Addison explained. "But every time I asked Zed, he just told me that it wasn't his business."

Eliza rolled her eyes with a smile. "I mean, I wasn't hiding it," she said with a shrug. "I was banging Lacey for several months."

The two girls' jaws dropped in shock. "You're lying."

Eliza shook her head. She bit her lip to keep from smiling and said, "Lesbian sex is really good, just FYI."

Addison gasped and was a bit flustered. She picked up her pillow and swung it at Eliza, making the latter gasp in mock surprise. She grabbed her own pillow and swung it at Addison, then turned and
dished the same punishment to Bree.

"What's wrong with you guys? I literally make gay jokes all the time!" Eliza exclaimed.

Bree threw a pillow at the Zombie. "No you don't! I would remember that!" she flustered.

"I always say how straight people are so weird," Eliza explained, flinging the pillow back.

Addison shook her head. "You've never said that to us."

Eliza swung her pillow at the white-haired girl again. Despite the several tosses and hits, it officially started the one am pillow fight.

"Now that I think about it, it was Zed I said that too."

"Eliza!"

"Eliza," Addison whispered. "Are you still awake?"

From across the room, Eliza muttered, "No."

"Go to sleep, Addy," Bree groaned.

"I have a question," Addison pointed out.

"It can wait for the morning," Eliza mumbled.

Addison rolled her eyes. "It is morning."

"Smartass."

"Why are you flirting with Eva if you're with Lacey?"

Eliza simply said, "I'm not with Lacey. She doesn't want a relationship."

"Oh."

Addison's eyes had adjusted to the dark. She watched as Bree sat up from her spot and did the same, both girls propped on their elbows. "When did that happen?" Bree asked.

"I dunno, I'm tired," Eliza stated. "Let me sleep."

"You so know," Bree argued. "We're just curious. We'd tell you all the gory details of our love lives."

Eliza groaned. "Before Winter break," she explained. "Like the day before Addison came back. I... I usually talk to Zed about it but he was a little occupied."

"I'm sorry," Addison said.

"Look on the bright side," Bree said cheerily. "You could ask out Eva. You guys would be so cute together."

Eliza shrugged a bit uncomfortably. "Romance is shit," she muttered. "I'm going to sleep."
Addison didn't sleep that night. She tried every technique she knew, but continued to be restless the entire night. At five in the morning, Bucky sent her a Snapchat. Going on her phone wouldn't help her in her attempts to get to sleep but she was curious as to why he was texting her.

Addison was glad she opened it. Bucky had sent her a snap of Zed, sleeping on the floor in some dark place. *'Your boyfriend's kinda cute.'*

*He's my crazy cute Zombie. Don't come for him. MINE.'*

He responded a minute later. *'Shouldn't you be asleep? It's really late.'*

*'You snapped me.'*

Bucky sent a picture of him next, eyes closed and little Z's drawn by his forehead. *'Okay im going to sleep. You should too. See you Sunday.'*

Addison didn't bother answering. She put her phone back where it was charging and laid back on her sleeping bag.

Addison didn't want to, but she missed Zed. At that present moment she missed sleeping with him, in his bed and snuggled into him. It was twin-sized and small; Zed could barely fit, and the two of them in it at once was a tight squeeze, but not uncomfortable. Even though he was toned and muscular in all the right places, he was more comfortable to sleep on than her own queen-sized bed where she could stretch out and have all the space she needed.

Addison sat up and crawled out of her sleeping bag, tip-toeing her way around the basement to her suitcase against the wall. She had stolen a few of Zed's shirts while she was packing, and slipped one long-sleeve on over her pajamas. It was warm and smelled like he did and felt like when they'd cuddled. It was easier to drift off buried in his shirt. It wasn't the same, but it was as close as she would get.

"Let's go out for breakfast," Bree suggested. "My dad'll pay for it too, so you guys don't have to worry."

Eliza yawned dramatically and made a show of turning in her sleeping bag. "I'm still sleeping," she grumbled.

"It's almost lunchtime anyway," Addison pointed out. "We shouldn't have stayed up that late. My head hurts."

"Maybe you shouldn't have stayed up all night texting your boyfriend," Bree said cheekily.

Addison rolled her eyes. "I couldn't sleep. I'm suffering from separation, okay?"

Eliza's head perked up with a sly grin. "From Zed, huh?"

"Okay, that's enough," Addison stated. She smiled though and stood up. "We should definitely go and get breakfast. When I was at cheer camp, my parents would take me to this fun place a few blocks away for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It's great I think you guys'll love it!"

It didn't take long for them to get dressed in more presentable clothes—they changed from pajama pants into leggings and put on their sneakers and coats.

"We look like a mess," Bree said with a grin. "Let's go!"
"I know this is a girls' weekend and everything, but I just wanna ask you questions about Bonzo."

Eliza nodded. "I can reveal all the juicy secrets about your boyfriends, I've known them since we were babies."

"What's this whole 'miracle baby' thing? Zed doesn't really like it when I bring it up, but I'm curious."

"Good question." Eliza took a minute to eat another bite of her omelette before answering. "So after they invented the Z-bands, no one was really sure how the anatomy of Zombies worked. There's no brain activity when we're rogue, so that amount of cell death should've been enough to fuck with reproduction. So these scientists got a group of Zombies—all young between like sixteen and twenty-five—and tried reproduction. And for months nothing would happen. Then in like the fourth trial group, Zed's mom and like four others turned up pregnant. So they knew shit was happening in there, and then the next trial group came and had a 72% success rate. In Zed's trial group there were two miscarriages in the second trimester. And then the second trial group—my group—half of them didn't make it past embryonic phase.

"Then Zed had the audacity to be born three weeks early. And everyone thought he would die before his first 24-hours of life were complete, but he didn't. The other baby in his group was stillborn. Then in my group, three of the seven made it past birth. But that wasn't until months after Zed had been born, and they used all the information from his conception and birth and shit to figure out how to get more Zombabies. And now we're a Zombietown."

Bree leaned forward on the table. "I thought Bonzo was the oldest?"

Eliza nodded. "Zed's a miracle baby, but Bonzo was born three months before him. It's just no one knew about Bonzo for a good year and a half—details you don't wanna learn from me—and by that point Zed had coined the title of Zombietown's Little Miracle."

Eliza took another bite of her omelette and moaned, making the two other girls laugh. "You humans eat so good," she said around her food.

The two humans laughed again. Then, Bree asked, "So what does Bonzo not like? 'Cause I know if I ask, he'll just say he's fine with anything because he's being nice. But I don't wanna make him uncomfortable or anything."

"Bonzo loves everything," Eliza said with an eye roll. "Show up and he'll be happy. He loves you, okay? And Zed—" Eliza said, pointing her fork at Addison, "Zed can be sensitive to lots of things. I mean, for your sake he'll try to hide it. But he's easily spooked. You know one time he ate a raccoon carcass?"

Bree made a disgusted face while Addison just looked between them in confusion. "What's a carcass?"

"He ate a dead raccoon," Eliza explained. "He was young. I think six. It was before Zoey was born for sure. And his Z-Band glitched and he killed like four street animals and ate the raccoon before he went back online. It was a shitshow, and he cried for like four days. Do not bring it up with him."

"He...he ate a dead raccoon?" Addison asked with a raised eyebrow. "And he was six?"

"Or seven, the numbers are fuzzy." Eliza shrugged.
"That's…interesting."

"Oh please, Zed's got more baggage than an airport," Eliza said with an eye roll. "And so do you. You're perfect together, especially 'cause you guys heal each other."

"Aw!" Bree gushed.

"Who cares! We could make a movie with their story." Eliza waved her hand. "Let's talk about me."

"Yes!" Addison exclaimed. "If you don't mind, I wanna hear all the gory details of you and Lacey."

Eliza chuckled. She leaned back in her chair and sipped her milkshake. "We had sex four times. Friends with benefits, you know? That's all we were. It was stupid to think I could make something out of that."

"That's not stupid, that's hum—" Addison trailed off at the sight of Eliza's smirk and raised eyebrow. "Um, never mind."

Eliza laughed, a mixture of humor and bitterness. "What else would you want to know, anyway? Lacey was the only person I've ever…had feelings for."

"Except Eva."

Eliza rolled her eyes. "Nothing's gonna happen, she's probably got some human girlfriend or some shit." Addison and Bree opened their mouth to add something. Eliza interrupted them, saying, "Let's just drop it. Fun girls' weekend, remember?"

The rest of the weekend was amazing. They laughed and played games and goofed around. Bree shared her special dessert recipes and they made batches of brownies and cookies and whatever they could imagine.

They did makeovers while watching Toy Story, and cried while watch Up. They danced and sang to 2012-13 pop tunes. Eliza crushed them in every video game they played, from Mario Kart to Just Dance.

Sunday morning, none of them wanted the weekend to end. They ate breakfast slowly and talked. Then, when they finished eating, Addison and Bree grabbed their phones to take more selfies together.

"Why does Bucky keep snapping me?" Addison wondered out loud.

"Oh! Open them!" Bree exclaimed, running over to look over Addison shoulder. Eliza made her way over and stuck her nose in Addison's phone.

"You should record it in case he's being an idiot," Bree suggested. "For blackmail purposes, of course."

Addison laughed and turned on screen recording, then opened the Snapchats Bucky had sent her through the night.

They started off innocent, compared to how they ended. It was an hours worth of Bucky and Zed drinking and being stupid, dancing and laughing and smashing full bottles against the wall and Bucky grinding on another Zombie. About halfway through Zed had dragged Bucky from
wherever they were and gotten into a pickup truck, driving off into the night completely plastered.

Then Bucky had passed out and it was just Zed being stupid, saying the most random things all directed to Addison. Then he ended it by saying he was tired and was "gonna have the worst fucking hangover in a few hours."

After the videos and pictures ended Addison stared at her blank phone screen. Her head was swarming with thoughts and ideas fast enough to make her dizzy. Finally, after being stunned for several minutes, she pocketed her phone and turned to Bree. "I gotta go find him," she stated. "I-I…"

Bree nodded in understanding. "I hope everything's okay. Text me about it."

Addison nodded a bit numbly. Her and Eliza gathered their stuff and left after that.
Hold Onto Me

Addison saw the three of them coming before they saw her. Eliza held her back as long as she could. "Give them time to get closer before you attack."

In the few minutes it took for the boys to get closer, Addison saw that Bucky was dressed in Zombie coveralls that hung loosely from his small body (or smaller than the guys who had loaned him the clothes).

Once they were by Bonzo's house and definitely close enough to notice her, Eliza released the human's arm to which she sprung up and ran down the steps and to her boyfriend and cousin. She stopped right in front of them and crossed her arms petulantly.

"What the heck!" she exclaimed. "You send me hours of videos of you guys drinking and being stupid and fucking driving drunk!"

She pressed a seen finger in her boyfriend's chest. "You don't even have a driver's license! What were you thinking! You could've killed someone, or Bucky, or…or yourself! You could've died, Zed!"

Zed pulled her by her arm into him and wrapped his arms around her. She punched his chest effortlessly. "You could've died," she muttered. "You're so stupid."

Zed breathed out a laugh. "I am stupid, aren't I?"

Addison nodded and hit him again. "If my hair could change you'd give me grey hair," she told him.

"What'd I tell you?" Zed said to Bucky. "She hit me, she's pissed, and she's still caring."

"You shoulda put money on it," Bucky said with a laugh.

Zed laughed and Addison pulled away from him. "You guys get shitfaced for one night and are best friends all of a sudden?"

"You're not the only one who can have fun," Bucky said with a grin.

Addison scrunched up her face. She turned to her cousin and punched his shoulder hard. "How dare you condone such behavior! You're better than that! And what are you wearing? Aunt Janet is going to kill you if she sees you!"

"We were having fun, just like you were." Bucky stated.

"You're both underaged," Addison said. "If a Z-Patrol caught you, Aunt Janet would find out and would literally end your life. And Zed, everything you've been working for would've gone down the drain."

"I may be stupid, Addy, but I'm not an idiot," Zed said, a bit exasperated. "I wasn't going to get caught."

"You were driving without a license, and totally wasted."

"It's not the first time I've been drunk, Addison."
Addison put her hands on her hips. "Oh so you just get totally shitfaced regularly? 'Cause I'm not in the business of babysitting an alcoholic."

Zed rolled his eyes. "I don't get shitfaced regularly, okay? I don't even drink that often."

"So what aren't you telling me, Zed? I saw forty minutes of video of you just drinking and drinking and acting reckless and completely idiotic, and now you're telling me that you don't even drink."

Zed glanced behind her to Eliza, who just shook her head at his unspoken question. He sighed and looked back at his girlfriend's expectant look. "We…we gotta talk, Addison," he said quietly.

Addison nodded and walked alongside Zed to his house, sitting beside him on the front steps. Bucky watched them for a second, then went over and sat next to Eliza.

"Hey."

"Nice threads," Eliza said in an amused tone.

"Your one to talk. You're sitting out here in your pajamas."

"That's 'cause Addison made us rush over here so she could intercept you guys," Eliza explained. "What's your excuse?"

"Zed said I needed to 'blend in'."

Eliza nodded. "You look nice I guess. Kinda small. Those clothes are huge on you."

Bucky laughed. He looked across the street to where his cousin and her boyfriend were sitting, both of them sitting there silently.

"You have a thing for Zach?"

"What?"

"Those videos you sent Addison," Eliza explained. "Half of them were you grinding all up on Zach. And he doesn't drink, so he was sober and feeling it. I'm pretty sure there was one where you licked his face, not sure."

Bucky's jaw dropped. "You're lying."

Eliza laughed at his misfortune. "Were you that wasted that you really don't remember anything?"

"I-I can remember bits and pieces. I don't remember that though."

Eliza grinned. "Did you eat? You can come in for some breakfast if you're hungry and I can show you what Addison and I screen recorded."

Bucky raised an eyebrow. "What? You have her phone or something?"

To answer his question, Eliza slipped out Addison's phone from her pocket. She got up and led the cheer captain inside of her house.

"Yesterday was the six year anniversary of my mom's death," Zed said quietly. "I can't be here that day. It…it hurts too much. There's too many bad memories. So me and Bonzo and Eliza usually go out and spend the night, sometimes a few nights, somewhere else in Zombietown."
"Zed," Addison said softly. His eyes were screwed shut and his hands were shaking in his lap, like he was scared and angry and trying not to cry at once. "Why didn't you tell me? Why'd you let me take Eliza to a sleepover if you guys had plans?"

"You've got enough shit going on. You deserved to have fun this weekend and not have to babysit me."

"It's not babysitting, it's being there for you when your hurting."

Zed let out a shaky breath and leaned over to rest his head in her lap. Addison reached down and stroked his hair, waiting patiently for him to speak.

"If I open my eyes, all I see is them beating her," he whispered. "I was under these steps. Zoey was crying and I was crying, but not for the same reasons. She was barely six months, she had no idea what was happening."

"What happens when you close your eyes?"

Zed gave a soft smile. "I see her. It's like she's still here."

His words made her heart ache. Addison felt her eyes watering at the thought, losing someone that close to you and having such vivid memories of them.

"Can you sing something?" Zed whispered. "I just wanna hear your voice."

Addison smiled and continued to stroke his hair. "Do you have any requests?"

"Do you know any Frank Sinatra? Mommy loved his songs."

Her grin softened into a soft smile. "My mom is obsessed with him too," she said. "When she would do my hair she always sang 'Fly Me to the Moon'."

"My mom loved that song," Zed said wistfully. "I only know it in Zombie-Tongue."

"Fly me to the moon," Addison sang softly. Zed smiled at the sound and at the warm memories that filled his head.

Let me play among the stars
Let me see what spring is like
On a-Jupiter and Mars

"You're my little rockstar," Zora said with a grin. "You're gonna change the world someday, Bubba."

She tickled her son and grinned as he squirmed and laughed in her lap. "Mommy! Mommy stop!" he shrieked in delight.

In other words: hold my hand
In other words: baby, kiss me

"Why do I have to change the world?" Zed grumbled. "Humans don't even like Zombies.

Zora smiled softly. She kissed her son's nose and said to him, "That's just 'cause they haven't met my amazing son yet. You're a rockstar. I love you Bubba."

When Zed looked up at his mother, his pout melted into a resigned smile. "I love you too, Mommy."
Fill my heart with song
And let me sing for ever more
You are all I long for
All I worship and adore

Zed shrieked as the cold water rushed over his skin again. He watched the watered down blood run through the tub and down the drain. Zora scrubbed at his skin furiously, working to get the remnants off of him. He felt angry with himself—with his Zombie. And his mom was clearly upset too.

"I'm sorry Mommy," he whispered.

Zora paused in her ministrations. "Zed, don't be sorry for what happened. It wasn't your fault."

Zed hated the feeling inside. His stomach felt queasy and incredibly full. "Mommy, I-I'm a monster!" he cried. "I killed a raccoon! I ate a dead raccoon! Normal people don't do that!"

Zora sighed, a bit defeatedly and sadly. "Zed. The little boy in question didn't look up. "Zedekiah Necrodopolus."

Reluctantly he looked up at her soft but firm expression. "You're not normal, okay? And you're not a monster. You're a Zombie. Sometimes things won't go as planned, but that's fine. You just gotta let your freak flag fly, Bubba."

In other words: please, be true
In other words: I love you

"Bubba, I need to talk to you."

That was never a good sign. Zora was smiling though, so he sat down and waited for her to speak. "How would you feel about having a little brother or sister?"

Zed didn't get the inundo and shrugged. Zora grinned and glanced at her husband. "Zed, in a few months you're going to have a little brother or sister."

It took a second to click in his head. Then, his face broke out in a grin. He jumped up and cheered loudly, making his parents smile wider.

Fill my heart with song
Let me sing for ever more
You are all I long for
All I worship and adore

"The baby can hear you," Zora told him softly. "You can talk to her all you want. And then, when she's born, she'll be able to recognize the sound of your voice."

Zed didn't move. He kept his small hand on his mother's swollen belly, reveling in the feel of the light flutters from within. "This is my little sister in there?" Zed asked, quietly and curiously.

Zora nodded. "That's your little sister."

Zed grinned and turned his attention to her belly. "I love you."

In other words: please, be true
In other words
"In other words: I love you." By the time she had finished singing, Zed was sobbing in her lap. Addison couldn't help the tears falling from her eyes. Zed sat up a little and hid his face on her chest.
Chained to the Rhythm

Chapter Notes

This is a very important thing I always forget to mention. I don’t often know anything about the chapters I post because I write most of them like a few weeks before.

All the zombies were characterized and named and everything by the amazing and lovely Ly, aka unusual-ly on tumblr and CallMeLy on fanfiction and Wattpad. She’s worked very hard on them and I always forget to appreciate them.

Ly is amazing for that, by the way. (and also I change up her characters a tiny bit for the sake of the story so there’s that too).

Zed knew something was off the day he woke up and Addison wasn't cuddling against him. They hadn't been their usual selves for a few days, always arguing or being short with each other and rolling eyes and sucking teeth. But the night they stopped cuddling freaked Zed out.

He didn't mention it to her though. They went about their morning routine a bit sluggish and walked to school together, though Addison stood next to Eliza and didn't hold his hand. Their schedules were the same so he couldn't sneak away to talk to Eliza or Bonzo about it. Despite his best wishes, he'd have to talk to Addison about it first, without any advice from his friends.

Before they got to gym, Zed pulled her aside in the hallway. "Problem?" she asked, not expecting an actual problem.

Zed nodded. "Yeah, there is."

Addison tilted her head at him. "What?"

"It's us."

Her eyes went wide. "Us? Is this going to end in a break up!"

"What! No!" Zed exclaimed quickly. Addison breathed out a sigh of relief.

"There's a problem with us?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

Zed nodded. "We...we're not acting like us. We keep fighting over stupid things and...and being rude with each other. It's not like us."

Addison frowned at him. "And...and we don't hold hands all the time anymore," Zed added nervously. He didn't want to sound whiny but it was bothering him. "You didn't walk with me to history, and it hurt a little. And I woke up this morning and we weren't touching, which had to take some effort because my bed is tiny. And we haven't kissed since Sunday."

"Oh," Addison said quietly. She stood there and looked down at the ground. "I...I didn't even realize."

The bell rang and Addison looked up at the ceiling, then at her boyfriend. "Do you wanna skip?
"If I'm being honest," Addison started. "It's just...I'm still adjusting to living with you. I love you and everything, and I'm grateful your family has opened your door for me. But it's just a little weird for me. With...with everything and all. I'd get random episodes but you were always there and they didn't last more than a few hours. I don't think you even noticed."

Zed shook his head. "I had no idea."

"I wasn't hiding it from you, but I didn't want you to worry either," Addison explained. "With the meds that kept changing, I've just been adjusting to a lot lately."

She sighed and lifted her legs onto the stretcher, hugging her knees to her chest. "I haven't had my period since October," she admitted. "I wasn't eating right and taking care of myself around Thanksgiving. Then with everything that happened after. Dr. Jan said I should come back in February or March. It doesn't bother me, it's just so weird not having to buy tampons and pads and shit."

Zed shrugged helplessly. "I have one female friend and Zombies' get their period differently or something. I dunno, if you care you can ask Eliza."

Addison smiled and laughed breathily. "I get what you're saying, and I'm glad we're talking about this," Zed said. "It's...I..." he stopped and sighed. "I get out of hand around this time. I was really close to my mom, and it's just...it's hard without her. I go crazy, if you haven't noticed."

"Oh I've noticed," Addison teased, pinching his arm.

Zed smiled. "I was in therapy for a year and a half after she died," Zed told her. "And even though I don't go back, I feel like I still need it. I get short with people and angry easily. 'Giving into my Zombie' is the technical term for it. I just want to make my girls—you and Zoey—happy. I want my dad to not worry about me. I haven't been doing that right, though. We need...we just need to figure out our groove again."

"Oh my god," Addison laughed, dropping her head in her knees. Zed watched her shake with laughter, before looking back up at him. "How are you fifteen? You talk like an old man!"

Zed dropped his head back and laughed with her. "Don't laugh at me!"

Addison laughed some more. Once she calmed down, she said, "Yes, we need to figure out our rhythm. No one's said 'groove' since like, the seventies."

Zed just smiled and shrugged.

"How are we gonna do this?" Addison asked. "I love you, you're my best friend. I don't want this to end up as a break up convo."

"Convo?"

"Short for conversation," she explained. "That one wasn't even hard. You need to be caught up on social norms."

Zed nodded. "I think I'm gonna ask out a beautiful girl," he joked. "But I won't tell her anything
more than that.”

Addison bit her lip to keep from smiling too widely. "She sounds like a lucky girl," she said. "Do you wanna go to class?"

Zed shook his head. "Definitely not."

He scooted closer to her and slung an arm over her shoulder. "We can just sit here," he said. "We can talk some more too, if you want."

"That'd be nice," she said. "I feel like we haven't had alone time for a while."

Zed nodded. "I agree. Tell me about your day. Tell me about your life. I wanna know it all."

Like every Wednesday (and also Monday and Friday), Chief Dale picked Zed up in front of the school for driving practice. They sometimes talked or let the radio play, neither of which Zed minded. At least on a normal day, when he wasn't distracted by his crumbling relationship.

'It's not crumbling," he told himself. 'We've just hit a rough patch. It'll all work out.'

"Red light, coming up."

'What if it doesn't?"

"Zed, slow down."

'What if everything just falls apart? You're gonna lose Addison again!'

"Zed!"

Zed flinched and slammed on the brake. He pushed it hard enough to bend the pad, clenching the wheel as the car skidded to a stop.

Zed released the breath he'd been holding and blinked hard. "Thank Z," he muttered.

He glanced at Dale, seeing his wide eyed and wild expression. "What in the everloving hell!"

"I-I'm sorry!" Zed exclaimed quickly. "I—"

"What were you thinking! Could you not hear me!"

"I'm sorry!"

"You could've killed us both, Zed!" Dale went on. "You gotta pay attention, there are psychos on the road!"

Zed swallowed thickly and nodded. "I'm sorry sir," he said in a much quieter voice. "It won't happen again."

Dale looked at him. "What happened?"

"It's nothing."

"It clearly isn't nothing if it nearly kills us."

Zed sighed and said nothing, turning his attention back to the road. Dale sighed also, leaning back
in his chair. "If you don't tell me, you should tell someone."

"It's not important."

Dale sighed. "Whatever is bothering you is important, okay? I don't want to go through…I don't…
those are the things Addison would tell herself. I don't want that to happen to you."

Zed glanced at him and said nothing. The light switched and Zed eased forward and through the
intersection before pulling into the shoulder in front of an ice cream shop. He took a shaky breath.
"If I tell you, it's gotta stay between us," Zed said, not looking at him. "I want full confidentiality."

Dale shrugged. "There are some standard things I'd have to report like if you're in physical danger,
but sure. Confidentiality."

Zed nodded and sat back against his chair. "Everything's falling apart," he said. "I'm stressed out of
my mind. I spend three days a week in driving practice and then I'm constantly playing catch-up in
school because I'm stupid and don't know anything. I'm always in tutoring, even on Saturdays. I
don't get to spend any time with my family or my friends. Addison and I are always fighting.
Sometimes I just…I break down and I cry. I-I feel like a failure all the time."

"Zed—"

"My Zombie hates me. And he always tries to ruin my life. We're two different people and we are
never in sync and can't stand each other. He's constantly angry and clawing at my-my subconscious
trying to break through and ruin everything and kill everyone and everything I care for!"

"Zed—"

"Saturday was the sixth anniversary of my mom's death," Zed went on. "I get so broken and—and
fucked up that my dad doesn't even let me stay with him and Zoey. I can't stand being alone, I can't
stand closing my eyes or being home. I haven't slept right in days. Every night I have nightmares
and all I see is them beating her. Or-or I see the Zombie Patrol coming and burning through
Zombietown again.

"And usually I wake up and Addy's there and I can feel her and know there's good in this fucked up
world. But things between us are just…we're always fighting and being rude to each other and
today I woke up and she wasn't even near me which is really difficult with how small my bed is
and everything. And—"

Zed sucked in a breath, feeling tears threatening to fall from his eyes. "I can't lose her," Zed said in
a shaky voice. "She's the only thing that keeps me sane! I can't do it without her!"

Zed dropped his head on the wheel as tears slipped from his eyes. The more he talked the more
pressure he felt building up on his shoulders. It felt like any problem in the world was just pushed
onto him and no matter how much he tried to ignore them or leave them behind they just kept
coming back to him.

Minutes later, he managed to calm down enough to sit up again. "I'm sorry for putting all this on
you," he muttered.

"I did ask," Dale muttered.

"Are you gonna give me some life changing, heartfelt advice or something?"

Dale shook his head. "I don't even know how anyone could deal with the stuff you just mentioned,"
he said. "And I'm sure there's much more you didn't mention. That you just grazed the surface."

Dale sighed. "I can tell you some things about Addison, considering she is my daughter. And I've had experience with strained relationships. I dated four other women before I met Missy."

Zed turned his head to look at him. "Yes, Addison is my main priority at this point," Zed said.

"I've learned a lot about her in the fourteen years I spent raising her," Dale said. "And the few weeks of therapy we've been to together. And it's very obvious to anyone that you two are very much in love. It's perfectly normal to hit a rough patch—most people just call it 'leaving the honeymoon phase'."

"The what?"

"The beginning of your relationship, when everything is still fresh and exciting. When that's over, it's a little…boring."

"You think we're getting bored of each other?" Zed asked in horror.

"No, no, no." Dale assured him. "I'm just throwing things out there."

Zed let out a breath of relief. "I think, and it's just me," Dale went on. "That those first few months you guys were together were filled with excitement at every corner. With football and cheering, Z-Band malfunctions, lots of near death experiences. And now that all of that has stopped, it all feels a little boring or off."

Zed frowned at the chief. If Dale looked closely he'd see how upset the Zombie was and just how close to tears he was getting (again). "Try going on a second first date."

"We didn't even go on a first date."

Dale furrowed his brows. "What?"

"I mean, we've been on like, four dates," Zed explained. "But we've been dating for almost three months. And we don't know what was the actual first date. There was the Zombie Mash, which was rudely interrupted. Then we went to an ice cream parlor, but Addison said it doesn't count because I wasn't myself. And there was Bucky's pool but neither of us really consider that was a date. Then Halloween, which ended with the both of us getting arrested. Then we-we snuck out in Charlotte and went for a walk along the beach."

"I'm going to ignore the sneaking out one for my own sake," Dale said. "You should go out on a date in general then. A big deal date, like a fancy dinner. Addison loves Japanese food, and her favorite restaurant is downtown, which happens to be open to Zombies."

Zed looked at him skeptically. "I don't think I can afford Japanese food. I'm kinda…poor."

Dale just waved him off. "It's not expensive," he assured him. "I'm sure a date night will be nice, it's what us old, married couples do."

"We aren't an old married couple," Zed stated.

"And maybe you should try going back to therapy," Dale went on. "It's not only for the clinically depressed and their families, you know." He laughed humorlessly.

"I can't afford therapy either," Zed said. "It's two hundred every session. That's more than our
weekly income."

"It's not—you can't put a price on your mentality."

"Yeah, I can," Zed said with a nod. "It was free when I was younger, and now it's not. So I don't go. And-and I tell my dad I'm fine so he doesn't worry because he's got enough on his plate."

"But you aren't fine."

"I-I can't do that to my dad," Zed said weakly. "I just can't. You don't know what it's like to be a single-parent with two kids. To be a Zombie, who gets paid crap and wants only the best for his kids. We get one fifty every week, plus the money for Addison. We have to buy groceries, pay utilities and rent, Zoey's tuition. I can't add onto that, I just can't."

Dale sighed but lifted his hands in surrender. "I can't do anything, I know. I was just saying." Dale said. "If anything, talk to Addison about it. She's very understanding and has a lot of helpful tips."


"I know," Dale said with a laugh. "She's just like her mother."

That night, Zoey had insisted they watch *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*. Zed was inspired by the movie and openly displayed his love for it, singing the songs with his sister and girlfriend all night until the neighbors threatened to call Zombie Patrol.

The next day at lunch, Zed put his plan in action. Instead of going to his usual lunch table where he sat with his friends and girlfriend, he went to the Aceys' table. They all watched as he approached, looking as if they weren't sure if he was going to their table.

"Uh, Hey Zed?" Tracey greeted. "What brings you here?"

"I need your table so I can make a public service announcement."

"What?"

"I recommend moving your trays," Zed told them as he climbed onto Bucky's empty chair.

"What're you doing?" Lacey asked in surprise and disgust.

"Come on Blondie, the tray," Zed urged.

Lacey groaned and moved her tray. Zed climbed up onto the table, then crouched down and put his backpack up on the chair, opening it enough to reveal the bouquet of assorted flowers (all orange and purple as per Seabrook's legally allowed colors). He then stood and looked around at the cafeteria, where people were already looking at him strangely, including Addison on the other side of the cafeteria.

"Excuse me everyone!" Zed called. "I have a very important announcement to make, if you could all quiet down!"

Everyone who wasn't already looking at him turned and looked at him then. Zed grinned and locked eyes with his girlfriend, seeing her grinned excitedly and curiously at him.

Zed shifted his attention to the whole room. "So on the other side of this room is the most beautiful girl in the entire world," he said, bouncing slightly with excitement and anticipation. "And, lucky
me, she happens to be my girlfriend. And, bless her heart, she's still in love with me. So, because she's so amazing and because I also love her so, so much, I want to be big and showy and ask her out with all of you watching!"

Some people groaned but they were overpowered by the collective 'aw's throughout the room. Zed grinned and leaned down, grabbing the flowers and pink bakery box, offering them slightly to Addison. She covered her mouth with her hands and shook her head despite her smile.

"Addison! My sweet! Love of my life! Etcetera! Will you do me the honor of going on a date this Friday night?"

Addison nodded silently. Bree nudged her and Addison stood up, walking quickly across the cafeteria. Once she was a few feet away, Zed jumped down from the table and walked toward her. He smiled at her sweetly. "I freakin' hate you," she muttered with a smile.

"What was that?" Zed proclaimed loudly to the still-listening cafeteria.

Addison blushed a soft pink. "Yes! I'll go on a date with you!" she shouted, throwing her arms out for emphasis.

Everyone applauded and Zed grinned at his girlfriend, then leaned down and kissed her softly. Addison wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him more passionately.

"Get a room!" someone called.

Addison smirked against his mouth then pulled back. Zed offered her the flowers with a smile, then opened the pink box.

"Holy shit!" Addison exclaimed. "You got me avocados!"

From the back of the cafeteria, the lunch lady called, "Language," in her most uncaring voice.

Zed grinned and handed the box to her. He then looked up and around the room before saying, "Thank you, you can continue with your lunch."

"You're so extra," Addison whispered with a giggle.

"Oh you love it," Zed told her. "I gotta go get my stuff, I'll be right back!"

"Where are we going tomorrow night?"

"It's a surprise."

Addison tilted her head at her boyfriend. "A surprise?"

"Yup."

"So how am I supposed to know what to where?"

Zed paused for a second. He thought for a second then said, "Nothing super fancy, like what you wore for the dinner in Charlotte. But not jeans either. Something in between."

"What are you gonna wear?" Addison asked.

Zed shrugged. "A nice shirt—not a dress shirt but maybe something with a button up. I have to
look in my closet. It won't be casual though, maybe some jeans that can pass as dress pants."

Addison nodded. "You have tutoring today?"

Zed groaned and nodded. "Of course, I always have tutoring. I'm literally stupid."

"Don't say that," Addison argued. "You aren't stupid. School's stupid, that's what. They make you memorize all this information that you don't even need in the real world. How about they teach me something useful, like how to balance a checkbook? Or file taxes or something. Go about buying a home or understanding a contract. That should be in the curriculum, not fucking 'the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell'. If I don't go into medicine—honestly, why would I ever go into medicine?—that's the most useless piece of information."

Addison huffed out a breath and looked at her boyfriend. Zed grinned at her, watching her with adoration. "You're so beautiful and adorable when you get all passionate," he said with a smile.

Her face softened and she leaned back in her chair. "You're too kind, really," she said. "Okay, um, what was I talking about? Oh, I'm gonna go shopping with Bree and maybe Eliza after school. So don't expect me back for a while. You'll be learning, though."

Zed rolled his eyes again. "I hate my tutor," he grumbled. "I liked it when you would help me."

"I did too," Addison said with a wistful smile. "I'm almost all caught up. Then I can actually get you to learn something, considering I know how that brain works."

Addison kissed his forehead, then his nose and cheeks, the pecked his lips. Zed smiled adorably and said, "We have a test next period. Anymore questions about tomorrow or can we get back to studying?"

"Nope."

Shoreline was the place to go for anything non-Seabrook, like clothes that weren't the same two colors. It only took two bus trips to get to the Shoreline mall from Seabrook High.

They spent the hours after school ended at the outdoor mall, repeating their 'technique' at each store as they looked for the 'perfect dress'. And shoes and accessories, if there was time. Most fitting rooms had a limit of eight items per person, which was easily avoidable if Addison went shopping for a new dress with two friends, who could all carry a different amount of clothes in their arms.

Every few minutes, Eliza's gaze would linger on a dress. It got to the point where Addison turned to her when they were in their second store and said, "Eliza, if you like something you can pick it up."

"What?"

"Don't think I haven't noticed you looking," Addison pointed out. "You'd look amazing in any one of these dresses. You should get something."

"Oh no, I can't," Eliza said. "We're shopping for you."

Bree rolled her eyes. "Just because we have a purpose here doesn't mean we can't get distracted," she said. "If you haven't noticed, I'm always trying on shoes. And dresses. And pants. Especially camo-pants because I honestly feel like I look really good in camo-pants."
Addison giggled and patted her best friend's shoulder. "You do look really good," she assured her. "Like, Bonzo doesn't know what he's getting himself into. Because sweetie, you look fantastic."

Bree grinned widely and gushed, "Thank you!"

"Aside from your obvious need to buy camo-pants, I think it's a necessity that we all have something camouflage patterned," Addison stated. "It's a must for this year. E, you'd look amazing in camo too."

Eliza raised an eyebrow and chuckled. "As amazing as this sounds," Eliza said sarcastically, "I didn't bring any money."

Addison rolled her eyes. "You better not have. What kind of friend would I be if I dragged you two out here to help me shop if I didn't offer to buy your shit? It's all on me today ladies."

"Addison—"

"Don't you dare argue with me on this," Addison interrupted. "Zombies don't have to wear uniforms anymore, so let's spice up your closet."

"Okay," Eliza said shakily. "Whatever you say."

"So last time I remember you saying that you and Addison share a bed?"

Zed's eyes went wide with surprise. He laughed nervously and said, "There is a perfectly sound and logical reason for that, I swear."

"You'd better."

"Okay so," Zed started to explain. "She was in Zoey's room at first. For the one day we were at home. And in Charlotte, we shared a room and a bed. You know that, you signed the paperwork. Or Mayor Missy did. I don't know. So when we got back to Seabrook, she was in Zoey's room again and I was in my room. But then Addison couldn't fall asleep. She didn't sleep for four nights, so then we tried experimenting in different places. First we tried getting her an actual bed, which was Zoey's. And that didn't work. Then we tried my bed, and she got like a few hours of really restless sleep that night. And the next morning, she fell asleep on me on the couch. So then we took a ten hour nap and Addison slept like a baby."

Zed shrugged. "Eliza says she's become sleep-dependent on me, I dunno. She's the science one, I'm the cute one. I know she told me that when they had their sleepover Addison slept in some of my clothes that she took that I didn't know about, and still didn't sleep well." Zed shrugged again. "Humans are weird."

Dale chortled at that, making Zed glance at him weirdly. "Yes, humans are the weird ones."
Fourth period. Also known as cinematography class, where they did everything but watch movies, which was the whole reason why most people signed up for it.

Everyone except Eliza. And Eva. And Bucky. They ended up in cinematography due to scheduling changes and conflicts. None of them actually wanted to be there.

Eliza didn't get the option. When they got back from Winter Break, a new course had been added with a select group of students chosen to participate in it. It was Introduction to Zombism which was taught by Mr. Zeck, the former janitor. Principal Lee had chosen thirty Zombies and Humans to take the class. There was only one period, which meant that they all had schedule changes. They put Eliza into her core classes first, then gave her the only elective in the left over period, which happened to Cinematography.

Eva had been in the same boat as Eliza. Principal Lee figured that since Eva's mom was a big figure in the Zombie community, Eva would want to be in the class dedicated to Zombies.

And even though Bucky wasn't in the class about Zombies, his schedule had been a victim of changes because of everyone else's changes, and he got stuck in Cinematography.

The first week was very laid back. They did actually sit around and watch movies. The second week, they went through genres and movie styles.

Thursday during their fourth period, Mrs. Palmer had them sit down and take out their notebooks—the ones where the only thing they wrote were the genres and styles and their descriptions. She handed each of them a half piece of paper covered in words (an assignment).

"Film project?" Bucky read.

"Yes, Benedict, I'm glad you can read," Eliza stated.

Bucky just gave her a look, a sort of halfhearted glare. Once Mrs. Palmer had passed everyone the assignment, she moved to the smart board and pulled up a digital copy of the assignment.

"In Cinematography, you won't just be watching movies. It's the opposite in fact. We mostly watched movies while all the schedules were changed and everything was sorted out. Now we'll get down to work. And that is on the biggest project of the semester: the film project.

"You will be broken into groups of three or four and tasked with creating a movie with the same theme. This year, the theme is Zombies."

Eliza looked up at that. A lot of things that semester were about Zombies. The syllabus in her geography class had changed and now included a unit on Zombies and Zombietown. They added a whole class dedicated to Zombies where they were learning about the evolution of Zombie Tongue. And now this, where they would have to make movies about Zombies. All the attention honestly made her a little uncomfortable.

"Now I expect you all to have the common sense to know that this isn't a film where you spread hate and lies, but rather highlight the good. Zombies are not monsters."

A junior on the other side of the room raised her hand and Mrs. Palmer said, "No, Maria, you don't pick your groups. I've already created them."
Everyone groaned and muttered about how unfair it was that they didn't get to work with their friends. Eliza sympathized with them; she was a little disappointed that her chances of working with Eva had just dropped significantly.

"I'll announce the groups after I go over the assignment," Mrs. Palmer said. "Yes, I know all of it is on the paper I gave to you. I'm sure if I didn't explain though some of you would ask very ridiculous questions. And even if I do explain, you'll still be confused. But this way I get to give you attitude when you ask again.

"So the movie has to be between one and two hours long. If it's less than an hour you will lose points for every minute under. And if it is over two hours you will lose two points for every minute. You will be in charge of hiring actors and need at least four actors outside of your group. You also need at least two of your group members in the film. We'll draw up contracts next week as well as begin work on screenplays.

"The full movie will be due in May at a date to be determined. As we go through the course you will learn more about creating movies and pre-production, production, and post-production. Starting next week we'll go over how to write a proper screenplay. Your movie will be due in pieces. You need to have a screenplay done within the next two and a half weeks. And after that, five minutes of your progress will be due every week. It could be an actual movie scene or you and your group working on behind the scenes action. You all know how to access my class online so please be aware of any changes or announcements I make regarding your project."

Mrs. Palmer waited a beat, then switched the screen to the class page. The smart board displayed the class split into groups, six with three people and two with four. Eliza couldn't help but notice that almost every group had at least one Zombie in it. Some had two, but hers didn't. Her group was one of the one of threes: herself, Eva, and Bucky.

"Drogi Z," Eliza muttered. The Eva part was good. Everything else (read: Bucky) made her want to vomit.

"You have today and tomorrow to start gathering ideas. You need a finalized idea by Monday when you come into class." Mrs. Palmer said.

A minute later, everyone began breaking up into their groups. Eva migrated over to where Eliza and Bucky were seated. "So I don't know much about Zombies," Eva started. "I just moved here and all. I'm down to do whatever though."

"What about you, Benedict?" Eliza asked. "Are you down for whatever?"

Bucky frowned and shrugged. "What do you want to do?"

"What? Are you asking just because she's a Zombie?" Eva asked teasingly.

Bucky's cheeks turned red and he stammered out, "No-no! That's no-I mean—I didn't mean it like that!"

Eva laughed at his misfortune. The human was quickly becoming one of Eliza's favorite people. "I'm just picking on you, Bucky," Eva said. "I feel like we should make it a documentary or something. Maybe focus on a Zombie we know or something."

"Like who?" Bucky asked.

Eva shrugged. "Before you say it, I don't want a movie about me," Eliza stated.
Eva chuckled and grinned. "Maybe about a friend of yours?"

"Like Zed," Bucky suggested.

"Like Zed needs any more of a big head," Eliza said with a eye roll.

"Do you want to do a documentary sort of thing?" Eva asked seriously. "If you don't I understand."

Eliza shrugged. "I'm fine with it as long as it's not about me. Zed would work, but everyone knows and loves Zed. Lots of people could make a movie about Zed."

"Let's come up with a few more ideas through the day and regroup tomorrow," Eva decided.

In lunch that day, Zed had walked in and made his way to the cheerleaders' table. Eliza wanted to go up and bother him about it but the conversation he was having with the Aceys looked very serious.

"What're we looking at?" Eva asked, leaning into Eliza.

"That doofus," Eliza said. "Zed is very impulsive. Look at him, climbing onto the table."

Zed climbed up onto the table and looked around at the cafeteria, where people were already looking at him strangely.

"Excuse me everyone!" Zed called. "I have a very important announcement to make, if you could all quiet down!"

Everyone who wasn't already looking at him turned and looked at him then. Zed grinned and looked at their table. Eliza and Eva both looked and saw Addison grinning back.

"So on the other side of this room is the most beautiful girl in the entire world," he said, bouncing slightly with excitement and anticipation. "And, lucky me, she happens to be my girlfriend. And, bless her heart, she's still in love with me. So, because she's so amazing and because I also love her so, so much, I want to be big and showy and ask her out with all of you watching!"

Eliza groaned but was overpowered by the collective 'aw's throughout the room, especially from Eva. Zed grinned and leaned down, grabbing the flowers and pink bakery box, offering them slightly to Addison. She covered her mouth with her hands and shook her head despite her smile.

"Addison! My sweet! Love of my life! Etcetera! Will you do me the honor of going on a date this Friday night?"

Addison nodded silently. Bree nudged her and Addison stood up, walking quickly across the cafeteria. Once she was a few feet away, Zed jumped down from the table and walked toward her. He smiled at her sweetly.

Addison muttered something to him. "What was that?" Zed proclaimed loudly to the still-listening cafeteria.

"Yes! I'll go on a date with you!" she shouted, throwing her arms out for emphasis.

Everyone applauded and Zed grinned at his girlfriend, then leaned down and kissed her. Addison wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him more passionately.

"Get a room!" someone called.
Addison pulled back. Zed offered her the flowers with a smile, then opened the pink box. "Holy shit!" Addison exclaimed. "You got me avocados!"

From the back of the cafeteria, the lunch lady called, "Language," in her most uncaring voice.

Zed grinned and handed the box to her. He then looked up and around the room before saying, "Thank you, you can continue with your lunch."

"Oh my god! We should make our movie about them!" Eva exclaimed.

"What?"

"A movie about Zed and Addison," Eva explained in a rush. "How they got together or something! It'd be so cute!"

Eliza chuckled. "Zed and Addison? That's...you really think we could make a movie about them? I think...it could work."

"And it's a cheat to learn all about your inner-circle," Eva said. "I'm so excited! I'm gonna go find Bucky and tell him."

She jumped up and turned to head off to the front. She stopped and threw her arms around Eliza, nuzzling their cheeks together. Eliza stiffened and inhaled sharply. Her heart rate picked up to a speed that made her nervous.

"I'm so glad I've met you, honestly," Eva said softly. "I thought moving to a new town would be so hard but you made it so easy."

Eliza just nodded numbly. Eva pulled back, completely unfazed, and walked over to Bucky's table. When Eliza looked over at Bree and Bonzo still at the table and their knowing smiles, she felt her face heat up and waves of nervousness wash over her.

"I think my heart is beating," she said, half jokingly and all terrified at the prospect of feeling.

"Gerb gur gargiza," Bonzo said, aimed at Bree but loud enough for Eliza to hear.

"Shut up!" Eliza exclaimed in embarrassment. "I don't..." she pursed her lips then muttered, "I don't like her. She's my friend."

Both Bree and Bonzo looked like they wanted to say more, but Eva returned then. "Bucky said that Zed and Addison getting together aligns with the Zombies being integrated into the human community. He suggested we do it about that, where Zed and Addison are the main characters but it's really about Zombie integration."

"That...that could work," Eliza said with a nod. "I'll talk to Bucky to decide start events and end events so we know, but I think that'll be good."

"We're making a movie?" Bree asked curiously.

Eva nodded with a grin. "I'm sure you'll be in it a lot, Bree. And Bonzo. And even you, Eliza."

"As Zed's best friend and chairman of the Zombie-integration movement, I can guarantee I'm in it a lot," Eliza said with a grin. Then, she cleared her throat and sang in a voice mocking her own, "We'll never be accepted, Zombies need to rise up. Fight the good fight, stand for what's right."

"Oh, I forgot about the whole singing and dancing thing," Eva said. "You have a really pretty
"voice, by the way."

"Thanks."

Then, a little shyly, Eva added, "I hope you sing a lot once we flesh this whole thing out."

"She's blushing!" Bree gushed in a quiet voice to Bonzo. Luckily, Eliza only heard because of her Zombie hearing.

"Um, I gotta go...I need to see a teacher." Eliza lied.

"Okay, see you later."

Eliza packed up her stuff and grabbed her unfinished lunch, eating toward the trash cans to throw it out. She turned to exit, catching Eva watching her with a smile. Eliza gave the human a little wave before leaving.

'I hate this I hate this I hate this. Is this how it feels to like someone?'
Addison stored most of her shopping bags at Eliza's. She had gone with Eliza and Bree to the Zombie's house after school on Friday to get ready while Zed went driving for an hour and a half. Zed went home and changed after that. Eliza had told him specifically not to pick up Addison until six thirty—which went well with their reservation at seven thirty.

He sat anxiously while Zoey went about her day like the ball of energy she was. He didn't listen as she talked and she knew and didn't mind. Zed was nervous, despite the fact that Addison was already his girlfriend and he always felt comfortable around her. They hadn't gone on a serious date in weeks—maybe months, he'd have to check a calendar to be sure—and the prospect of one made him a bit queasy.

Zed had carefully planned it out—something that never happened. He had called Kaigan-Gawa and made the reservations under his name and checked twice if his Zombism would be a problem. They had assured him it wouldn't, which had been a relief on his part.

Zoey tied his bow-tie—a skill he had no idea she knew how to do—and fixed his hair. "I wanna make sure Addy stays around," Zoey told him. "Now go get 'em. Who's the Zombie?"

"I'm the Zombie!"

"Say it loud and proud!" Zoey shouted.

Zed jumped up and shouted confidently, "I'm the Zombie!"

Eliza's older sister, Azalea, opened the door for Zed. Zed smiled politely at her and she just frowned. "Honey, the boy who plans on taking out our precious little girl is here," she called into the house.

Zed furrowed his brow in confusion. "What?"

"The chief of Zombie Patrol came by earlier and asked us to make sure we grill you a sufficient amount of time. In his honor." Azalea explained. She crossed her arms then said, "What makes you think you're good enough for my precious girl?"

"Um, I really like her," Zed stammered. "She's amazing and perfect and beautiful and I love her."

Azalea bit her cheek to keep from smiling. "Come in, then," she said.

She stepped aside and let him walk in, closing the door behind him. "You clean up well, Zed," she commented. "Did your dad tie your bow-tie?"

"Zoey did."

"Wow," she breathed out. "That's really sad."

Zed simply shrugged. Azalea walked with him into the kitchen, where Zinnia was sitting at the table. "Here he is, Hon," Azalea said to her mom. "Here's the boy who's going to take out our sweet little Addy."

"Huh."
"This is so weird," Zed muttered.

Azalea sat down beside her mother and mimicked the stern look. "Have a seat," Zinnia instructed him.

Zed sat down across from them, looking between the two with confusion. "May I ask what's happening?" Zed asked. "Because I'm really confused."

"Not very good at comprehension," Azalea muttered.

"What?"

"Zed, what are your intentions for tonight?" Zinnia asked.

"I'm going on a date with my girlfriend," Zed stated.

"And what will this date include? Be specific."

"Well, we're gonna walk downtown. Addison loves taking walks and it's not as cold out tonight. And we're gonna go and eat which will be an experience in itself. And then when we finish, we'll go to the park and just walk around and talk. When it gets late and time to go home, we'll take a bus back to the barrier."

Azalea rolled her eyes and smiled. "You're such a sweetheart, Zed," she said. "I can't pretend to be mean anymore."

"Is that what you were doing?"

Azalea rolled her eyes again. "I explained this to you. Were you listening?"

"I mean—"

"Zed, don't worry about it," Zinnia assured him. "You're a sweet kid and everyone knows it. The chief just wanted to strike fear into you to make sure you knew the consequences of crossing Addison or their family."

"Duly noted."

"Addison's nice," Azalea said. "I feel like you guys are good for each other."

"No!" Zed turned and saw Eliza walking briskly into the kitchen. "Don't you dare get him started on Addison. He'll be here all night gushing over her."

Zed grinned at his best friend and turned to face her. "You know you love me, E," he said. "Where's Addy?"

"She's almost finished, don't get your balls in a twist."

"Eliza," her mother scolded.

"Sorry Ma," Eliza said without any remorse. She leaned against the counter and crossed her arms so that all three women were watching Zed carefully with stern expression.

"I go away for a few weeks and all of a sudden you're dating a human."

"She's kinda cute, ya'know," Zed said with sarcastic smile. "Pretty smart too. Did you smell her
brains? To die for!"

Eliza laughed heartily. "And her skin is so soft," Zed went on. "Well moisturized and healthy. I haven't actually tasted it because I gotta wait until it's just right, but I can already tell it'll be amazing."

It wasn't true, considering he had bit into her flesh once before and had enjoyed it, despite how much he didn't want to. Zed knew he wouldn't do it again though. Just the thought of eating a human—a small bite or complete death—made him sick to his stomach. He smiled despite the sick feeling he got just thinking of it.

"Don't get smart with me, young man," Zinnia said with an eye roll.

Zed chuckled and smiled. "I couldn't help it, sorry Auntie Z."

"I should ground you," Zinnia pointed out. "Being sarcastic and rude. Not let you go out tonight."

"Ma, they live together," Eliza pointed out. "It won't be as effective as you'd think."

Zinnia made a disgusted face. "You live with her?"

"Temporarily," Zed said and shrugged. "Things are a little rough at her house, and it's not my business to tell."

"So you're dating and living with a human with daddy issues? Hm."

Zed shook his head and said nothing otherwise. Zinnia was more old fashioned than any other Zombie. It wasn't twenty-eighteen to her. She treated her family and neighbors and acted as if it were still nineteen-sixty something.

"Come on Mom, Zed can date whoever he wants." Azalea said. "He's fifteen and it's the twenty first century. If he wants a tan, living girlfriend with a fast heartbeat and no brain cravings, so be it."

"Thanks?"

The sound of Addison coming down the stairs hit everyone's ears. They all turned and watched the human walk in slowly and look around the room cautiously before her eyes landed on Zed and her face softened into a smile. "Hi," she said in greeting.


"You don't look so bad yourself." Zed chuckled lightly. Addison grinned and looked up, then reached up and tugged on his bow-tie. "When'd you get this? I've been through your closet, you know."

"My dad," Zed said. He looked her up and down again and smiled. "I like your shoes."

Addison smiled and giggled. She shifted in her place and said, "Thank you, I like yours. Though I always like it when you wear those. They look really good on you."

Zed smiled, then took a cautious step toward her and reached out for her hand. "Oh my god," Eliza groaned. "They're so cute it's suffocating."

Addison just smirked at her boyfriend. Zed rolled his eyes and turned to the family, grabbing Addison's hand in the process. "Okay, we're gonna go now," he said. "We have dinner reservations
"Thank you guys for having me," Addison said. "Is it okay if I come by tomorrow to pick up my stuff?"

"Yeah," Eliza nodded. "Now gimme your phone. You guys look cute and I know you want those good pictures."

"I do, actually. And I want pictures with you because you look capital A-mazing."

Eliza grinned and took Addison's phone from her outstretched hand and offered it to her sister. "Would you mind?" Eliza asked.

Azalea rolled her eyes and grinned, then stood up. "Look cute guys, I won't take a lot of these."

She took pictures of Addison and Zed, then Addison with Eliza while Zed ran to the bathroom. When he got back he excused himself and Addison, saying that they might miss their reservations if they didn't leave.

They walked hand in hand through Zombietown quietly. Once they reached the barrier though, Addison turned her head up at him and said, "I know we're on a date but I just have a few questions about Eliza and her family and literally everything I learned today."

Zed chuckled. "I don't mind, don't worry."

"First question: I thought you were the oldest Zombie-baby."

"That's not a question."

"Hush," she said. "My question is: If you're the oldest, why does Eliza have an older sister?"

"Azalea was born before the outbreak," Zed explained. "She was six when the outbreak happened. And she didn't get a Z-Band until the year before I was born. So chronologically, she's...twenty-one."

Addison nodded along. "Okay, that explains that," she said. "My other question is more like...I don't know how to put it. Eliza's mom is...she's just very..."

"She's discriminatory," Zed said with a nod. "Homophobic, doesn't like people who aren't Zombies. I don't think she likes that we're dating."

"I had a feeling she didn't like me." Addison paused, then asked, "So she doesn't know that Eliza's gay?"

"Eliza didn't know she was gay until a few months ago," Zed stated. "So only you, Bree, Bonzo, and Lacey know. And I'm sure bad things will happen if news got back to Auntie Z."

"She's your aunt?"

"She's my godmother. I've been calling her that my whole life."

"So you and Eliza are like, familial-close?"

He tilted his head at his girlfriend and raised an amused eyebrow. "What? Did you think I had a thing for Eliza?"
"Can you blame me? Eliza's hot."

Zed chuckled, then said in a teasing tone, "What? Do you have a thing for Eliza?"

What she said next completely took him off guard. "If I wasn't dating you I'd probably date Eliza."

"What!"

Addison laughed at his shocked expression. "Zed, I'm so pan it's not even funny. Before you I dated three people—two genderqueer and a girl. Granted, one was in the second grade so I don't think it really counts. You were the first guy I really liked."

Zed blinked in surprise. "No way," he breathed out. "I had no idea."

Addison laughed again, this time more nervously. "Does that bother you or something?"

Zed shook his head. "No, it's just...I'm just really surprised is all."

Addison just smiled at her boyfriend. "Don't worry, your my favorite of all the people I've dated," she said. She stood on her toes and pressed a kiss to his cheek. "Bucky was super angry at me because apparently he's the gay cousin and I can't be and I told him to suck my nonexistent dick."

"Addison!"

Addison laughed heartily. "Are you still shocked about my sexuality or something else bothering you?"

"I'm still very shocked."

"It doesn't matter anyway," she said with a shrug. "I love you. You're the one I wanna be with, forever and ever. No matter where life takes us, nothing can keep us apart."

Zed smiled despite himself. Addison singing was like magic to his ears and made him happy every time. He couldn't help but join in. "You know it's true."

"I just wanna be with you," they sang together.

Addison grinned at him. "So where are you taking me? I think now that we're pretty deep in Seabrook you can tell me."

"Nope. I won't say a word until we're walking in."

Addison pouted at him. "I think I'd like it much better if you told me."

"Good things come to those who are patient."

Addison rolled her eyes at his cheesiness. After a quiet second, she asked, "How many people did you date before me?"

"None."

"You're lying."

Zed shook his head. "I'm fifteen and lived in a tiny community my whole life," he explained. "I mean, I had a few crushes that didn't really go anywhere."
"I mean, it's disappointing but also really good. Because now your mine, and I don't plan on letting you go anytime soon."

"Me neither." Zed smiled at his girlfriend, then frowned as he remembered something she had told him a few weeks before. "You told me you didn't have a lot of friends growing up because you were afraid they'd find out about your hair."

"That's true."

"So then why were you in three relationships?"

"I was seven in one of them, Zed. It doesn't even technically count."

"But what about the others."

Addison shrugged. "Both were in the seventh grade. And neither got past three dates."

"Why?"

"Zed, I'd rather not talk about my three past relationships." Addison said. "We're on a date! I wanna focus on my favorite relationship and my crazy cute Zombie! We can talk about anything other than my sexuality and past relationships, okay?"

"I was just curious," Zed said sheepishly.

"I know, Baby," she said gently. "You can ask some other time. Tonight is our night."

Zed nodded in understanding. He racked his brain for something else to talk about, then asked her, "Why was Eliza all dressed up?"

"She's meeting Bucky and Eva for a project," Addison said. "I was going to tease her about it, but it wasn't hard to figure out that her house is homophobic."

"Probably for the best," Zed said with a nod. "You know that you told me you were buying a dress?"

"I bought a lot of clothes," Addison stated. "Including this outfit and these shoes! I love them they're so cute and comfy!"

Zed smiled because he loved when she got excited over little things. Addison grinned up at him and continued, "But, um, I figured this would be cuter than any of the dresses I bought. More semi-formal or whatever the attire is for our mystery date."

"You look beautiful, as always."

"You look delicious too," Addison teased. "I mean gorgeous."

Zed laughed and kissed to top of her head. "Gorgeous and delicious are the same word in Zombie-Tongue."

"That explains a lot," Addison said with a nod. "Don't worry. I don't mind if you call me delicious either. Feels good."

Zed couldn't help but giggle. "Addy, you're so quirky. I love it."

Addison grinned at him. She looked at him with a mischievous smile, then belted out, "I don't
Zed couldn't help but laugh until his sides hurt as Addison skipped on along, singing dramatically off key to 2012 pop music.

When Zed stopped in front of the restaurant Addison gasped in shock. She dropped her boyfriend's hand and stepped forward, staring up at the sign. "No way," she breathed out. She turned to him and then shouted, "No way! Zed!"

Zed just smiled. He braced himself as she charged at him, throwing her arms around his neck and squeezing him tightly. He wrapped his arms around her waist to hold her a few inches off the ground. She hugged him, then peppered kisses all around his face.

"How'd you know this is my favorite restaurant?" Addison asked.

"Your dad told me," Zed said with a smile. He tilted his head down and pecked her lips. "Now come on, we have reservations."

Addison grinned and he put her down, took her hand and led them into the restaurant. The hostess looked up and smiled to greet them. Zed noticed how her expression faltered at the sight of him but she forced a smile. "Welcome to Kaigan-Gawa," she greeted. She didn't lift her eyes to Zed and instead addressed Addison, asking, "Do you have a reservation?"

"Yes, it's under 'Zed Necrodopolus'," Zed said.

The hostess still didn't address him as she said, "I'm sorry there's no reservation for that name."

"Um, excuse me but you didn't even check," Addison pointed out.

The hostess just laughed awkwardly. "Of course," she said, glancing at her registry book. "My apologies, I'll see if there's a…suitable table."

She then left into the dining room and Zed sighed. "What's wrong?" Addison asked.

"They're gonna put us in some dark corner because I'm a Zombie," Zed said with an undertone of sadness. "So people can't see me or something."

Addison just looked at him at a loss for words. She squeezed his hand comfortingly. "I love you, okay?" she said softly, leaning into his side.

The hostess came back a second and led them to the exact table Zed described: deep in the back of the dining room, barely lit and close to the fire exit. She gave them their menus then scurried off back to her post.

"Sorry about this," Zed apologized sheepishly. "I asked when I made the reservation but…"

"I'm happy with anything as long as I get to be with you," she said with a smile. "You're my crazy cute boyfriend. I love you."

Zed smiled and breathed out a laugh. "You say that a lot, Addy." Addison raised a questioning eyebrow. "You know, 'crazy cute boyfriend' or some variation."

"Oh, I stole it from Zoey," Addison explained. "She has this cheer it's like 'I'm crazy, I'm cute! Zombies to boot!'"
"I'm rocking, I smile. Zombies aren't vile!" Zed joined her with a grin, both of them doing jazz hands at the end.

Zed laughed. "So now I'm 'crazy cute boyfriend'?

Addison nodded. "Absolutely. Zoey is crazy cute zombaby. And soon, my little Zombie cheerleaders will be Zombeans!"

Zed grinned. He loved it when she got excited and passionate about something. "How's that going by the way?"

Addison gave a half shrug. Before she could answer, a young male waiter walked over to their table. Zed noticed the way he looked at Addison and did his best to ignore the slight anger in his chest. "Hey, welcome to Kaigan-Gawa. I'm Karter, I'll be your server tonight. Can I start you off with anything to drink?"

"I'll have a water," Zed stated, drawing his attention.

Karter nodded then glanced at Addison. She smiled politely and said, "Me too, please."

"Would you care for any appetizers?"

Addison glanced at Zed who shrugged. "You want anything, Addy?"

"No thank you," Addison said with a polite smile.

"I'll be back with your drinks then, give you some time to look over the menu."

Addison and Zed watched as he walked away, waiting until he was out of earshot before picking up with their conversation. "The cheer committee says I need to get at least ten girls and five boys to sign up by March if we want to compete," Addison explained. "I'm going to the copy store tomorrow to print out applications—Zoey said I should print thirty but I doubt I could get thirty kids."

"I don't even think there are thirty Zombies under ten."

"They just can't be thirteen." Addison said.

"Oh, you're good then."

"And I've rented this empty warehouse sorta place just outside the barrier. They wouldn't let me rent in Zombietown so I got as close as possible. And they said I need to have a ratio of kids to supervisors, 5 to 1. So if I need a minimum of fifteen I'd need two more people. And I've got Bree. I'm planning on stealing cheerleaders from Bucky and then going to Shoreline High to get some more cheerleaders. So yeah."

Zed smiled at her. "I'm really proud of you," he said. "You're awesome."

Addison shrugged sheepishly. "Just saw something was wrong and fixed it, that's all."

"Still. You guys are gonna crush it, I'm sure."

Addison smiled and opened her menu. They spent their meal just talking and laughing with each other. They played twenty questions and shared their meals and just had an overall great time. When they finished the went to a nearby park and continued their easy going conversation.
They stayed out until after midnight until Addison was nearly asleep on the swing set. Zed gave her a piggy back ride back to his place, where she actually fell asleep on his back. She even drooled a little.

Zed only woke her up so she could change into her pajamas, then they both fell asleep, cuddling in his bed.
Dreams Come True

Bucky: Just a warning *everyone* is gonna be at the banquet today

Addison: Meaning?

Bucky: My parents and siblings

Bucky: All of them

Bucky: And your cousins

Bucky: On your dad's side

Bucky: Your parents are tryna diffuse them and make everyone less angry at you but it is *not* working

Addison: Angry at me?

Addison: You're kidding

Bucky: I shit you not. Raina's planning on making a whole scene. She's hella pissed. Be prepared.

Bucky: We're heading out, see you soon

"So what I'm thinking is that I'm just gonna be super polite and respectful," Addison told Zed. "Kinda like you are when people start disrespecting Zombies."

Zed raised a questioning eyebrow. "How am I, exactly?"

"Well you don't get angry and you just let their words roll off your back," Addison explained. "I'll do that."

"Yeah but I do that so that I can prove them wrong."

"What are you not getting? I haven't had a formal conversation with those people since Thanksgiving. Some of them will beat around the bush and not bring it up. And then the others, like Bucky's sister, will give me shit about it all night long."

Zed nodded. "They're your family, not mine. I can't tell you what to do."

"But…?"

Zed raised a curious eyebrow, not catching her hint. Addison sighed and said, "But you'll be there for me, right? In case…something happened."

"Oh." Zed nodded in agreement. "If you end up crying I might just end up going Zombie on their asses."

Addison giggled. "Appreciated, but probably not the best idea."
Zed hummed in agreement. "At least you got a warning. Last time they were dicks you were not prepared."

"As in my whole life?" Addison joked in a sadistic way. "I've been dealing with their shit forever. And I'm really glad I've gotten to know you and Eliza, because now I know how to stand up for myself."

Zed grinned, then leaned down and kissed the top of her head. "Glad I could help."

Addison spent the walk to the banquet hall going through her family pictures and pointing out all her cousins and relatives. "Bucky is the youngest of four. Mikey, Anthony, and Raina. In that order. They're all intimidating, but Raina is the worst one. She's like Bucky, turned up to fifty. Mikey and Anthony are wild cards. It all depends how the feel. They aren't twins, but they act like it."

"I remember them," Zed stated. "I think they like that I'm good at football."

Addison rolled her eyes. "That's Mikey and Anthony and any guy in my family. They all gave Bucky shit for being like Raina and cheering. At least until he won championships."

"S'not good," Zoey piped from her spot a few feet ahead. "Daddy and Zed always say that family shouldn't care if you're a star or the best. That they should love and support you no matter what."

"Why else do you think I love being with you all and not my own family?"

Zoey whooped and did a cartwheel down the sidewalk. Both Zevon and Zed said to her, "No stunts in the road!"

Addison chuckled and shook her head. "So on my dad's side are Nick and Chris. They're two years apart, but are also almost like twins. They're huge football guys. They'll like you. Bucky tells me they were like, in love with your performance at that one game they went to."

"So what you're saying is I only have to win over Raina?"

Addison laughed at him. "God, if it were that easy. There's still my aunts and uncle, and my parents."

"I already won over your parents."

Addison shook her head. "They don't mind you, but mom said on Thursday that she still doesn't like you and that you stole her baby from her."

"Oh great," Zed said, nodding along. "Your dad—"

"Hates you," Addison said. "I mean, he likes that you're honest with him. It doesn't change the fact that you're the guy who's gonna take his little girl from him."

"Think of it this way, son," Zevon said. "Imagine the person who's gonna date Zoey."

"Oh I'll kill them without even going Zombie."

Both Zoey and Addison looked at him and exclaimed, "Zed!"

"You're my baby sister and any person, man or woman, will have to fight me to get to you." Addison gave him a pointed look and he nodded. "Okay, I get what you mean now."
"And my dad's sister, Carla, is a bitch. Her wife, Erika, is a lot nice. My mom's sister, Janet who we sometimes call Kitty, is also a bitch. She's Bucky's mom. And her husband, Phillip, is a lot like her. So both are pretty horrible."

"I feel very stressed out," Zed said honestly.

"You should be yourself that's the coolest thing!" Zoey exclaimed. "That's what I'm gonna do. Everyone loves an adorable little kid!"

"I'm fifteen and six-foot-two. I'm way past the stage of 'cute little kid'."

"You're a cute young man," Addison said, pinching his cheek. "And I honestly don't care if they like you or not. I just think you should be prepared for the hellstorm that is my family."

"Bucky is cool," Zoey stated. "I mean, he was a little mean at first. But like I said: everyone loves a cute little kid."

Zevon chuckled at his daughter. "C'mere my little Zombie Angel."

Addison smiled and squeezed Zed's hand. "You'll do great! You're charismatic and cute and charming. All the girls want you and all the guys questions their sexuality around you. And I get the pleasure of being yours. I don't care what they think of you, remember that."

Zed smirked, kissed the top of her head, then said, "Let them talk if they wanna."

Addison grinned and responded with, "Let them talk, 'cause they're gonna."

"You and me, we're gonna do what we wanna."

"Hey," Zevon warned. "I know where this is going. You're going to sing then dance. And the rules apply to you both too: no dancing in the street."

The teenagers giggled to themselves. "Sorry Pops," Zed said.

Five seconds after they hung up their coats, Bree pounced on them. Zed wasn't even sure where she had come from or how she had found them. He chalked it down to the magic of Bree and just hugged her when she got to him.

"You guys look so good! I love the whole family-matching thing you got going! And how the colors compliment Addison's outfit! Oh my god, I wish my family would color coordinate with me!"

Zed chuckled and said, "We didn't do it on purpose."

"That's. Even. Cuter!" Bree exclaimed, punctuating each word with a slap to Zed's arm.

"Ow! Why are humans so violent!"

"Not humans, just cheerleaders," Addison said cheekily.

"You guys have to take pictures!" Bree went on. "Everyone has been waiting for Zoey to get here because all the guys want to show her off to their families."

"Me?"
"They love you, Zoe," Bree said. She then grabbed Addison and Zed's arm and began dragging them toward the photographer. "Come on!"

Bree had the photographer take tens of pictures, first of the Necrodopolus family, then of Zed and Zoey, then solo photos, then Zed and Addison, then of Bree and Addison. The only reason they stopped was because Bucky had come out of the ballroom and found them immediately.

"What are you doing out here! The party is inside!" Bucky exclaimed once he was in earshot.

"Hello to you too," Addison said cheekily. "How are you today, cousin?"

"Horrible!" Bucky all but shouted. "I have to deal with my siblings and your cousins alone! Do you know how horrible that is?"

"It's even worse when you have to deal with Bucky too."

Bucky glared at her and said, "Don't start with me. It's been a long day and you need to get your butt in that ballroom immediately."

"I don't wanna," Addison whined.

"Addison!"

"Raina is in there and I don't want to see her," Addison whined.

"Hey," Zed said soothingly. He took Addison's hand and squeezed it, drawing her attention to his face. "Think of me as your bodyguard. Anyone you don't want to talk to, you won't. We got this."

Addison took a deep breath and nodded. "We got this."

She reached down and took Zoey's hand. "C'mon Necrodopoluses. We got this!"

"Why are you at a different table?" Zed asked.

"Auntie Missy wants to show off Mr. Necrodopolus to my parents and the cousins want to openly attack Zed and Zoey." Bucky stated.

"Oh my god," Addison muttered.

"We're fine!" Zed said optimistically.

Addison looked at him fearfully and he gave her his best smile. "Good luck with the adults, Dad," Zed said. "I'll be controlling the…other adults who are slightly younger."

Zevon chuckled to hide his own nervousness. Zed just exhaled deeply. He picked up his little sister then took Addison's hand, walking with his two favorite girls into the ballroom. Addison squeezed his hand tightly and leaned against him. "They're watching us," she whispered.

She nodded her head toward the front of the room. Zed recognized her parents and aunts and uncle at one table and her cousins at the other, all watching them as they walked over.

"Don't look so terrified," Zed whispered to Addison.

Zoey clutched onto her brother tightly. "I've never seen so many mean looking humans," she whispered.
Zed was tempted to bring up the cheer championship, when every human in the room was booing her. Then he thought that his sister probably didn't notice they hated her there.

Bucky got to the table before them and sat down, leaving two seats and a smaller chair that was clearly out their for Zoey at the table. All conveniently between Raina and some guy cousin who looked suspiciously like an older version of Bucky.

One of the other guy cousins—one of the ones on her dad's side, maybe Chris—grinned and stood. "Addy-Catty! You came! You actually came!"

Addison smiled nervously. "Well, I am a cheerleader and statistician," she said. "Um, I don't know if you remember but this is my boyfriend, Zed."

Zed smiled because he didn't have a free hand to wave.

"And this is his little sister, Zoey," Addison introduced. "You guys know Bucky. That's his sister, Raina. His brothers, Michael—"

"Mikey," Zoey corrected.

"And Anthony," Addison went on. "And my other cousins, Chris and Nick."

"Well Baby Cuz, I must say you all look lovely," Nick stated. "I was a little worried they'd show up in coveralls."

"I'd look adorable no matter what," Zoey said with a smile. "I can't say the same about Zed, though."

"Okay, that's enough from you," Zed said. "You're nearly eight and you know how to walk." He set her down on the ground and said, "Don't do anything stupid."

"No promises!" Zoey said excitedly before running off. Zed and Addison and everyone at the table watched her cartwheel across the empty space and toward another table.

"I love that kid," Addison said wistfully.

She then pulled Zed to the open seats, putting him next to Raina. "I'm surprised you even sat with us," Raina commented.

"Well, family is important and you are Addison's," Zed said with a smile. He was tempted to add the fact that they were the bane of Addison's existence and, by the transitive property of relation, the bane of his, but decided against it.

"Is your Z-Band functioning properly? I wouldn't want an accident, especially sitting so close to you."

Addison laughed bitterly. "I was going to say that if Zed went Zombie he wouldn't hurt anyone, but then I remembered the fact that it's been mere minutes since we got here and you're already acting like a bitch. And still, Zed wouldn't hurt you because he's that good of a person."

Zed squeezed Addison hand as if to reassure her that he was there and she could calm down a bit. Addison sighed and looked at her cousins across from her. "I haven't talked to you guys in ages. How have you been?"

"Well Addy Catty, I can tell things are still tense between us," Mikey said.
"I asked Zed to switch from loving-boyfriend to bodyguard-boyfriend," Addison deadpanned.

"To be fair, being protective of Addy is what I do twenty-four seven," Zed said with a shrug. "She's so beautiful and nice, and I'm so lucky to have her."

Addison smiled and leaned into his side. "I'm more lucky to have you."

Zed smiled and kissed her cheek. Bucky groaned and said, "They're literally like this all the time. It's a little annoying."

"You're just upset because I have a cute boyfriend and you don't," Addison said without any real venom.

"Y'all two are real cute," Chris said in a mock country accent.

"Could you keep the PDA to a minimum though? I'd rather not watch a Zombie suck face with my Baby Cousin." Raina said in disgust.

Addison frowned and opened her mouth to say something. Before she could, though, Zed said, "It's funny that you seem to care so much about Addison all of a sudden because you never once make any attempt to check up on her. I know her parents come and ask me how's she's doing. Bucky sees us in school and checks on Addison. But you—none of you really—made an effort to even find out if Addison is eating or sleeping or even alive. But sure, the problem here is me showing my girlfriend affection and love."

"But Uncle Dale told us not to bother Addison," Mikey argued.

"If you really cared about her you'd at least find a way to check on her and make sure she was healthy and doing well and maybe even happy," Zed spat back. "But yes, *I'm* the problem here."

"Zed," Bucky said in a warning tone.

Zed glared at him slightly. "Don't try to talk me down," Zed stated. "I'm teetering on the edge of blowing my lid and you remember what that's like, don't you Benedict?"

Bucky paled and sat back, fully remembering the day Zed threatened him not even two weeks ago.

His siblings looked at him in slight horror. "Did he hurt you?" Anthony asked.

"Yes," Zed seriously. "I went right up to him in the school hallway. I got a few of my buddies from the team and I threatened his life because he was being unfair and too hard on Addison. I told him—and I say this with full meaning to everyone at this table—that if *any* of you do *anything* to hurt Addison, I swear to every god out there I will fuck you up without even going offline."

The table was silent as everyone processed what Zed said. He stood after a quiet second. "I'll be back," he said in a forced tone.

Zed walked quickly through the ballroom and out into the lobby. He turned down the hall toward what he hoped was the bathroom. He only stopped when he heard Addison calling after him. His anger dissolved and he loosened up immediately as she made her way over to him.

He opened his mouth to apologize. Addison threw her arms around his neck and pulled him down, kissing him hard. He squeaked in surprise but only took a second to recover, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulled her closer to him.
Addison pulled back, breathing hard with flushed cheeks and kiss-swollen lips. "I just have to say that was the hottest thing I've ever seen," she rushed out. "You get like, ten times more attractive when you threaten people in my defense."

Zed couldn't help but grin at that. "I'll do it however many times more you need, Babe," he whispered, then leaned down and kissed her, this time more gently. Addison whimpered slightly and tugged on the hair at the nape of his neck.

"Oh my god." Very regretfully, Zed and Addison separated and looked further down the hall to see Tracey and Lacey and Stacey watching them in surprise.

"We love an impromptu make out session more than anyone else," Lacey said. "But are you sure this is the time or place for that?"

Zed felt his face heat up and held Addison protectively. Addison grinned and hugged him back. "I was surprised at first that you guys went everywhere together, then I remembered you're the Aceys."

She giggled then pulled away from Zed. "Let's get back. I think we've struck complete fear in them so I wanna see how this evening plays out."

"So the plan is that we'll play the video recapping your regular season as well as cheer during dinner. Then when we serve dessert. We'll watch the cheer championship and the highlights from the championship game. After that we'll introduce you and then your speech."

"Yay," Zed said, feigning excitement.

His sarcasm went unnoticed by Principal Lee. "That's the spirit. Go enjoy the party for now."

Zoey slipped up to the table of Addison's older cousins, who all stopped their conversation as she made her way to Raina. The young Zombie held her hands behind her back and crossed her legs, bouncing slightly.

"Ms. Raina, can you please take me to the bathroom?" Zoey asked.

Raina furrowed her brows in confusion. "You're seven, aren't you potty trained?"

"Daddy and Zed said I'm not allowed to go by myself when we're in a very...human filled place. And I can't find Addy anywhere. I have to go real bad."

"What do you mean you can't find Addison?" Nick asked from across the table.

"It doesn't matter! I need to pee!" Zoey said in frustration. "Please please take me!"

Raina sighed and stood. Zoey grabbed her hand and ran off, dragging the human out of the ballroom. Raina had no choice but to run with her. Zoey ran into the bathroom and dropped Raina's hand, then ran into a stall.

Raina had to fight the urge to scrub her hands in the sink. 'She's just a little kid. If you get overpowered by a little kid then you deserve it.'

Zoey finished not long after and skipped her way to the sink. "I was scared you might leave me," Zoey said. "I know you don't like Zombies."
"Can you blame me? They tried to eat my grandfather."

"Yeah, well that was a long time ago," Zoey said. "If anything, Zombies are terrified of humans. It's why I can't go to the bathroom alone. In case an angry human comes and tries to kill me."

"Why would a human ever hurt a Zombie?"

"Well Ms. Raina, you may not realize it, but humans don't really like Zombies. They're scared of us, and that fear turns into them thinking that if they hurt us first, then Zombies can't hurt them. But to Zombies, especially like me, who were born way after the Outbreak, it's just humans coming into Zombietown and burning our houses and destroying our stuff and killing us for no reason."

Raina stood there, completely stunned. Everything Zoey had said had rang true in her head. It wasn't like a Zombie had ever done anything to her. She just…she always assumed that if she didn't hurt them first—if she let them walk freely—then they'd have the chance to hurt her.

"I've never even thought of eating brains," Zoey went on. "It sounds yucky. Plus, it'd be hard to get my tiny fingers through someone's skull. I could in theory, of course. But seems like it's more trouble than it's worth. Plus, if I hurt a human, I'd have to spend years in Zombie Containment. Zed spent forever there and he didn't even touch anyone."

"What's Zombie Containment?"

"Super high security lock up for bad Zombies." Zoey turned away from the sink and moved to the hand driers. "It's like that place. Alfalfa."

"Do you mean Alcatraz?"

"I'm seven, Ms. Raina."

"Why do you keep calling me 'Ms. Raina'?"

Zoey waited for her hands to dry before answering. She moved to Raina and said, "Zed said I need to show you respect because he made you angry and you can't hate the entire Necrodopolus family. He'd rather you hate him than me. But who could hate me! I'm a sweet little kid! All I want in life is to make people happy!"

Raina couldn't help the smile that came to her face. "Bucky told me you cheer," she said. "He said that because of you, Seabrook got second in the cheer championship."

Zoey grinned even wider. "I don't like to brag about it, but yeah!"

Zoey was so adorable and sweet, Raina could help but melt a little around her.

Because it was Seabrook the videos played out perfectly. None of them went over their allotted time frame or ended early. They were all so perfectly timed it made Zed sick.

It was definitely the perfect planning of Seabrook and not the prospect of saying his speech—four pages long—in front of the room. After all the videos finished, Principal Lee began to talk about what characterized an MVP.

Then Zed was being called up to the stage. Everyone applauded him as he went to the podium and Principal Lee shook his hand and congratulated him quietly.

When the applause died down and Zed had adjusted the microphone for his height, he began.
"Good evening, everyone," Zed said into the microphone. "Before I begin I'd just like to warn you all that this speech is kinda long. I hope it interests you and if not I'm truly sorry. I spent a long time researching MVP speeches because I just didn't know what I was supposed to say here. And, after a long conversation with my dad, I figured out what I needed to say. So now I'm actually gonna read from what I wrote because this took me a really long time to perfect and I worked really hard on this."

Zed took a deep breath, then started. "Good evening teammates, cheerleaders, parents of teammates and cheerleaders, and everyone in between. My name is Zed Necrodopolus, and I was chosen by my coach and teammates as the MVP for the season of 2017.

"Most of you probably think it's because I'm a Zombie. Some of you may think it was an unfair ruling because I 'cheated' during our regular season games. It's the reason why the first thing I wanted to talk about in my speech was the regular season.

"I grew up in Zombietown, surrounded by Zombies. Everyone loved me growing up, including the few humans I interacted with. I was a scientific miracle and I just made everyone happy by being myself. And when I found out I'd get to go to human high school, I was ecstatic. My dad tried to warn me about the real world. I can remember his words exactly that first day of school. 'You're a great kid, it's just...You haven't spent a whole lot of time around humans and humans don't really like Zombies.' And I thought that I could do the same thing I'd done for the first fifteen years of my life and win them over with a smile and being myself.

"That first day of school was a nightmare. All Zombies were crammed in the basement and we weren't allowed to leave. Which meant I couldn't accomplish my one goal, which was to join the football team. Of course, I didn't let that stop me. I knew that if I was given the chance to prove myself, things wouldn't be so bad between humans and Zombies.

"Then I was rejected from football. I didn't even get the chance to try out because I was a Zombie. It stung a little. All my life, people had been praising me for just being me. And now, the only thing I got was frightened looks and people doing their best to stay as far from me as possible.

"In the time it took me to get from sneaking out of the basement to football tryouts, I met a girl who was trying out for cheer. She eventually became my girlfriend, which is a story for another time. She was nice and different and didn't treat me the same way as every other human had that day. And then I saw her outside my house that night, getting ready to egg it, and my spirits were crushed.

"Humans are bad. Cheerleaders are monsters. That's the one thing my best friend would repeat to me over and over again. And I believed her, for one night. Then the same human who was ready to egg my house came to the basement that was filled to the max with Zombies, and apologized. And all of a sudden, humans weren't so bad. And Addison invited us to the pep rally that day.

"At that pep rally, the cheerleaders got the idea to use these spirit sticks that are basically sticks on fire. They did it because they wanted us to go Zombie so we could be shunned. One of my friends freaked out for very wise reasons that aren't my business to tell. I ran after him, because he's one of my closest friends. And in the process, my Z-Band shut off and I began to go Zombie. My friend ran through the gym and scared everyone off. Including the cheerleaders that had just tossed up Addison, who was now coming to the ground at full speed.

"When I'm Zombie, it's harder to comprehend things. But I knew that I needed to save Addison, so I ran for my life to catch her. I was told later that I completely crushed the offensive lineman. As Coach said, I 'ran through the offensive linemen like they were scrawny freshmen!' That's how I got on the team.
"I tried to play as regular olé Zed at first. But the guys on my team weren't too fond of having to play with a Zombie. They didn't even block for me. I didn't want to let anyone down. If I won football games than Zombies would get more benefits, like an actual classroom and lockers and maybe even human food. I did what I felt was the right thing. I played as a full Zombie in every game, and won every game. It hurt a lot, and my Zombie wants to rip my throat out now. But it was worth every agonizing minute because it meant good for all Zombies. It stopped being about people liking me and became equality for all Zombies. I don't want my little sister to have to make the decisions I had to. I want her to be able to dream something and do it, and not have to worry about people telling her no because of who she is.

"I'm proud to be a Zombie. I wouldn't have wanted my life to turn out any other way. I'm proud I got to play with such amazing guys this year, that I got to ride with them all the way to State Champions. I don't know if they only like me because I won them games or if we're actually friends. And I don't care anymore. I couldn't win by myself, it was a team effort. We did it together. That's what matters.

"Before I end my speech, I want to thank some special people for getting me where I am. Like my dad, who came to every game. Yes, he's one man who's a Zombie and had to support two kids. But he made sure he was there for every game. He couldn't make it to the states game though, but that's okay. Because I know he was with me.

"I definitely want to thank my little sister. You've given me the ability to learn how to work with and care for another person. You taught me how to find my strengths and excel at them, even though you probably didn't know it. And all the running around I did after you growing up definitely paid off.

"I wanna give a quick shout out to my amazing girlfriend. She was a cheerleader during our regular season and was obligated to be at every game. But during all our other games, she came out and volunteered as statistician and worked her butt off and only missed one game. Which was, coincidentally, the only game I did really bad in. Your amazing, I love you.

"Of course I wanna thank my team and my coach and everyone at school who always supported me. The Zombie Patrol, for always being there whenever there was a little mishap with the Z-Band. And also whoever gave us WiFi in the Z-Bands because you are a blessing.

"I wanna shout out my two best friends, Eliza and Bonzo, who couldn't come tonight because neither cheer nor play football. They're support really got me through everything, even when they didn't agree with what I was doing. They were always there for me.

"Lastly—and I'll warn you now that I might end up crying—I'd like to thank my mom. When I was really little she taught me how to play football. She found an old ball in a storage unit and played with me every night, no matter how tired she was or how early she'd have to leave in the morning for work. She always made time to play with me. And when she died a few years ago—" Zed paused and took a deep breath. He looked up and, in the light shining on him, it was clear that his eyes were shining with tears.

"When she died a few years ago, I just couldn't play anymore. It hurt playing football without her. It felt like I was trying to take one of our traditions and flush it down the toilet because she wasn't here and it was a Mommy and Zed thing. If…if I played without her it'd be like none of that matter. Those nine years of my life meant nothing if I did the things I usually did with her, without her. But now, whenever I get out on that field and I run until my legs burn and I play, I do it in your honor. I'll never forget you, Mom. You'll always be in my heart, and you're always with me whenever I play."
Zed took a step back from the microphone and ducked his head down. Addison looked at Zoey and saw her crying too. She reached into her bag and pulled out a box of tissues, offering it to the little girl. Zoey took the box, then jumped out of her seat and ran to her brother.

And, if they weren't crying then, seeing the two siblings hug and share the box of tissues was sure to melt every heart in the room and make everyone tear up.

Then Zoey took the tissues to her dad and then people were really crying. Zed watched them with a watery smile and moved back to the microphone.

"I'm sorry, I lost my place," he said, his voice thick and wavering. "Um, so I'm just really happy to be given this chance and thankful of everyone in my life who helped me get here. Thank you."
Addison once read that living with depression felt like eating food, and everything tastes like mashed potatoes. Pizza and macaroni and cake, it was all bland and flavorless and just so pointless. "Why don't you try eating your favorite foods?" That'd be a great idea if everything didn't taste like mashed potatoes. "Have you tried adding salt to your mashed potatoes?" Another good idea, if everything didn't taste like mashed potatoes. No matter what you'd do to it, it was all just bland and pointless slob. Mashed potatoes.

No medicine could change the fact that on some days, life was just pointless. She'd wake up and her muscles wouldn't want to move and she knew "oh it's that kind of day". The kind of day that was like mashed potatoes. Pointless and tired and bland and just not worth it.

"Addy? You gotta get up for school."

School. It was tiring and a strain on her brain. School and mashed potato days collided all the time. Addison would power through and leave classes, hide in the Safe Room and cry. Most times it was for no reason and she felt like she was being stupid. And sometimes she'd cry because she was upset. Upset because the cafeteria doesn't have apple juice and it's the smallest and stupidest thing but she can just feel the waves of tears coming and she just goes and sobs in the bathroom. Upset because Mrs. Smith had called on Jenika who didn't know the answer while Addison did know the answer and had been ignored. It was stupid and she was being dramatic and yeah, maybe Zed might make her feel better. But that was a big maybe.

Sometimes even Zed felt like mashed potatoes.

Talking was as exhausting as running laps on mashed potato days. "I can't," she said quietly. It was the first time she'd ever been honest with Zed about mashed potato days. Maybe on a regular day, when life didn't feel pointless and she didn't want to just shrink into her bed (Zed's bed), maybe then she'd explain to him what it was like. Maybe.

She forced her eyes open to see Zed nod solemnly. "Okay," he said. "I'll let my dad know."

Addison wanted to thank him. She wanted to say something instead of sitting there and being useless. Instead she just closed her eyes, trying to find something that wasn't so...so mashed potatoes.

"Where's Addison?" Zevon asked.

"She wants to stay home today," Zed explained. He looked toward the stairs to make sure his little sister wasn't coming down before continuing. "I...I think she may be...I don't know how to
explain."

Zevon nodded in understanding. "I know what you mean, Son. But do you really think leaving her alone is the best idea?"

Zed shook his head. 'I'll come visit during lunch. I have study hall and gym last. Do you think you could call and sign me out of the last two periods? I wanna be with her but...I can't really miss too much school."

"Of course I will."

On mashed potato days, it hurt to move. Usually, she could force herself out of bed and do her best to pretend like nothing was wrong, like life didn't feel like an endless hole of nothingness.

Usually.

Somewhere deep inside, she felt bad for crying so much in Zed's pillow. But she'd rather cry with her face down in the most suffocating position than risk someone coming home, coming up and seeing her broken and in despair and just not okay at all. She didn't want to be a burden. She didn't want to worry people with her emotions and have them stress about her.

She'd be fine. Once everything stopped being mashed potatoes.

"Where's Addison?"

Zed didn't know how to answer. He didn't want to say she was sick, and have everyone worrying about her. Addison didn't like it when people would make a fuss over her. But she wasn't necessarily fine and people don't just miss school when everything is okay.

"She's taking a day," Eliza supplied helpfully. Zed hadn't told her where Addison was, and yet she knew what he was thinking, and the words to describe where Addison was.

That seemed to be enough of an answer for Bree and Bonzo too. It didn't take much for them to get the hint either. Bree looked at Zed with worry and he gave her his best 'everything is fine' smile. "Don't worry, okay?" he told them. "Everything's fine."

The quiet was as suffocating as having her face buried in a pillow. The drugs usually silenced the voices, but on mashed potato days nothing could stop them. Not Zed or music or tv. It was all just mashed potatoes.

Zed's windows were open and the sun was bright and blinding, but she just couldn't get up and close the blinds and make it dark.

Time was pretty meaningless on mashed potato days. She could stare at a clock all she wanted but they'd just be numbers, floating around. Pointless.

Sometime when the sun was up, Zed came home. It must have been lunch or he could've been skipping. Didn't matter much anyway.

"Hey Addy," he said gently. She wanted to look up at him and smile her best reassuring smile, as if everything were all right. She couldn't though. Moving was a chore and moving her mouth was more tiresome than she'd ever experienced.
Zed was unfazed by her inability to look up at him. He sat down on the bed and asked her, "Have you eaten today?"

In the smallest, weakest voice she'd ever heard, she whispered, "No."

"Have you gotten up?"

"No."

"Well, let's go eat some lunch," he decided. "Don't worry, your stuck with me until biology in thirty five minutes."

Mashed potato days were like a chore. Nothing was fulfilling and everything was pointless. Sometimes even Zed would be mashed potatoes: the same thing everyday, completely meaningless and bland and just there.

Some days.
"I can't do this anymore, Honey. I haven't seen my daughter in a month and it's driving me crazy!"

"Missy, we see her every week."

"It's not the same, Dale!" Missy cried. "I'm sick and tired of sharing my daughter with everyone else! I carried her for eight and a half months, I raised her and she's my daughter!"

Dale sighed in frustration. "We can't go see her. We need to give her time to heal."

Missy dropped her head on the table. "I miss her so much," she said miserably.

Dale wrapped his arms around his wife and hugged her close and tightly. "I miss her too," he said. "But we have to do this. We need to be strong for her."

"Missy? It's late, you still aren't dressed."

Missy took a long and drawn out sip of her morning coffee. She put down her mug—one she hadn't touched in years—then answered her husband. "I took the day off," Missy explained. "I can't operate this way. So I'll go with you to work and to Seabrook High to pick up Zed. And who knows, maybe I might see Addison."

Dale sat down in the stool beside his wife and sighed. He placed his hand over hers and rubbed the pad of his thumb over the back of her hand. "Maybe we could talk to Dr. Jankowski. See if she'll let Addison come home for a day or two."

"I want to see my baby now!"

"I know, I know," Dale sympathized. "We have to stay strong for her, Missy. We have to."

Missy leaned into her husband and cried into his side. She couldn't bring herself to speak anymore and just reached into Dale for comfort. After a few minutes of crying she sat up and looked at him with red eyes. "It's so lonely here without Addison. She used to cartwheel around the house and cheer up in her room. I'm not ready for her to be gone yet, Dale."

Dale nodded and said nothing. He was afraid if he tried to say something he'd break down, and he had to stay strong for his wife and his daughter.

"She was so happy when she was young," Missy said with a sad smile. "I...I can't believe I didn't notice the change. I didn't notice that my baby hated her life. I-I didn't see the signs."

"We should go out," Dale decided. "On a date. We haven't done that in a while, right?"

"Dale..."

"No, it'll be good for us," Dale decided. "Just the other day I told Zed to go out on a date with Addison. I could tell you a lot of things about Zed and Addison, but mostly Zed. Hearing about Addy from his perspective is good! I think you'll enjoy everything I can tell you."

Missy tried her best not to smile but failed. She wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand and said, "That sounds nice."
"We can be cute, that's not just reserved for young couples y'know," Dale teased.

Missy nodded. "That sounds really nice."

"And, if we have a little time, I'm sure we can have a little more fun. If you can catch my vibe."

Missy broke into laughter. "Yeah, that sounds really nice."

"Missy dear, what are you doing?"

"I saw that Addy was posting on her Instagram and I wanted to see," Missy explained.

Dale sat up and looked at her curiously. "Addison let's you follow her on Instagram."

"Don't be ridiculous," Missy scoffed. "She's a fourteen year old girl; she blocked me on her Instagram. This is the page she runs for Zombietown."

"Addison's runs an Instagram for Zombietown?"

Missy grinned and giggled a little. "Yes dear, she does. It's a huge thing, she has two hundred sixty two point two thousand followers at this very moment. And it gets bigger every day!"

"That's good then," Dale said. "What does she post about?"

"Zombies."

"Figures."

"She's also been raising money for that cheer program she wants to start," Missy added offhandedly. "I've been donating, just something you should know."

"How do you think that's going?"

Missy shrugged, helplessly. "I know she's been in and out of city hall. If I could check her emails I'm sure I'd find exchanges between herself and someone at the state government. And of course the NCCA."

"Naturally."

Missy sighed and laid back against the pillows. She tilted her phone toward her husband, showing a selfie of Addison all bundled up in her coat and scarf with the tip of her nose all red. Missy lifted her finger and the video began playing, zooming out to show both Addison and Zed and two others (they were twins, as far as Missy was aware).

"I'm freezing my butt off," Addison complained with a laugh. "Rizzo and Zeph keep laughing at me too! It's like I'm the only one who gets cold around here!"

All three Zombies in the video chuckled and said, "You are, Addison."

The girl twin leaned in and said in a rush, "It's 'cause your human and your heart beats fast so your vasoconstricting and—"

The video ended, promptly cutting her off. The next video began, this time focused on the girl twin. "Science lesson! Humans vasoconstrict and vasodilate in response to heat and cold respectively. Zombies don't because how blood flow is controlled by the electrical impulses of the
"Z-Band—" cue three Z-Bands coming into frame. "So the Z-Band can make us more warm or cold and we don't need to bundle up as much as humans do."

The video ended again and the next was Zed. "That doesn't apply to younger Zombies. The Z-Band is all weird with them so they need to be treated almost the same as humans, like wearing more or less based on the temperature and stuff like that."

The boy twin jumped behind Zed and smiled at the camera. That video ended and then cut to a boomerang of the three Zombies laughing and goofing with the caption 'The More You Know!' The next one was of Addison. They were on the human side of the barrier now, probably close to school. "If you haven't guessed, today's Instagram takeover is by the amazing twins Zephyr and Rizzo. Rizzo's the girl and Zeph's the boy. Zeph's younger and also plays football and anything else you wanna know you can find out from them. I'll see you later!"

Missy then swiped out. "She doesn't do it everyday but that usually how it goes down," she explained. "I'd much rather just see her, but alas she's blocked me."

"We can see her later," Dale reminded her. "It's nearly time for driving. You just need to get dressed."

"You do too."

Dale put the car in park outside of Seabrook High School. "They don't get out for another seven minutes," he told his wife. "Then Zed and Addison will walk out a few minutes after that."

Missy nodded. "I take Zed driving for an hour then take him home. Then repeat on Wednesday and some Fridays."

"Do you think she'll come talk to us?" Missy asked hopefully.

Dale nodded, though he knew that Addison skillfully avoided him whenever he'd pick Zed up for driving practice. They waited in almost silence for the school bell to ring, then another few minutes for students to start streaming out.

It wasn't hard to spot the white haired teen walking out, hand-in-hand with her Zombie boyfriend. "Oh look at her," Missy gushed. "Her hair is so long. She's so red. Should she be that red?"

"They have gym last period," Dale explained.

Zed and Addison stopped walking a few feet outside of the main entrance. They were talking and smiling and it was all so sickeningly cute. Zed opened his backpack and passed a water bottle to his girlfriend, to which she refused at first, then reluctantly took after he continued to insist. Zed looked over at where Dale had parked and said something to Addison. He leaned down and kissed her before walking over, waving at her as he left.

"Are you moving to the backseat, Dear?"

Missy nodded and climbed out from the car. "Afternoon Mayor," Zed greeted with a grin. "It's a surprise seeing you here."

Missy put on her best smile. "I took the day off today, thought I'd see how things are going with you and driving."
Zed grinned and moved around her, popping the trunk and dropping his bag inside before moving to the driver's seat. He noticed how Missy's attention was somewhere else as she stood there, her hand on the door handle and a little wistful expression on her face. He followed her gaze until it landed on his girlfriend, then softened his smile.

"You wanted to see Addison, huh?" Zed asked.

His words snapped her from her haze. She ignored him and blushed, then climbed into the backseat. Zed frowned and moved to open his door. He peered down inside the car and said, "Um, I'll just be a sec. I forgot something." Then jogged off toward Addison.

"What're you still doing here?" Addison asked.

"Give me one of your notebooks," Zed said. "I said I needed to get something and can't go back empty handed."

Addison slipped her bag from her shoulder and started feeling around inside. "Why did you do that?"

"I wanted to tell you that your mom is here too," Zed said.

"What? My mom doesn't do this sort of thing."

Zed nodded. "I think she really misses you," he said. "Like, really badly. To the point where she's going to drive around with an inexperienced Zombie for an hour."

Addison shook her head. "My mom's perfect, she wouldn't make it obvious if she missed me."

She slipped out a spiral notebook and handed it to him. "Addy—"

"Ah, don't 'Addy' me," she stopped him. "If anything, we can finish this later."

Zed frowned but nodded, not wanting to push the subject further. "Love you, see you later." He leaned down and pecked her lips, then turned to head back to the car.

"Bye!"

The entire time he was driving, Missy pestered Zed with questions. All of them were about Addison and how she was doing and if she was eating or cheering or if she was happy.

"How often does she go to the bathroom and is her urine clear or dark yellow? Sometimes she get juice happy and has a lot and not enough water and it really slows her down."

"That all made me uncomfortable in many different ways," Zed stated. "I don't pay attention to her urination patterns. I just make sure she showers and brushes her teeth?"

"Twice a day?"

"Shower or brush?"

"Both."

"Yes ma'am."

"Has Addison been sick?" Missy asked. "She usually gets a bad cold around this time of year and
gets really miserable and also really needy which I love because I love having my baby girl need me."

"Addison doesn't appreciate it when everyone refers to her as a baby," Zed stated. "Just throwing that out there. Like when her cousins call her 'Baby Cuz' she gets really ticked off."

"I'm her mother. I gave her a name."

Zed shrugged. "I'm just letting you know is all. I know you miss Addison a lot, so I'm just sharing what I've learned."

"How's her hair?" Missy asked.

"Her hair?"

"When she was a baby she'd get bad eczema on her scalp and I'm worried it might come back. She cleans it everyday, right?"

"As far as I know," Zed said. "I can tell you that it's thick and curly, and like pretty long too."

"I saw her at the banquet."

"I'm just saying."

The rest of the drive went about the same. Eventually Dale had Zed drive into Zombietown and parallel park on the curb outside Zed's house.

"Your actually pretty good," Missy commented. "I wasn't even terrified for my life, like I know I'll be when Addison starts driving."

Zed chuckled, knowing how impulsive Addison was and how much worse it was getting as the days went by. Sometimes she'd take off down the street when they were walking Puppy or on their way to school. And when Zed would catch up with her, it'd be just in time before she did something insane like scale a five foot wall to knock down a sign (vandalism).

"Since you think I'm doing better," Zed said. "I think now is a good time to mention that I can't do this three days a week anymore."

"Why not?" Missy questioned with genuine curiosity.

Zed smiled nervously. "I, uh, need to spend more time with my tutor," he explained. "I'm not very good at school. And before going to tutoring wasn't as bad because it'd leave school then do tutoring then go to football. But now I only go three times and I really need to bring up my grades." He glanced down and said in a shy voice, "Don't be mad."

"No, I'm not upset with you," Dale said. "I'm actually a little proud. You have very good communication, and you're always honest."

"If you need to focus more time on school, we understand," Missy said. "It's fine anyway. At the pace you're learning, your hurt need a little more practice then you'd be all set to take the test."

Zed let out a breath. "Thank you."

"Just let me know when you're available for more practice," Dale said.

The two humans exchanged a look. "We were gonna wait until your birthday, but it seems like a
good time," Missy said, reaching below the seat and producing a vibrant pink bag. "It'll come in handy."

Zed looked at them with wide eyes. "No no no," he insisted. "I can't—there's no way—you guys don't even like me!"

The humans looked at him oddly. "It's a gift," Missy insisted. "Besides, it's not like you'll be the only Zombie with a cell phone. The folks down at Zombie Development will be raffling off twenty phones just like this—fully paid for, that is."

"And we do like you," Dale insisted.

Zed continued to shake his head. "It's really sweet and all but I couldn't possibly—"

"We want you to have it," Missy insisted.

Zed looked between the two of them for confirmation, then slowly took the bag from Missy's hands. He kept it closed, afraid to look inside.

"Thank you," he said earnestly. "I-I don't know how I could ever repay for—for everything."

"Just keep making our princess smile," Missy said with a soft smile on her face.

Zed felt his lip quiver. "Oh don't cry," Dale said. "Go on and get your homework done. See you later."

"Thank you," Zed said again.

"They bought Zed an iPhone," Addison complained. "And to make it worse, it was the iPhone X! The X! They bought my boyfriend a phone!"

Dr. Jan nodded along, then looked at Addison's parents. "Is this really what we're gonna talk about today?" Dale asked. "Don't you think there are more…important things?"

"No," Addison stated. She folded her arms over her chest and slumped back against the couch. "We won't talk about anything until this is over. Why would you buy Zed the iPhone X? I want the X! I've had the 6 for years. I drop hints about a new phone and you've done nothing! Then you go out and buy my boyfriend—who isn't your flesh and blood—a one thousand dollar phone!"

"We didn't buy him a phone, specifically," Dale pointed out. "There was a surplus of money in Zombie Development so they decided it'd be nice for Zombies to have other ways of communication. They bought one hundred iPhones—"

"Apple was a partner in the Z-Band initiative," Missy supplied helpfully.

"They're giving out twenty this weekend," Dale told his daughter. "The rest are gonna be put in stores."

"What Zombie could afford an X?"

"They're giving out all of the X's for free and selling all the other models," Dale explained. "Is this settled now?"

Addison frowned, then slowly nodded. "I want an iPhone X still. My birthdays in July so you can start saving now." Her tone was light enough that they knew she wanted it to sound like a joke, but
also that she was completely serious.

"Anything else you'd like to vent about, Addison?" Dr. Jan asked.

Addison nodded and sat up. "They keep stalking me," Addison said. "Dad picks up Zed after school and takes him driving and yesterday he brought Mom with him and they just sat there and watched us."

"I miss you!" Missy exclaimed. "Is it so wrong to miss my daughter? My baby girl who I carried for eight and a half months."

"Yeah, right and a half because you couldn't wait to get rid of me."

"That's not true!" Missy whined. "You were three weeks early because sometimes things happen. But you're my precious angel and you were so small with big blue eyes and so cute. I just wanna squeeze your face every time I think of you! I miss you, Addy Cat. I want you to come home."

"We both do," Dale added. "You're our only kid, Addy. And you'll graduate and move out officially before we know it. You grew up in the blink of an eye. I wanna spend as much time with you before it's too late."

"You aren't getting it, then," Addison said. "To me, it's been too late for years. I don't like being around you both because...I just...I feel like I can't be myself with you guys. I like to sing and dance and just have fun! But when I'm with you, it's like I have to be this cookie cutter girl who's seen and not heard. Like I have to dress a certain way and hide all these things about myself."

Missy sighed sadly. She understood exactly what Addison was saying. She remembered all those times she'd force Addison to be perfect as she grew up.

"Missy? Dale? Do you have anything to add?" Dr. Jan asked.

Missy frowned and dropped her face in her hands. "I'm a horrible mother."

"I see this type of thing a lot with families, especially from Seabrook," Dr. Jan said. "It isn't unnatural for children to feel like they have to hide who they are around their parents and family. As kids grow up, they begin to eventually separate themselves into different personalities. A poised and prim personality when they're around their family and elders, and a loose and wild personality when they're with their friends."

"Usually what I say is to be completely honest with each other. The less secrets the better. Missy, Dale, you may not like certain things. And Addison may like them. But the key to a relationship is accepting different interests and respecting those interests. Maybe even partaking and learning more about them. Addison, you mentioned singing and dancing?"

Addison blushed at that. "Oh, yeah," she said. "I mean, it was just an example is all. We could... we could do something else."

"Do you have any ideas? Anything specific you'd like to show us?" Dale asked.

Addison shook her head. "I mean, the only thing I'm doing right now—besides school—is trying to get this whole cheer camp started," she said. "And Mom, you can't help me with it because of 'conflict of interest'."

"What do you do with your friends?" Dr. Jan asked.
Addison laughed at that. "I do my school work and hang out with Zed. That's how every day is."

"Well, what's something you'd like to do with either your parents or your friends?"

Addison shrugged. "Um, me and my friends are going to the carnival next month. We're trying to set someone up, so we plan on isolating the two of them. It's gonna be fun. But I also have to run my booth for Zombeans—it's the name me and Zoey picked for the cheer camp—and we need some funds. Shit's expensive."

"Addison," both her parents scolded.

Addison giggled lightly. "Sorry. But, you could help me with the booth. And we could work a little together on getting this started. I finished my homework for today, maybe we can do something after this?"

"Really?" both Dale and Missy asked simultaneously, incredibly hopeful.

Addison nodded. "Let me think. Um…Zed and Zoey are making dinner tonight. Maybe you can… come over. And we could eat it together."

"Dinner?" Missy asked. "With…Zed?"

Addison nodded. "I may want to spend a little time with you, but I don't think I could handle it without Zed. I've become very dependent on him." She turned to Dr. Jan and said, "I know that's a problem in itself. We're taking it one thing at a time here."

"So dinner?" Dr. Jan asked. "Everyone here and there okay with that?"

"You're right, I should text Zed on his brand new iPhone X," Addison said pointedly. "Yes, I'm not over it. He doesn't even know how to work it!"

"He can learn," Dale said defensively. "And you're acting like you haven't helped him already and filled his camera roll with selfies like you do on our phones."

Addison frowned and blushed. "That's besides the point! Zed definitely needs hundreds of pictures of his cute girlfriend in his phone. He doesn't need the girlfriend’s parents buying him a one thousand dollar phone."

"We didn't buy them, they were gifts," Dale explained again.

"It still hurts my feelings."

"I know baby, now text Zed."

Dr. Jan smiled at them. "I think we're making great progress here. Lots of open communication and honesty between you all. Now I would like to point out that, while you are starting to spend time together outside of our appointments, it should only be when you're both comfortable with it. Addison, you shouldn't force yourself to spend time with them when you know you can't. And Missy and Dale, you shouldn't spend time with Addison when you know you can't, like when you're slammed with work."

The three nodded together. "Yes ma'am," Addison agreed.
Chapter Summary

Here it is, the last chapter before I take my break. It's around that time when school is extra stressfull and I can only write so much. And if I gotta put a story on pause, it'll be this one. Don't worry, we'll be back to regularly scheduled updates sometime in January!

It didn't take Einstein to know that Eliza and Bucky weren't friends. Or that they hated each other with a burning passion.

It was more like Eliza had some sort of vendetta against the cheerleader. From what Eva could tell, Bucky was trying to make amends with Eliza, who didn't seem to care much.

"I will do this project with you, then I will make sure I never have another class with you again," Eliza had told him harshly.

"Come on, be civil," Eva asked her. "I'm sure you guys could be friends if you tried."

"Bucky is the worst person alive."

"That's an exaggeration."

Eva looked at Bucky for help, to which he just shrugged. "I was a jerk, yes," he admitted. "But I've changed and—"

"I don't want to hear it," Eliza stated. "We need to make some contracts. Mrs. Palmer said we aren't allowed to get any outside help unless they're under a contract approved by her. I already talked with Zed and Addison and they said they'd star in the movie for a suitable compensation."

"Well we can't pay them," Bucky argued. "You know, 'cause we aren't making any profit."

"I know that," Eliza stated. "Eva and I went to Mrs. Palmer and she said we can 'pay them' by giving them service hours."

"You guys went without me?"

Eva shrugged. "We went during homeroom yesterday. We were talking with Addison and she said she'd take service hours. Then she texted Zed—"

"Did you know Zed got a phone?" Eliza interrupted. "And then Addison's dad came into Zombietown over the weekend and auctioned off twenty phones—iPhones!"

"The iPhone X, actually," Eva added. "E's bitter because she didn't get one."

Bucky nodded in understanding and Eliza blushed at Eva's use of her simple nickname. "So yes, Zed and Addison will work for service hours," Eva finalized. "I already drafted up a contract. We just need to go over it then print it and hopefully Zed and Addison don't make us change anything."
"Addison doesn't know how to understand a contract. She's fourteen."

"Don't undermine her just because she's young," Eliza argued. "Isn't it true that Zoey, a six year old little girl, outsmarted you and showed you the true ways of integration?"

"Addison is my cousin, Eliza. I think I know my cousin."

"God, working with you two will be insufferable," Eva complained. "I'm gonna go grab the copies of the contract. Don't kill each other."

Eva stood up and went off to the printer. Eliza and Bucky glared at each other slightly. "Dude, we gotta stop this," Eliza stated. "We have a project so you need to not make me want to gouge my eyeballs out."

"I'm not even doing anything!"

"Well then... just change," Eliza stated. "You know how bad this looks to the new student? When we're fighting like this?"

"You only care because you like her."

"I do not!"

Bucky raised an eyebrow at her. "I'm a cheerleader, Eliza. I deal with drama and denial and all that shit on a daily basis. I know when someone has a crush."

"I am not talking about this with you."

"Yeah you are," Bucky insisted. "You may not like me but you can't deny the fact that I know way more about relationships than you. And I can definitely help you, because you desperately need my help."

"Hey!"

"You just sit there and blush the entire time," Bucky explained. "I do my best to be as minimally annoying as possible while we work, but you have to stop being a pussy and talk to her."

Eliza glared at him. "I can help you flirt, too," Bucky went on. "I've gotten many people together. You think Bree and Bonzo are dating because they actually talked? No sweetie, that was all me and my careful planning."

Eliza shook her head. She didn't want to like Eva. Liking people always led to disaster. It always led to heartache and embarrassment and it was a waste of time. But also, if she agreed to Bucky's deal, he would be less annoying and she could possible get over her feelings. She sighed and nodded. "As long as it's not out of my comfort zone," she agreed.

Bucky grinned. "That's good. You don't wanna pretend to be something your not. That's how so many relationships fail."

Eliza just hummed in response. Zed had told her that Bucky wasn't that bad and she should give him a chance. And, even though this was mostly to get him off her case and to stop being so annoying, it was the only chance Bucky was getting from her.

Eva returned not long after with a stack of papers for Zed and Addison. She took her seat between Eliza and Bucky and Addison and Zed sat opposite them. "So, what's this movie about?" Addison
asked. "I'm not signing a contract if you're gonna make me look like an idiot."

"The only person who'll look like an idiot will be Bucky," Eliza stated. When Bucky glared at her she shrugged sheepishly. "I'm not wrong."

"It's about you two," Eva explained. "Your relationship, how you guys got together. I've heard that it's a pretty good story, so we're making it into a movie."

"What, specifically?"

"Well, you guys would get creative jurisdictions," Eva explained. "What you want, what you don't want. But we gonna make it as true and real as possible. We've already gotten access to some of the CCTV, like in Zombietown and in the school."

"The what?"

"Security cameras," Zed explained. "Just in Seabrook they're…perfect. High definition and lots of angles. All that jazz."

"So in your contract, you'd be signing to help us with the storyline and the screenplay. The soundtrack because apparently all you do is sing around here. And you'd be compensated with hours."

"Sounds like there's a catch," Addison said suggestively.

"The contract is exclusive," Eliza stated. "So you can't help anyone else with their movies. You can't have any speaking roles in any other movies. You'd be all ours."

"Sounds thrilling," Zed said sarcastically.

"But it's not like you don't get benefits," Eva added. "You don't get complete creative control, but you do get an eighty percent input in what goes on screen and what doesn't. And if there's a conflict, your vote will be the deciding factor."

"Unless it's something we can't change, like swearing or sex or nudity."

Eva slide the papers to the two of them. "Read it over, but it's just a formal and long version of what we just told you."

While Addison and Zed read through it, Eliza explained to them, "Bucky and I were think of starting at the first day of school. And maybe ending after the cheer championship—"

"Or after the block party," Bucky added. "It's up to you two."

"The block party was a really long time after the cheer championship, though," Eliza argued. "I doubt anything important happened between the two."

Addison shook her head. "Nothing movie worthy at least. But I think the block party's a good ending. Plus, you wouldn't have to put all the stuff between. Time slips are always relevant."

"Also the block party had the third best song I've ever heard," Zed said. "After Someday and Bamm, of course."

Eva grinned at them. "I guess it's decided then," she said. "So as soon as you guys sign we can start fleshing out the screenplay. Since this is a very musical town, I figured we could name the songs and then put events between them, and work from there."
"I mean, I can't find anything wrong or shady here," Addison said. "It's a fair contract, with an exchange of my services for volunteer hours. The only thing is the exclusivity which isn't even that bad. Can I have a pen?"

Eva grinned at Eliza, and Bucky passed his cousin a pen.

At the end of the first day, they had a loose storyline created. There were eight songs in total, which they'd ask Bonzo to help them with (or beg if they had to). They met up several more times over the next week, created a solid plot and story, writing out lyrics and getting together sheet music for songs that didn't already have music (Someday and My Year and the song Addison was working on in almost complete secret).

"What's your secret song?" Eva asked. "Like, where would it fit?"

"Oh, well it's not really a secret," Addison said sheepishly. "It's…it was when I took off my wig. I sang the first verse and the last chorus, but I feel like there could be so much more in between."

"That makes sense," Eva agreed.

"Don't say anything to the others," Addison added. "It's…it's very personal and sentimental and I just need to figure out where I want it to go first."

Eva smiled and reached over the table, covering Addison's hand with her own. "I get it," she said. "But once you figure it out, make sure you have your musical accompaniment ready. I know that Bucky and Eliza said that the first songs they wanted to record would be the ones already with music. Oh! And Zed had this idea where the two of you interact with the audience a bit. The only problem would be that those scenes we'd have to record now and you aren't wearing a wig now."

"Oh, it's fine," Addison said without hesitation. "I would have to put it on for Someday and all the Safe Room scenes anyway. It's not like…it's not like you guys won't be there to keep me from losing my mind."

"Are you sure?"

Addison nodded. "I may be an emotionally unstable depressed mess, but I will never go back to that lifestyle."

"Good," Eva said.

"Who'd you guys get to do the music?"

"Only the most famous band in all of Seabrook."

"Oh my god," Addison groaned with a grin. "Bowling for Zoup?"

Eva nodded with an adorable grin on her face. "Eliza and Zed agreed and then Bucky nodded along and Zed said it was because Bucky never got the chance to talk to Zach after they made out at some point."

Addison rolled her eyes. "That was the most loaded statement but I've never heard anything more true."

"Can we stop talking about school now? You're the only person that said yes when I asked them to join me at the museum."
"Not even Zed?"

"Zombies are only allowed downtown and we're in uptown, so he could come."

"That honestly sucks."

Addison shrugged. She grabbed her bag and slid out of the booth, then pulled Eva out too. "C'est la vie, my friend. Now let's go explore the wonders of discovery and science!"

---

"Do you think Eliza likes me?"

"Absolutely," Addison said without hesitation. "Why?"

Eva shrugged a bit uncomfortably. "She's just…I dunno. It just doesn't seem like it."

"Oh trust me, she likes you," Addison said. "But she's Eliza, so."

"So what?"

"She didn't even know she was gay until a few months ago," Addison explained. "Her parents are from the fifties or sixties. I don't remember exactly. But she grew up in a very homophobic house. She's been in one relationship that sucked ass. Just give her some time, she'll come around."

Eva nodded in understanding. "Okay, I guess." Addison looked at her curiously, prompting Eva to ask her next question. "Have you and her ever—?"

Addison shook her head before she could continue. "I have a boyfriend, whom I very much love. I've known them both for the same amount of time. Eliza's pretty, sure. But I like her as just a friend, so you're good."

"But…but if you and Zed ever broke up—"

Addison stopped walking and moved in front of Eva. "Eliza is my friend. And you are also my friend. And as friends, it's my job to hook the two of you up. Even if I didn't have Zed, I would know that you two are a force to be reckoned with, and definitely meant to be. Okay?"

Eva nodded in understanding. "I'm sorry," she apologized. "I've never done anything…real, I guess. Like, a date or a girlfriend or a kiss."

"It's okay to be nervous. But don't worry. Everyone's rooting for you guys."
Guess who’s back and better than ever! It’s me, with a new chapter! After that very very long break you should be happy to know I’ve written five full chapters for this story, I’ve done lots of other stories. Basically I’ve done a lot of writing, so check those out.

This story is my baby’s I’ve missed it so much! I have so much in store for it so be prepared! Anyway, enjoy this fun carnival chapter that in no way at all makes me die laughing every time it makes my heart melt because of—well you’ll find out.

Seabrook never had carnivals. According to Addison, carnivals were hotbeds for gangs and drug addicts, which Seabrook didn't need.

Zoey's school in Shoreside, though, had a carnival every year. It was a thing all the private schools in Shoreside did. They were competitive that way.

Addison had gone over to Shoreside straight after school that Thursday, with Zed and Eliza and Bree and Bonzo, all to help set up the booth where they would ask for donations and volunteers. They got to provide drinks and funnel cake, and all the money they'd make from those, after compensating Addison's parents back for the supplies, would go into the Zombeans bank account.

The first two days of the carnival (Thursday and Friday), Addison, Zed and Zoey (and Eliza, Bree, and Bonzo) had stayed at the booth and helped them make profits. Zoey got teens to sign up as volunteers and even interested parents from her school to donate. Zed, Bonzo, and Eliza manned the funnel cake. Bree did the sodas and Addison handled all the money.

On Saturday, they did it all again until sundown. Then their parents came, as well as Eliza's older sister, and they manned the booth. Missy handed the money, Dale and Zevon did funnel cake, and Azalea did drinks.

Zoey was extremely hyper. It was her first time at a carnival and she just wanted to run away from Zed and go hang out with her friends. "I'll be good, I promise!" she begged. "Plus you can call me on my Z-Band and I can call you if anything happens! But Kristen and Kaycee are over there and I wanna go!"

Zed looked at his girlfriend and asked, "Do you think I should let her go?"

Addison shrugged. "She is a good kid. Plus, I know Kaycee's mom, who's walking with them. I trust them."

Zoey whooped loudly and ran over to her friends. "They grow up so fast," Zed said wistfully. Addison nodded in agreement, then looked at Zed.

"We also needed her gone so that A we could make out without her around and B we could set up Eva and Eliza."

"The making out sounds fun," Zed said with a grin. "But I don't wanna mess with E's love life."
She's a little scary, you know."

"I've had girl talk with Eliza," Addison stated. "I can't reveal too much because what happens in girl talk stays in girl talk, but Eliza likes Eva and is just too afraid of relationships to do anything. Me and Bree have been planning this for a month, so don't mess this up."

"And what will we do until everyone arrives?" Zed asked suggestively.

Addison giggled and grabbed his hand, pulling him to the other end of the carnival. "I made a schedule, babe," she said. "I listed rides we could ride over and over again, rides we can't because of popularity or the fact that they'll make you sick, and then rides we have to wait for everyone else to be here for."

"You're so prepared."

Addison smiled and stopped in the line for the Ferris wheel. "It's the Seabrook in me, everything has to be perfect," she said sheepishly.

"You know I'll be happy even if nothing goes to plan?"

Addison playfully hit his arm. "Don't jinx it!" she warned. "I've spent too long on this for you to ruin it!"

Zed laughed anyway. "Don't worry, if things are meant to be they'll find their way together no matter what," he said. "You should put this much attention into our relationship."

Addison frowned. "I put attention in us. We're going on the Ferris wheel, which is the most romantic ride ever. And the key to getting Eliza and Eva together is in you and me being super cute and adorable and isolating them. And also Bree and Bonzo, but Bonzo is so head over heels for Bree I don't even have to tell him the plan."

The ride operator motioned for them to climb into their carriage. "So how exactly does this work?"

Zed whispered to Addison once they were seated.

"Are you kidding?"

Zed shook his head. The operator put the bar across their lap and locked it in. "I've never been to a carnival, Addy. Have you already forgotten?"

Zed shrieked when the ride started up and they moved backward so the operator could load another pair on. Addison couldn't help but laugh at his expense. "Every ride here is safe, don't worry," Addison said. "This is a carnival at a private school. If something has a bad track I'd tell you, because I want your first time to be magical."

Zed blushed so hard his cheeks actually turned deep red. Addison laughed, nervously and awkwardly as she realized exactly what she had said.

"I didn't mean it like that," she said a bit shyly. "I mean obviously I want your first time—our first time—to be magical I just meant—"

"Oh my god, Addy," Zed groaned, cutting her off. "This is such a weird conversation!"

"We're gonna have to have it eventually!" she argued.

Zed made a face which morphed into panic when the ride halted to a stop when they were
descending from the top. "Relax, it does that so he can put more people on," Addison explained. "Spreads them out evenly for weight distribution. There's a method to the madness."

"Humans are so weird."

"You always say that."

Zed shrugged. "You guys willingly get into confined carts made of metal on shaking and rusting poles and hinges that spin at insane rates just for a thrill. Isn't that a little weird to you?"

Addison was at a loss for words. He had a point, and she couldn't really defend thrill rides. "You... you'll understand once we go on the Zipper."

"The what?"

Addison drew his attention to the other side of the carnival, where the nearly sixty foot, oblong ride was in full motion. "You want me to go on that?" Zed asked in disbelief.

"It's so much fun! I love near death experiences!" Addison said happily.

Zed stared at her with wide eyes. "What the fuck," he breathed out. "You're insane, Addy." He shrieked again when the ride started up again.

"Plus, it seats two people. Near death experiences in a confined space bring so many couples together!"

Addison giggled at his still shocked expression. She peeled his hand from the rail and moved it over her shoulder. "That won't come until later, so you'll have time to prepare," she said. "Let's just enjoy the ride."

---

Eva and Eliza and Bree and Bonzo were waiting for them at the bottom of the Ferris wheel. They hadn't even gotten off the ride yet before Addison noticed and started freaking out.

"They're early," Addison whispered. "There was supposed to be twenty more minutes of downtime. Everything's gonna be off schedule now."

"Hey, it'll be fine," Zed assured her.

"No no no," Addison complained. "It's too early and everything was planned to a certain time—"

"Addy, don't have a panic attack or anything," Zed interrupted her. Addison looked at him worriedly. "How about, um, we eat during the next twenty minutes?"

"Dinner wasn't scheduled for another hour and a half."

"What about we do something that isn't on the schedule?" Zed suggested. "Kiddie rides? Did you plan for those?"

"You're too tall for most kid rides so I didn't even consider them."

"We'll make it work, we can fill the time and then we'll be on schedule," Zed decided. "It will be fine, okay?"

"Okay." She didn't sound sure though. Zed tilted his head down and kissed her forehead.
"You've done all you can and it will all be amazing."

Addison was used to planning to perfection and doing everything to the tee so it would all be perfect. And when things didn't, she tended to freak out. She had planned their last date and nearly had a panic attack when it started to snow during their walk ("I didn't plan for snow it's too cold to walk in the snow").

The ride came to a stop and they were let off, meeting their friends at the gate. "Hey, what's up?" Zed greeted.

"You're early," Addison stated, folding her arms furiously.

Zed grinned and wrapped his arm around her shoulder, pulling her into his side. "We weren't expecting you until later, is all."

"Oh, you want more time to make out?" Eliza teased.

"Yes," Addison stated. "I was supposed to have seventeen minutes and forty-four more seconds of Zed time and then the rest of the night to socialize. Now everything—"

Zed chose that moment to cover her mouth with his hand, cutting off her rant. He smiled at his friends. "Addison likes to plan things and you've disturbed her schedule," he explained. Addison nodded in agreement.

Eva shrugged. "We could grab some food," she offered.

Addison's protest was muffled by Zed's hand still covering her mouth. "No, Evangeline, we can't," he said. "There's a schedule and it has been planned to the tee." Zed pulled his hand from her mouth and asked, "What else did you have planned for 'Zeddison time', Babe?"

"Your hands are fucking freezing," Addison grumbled. "Um…I honestly just wanted to sit and talk with you, maybe make out a little. But I guess, we could go on the hang glider ride?"

She pointed across the fair to the currently operational ride. "Three people per cart, and I call Zed. Who wants to join us?"

Bonzo made a face at that. "Oh yeah," Zed said in realization. "Bonzo isn't a fan of anything fast."

"Or spinning," Eliza added.

"Anzi goraco zn ziragul," Bonzo added a bit uncomfortably.

"Perfect," Addison groaned. "That's something I should know before I make schedules!" Bonzo flinched at her aggression.

"Hey, calm down," Zed said, rubbing her arm soothingly. "There's five of us—"

"I'll wait for you guys with Bonzo, actually," Bree said.

"Okay there's four of us," Zed said. "Why don't we just…do the bumper cars? Were they on your schedule?"

Addison shook her head. "I didn't think you'd be able to fit because your legs are so long so I didn't want to risk it and didn't—"

"We'll make it work," Zed grinned. "C'mon guys!"
They did make it work. The line for the bumper cars and the time of the ride put them back on schedule, and Addison got her much needed smooches while they waited in line (much to the disapproval of parents around them). Everyone was pretty impressed with her ability to schedule; she even factored in the time they'd spend in line.

They played games—Addison won Zed a giant stuffed bear which he loved, and Bonzo won more stuffed animals and candy than he and Bree could carry. Eliza and Eva took the challenge to see who could win more games. In the end they stashed all of their prizes at Addison's booth before heading off to their next challenge: the Zipper.

It was a nearly 56-foot tall ride on the end of the carnival. Everything about it screamed safety hazard and Addison was thrilled to ride it. The Zipper had a long oblong frame that rotated like a Ferris wheel, with free-flipping cars suspended on off-center axes that move around the sides of the boom via a pulley system. The line wasn't very long, considering they put twelve people on at a time (only half of the ride was filled up).

It spun and it spun fast and Bonzo was not got it in the slightest. He actually got a little nauseous just watching. Bree had stayed on the ground with Bonzo, 'watching their stuff'.

Eliza and Eva got on before Zed and Addison did. It was a struggle to get the door closed, the very rusty and squeaky hinged door that made Zed nervous.

"Wait, is this the only restraint?" Zed asked in panic, once the door was closed.

Addison giggled and nodded. "Hold onto the bars," she told him. "Or you'll smash your head on the door."

"How reassur—" The ride started moving and their cart swayed backwards and forwards and Zed screamed. Addison jumped and gasped, both nervously and excitedly.

"I hate this I hate this I hate this," Zed chanted in panic. The ride stopped but their cart still sway and he made a noise like he was going to cry. "Why won't it stop moving?"

"It's free moving," Addison explained. "Just take a deep breath. Do something to calm down. Try singing."

"*How could I sing at a time like this!*" Zed screeched. "I feel like I'm going to die!"

"Well then say a prayer!"

He did, actually. He was praying in Zombie Tongue in a hushed and rushed voice, gripping the bars for dear life with his eyes squeezed tightly. Addison couldn't even translate him or what he was saying, but she'd heard prayer before. In the middle of his prayer the ride started again.

Like, actually started, where the pulley the carts were on started spinning the 'boom' (the base of the ride) started spinning, in two different directions. The carts swung back and forth and flipped forward and backward. They were upside down or right side up, sometimes rushing toward the ground or staring up at the night sky.

Zed screamed. Addison screamed. They were two completely different screams though. Zed was screaming in terror and fear, while Addison was enjoying the ride and her time. The two of them were having completely different experiences.

Sometime later—not long after the ride started—everything stopped abruptly. "Please be over please be over," Zed begged. Except they were laying back and staring at the sky and the sounds
coming from the engine were anything but reassuring.

"I think the ride broke."

The sound Zed made was ungodly and not funny in the slightest.

The Zipper may have been terrifying. It was huge and spun and looked completely unsafe. But Eva had offered to hold Eliza's hand through the ride, and had talked calmly through most of it. It was odd and reassuring all at once.

The feeling of falling forward and flipping upside down at speeds unimaginable were horrifying though, and Eliza couldn't help but scream.

"I think it broke."

Eliza whimpered in a way she didn't think she ever could. She didn't even know she was physically capable of whimpering.

"Addison said this ride was safe," Eliza said, more to reassure herself than anything. "Addison said it would be fine. Addison did not tell me I was going to die today!"

Eva looked at her with wide eyes. She could hear the sound of Eliza's Z-Band whirring and going into overdrive. When she glanced at the screen she saw it was flashing orange and confirmed that Eliza was panicking.

Eva squeezed her hand, drawing attention to herself. "Hey, you're gonna be okay," she said comfortingy. "I'm here, everything will be fine."

"Are we? Because it seems we are in a metal death trap that won't stop rocking back and forth," Eliza said, her voice so venomous it took a lot to not be hurt/frightened by her words.

"Just...don't lean too much to one side," Eva advised. "Take some deep breaths before you go have a panic attack. Or, ya' know, short out your Z-Band."

"Oh I see where your priorities are," Eliza grumbled.

"If you were to go Zombie and something were to happen, you'd be in Containment for years. Not regular Containment, high security. It's bad there, okay? I don't want that for you."

"Oh why? Because I won't have any senses and you think I'll be too gone to hurt you? I'm not a guy I have control over my Zombie."

"I've been to Containment and I've seen some of the kindest people Zombie and I cannot see that happen to you," Eva stated firmly. "You may not be the nicest person ever but I still care about you because of your stupidly beautiful face and the fact that you're so hard to resist."

Eliza blinked at her in surprise. Eva rolled her eyes and groaned, then closed the small amount of space between them. It was quick and the second it happened the carriage began to rock harder. They both shrieked and Eva gripped both the bars and Eliza's hand for dear life.

"Jesus fuck," she breathed out. "This is not the place to admit I like you."

"Hey, Addison's going on Instagram."
"I thought she blocked you?" Dale asked.

"On her other Instagram account," Missy said.

Missy opened Instagram and went on the live. The camera was on Zed and Addison, really close together and in what looked like a cramped space. "Oh my god, my mom is watching," Addison groaned.

"How do you know?" Zed asked.

"It literally says who joins."

"Please do not get sarcastic with me I don't want my last moments of life to be bad."

Addison giggled at him. "We're on this ride called the Zipper and it broke and Zed thinks we're gonna die."

"What?" Dale and Zevon rushed over from their spots to view the screen.

"My throat hurts from screaming," Zed whined.

"And crying."

"Yes Addy, I cried because I don't want to die!"

"You aren't gonna die, Zed. They'll fix the ride and we'll get off and then you can get your cake. And eat it too!"

"Stop it with your corny jokes, this is serious!"

Addison jumped and gave him a sideways look. She looked back at the camera and said, "Don't worry parents of mine, I'll be fine. Don't you dare abandon my booth!"

"Oh look, Eva requested to join my live," Addison said. "Eva is in the cart ahead of us. With Eliza. I'm gonna accept it."

"I'm going to go find them," Dale said firmly. He looked at his wife and said, "Stay here. You coming, Z?"

Zevon nodded and followed Dale out of the booth. Missy looked back at her screen and saw Addison had let her friend Eva join. "Hey guys, how are you?" Addison asked. "I heard you screaming."

"We're on a death trap! Of course we were screaming!" Eliza shouted.

Addison and Eva rolled their eyes. "You both are so dramatic. We'll be fine." Addison said.

"My heart is beating," Zed stated. "My heart is beating and it's not supposed to do that!"

Addison smiled cheekily and asked, "Aw I thought only I did that to you?"

"Addison this is not the time for your smart remarks!" Zed shouted. Addison giggled. "Stop laughing at me! I am in distr—"

Zed was cut off but the ride starting up again. The four people on camera screamed and Addison and Eva lost their grips on their phone. There was screaming and cursing before the engine cut off
and the carts rocked back and forth.

"Shit, where's my phone?" Addison asked.

"Oh my god," Eva gasped.

"What's happening? Get me out of here!"

"Zed, don't touch the door," Addison said calmly. "Just hold on tight. I'm sure that we'll be—"

The ride started up again and they all screamed as they went backwards (and forwards). The ride stopped, then the cage door opened and the camera fell out and onto the ground, facing up at the sky. Zed and Addison stumbled off the ride. Addison picked up her phone and frowned, then ended the live video.

"Oh my god I think I'm gonna vomit," Addison complained.

"Our dads are waving at us," Zed pointed out.

Addison groaned. She leaned on Zed and Zed leaned on her as they left the ride area and made their way to their dads. They were both dizzy and disoriented and a little sick. The minute they were out of the gate, they were pulled apart by their dads.

Addison could hear Zevon muttering Zombie Tongue to Zed. Her own dad was holding her to his chest completely out of breath as if he had gotten off a death trap. He was holding her as tight as he did the time she tried to jump from the tree in her backyard (when she thought she could fly and would've broken something serious if they didn't catch her).

He pulled back from her and inspected her. "Are you hurt? Do you feel sick? Do you want to go home and go to sleep?"

"Dad, I'm fine," Addison said.

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Are you sure? You were up there for so long and I could hear you screaming and—"

"Yeah Dad," Addison said. She shrugged and added, "I'm a little dizzy but I'm usually dizzy after a spinning ride."

He pulled her in again and Addison squeaked in surprise. "Dad," she groaned, her voice muffled by his chest.

"I'm just glad you're alright is all."

Addison softened up. "I'm okay Dad," she assured him. "Don't worry."

"C'mon, let's go back to the booth."

Addison shook her head and turned. "I have to wait for Eva and Eliza to get off," she said as she watched them stumble off the ride. She then looked over at Zed, catching him watching her and smiled at him. "And I should probably go comfort my boyfriend."

"Funny that you think I'm letting you go on alone," Dale stated. Addison's moved over to Zed with her dad on her tail. "You aren't going on anymore rides tonight."

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Addison shrugged. "That's fair."

Eliza and Eva stopped beside her and grinned slightly. "I gotta head home," Eva said. "I've had enough excitement for one day."

"Thanks for coming," Addison said offhandedly. "See you on Monday."

Eva smiled at Addison, then leaned over and kissed Eliza's cheek. "Bye guys!" she said excitedly before turning and walking off.

Both Zed and Addison gaped at Eliza. "No way!" Addison gasped. "No way!"

Eliza looked at them confused. "What?"

"She kissed you," Addison said excitedly.

Eliza shrugged. "That's not what happened."

"What!"

"I'm gonna go find Bonzo," Eliza said, walking away.

Addison and Zed looked at each other, then at their dads (respectively). "You saw that too, right?" they asked in unison.

Dale and Zevon grinned and nodded. "You seem very excited about it," Dale noted.

Zed spun around, then held his head because he was still dizzy from the ride. "The whole reason we came was to get them together!" Addison said excitedly. She smiled widely, then turned to her boyfriend and high-fives him.

"Our kids are so strange," Zevon said to Dale, shaking his head.

"Mission accomplished! Let's get ice cream to celebrate!"

Addison turned to her dad and smiled sweetly. "Daddy, can I have some money?" she asked sweetly in her best "innocent little girl' voice.

Dale rolled his eyes despite his smile. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet, handing his daughter a ten. "That's all your getting, Addy."

Addison grinned and took the money, then hugged her dad. "Thanks! We'll meet you guys at the booth!"
Our First Punch

They started filming during February. They hadn't gathered all the footage they would use yet, but they did know what they didn't have: all the scenes inside of a house, everything that happened in the Safe Room, and everything from the Zombie Mash.

The plan for the first day was to have Bucky film at Addison's house while Eliza filmed at Zed's. Then they'd meet Eva and the Aceys at school to film the first Safe Room scene. On Addison's part, things went fairly well. They got it all done with one rehearsal to see where the camera needed to be and then one shot.

The longest scene they filmed was the Safe Room scene. After the fourth time of being interrupted by Zed flinching or backing away from her, Eva demanded to know the problem. "You're wasting time! Bonzo is waiting for us to see if we could lay some groundwork for Someday."

"I don't want Addison to punch me again!" Zed exclaimed. "She keeps trying to punch me!"

"That's what happened," Addison told him for the sixth time. "Here, we'll do a stage punch."

"I don't trust you."

Everyone groaned in response. "Really? You don't trust your own girlfriend?" Eva asked disbelievingly.

"She may look small and frail and defenseless but she punches hard!"

Addison rolled her eyes. "I pinkie promise I won't hit you," Addison said, offering her pinkie.

Zed sighed and wrapped his pinkie around hers. Eva, seeing Addison with her fingers crossed behind her back, quickly added, "But if she does, just keep following the script."

Begrudgingly, Zed nodded. Eliza, sitting in the back on her laptop with 'limited control' of the Safe Room, reset it to lights off and 'Zombie Warning'. Zed and Addison went back to their starting posts.

"Roll sound."

"Rolling." Eliza called. She switched on the walkie talkie she had in her pocket, which transmitted sound to Bucky and the Aceys on the other side of the door so they could know their cue.

"Camera speeds. Mark! Set! Action!"

Zed was on one side, running around and definitely bumping into things on accident. It was all good, he was supposed to be clumsy in the scene. But the amount of strength it took to not curse every time he slammed his shin or arm into something was beyond what he had.

"Hello?"

Zed stopped and looked over shelves and boxes. "Hello?" Zed called back.

More insistently, Addison called "Hello?"

After taking a second to calm his breathing, he responded, "Why, hello."
Then Addison scoffed at him. In the dark, Zed can see her fold her arms over her chest. "Don't get any ideas, buster. The only thing more deadly than my high kick is my low kick."

Zed let out a nervous laugh, zigzagging his way through the shelves. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "This just isn't how I was expecting my first day at a new school to go."

"You weren't expecting to be trapped in a Zombie Safe Room?"

"Oh, no, that I expected. That happens to me all the time. It's sort of my thing." Addison laughed lightly and let her arms drop to her side.

For assurance, Zed asked, "So I'm not gonna get low kicked?"

"You're safe." After a pause, she added, "for now."

Zed let out a relieved sigh. "Good. 'Cause today's a big day. I'm trying out for the football team."

"Well, we're both having big days." she breathed out in excitement. "I'm trying out for the cheer squad."

"That's a tough gig to get."

Addison shrugged innocently. "Yeah, but I love it. My parents have had me in cheer camp since forever."

"My dad doesn't even think I'm gonna make the team."

Addison let out a disbelieving "What?" Zed nodded in agreement, confirming that she heard right. "No, sure you will. You just need someone to cheer for you. And soon, fingers crossed, it'll be, like, my job. So..." she shrugged, rocking slightly on her heels.

"I'm Zed. What's your name?"

"Addison. Nice to meet you."

The 'All clear' goes off and the lights come on. "Ah! Zombie!" Addison shrieked, then she punched Zed in the face.

It takes Zed a second to recover from the shook (he should have seen it coming, they hadn't even practiced a stage punch). He holds his nose, feeling it throbbing slowly.

"Zed, I'm so sorry." Addison rushed out, grimacing slightly. Or maybe he was grimacing, it was all a little fuzzy. "My parents have always taught me that Zombies are disgusting dead-eyed freaks but..." Zed glanced down at her, seeing her blinking slowly. "You're not hideous at all."

"Uh, thanks. I'll take it."

"My parents have always hated Zombies since one bit my grandpa's ear off."

"But now we'll just talk your ear off." Addison laughed at that.

The door to the Safe Room burst open. Zed turned his head, watching as four cheerleaders sauntered in. Bucky shouted, "There you are!" while his entourage said their own variations of "Ew!" "Zombie germs." and "Nasty!"

Bucky looked over Addison quickly, turning and giving Zed a sharp look. "If you ever touch my
cousin again, it won't be pretty. Which, as you can see, is off-brand for me."

The cheer captain pulled Addison with him, the group of five backing out of the room quickly. "To
the cheer tryouts. Seabrook awaits."

Zed watched them leave, waiting for Bucky to close the door before turning to the camera.
"Progress," he sighed. "We're making progress."

He then walked off the screen, headed to Eliza. "And cut!" Eva shouted, her voice filled with
excitement. "Oh my god that was so good you guys!"

The Safe Room door opened and the Aceys walked in, followed by Bucky who was helping
Addison pull the bobby pins from her hair.

Zed turned to his girlfriend. "You punched me!"

"We got the scene done, you're welcome."

"You hit me Addison! That shit hurt!"

Addison shrugged. "At least we don't have to keep doing this one scene. Now what's next on the
agenda?"

"We're meeting Bonzo, Bree, and BFZ to work on some music," Eliza stated. "The audio for Fired
Up and Bamm, both versions, are good to record. Except for the tiny detail that we can't get Zoey
without first getting her a contract."

"Do we have anything else to do in the here?" Eva asked.

"Someday," Zed and Addison stated.

"What's that?" Tracey asked.

"A song," Eliza stated. "It's grossly cute and adorable."

Eva glanced at her briefly, then turned her attention to Addison and Zed. "Are you guys ready?"

Addison shook her head. "I will not spend another minute in this wig," she said as she pulled it off.
"Plus, that's a whole different outfit. And music. We need music."

"Well not need," Zed said. "Just preferably."

Eliza stood up and closed her laptop. "So I guess we're heading to the studio," she said. "To be
clear, we can record Bamm and Fired Up today, and Bamm from the Block Party. We have the
music and everyone available. It's nine in the morning, so I'm pretty sure we could finish those
three. But we do need to start working with Al and them to get music for My Year and the two
versions of Someday."

"Wait, they have two versions of a song?"

"The movie is literally about them, Tracey," Eliza stated. "When someone wants to make a movie
about you, then you could have two songs about you."

"If anyone ever makes a movie about you," Eva teased, earning a high-five from Eliza.

Before things could go any further, Bucky said, "Let's all stop picking on Tracey and head over to
Since Bucky was the only one with a license, he had been given the task of driving Eva and all of their equipment to the studio. The Aceys had jumped in his car too. Addison, Zed, and Eliza were fine with walking.

"I never told you this Addison but your first day of school outfit is really cute," Eliza said.

Addison smiled and did a little twirl in her dress. "Thanks. It's all about impressions. Yours was also amazing! It made me kinda jealous. And your earrings are always so cool."

"I can make you some if you'd like," Eliza offered. "Mine are really personalized but I could find some stuff for you."

"That'd be awesome," Addison said with a smile. Her smile turned to a teasing grin as she said, "You could make some for your girlfriend too."

Eliza rolled her eyes and let out a humorless laugh. "If you're talking about Eva, she's not my girlfriend."

Addison let go of Zed's hand and skipped to be in front of Eliza. "Eva told me you guys kissed on that death trap."

Zed raised an eyebrow at that. "You guys kissed?"

Eliza nodded. "And that was it. We're not dating or anything. We just kissed."

"But you could be dating," Addison said. "Then you could stop third wheeling with me and Zed."

"We love having you around though," Zed added. "We just want time to ourselves. Occasionally."

"You live together."

"It's not about us wanting alone time, it's about us wanting you to be happy." Addison said.

Zed linked hands with Addison and pulled her to him. "And also alone time."

Addison giggled. "Valentine's Day is coming. Maybe you could, ask her out."

"Never in my days."

"Eliza," he groaned.

"Dude," Eliza stated. "I'm not you. I can't just go for the girl."

"The way I see it, she's into you," Addison said. "She kissed you and everything! Just ask her out. Go see a movie. Minimal conversations required during movies."

"I…I'll think about it."

Addison whooped, making both Zombies chuckle.

By the time they got there it was lunch time. They had more work to do that didn't just involve recording and both Zed and Addison were a little sick of singing.
Bucky went out and bought everyone (literally everyone) some burgers and fries and drinks. He even went out of his way and stopped at Zane's food stand to get some Zombie snacks. It was confusing, considering Bucky didn't offer people food or take food requests. Addison chalked it down as a mystery she'd have to solve later, after she figured out how to get Eliza and Eva together.

"Just ask her out," Addison told Eva. "She's into you, I swear."

Eva shrugged. "I don't think so," she said. "She hadn't said or done anything since we kissed. I probably freaked her out."

Addison groaned. "What's wrong with lesbians? Why can't you see what I see?"

"Why would you generalize it like that? You straight people take forever to realize your feelings."

"Not you straight people," Addison argued. "I've dealt with lesbians for years. One of my old cheer coaches had been living with this girl for years. They'd hug and kiss each other on the cheek and share a bed. And she still thought her roommate wasn't into her. Do you want that be you?"

Eva sighed and shook her head. "No. But—"

"No buts," Addison stated. "I wouldn't set you up with Eliza if I wasn't sure she was into you. Eliza is my friend, we gossip about relationships. You could ask Zed and Bree: she's into you! But she's not used to dating or anything like that. You're one of the first people she's truly liked. She didn't even know she was gay until a few months ago. She isn't gonna make the first move."

Eva sighed, knowing Addison was right. Before she could say anything else, Zed called for Addison to go join him and the other Zombies (and Bucky) on the other side of the room. It was a little weird, considering Bucky could be sitting with the Aceys and not the Zombies.

Addison sat between her boyfriend and Eliza. They were all sitting in a circle—Zephyr on Zed's left with his boyfriend next to him, then Roz, then Zach, then Bucky, then Eliza.

"We're talking about Someday," Zed explained. "Because they're gonna help us write the music."

"Oh."

"You guys get your own song in this movie?" Zephyr asked.

"The movie is about them," Eliza stated. "It's like I told Tracey: if someone decides to make a movie about you, then you can have your own romance song. It's probably be some Bowling for Soup trash."

Alonzo gasped dramatically and held onto his boyfriend. "You take that back," Zephyr stated.

Eliza shrugged. "Get on with it. Start explaining. Set the scene or some shit."

"Okay," Addison said. "It was the day of the pep rally. I don't know if you guys were there but Zed and some of his friends went and long story short I nearly died and Zed saved me."

"Oh we're starting way at the beginning," Zed said. "Okay. Then there was a deal I made with Principal Lee where Zombies got to eat in the cafeteria. Addison, ever the darling, came to talk to us when the Aceys told her to stay away from Zombies."

"So then I left the cafeteria and Zed followed me. We were talking and walking and then we heard someone coming so we ran. We ended up in the Zombie Safe Room." They all made a face at that,
"Addy said 'This is where we first met' and I was all like 'This is where we had our first punch'. Referencing a moment in the days before when we first met in the Safe Room and she punched me in the face."

They gasped and Addison exclaimed incredulously, "Zed! Don't tell people about that!"

"You didn't seem embarrassed when we were recording earlier," Zed shot back.

"That was just with Eva and Eliza," Addison said. "Don't tell other people about that."

Across the circle, Zach reached into Bucky's fries and ate it, pretending it was popcorn. "What happened next?" he asked.

Addison looked at him curiously. Bucky never shared his fries willingly.

"Then we sang," Zed stated. He wrapped his arms around Addison and pulled her into him, kissing her temple. "We also sang a slower, more romantic version in the Light Garden."

"Wait, you took Addison to the Light Garden?" Roz asked.

"Don't worry, there was no kissing," Zed said. He rolled his eyes and grumbled, "Stupid Zombie Patrol."

"Well we can start working on it whenever you guys are ready," Alonzo said.

"Just remember we can't film either of those scenes until we have the music," Eliza said. "And we can't film the Zombie Mash until we have the second Someday. So try not to take too long."

Eliza got up and offered to take everyone's trash. "Come on, Bucky, we have work to do," she said as she walked away.

Bucky got to his feet, handing his half full fries to Zach before following Eliza. Addison frowned because Bucky would rather throw out his fries than give them away, but didn't say anything. Zed noticed her frown and whispered to her, "What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you later."

Then, to Addison surprise, she heard Alonzo say to Zach, "You sure know how to pick a greeska kêreb."

Addison frowned. She was still a little rusty with Zombie Tongue but he was pretty sure he just said 'cheerleader boyfriend'. Zed noticed it too because he gave Addison a confused look. She just mouthed 'later'.

Eva was pretty impressed with both versions of *Bamm* (with background vocals provided by BFZ). Addison and Zed both noticed the way Eva and Eliza smiled at each other while Eliza was singing.

All of the recording went off without any problems (which was surprising considering how long it took them to film that morning). When they finished for the day, Addison literally ran off to find Bowling for Zoup. She hadn't told Zed where she was going and just ran away from him to find them.

"Hey! Wait up!" Addison called. She hadn't said any specific names so all of Bowling for Zoup
turned at her call. They stopped walking and Addison jogged up to them. They all looked equally confused which made sense, considering Addison knew one of their names (Roz, who she'd seen hanging around with Kiera) and they never really talked.

"What's up?" the singer (she'd heard Zed call him Al) asked.

Addison pointed at the bass player—tall and kind of lanky with short hair. "I heard you guys talking earlier," she explained. "I understand a little Zombie Tongue. You were talking about my cousin, Bucky."

"Oh."

Addison nodded. "I'm not mad or anything," Addison said. "I wanna help. Well, if you want my help, that is."

"What?"

She nodded again. "I've never seen Bucky date anyone. He's always so focused on cheer and yeah he's happy but he could use a little romance." She paused, then added, "I also saw the two of you together back in January. It was kinda cute, like my second OTP. And Bucky looked happy hanging with you."

"It was probably the alcohol," Roz teased.

The other two chuckled and the bassist forced a frown. "Lighten up, Zach," Al said, elbowing him. "You've got his cousin wanting to set you up on a date."

"You want to date Bucky and I want him to be happy," Addison said. "Plus, I approve of you. You're cute and over the top, kinda like Bucky. You guys would look good together."

Zach made an odd expression. "Thank you?"

Addison raised an eyebrow. "The questions is if you're prepared for the hell storm that is my family? They flipped out when they found out I was dating Zed and the only reason no one got punched was because I tried to kill myself that same night."

"What the—" the Zombie wrapped around Al's arm muttered.

"And they were even more upset when they found out Bucky was gay," Addison said. "I'm not trying to scare you or anything by once word gets around, shit will get wild."

"Um—"

"Lucky for you it's spring and if you and him were to get together you wouldn't have to deal with any of them until Thanksgiving. Maybe May if any of them decide to come home."

"You want to help me?" Zach asked for clarification. Addison nodded. "Aren't you a part of the family that's homophobic and anti-Zombie?"

"Just by blood," Addison said. "I mean clearly I don't hate Zombies. And I'm also pan, like you are."

"How did—"

"Stop asking questions," Al said.
"You could get a boyfriend and stop shameless flirting with literally everyone." Roz pointed out.

"Oh I'll never stop," Zach grinned. He looked at Addison and said, "And yes, that is an amazing deal."

Addison grinned and squealed. "Awesome! You have a phone?" Zach shook his head. "Okay, give me your Z-Band number and I'll text you later with all my ideas!"

"Addison!"

Addison turned her head to watch her boyfriend run up to her. "You can't run off like that!" he said a little out of breath.

Addison rolled her eyes. "Relax, I'm with friends," she said.

"Yeah man, we'll protect your girl way better than you could," Zach teased.

Zed glared at him. Addison rolled her eyes. "I'll see you guys tomorrow," she said.

Zed slung his arm around her shoulder and asked, "Not so fast. I wanna know what you guys were talking about."

"I'll tell you later," Addison said. "Let's go home. Bye guys!"

She held onto his hand and turned the two of them in the direction of his house. Once they were a considerable distance away, Addison said, "After we get Eliza and Eva together, our next project is Zach and Bucky."

"Zach and Bucky?"

Addison nodded. "Don't sound surprised. You are partially responsible."

"What?"

"You got Bucky drunk and he and Zach were making out at your thing," Addison explained. "They'd be cute together, no?"

"They would, wouldn't they," he said. "You have an eye for cute couples. Too bad you'd have to convince Bucky to date a Zombie."

"It won't take much work to convince him to date a Zombie. He's already made out with him. It's pretty clear that Bucky has some sort of feelings for Zach but his beliefs related to Zombies are keeping him hostage. We've just got to open his mind."

Zed kissed her temple. "You're so smart. I love you."

"I love you too," Addison said.

"Also, Eva asked Eliza out. They have a date on Wednesday."

"Wednesday? You mean Valentine's Day?"

"That's not Wednesday."

"Yes it is."
"Shit."
Valentine’s Day

Addison and Zed were walking Puppy Sunday afternoon. Zoey usually joined them on their walks, but had asked her father to take her to Zombie Containment to see one of her friends who had gotten surgery the day before. Everyone had decided it was for the best if Addison never saw what went down in Zombie Containment, without even letting Addison know about the decision.

They never walked Puppy in Zombietown. Zed didn’t like taking his girlfriend in too deep. He would say it was too dangerous, especially for a human. Not even he liked going past a certain point and he grew up there. Some places were better left unexplored.

There was a park in Seabrook not too far from Zombietown. It was a dog park so they could take Puppy off of his leash and let him run wild while they had a little bit of alone time, especially since Zoey wasn’t there and didn’t need to be watched by them.

"Addy," Zed said. "Valentine's Day is coming in a few days."

"It's on Wednesday," Addison stated. "I mean I had no idea."

Zed chuckled at her. "Would you want to do something? A date, I mean?"

It was Addison's turn to giggle. "A date would be nice," she said. "But it's in three days. There's no way you could get a reservation to any restaurant or anything like that on such short notice."

Zed booped her nose, making her laugh. "Silly Addy, thinking I'm not ready for Valentine's Day."

"Yesterday I told you when it was."

"Ssh."

Zed didn't have an actual plan. He'd spent weeks taking care of himself and his family, worrying about Addison, keeping puppy alive, catching up on schoolwork, and Eliza's movie that the holiday had completely snuck up on him.

Luckily he had the first part taken care of, thanks to the Seabrook High student council. They were selling roses in the days leading up to Valentine's Day and would distribute them during home room on that Wednesday.

Zed wasn't in her home room but he had her in his first class of the day (algebra). Instead of meeting up before class he went straight to class and sat in his usual seat. Addison came in seconds before the bell with both her arms filled with roses of all colors.

Zed smiled at her and she rolled her eyes and even though she was smiling still. She took her seat next to him and sighed dramatically. "What's wrong with you, Zed?" Addison asked. "You bought me five dozen roses?"

Zed smiled and nodded. "Happy Valentine's Day Addy." He kissed her cheek as the bell rang.

Through the whole period, Zed twisted the stems of the roses together. By the time class was over, Addison had only three bouquets left. "What did you do?" she asked with an amused smile.

To answer her, Zed took the roses he'd twisted together and wrapped a headband around her hair, then twisted some around her wrists as bracelets. "Viola!"
Addison giggled and stood up, doing a little spin in her new accessories. "Zed, Addison, time for next period," Mrs. Baker said from her desk. "I won't write you guys a pass this time."

Zed smiled and stole a rose from Addison's desk. They grabbed their bags and made their way to the door, detouring at her desk. Zed handed her the rose and said, "Happy Valentine's Day Mrs. Baker!"

She smiled at them and Zed grabbed Addison's hand, pulling her to the door. Addison giggled as they ran out of the classroom.

"I have so many flowers," she said with a smile. "Thank you, by the way."

"It was nothing," Zed shrugged. "Did you read the notes? Zoey bought you a bouquet too."

"I know! She's so sweet!" They turned the corner, making their way to their English class. "Did Bucky…"

Zed nodded. "He was really confused and I'm pretty sure he blushed a little. I dunno, the only person I've seen blush is you and you're really pale so it's very obvious."

"Hey!"

Zed chuckled and kissed her cheek. "I tease you because I love you. Happy Valentine's Day Addy."

Addison giggled again then looked at her watch. She gasped and said, "Oh shit we're gonna be late!" Then they ran down the hall to class, getting in just as the bell rang.

School ended and everyone went their separate ways. Zed and Addison had some recording to do for their friends' movie, where Addison learned just how confused Bucky was by the rose from his 'Secret Admirer' (it was Zach, obviously). She let him know that she knew who it was and that "Yes Bucky, it's a guy and he's cute. Don't worry."

When they finished, Zed sent Addison home and told her he had to go work on her Valentine's Day surprise. She went back to his house and quickly did her homework, then hopped in the shower to get ready for the night. When she finished getting ready and went downstairs, she was surprised to find her parents in the kitchen with Zevon.

"Mom? Dad? What're you doing here?"

"Zed invited us," Missy explained. "You look beautiful, sweetheart."

Addison smiled and said, "I have a date tonight. Because it's Valentine's Day. Aren't you guys going out?"

"It's all a part of your surprise," Zevon said. "Zed went out to buy us dinner. And set up."

"So you guys are all in on this?"

They all nodded in agreement. Missy stood up and walked over to Addison, reaching out to touch her only to freeze and ask, "Is it alright if I touch your hair?"

Addison fought back the grin that threatened to escape; her mom was learning and it was awesome. "Go ahead," Addison said. "Thank you for asking."
Missy paid special mind not to mess up the actual hairstyle as she slowly combed her fingers through her daughter's hair. "Has it gotten longer?" Missy asked.

"You saw me on Thursday, Mom."

"This is different," Missy argued. "I haven't seen you outside that office in ages! This is special."

Addison rolled her eyes. "If you're asking me if my hair has grown since December then yes, it has."

Missy ignored her daughter's sarcasm. "Where did you get these clothes? You look good."

"I went shopping with my friends," Addison said. She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from saying a snarky remark.

There was a knock on the door and everyone turned at the sound. "Dale, would you mind getting the door?" Zevon asked.

Addison knew immediately that this had something to do with Zed's plans. Zevon wasn't particularly good at lying. Addison walked behind both her parents to the front door, seeing Zoey sitting on the couch with Puppy and Zander in her arms. It further confirmed that this was a Zed scheme, considering how close Zoey was to the door and how she was holding their dog back from running to it.

Dale opened the door and of course, Zed was on the other side, smiling with another bunch of roses (as if there weren't enough up in his room). "Oh look, it's Zed," Missy said, obviously faking surprise. This was Zed's house.

"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Davis," Zed greeted. He offered half of the bundle to Missy. "Happy Valentine's Day."

"Thank you."

Addison rolled her eyes. Even though she was wearing heels, she stood on her toes to catch a glimpse of him over her parents' shoulders. She gasped excitedly when she saw him and he grinned at her.

"Well don't just stand outside, you must be freezing," Missy said.

Addison giggled a little. Zed was so extra she loved it. She moved back and so did her parents, letting Zed come inside and close the door.

"I'm here to take the lovely Addison out on a date for Valentine's Day," Zed explained.

Her parents turned to look at her and Addison fought back her grin and an eye roll. She had an unobstructed view of Zed now and couldn't help but laugh.

"Zed! You got a haircut!"

Zed winked at her, then offered her the final bundle of roses. "For you, ma chérie."

"I definitely don't need any more flowers, but I will take these anyway because they're pretty."

Zed held out his hand for her and Addison took it and the flowers, moving to the door. "I'll have her back no later than eight thirty," Zed promised.
"You'd better," Dale said, giving Zed a playfully threatening look.

Zed guided his girlfriend out the door and down the steps, turning to walk deeper into Zombietown. Addison laughed and swung their intertwined hands back and forth. "You're so ridiculous," Addison laughed. "You made my parents come all the way here so you could do another thing where you're being extra as fuck?"

"Well, I felt like I haven't picked you up for a date in a while. Plus your mom is always asking about you so I figured this was a good compromise."

Addison kissed his cheek. "It was sweet. I love you."

Zed giggled and turned to kiss her. "I love you too."

"I also love this haircut, you cutie," Addison said, running her fingers through his short hair. "And this look. You're so cute, god. Where did you get this bracelet and these rings?"

"My Pops. He gave them to me for my birthday last year. He said that I can engrave them and make them my own, for every birthday that passes. I plan on engraving one of the rings this year, if everything goes right."

"What does that mean?"

Zed shrugged. "It's not a fun topic," he warned. "I wouldn't want to worry you, especially because it's Valentine's Day. But if you want to know, I'll tell you."

"I want to know," Addison said. "I'm your girlfriend and your birthday is in a few weeks. I need all the details to make it awesome."

They walked into the old Power Plant and to the elevator. "We always have such deep talks in this elevator," Zed notes as he pressed the button and the cage closed.

"Why are we coming here, exactly?"

"It's part of the surprise, duh," he said. "So, birthdays. What a fun topic."

"I personally love birthdays," Addison said. "Tell me about yours though. You sound like you're kinda dreading it."

Zed nodded. "Birthdays are the day we get all our checkups. Literally for everything. I spend the entire day in Zombie Containment. It's like a check up at the doctor, and the dentist, then they check my Z-Band which takes hours. It's horrible and sometimes, the Z-Band check goes very very bad. I've had friends who...who have died getting theirs checked."

"That's...that's horrible," Addison said. She held his hand a little tighter and said, "I had no idea."

Zed shrugged. "It's mandatory and it's not like people actually care about Zombies. Well, pretty much every human that isn't you or Bree or Evangeline. And it's not like any of you could do anything to fix Zombie Containment."

"Don't say that," she argued. "Maybe it's horrible now, but things are changing, Zed. Our whole school is filled with kids who are starting to see Zombies as more than what they were told. And this is the time when we learn to make our own opinions and stop following whatever our parents believe. Maybe it won't be now, but I know that soon there will be a whole generation of adults all around us who care about Zombies and work their asses off to change things."
Zed didn't say anything, so Addison went on. "I'm not a science person. I'm not good at math and genetics and all that. And I may hate public speaking and debating and freeze up when I'm all alone in front of crowds. But I'm gonna change things doing what I'm good at."

Zed looked at her and smiled sadly. "I'm not a monster. I'm a Zombie. You're a cheerleader. You're not gonna change the world through sabotage. You change the world through cheer."

Addison reached out and cupped his jaw, leaning in and giving him a soft kiss. "We're gonna change things around here," she promised. "Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow."

Zed smiled a much happier one. "But someday."

"Exactly."

They kissed again. Then Zed said to her, "By the way, I think you could be like, the greatest advocate or activist or whatever the word is, for like Zombie Rights."

"Really?"

Zed nodded. "When you get passionate about something, there's no stopping you. And it's not like you couldn't become a better public speaker. You're already working on it with your cheering and stuff like that. You're gonna do amazing things Addy, even if you aren't being a huge doctor or lawyer or something."

Addison smiled at his sweet words. She stood on her toes and kissed his cheek, then the elevator doors opened. Addison looked down at the ground and noticed the rose petals leading from the elevator further into the Power Plant. "Come on," Zed told her, pulling her toward the path. "We follow the roses to our final destination."

Addison couldn't stop smiling as she figured out where they going. Just like she had suspected, they ended up at the Zombie Light Garden. It wasn't as she had expected. Zed has decorated all of it even more spectacularly than usual and in the middle, a picnic was set up with flowers and food and everything was beautiful.

"Woah. This is...woah."

"Happy Valentine's Day, Addy."

Addison turned to him with the sweetest, most grateful, innocent smile Zed had ever seen. She set down the flowers on the ground and wrapped her arms around his middle, hugging him tightly. Zed wrapped his arms around her and couldn't help but smile too. He loved her, and he loved kissing her. But there was something about their hugs that made his heart melt every time.

Even in her heels, she only went up to his chin. He could rest his head atop hers comfortable. They were kinda like puzzle pieces, perfectly fit for each other. Zed smiled at the thought and held her tighter.

Addison lifted her head so she could speak to him. "Zed, this is beyond amazing. I can't believe you did this for me."

"You're the love of my life and this is our first Valentine's Day together, it needs to be amazing and set the stone for all other Valentine's Days."

"I love you. Happy Valentine's Day, Zed." Then she moved her arms up to his neck and pulled him down for a kiss.
(And the next day at school, Eva and Eliza walked in, hand in hand with silly smiles on their faces.)
The way Bonzo was having them record meant they couldn't do anything without all of the singers present. Since Addison sang on every song, they couldn't record any without her. They still had to work out the music for three songs (they had finished with *Fired Up* and the two versions of *Bamm* the week before). It was only three songs to everyone who didn't know about *Stand*, which was Zed and everyone who wasn't actually making the movie. All in all, the music recording was the longest process to do.

Eva had stolen Bonzo away from music making to record lines, so Addison pulled BFZ into a quiet room to work on her 'secret project' (which she hadn't even told them about yet).

Before Addison could go into the room, Zach tugged her to the side. "Hey Addison, how did the whole rose thing go over?" Zach asked her.

"He was confused, because no one ever had the guts to show feelings for him," Addison said. "He knows that I know who it is. He asked me a few questions but it's Bucky. He won't do anything so we have to up our game."

Zach nodded. "Okay. We can like, think of stuff after we finish here."

They went inside the room and Addison closed the door, clicking the lock. When she turned back they all looked a little frightened.

"Don't worry, I just don't want Zed to walk in," Addison said.

"Okay," Alonzo said. "So what's up?"

"Do you guys remember the football game when everything went to shit?"

They all nodded and shifted a little uncomfortably. "Well, um, long story short there was a short sort of song I was singing when the wig came off. And I wanted you guys to help me write a full song. Because the actual real stuff is just crying, realization, wig."

"You want us to help you write a song?" Alonzo asked.

Addison nodded. She shifted a little more uncomfortably, feeling awkward talking about it. "Eva and Eliza said it's fine and I-I had a feeling it would kinda complete the movie. It's fine if you don't wanna help me, though."

Alonzo tilted his head and asked, "Seem cool. I'm in."

"Yeah Addison, sounds cool," Roz agreed.

Addison smiled happily as Zephyr and Zach agreed with their friends.

"Oh, and I don't want Zed to find out," Addison added. "I can't promise I won't start crying and I want him to be surprised and…yeah."

"That's cool," Zach said. "What do you have so far?"

Addison sat down with them on the floor. "So the first part is just like, after Zed and Eliza and Bonzo got cuffed to go to Containment. And everything kinda just fell apart."
They nodded along and Addison closed her eyes. "I wanna scream top of my lungs. Not sitting back, won't hold my tongue. No, some things are different than we thought. There's more to life than what we're taught. I'm speaking up, enough's enough. Cause I can't go on this way. Gotta wake up and be brave. But I know I'll face the fire if I say…"

She pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms around them. "Um, that's the first part, I guess," she said in a soft voice. "I, um sorry. I need a minute."

"Everything alright?" Roz asked.

Addison nodded and opened her eyes at them. "The song feels a little personal to me, and showing it to people makes me nervous. It's stupid, I know. I-I shouldn't even have a whole song about myself. I won't do it, it's fine."

"Hey," Alonzo interrupted. "You deserve a song about yourself. And your song is really good right now."

"Anything else? Did you have the other parts?" Zephyr asked.

Addison nodded and pulled out her phone. She opened her conversation with Eva, scrolling to the video clip she had sent. "The audio is garbage, but here it is," she told them. "And it would be near the end so I doubt we'll redo the audio anytime soon."

They all crowded around her and Addison turned up her volume and brightness, then hit play. The clip started from when Zombie Zed had cornered Bucky. They all watched in silence as the video played.

"Zed, please!"

"Addy, I'm sorry." Zed sighed. "Maybe they're right. Maybe we shouldn't be together."

"What? No. Don't say that. Stop!"

"Hey! You, did this to him. All of you. He was your monster You made him feel like he had to risk his life to belong Because you couldn't deal with someone different! But you had no problem using him to win your stupid games!"

Addison turned around and the angle cut to a close up of her crying. "I wanna scream top of my lungs," she sang, her voice deep and thick from crying. Not sitting back, won't hold my tongue. No, some things are different than we thought. There's more to life than what we're taught. I'm speaking up, enough's enough. Cause I can't go on this way. Gotta wake up and be brave. But I know I'll face the fire if I say…"

There was a long pause, then Addison grinned widely. She turned around and ripped off her wig as she proclaimed, "I'm gonna stand! Yeah. I'm gonna stand! Yeah. I'm gonna stand! Yeah. I'm gonna stand!"

Addison quickly swiped out of the video before anymore could play. "So that's that," Addison said. She scooted forward and turned around to face them. "Um, what do you guys think?"

"You did this weird neck thing right before you looked away," Zach said. "You do you sweetie, but I just wanted to point that out."

Addison furrowed her brows in confusion. She looked at the others—Zephyr was nodding along either agreeing with his friend or just doing it to hide his amusement; Alonzo was grinning either
his mouth pressed in a fine line to keep from actually laughing; and Roz just rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Um, okay?"

That broke them and they all started laughing. Addison couldn't help but laugh a little too. It was hard to not laugh when nearly everyone was laughing.

"Have you thought of anything else? Besides what you've showed us?" Alonzo asked.

Addison nodded. "I wrote like, a little pre-chorus sort of thing. And I feel like it's worth mentioning that I wanted Bucky to have a part in the song too. Kinda like what he was thinking during all of this. 'Cause Zed was gonna…would've eaten him if he hadn't stopped himself and I know that Bucky was really surprised and shocked by that and everything and…yeah."

"You know Addison, you say really smart things," Zephyr said. "But you just lose your confidence in your words. And you just stop. Just an observation."

"I-Okay," Addison nodded. She pulled on her hair—something she always did when she would get a little nervous though she still wasn't used to pulling on her real hair. "Sorry."

"Don't apologize because Zeph is being mean," Roz stated, shooting Zephyr a look.

"I'm not being mean! Just noticing things."

"It's okay," Addison said, pulling their attention back to her. "He isn't, um, wrong. I'm not very good with social situations. I mean I am but I'm also not. It's-it's stupid, sorry I brought it up. Let's just work on the song."

"Okay. The pre-chorus?"

Addison nodded and went back to her phone, opening her notes and clicking on the lyrics. "I am no professional so bear with me," she warned. "I'm gonna stand strong, nothing's stoppin' me. I'll be loud you'll hear me now. I'm gonna stand tall, take it to the top. I'll be free can't bring me down. So I'll rise, won't turn back, I won't hide who I am. I'm gonna stand."

"Why do you even need us?" Alonzo asked with a smile. "You're pretty good at this."


"That we do," Alonzo confirmed. "Let's try to get a main track line down, before we need to go work on something else."

Addison nodded in agreement. "Okay. I don't really know what that means but, okay."

The next day was a Saturday when they were filming the Zombie Mash and the cheer initiation. Both of those happened at night time and the videos they had gotten were filtered with night cameras so they had to record them again.

The first part of the Zombie Mash—when Addison and Zed met up at the barrier—was the first they filmed. It was still a little bright outside and everything they did had to be timed perfectly, otherwise they would have to wait until the next day.

After they filmed that, Zed and Addison went and changed to film the cheer initiation scene. Eliza
had gone ahead to the Power Plant with Addison's parents to go get set for the Zombie Mash filming. They (Addison, Zed, Bucky, Jess, Bree, and the Aceys) had spent the time waiting for the sun to set just goofing off in the street, playing around on Addison's phone.

After they finished the cheer initiation scene, Addison and Zed changed back into the Zombie Mash clothes and Zoey also changed from her skirt to coveralls. The Aceys and Jess and Bree went back to Seabrook since they weren't needed. Then they all made their way to the Power Plant.

Zoey took Eva and Bucky through a separate entrance, where they would be watching the cameras (that Eliza had set up) with Addison's parents. It was not too far from the Zombie Light Garden, and Addison's parents needed to be there for the purpose of the Zombie Patrol showing up.

As soon as they got in the elevator, the cameras started to record. Eliza had set up enough wireless cameras that they could get angles and even instances where they would look directly into the camera, sometimes without even knowing.

"Are you okay? You don't look so hot." Addison asked.

"Ouch," Zed teased.

Addison grinned and playfully punched his shoulder. "No, you know what I meant."

Zed smiled, then looked down. "I have to mess with my z-band to win games," he said while rubbing his wrist.

Addison's smile morphed into a look of concern. "Isn't that dangerous?"

Zed just sighed. "Addison, if I don't win, Zombies will never be accepted."

"I know how that feels." She flicked her blonde braid.

The elevator doors slid open, revealing a huge room filled with lights and loud music and Zombies.

"Are you serious!" Addison exclaimed.

Zed moved up beside her and grinned. "It's a chance to get loose and be ourselves!"

He walked ahead of her to greet more people, leaving her to bask in the party some more. After a second, Addison joined him, asking, "So, this whole celebration is for you winning football games?"

"It's more than that," Zed said. "It's a win for all of us. And we really needed a win."

Zed turns to see what she's looking at. "It's Zombie tongue." he explained. "We have a rich language. Twenty-three different words for brains."

"Whoa. So, you like a girl with brains?" she asked, waving her hands at him in a mock state of attack. Zed laughed at her joke.

From behind them, Eliza turned and frowned. "You know that's super offensive." she stated, walking over.

"Oh, no, no, no. It was just a joke. I'm sorry."

Eliza turned to address Zed. "You brought little Miss Cheer Boots to our Zombie mash? A human, here?"
Zed just rolled his eyes at that. The music cuts out and the lights dim. "Oh, it's starting." Zed says. "Come on."

He runs off, leaving Addison with Eliza. She made a split second decision to follow him, only stopping when she realized she had lost him in the crowd.

Bucky and Eva have pretty much nothing to do aside from watch. Usually they would queue up the music, but this was a Zombie Mash and Bonzo was the musical mastermind. *Bamm* went off without a hitch. Nobody broke anything and they got through the entire scene without any goofs or mistakes.

After, Zed and Addison got separated again. They were in two different parts of the Plant at once. With Zed, he had sat down on a windowsill to look at his arm, gasping in surprise and in pain. Lucky for the movie and not for him, the skin around his wrist was still red and irritated and looked horrible.

Bonzo slid up next to him. "*Bronz'up?*

"I don't know. The z-band hack really hurts. I can barely feel my wrist."

"Zorog?"

"I'll be fine, buddy, don't worry about it."

Bonzo gave him a look, then wrapped his arms around Zed and pulled him in for a tight hug. Zed winced and said, "Ah. Okay, Bonzo, my arm."

Bonzo frowned then stood up, patting Zed's arm as he walked away. Zed sighed then stood up, heading off camera.

Meanwhile Addison found herself 'lost'. She looked lost which meant she had gotten lost the first time around as she made her way through the crowded party. Zoey's cheering could be heard though, and Addison followed the sound.

"I'm crazy! I'm cute! Zombies to boot!"

Addison turned around the corner, seeing Zoey cheering up on a platform. She waved around pom poms made from newspapers, but was surprisingly really good. "I'm rocking, I smile, Zombies aren't vile!" she cheered, jumping around on the stage. "Yay!"

Addison clapped softly and Zoey jumped in surprise. "That's some great cheering," Addison said.

"I wasn't doing anything. Certainly not cheering." Zoey said, her pom poms falling to the ground. "Please don't tell anyone."

"You're Zed's little sister, right?"

"I'm Zoey," she confirmed. "You're…Addison."

Addison smiled and nodded. She moved over so they're not far apart, Zoey getting on her knees to level with Addison. "When I cheer, it makes me happy," Zoey confessed.

"Me, too." Addison agreed with a smile. "You're great at cheerleading, Zoey."

Zoey smiled brightly. "Thanks, but my pet Zander—" she picked up the stuff animal beside, a patchwork dog, "doesn't seem that impressed."
Addison couldn't help but giggle. "Well, he should be," she said, smiling at them. "But I think you're old enough to have a real pet. Wouldn't that be awesome?"

Zoey's face brightened up at that. The moment of sheer joy is disturbed by Eliza, to no surprise. "Stop teasing her. You know they don't allow Zombies to have pets."

"I didn't know that," Addison pointed out. Eliza seems surprised at that. "I'm still learning that Zombies aren't what I was taught. I mean, look at you. You're smart, cool, pretty—"

"Yo-you think I'm pretty?"

"Yeah," Addison said. Eliza and Zoey seem surprised at the compliment.

Zed rounded the corner, spotting Addison first. "There you are!" he said, walking over and spotting his little sister. "Zoey, whoa! What're you doing here?"

"Please. I'm not gonna miss a Zombie mash." the girl in question said as if it were obvious.

Zed folded his arms over his chest, giving his sister a serious look. "Zoey."

Addison looks between the sibling pair. Zed is trying his best to hold his serious expression, while Zoey seems to be conjuring up an idea.

"Come on," she said in a sort of whine. "Who's a good boy?"

Zed pouted, glancing at Eliza, than his sister, than at Addison before back to Zoey. He barked gruffly, kind of like a dog, much to the surprise of Addison. He scampered over to her, arms up like how a person would pretend to be a dog, panting lightly. "Me."

Addison did her best to hide her surprise, but from the way Eliza grinned at her she knows she gaping obviously.

Zoey patted her brother on the head. "Good boy. Good boy."

"All right," Eliza interrupted, moving over and picking up Zoey. "I'll take you home. Zed's gotta make sure Addison gets outta here."

"We should hang out, Eliza," Addison said. "And I really like your boots."

Eliza smiled sweetly. "Oh, thanks. They're orthotic. I got this draggy foot thing going on, so." Addison giggled lightly, watching as she gets a few feet away to talk to Zed.

Even though they had moved away and were whispering, Addison could still hear them. "She's cool," Eliza whispered, nodding in Addison direction.

"Yeah," Zed agreed, then adds, "for a human, right?"

"No. She's just cool." Eliza glanced at Addison briefly; Addison turns so it doesn't look like she was listening. "You guys look good together."

Eliza moved to head out, just when Addison noticed the stuffed animal still sitting on the platform. "Hey!" she called, picking up the dog and jogging to catch up to them. "Don't forget Zander."

"See ya," Zed called, and Zoey calls back her goodbyes.

Once they're out of earshot, Addison turned and grinned at Zed. "So… What was that all about?"
"I have no idea what you're talking about," Zed lied easily.

Addison laughed and Zed grinned, moving over to her and taking her hand in his. "Come on, Addy, I wanna show you something."

They don't go too far, climbing over a few railings into another similar area, the space is dark save the soft glow of the light bulbs. Like most rooms in the building, there are Zombie inspired murals on the walls.

"Wow," she breathed out, looking around. "What is this place?"

"It's a zombie-light garden," Zed answered.

"It's beautiful," she said. Zed pulled her along further. "Where're we going?"

"For a walk in the park."

Like magic, the piano Zed and Bonzo had recorded the day before started playing. Zed was the first to sing. "I know it might be crazy, but did you hear the story?"

"I think I heard it vaguely."

"A girl and a zombie."

"Oh, tell me more, boy. Sounds like a fantasy."

"Oh, what could go so wrong with a girl and a zombie," they sang together.

Zed continued the singing. "You're from the perfect paradise. And I'm living on the darker side."

"Ooh, I've got a feeling if you get to know me."

"Right from the start you caught my eye. And something inside me came to life."

"Ooh, I've got a feeling, if you get to know me."

Together, they sang, "Someday," then Addison continued with, "This could be, this could be ordinary."

Together again they sang, "Someday, could we be something extraordinary?"

"You and me side by side," Zed sang.

"Out in the broad daylight," they sang together. "If they laugh, we'll say: we're gonna be someday. Someday, someday. We're gonna be someday. Someday, someday. We're gonna be someday."

Zed's standing so close to her, close enough to kiss her. Her breath hitched in her throat when she realizes that he just might, his hand reaching up to cradle her jaw. Addison closed her eyes, leaning into his touch. That's when she felt a tugging on her hair, her real hair, realizing that Zed could see her actual hair.

Her eyes flew open and she pushed his hand away, trying her best to cover it up. Zed looked at her, complete love and adoration in his eyes. He gently pulled her hands away and she relents. "It's beautiful," he told her.

"You're beautiful," he added softly, then leaned down to close the space between them.
Before his lips can touch hers, the lights cut out and the music in the main room cuts.

"Zombies show yourselves!" a Zombie Patrol officer called through the room. In the darkness, Addison sees Zed run away from her, gone faster than she can blink.

"You're out past curfew!" another officer called.

From behind her, a Patrol said, "Zombie, please turn around."

She turned around willingly, squinting through the bright light.

"Addison?"

She spots her dad's second in command, standing there and flashing a light in her eyes. "Gus?"

"What're you doing here?" Gus asked. "This is a hot bed for Zombie activity. It's not safe for humans." Addison didn't answer him, her gaze shifting to the ground. "Come on, let's get you home."

Addison climbs down from the platform then walks a few steps with him. Before she can even leave, the lights cut back on and Zed runs up to her. He wrapped his arms around her, turned her around and kissed her. Addison giggled and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Zed pulled his lips back and smiled, resting his forehead on hers. "Do you know how hard it was to not kiss you during that scene?" he whispered.

Addison nodded with a smile. She turned around to see her dad and a few of the Zombie Patrol officers conversing with Eva. Eliza and Bucky were nowhere to be found and Missy was walking with Zoey toward them.

"Okay, just one more kiss before your mom comes," Zed said quietly.

They kissed again, then pulled back to face Missy and Zoey. "That was all...really good?"

"Thank you?" Zed said in the same tone.

"She had a great time, trust me," Zoey said. "Mayor Missy nearly cried during Someday and I was just like 'this is what they use to get me to go to sleep' and then Eliza gave me a weird look but who cares!"

"Where is Eliza?" Zed asked.

"And Bucky."

"They went to go talk to all your Zombie friends," Zoey said. "And Eva is talking to the Zombie Patrol. And after we're going to Mayor Missy's house to film one more scene before calling it a night."

"No," Zed stated. "It's late and way past your bedtime. You're going home."

"Aw come on!"

Zed pulled away from his girlfriend and picked up his little sister. "Dad is probably worried sick about you," he told her. He looked at Addison and said, "I'm gonna take her home but I'll meet you at your house."
"Okay," Addison nodded. "Bye guys!"

Zed went over to Eva and Addison couldn't hear him anymore. She looked up at her mother, feeling suddenly nervous. "So...what did you think?"

"You were amazing," Missy said earnestly. "You looked so happy. I've never seen you like that before."

Addison couldn't help but smile. "You should see when we film the full version of Someday. That's my favorite song."

"Is that an invite?"

"If the production team will allow it."

Missy squealed excitedly reaching out for Addison then pausing. "Can I hug you?"

Addison nodded and let her mom pull her in for a hug. "Okay, that's enough now," Addison said. "We aren't finished for the night."
Addison wasn't allowed to host her Zombeans informational event at any place in Seabrook. None of the owners of any space big enough wanted to host an event for Zombies. So Zed got a few of his friends to help smooth out the area in front of the old Power Plant and fill it with chairs and tables and even a little stage.

Addison had spent two weeks on the presentation and a couple hundred dollars of her own money printing applications and paperwork. In addition to Bree and Jessica, Addison had four kids from her school confirm they would volunteer with Zombeans during the summer: two of them had tried out for cheer and hadn't made it (Charlotte and Mia) and the other two were cheerleaders but had been kicked off the team when Bucky was on his anti-Zombie rage (Malcolm and Peggy). There were more who's paperwork was still being processed or were still undecided, like some Zombies and cheerleaders from other schools.

On a Saturday in late February, they were hosting their first big main event. They had handed out fliers and interest forms and done paperwork for months and now, a bunch of parents and kids gathered in Zombietown at three in the afternoon for the application meeting.

Eliza and five of the cheerleaders were in the front, handling sign-in and making sure everyone got application packets. Zed and Zoey were off to the side, collecting donations and selling cold drinks donated by Addison's parents. Bree was with Addison at the stage, going through the PowerPoint one last time.

When it was nearly time for them to start, Eliza came to join them and set up their audio. They had microphones that connected to the speakers strategically placed around the open space. She also made sure Addison's laptop was connected to the projector and everything was running smoothly, then returned to her post at the front.

"Alright, we're about to start," Bree told her. "You ready?"

Addison shook her head. "I feel like I might actually vomit. Do I look green? Is it hot? I'm hot, are you hot?"

"Addison, it's February," Bree said. "I'm surprised this many people came to something outdoors in February."

"I can't do this."

"Yes you can! You're just presenting a presentation that we made, just like school."

Addison shook her head. "Come on Bree, I-I can't present," she said. "I hate public speaking. It's scary!"

"Since when did you hate public speaking? You're a cheerleader!"

"There's a difference between cheering and speaking publicly, like the fact that my face and my voice are drowned out by a whole team!"

Bree grabbed her friend by the shoulders and gave her a serious look. "What's up for real? I've never seen you like this."

"I-I can't do this," Addison said in a panic. "What if everyone hates this idea? What if they...they
"You're hyperventilating! Deep breaths, okay?"

Addison nodded and did a few deep breaths with Bree. "Addy what's wrong?" Bree asked. "You've never been afraid of performing before."

"I haven't had to since…since that football game," Addison admitted. "And when I did everyone booed me and I got shunned in school and I was a freak!"

"Oh Addy!" Bree pulled Addison in for a hug, holding her tight. She then held her at arms length and gave her a serious look. "All these people are here because they want to hear you! They believe in you and they want to know what this is all about. They like your idea and they want to support it. You won't get booed, you won't be shunned. You're an amazing speaker."

Addison nodded along. "I…I don't know."

"I'll be up there with you," Bree said. "And you can just find Zed in the crowd. Whenever you're focusing on him you always seem to relax a lot more. Just be yourself. You're already passionate about this, so just do what you did when we practiced, because you rocked it them."

"Okay."

Bree smiled and asked, "Okay?"

Addison nodded and smiled slightly. "Okay!"

Bree handed Addison her microphone then moved to center stage. "Good afternoon everyone! We're gonna get started in a second!" Bree announced into her microphone. "If you haven't already please visit our donation booth and contribute to our funds! Every penny counts!"

From the donation booth, Zoey and Zed cheered loudly. Addison couldn't help but smile. She walked to Bree in the center of the stage and turned on her own microphone, putting on a peppy smile. "Hello everybody. I'm Addison," she greeted. "You've probably met me before. I went door to door spreading the word about this with some friends, or maybe we met at the carnival a few weeks ago. Either way, I'm very happy to see this turnout!"

Zed cheered and whooped from the donation booth and Addison couldn't help but giggle. Even though he was a good distance away Addison could tell he was giving her a huge grin.

"This is Bree," Addison introduced. "My partner in crime, so to speak. We're the 'Zombeans directors' which means we're in charge. We do have a good number of volunteers, a few who were checking you all in."

The PowerPoint moved onto the next slide, which had a picture of Bree and Addison from cheer season and lots of words. "So a little about us," Addison said. "We are currently freshmen at Seabrook High. We were cheerleaders, and were kicked off the team for supporting a certain Zombie football player."

"Love you babe!"

Zed's comment lightened up the crowd and they laughed a little.

"A few of the volunteers from our school were kicked off of the cheer team for not being anti-Zombie," Bree added. "So it's pretty clear where we stand."
It moved onto the next slide, which had a few bullet points on it and was titled 'How It Happened.' Addison moved closer to center stage and the edge. "A little history on how 'Zombeans' came to be." Addison introduced. "So after Bree and I were kicked off the team and the captain 'purged' the team of anyone who wasn't anti-zombie, the team was left with like eight people. They went and performed at had the Regional Cheer Championship even though they had no members. They pretty much came out looking stupid.

"So my boyfriend and his sister—who are at the donation booth—came out with a bunch of Zombies and cheerleaders who our captain wrongfully got rid of. And we placed second, so our captain nominated Zoey to the Seabrook Mini Shrimp Cheer Program. And she was literally perfect for the spot, except that she was a Zombie. It was unfair and unjust, but I know that changing the minds of anyone in Seabrook is pointless. I also knew that instead of waiting for things to change, we could change things."

"Right now, Zombeans is reserved mostly for Zombies and a select few kids," Bree explained. "But the long term goal is to be open for everyone. We want to give kids opportunities they won't get normally."

"And also we wanna win the cheer competition at the end of the summer to show them what they're missing," Addison added with a cheeky smile, earning a laugh from the crowd.

It moved onto the next slide, which was titled 'Donations.' "Before we get into all the details about Zombeans, I wanted to emphasize the importance of donations," Addison said. "We are a not-for-profit organization which means we have no funds. So far, everything has been paid with by myself or from my mom's campaign—Mayor Missy Davis. I also have to clarify that that is all that is going on. Her campaign donated money and water to us to support the cause."

"Mayor Missy rocks though!" Zed cheered from the booth.

Addison giggled and shook her head. "We need lots of money. We need to rent a space and we want to buy uniforms and pompoms and also be able to provide everyone with food and drinks and emergency medical attention. We want to be able to give these kids the world. We will not ask you to pay for them but we ask that you please donate whatever you can. Money, food, drinks. Anything will do."

"And if you're wondering why we're selling water instead of saving it," Bree added. "It's because it's incredibly hot today and also both our parents said they would match how much money we get today. So buy more water, please!"

They went through the rest of the presentation and the applications without any mishaps. Everything went according to the plans. When everyone had mostly cleared out and Addison and Bree checked in with the cheerleaders at the front, they had a 90% application return (the other 10% that hadn't returned had said they needed to finish filling it out and would drop them off at Zed's).

Zed wrapped his arms around Addison from behind and kissed the side of her face. "Great job Babe! My dad still has to fill out Zoey's application but I honestly wanna sign up to volunteer now!"

Addison giggled and shook her head. "I can't let you. You have football practice all summer Baby."

"Still."

Bree stood up from where she was sorting applications and said, "We can take this back to my
house. We can use the basement."

"That's my cue. Are you okay packing up here?" Addison asked.

Zed nodded. "Yeah. You want me to join you when we finish?"

Addison nodded and turned her head to kiss him. "I'll see you later Z."
Birthday Worries

Zed's birthday was on a Tuesday. Zevon came in and woke him up at four in the morning. Zed managed to untangle himself from Addison and slip out of the room without waking her up.

"You're sixteen now," Zevon whispered. "Happy birthday son."

"Thanks," Zed said distractedly. "I'm gonna get a shower in."

Zevon nodded. "I'll get you some clothes."

"Try not to wake up Addy please. I don't want her to know when I leave."

"Alright."

Time seemed to move too quickly. Zed finished in the shower and got dressed, then sat in the kitchen and moved his cauliflower around on the plate. He ate enough to not be completely starving. The Z-Patrol would be there at five thirty to take him away for the day.

A little before they came Zed made his way upstairs and into Zoey's room. She was already sitting up, rubbing the sleep from her eyes and smiled at her brother. "Happy birthday," she said quietly. "Are you leaving already?"

"Almost." Zed sat down on her bed and wrapped his arms around her. Zoey leaned into him, hiding her face in his side. "I'll see you later, don't worry."

"I have to worry, I'm your sister." Her voice was muffled by his shirt and Zed rubbed her back affectionately.

Zed laughed dryly. "I'll be fine. I promise. I'll come home and we'll eat birthday cake with Addy and Eliza and Bonzo like every year."

"Okay."

They both jumped at the pounding on the door. Zoey pulled back from her brother with a look of fear on her face. "It's okay, I'll be okay," Zed said and stood up. "I gotta go now."

Zoey stood up on her bed and threw her arms around his neck. "Goodbye," she said softly.

"Bye Zoe."

He pulled back from his sister and left her room. When he looked at his own room he saw Addison looking around the room in confusion. She spotted him in the hallway and sat up. Zed sucked in a breath; he had been hoping he could slip out without having to say bye to Addison. It was early enough that she wouldn't be awake, but he had forgotten about the fact that she had trouble sleeping without him.

His dad was at the bottom of the stairs with two Patrol officers. "Can I have a minute please?" Zed asked. All three nodded and Zed made his way to his room, while Addison made her way to the door.

"It's so early, why are you already dressed?" Addison asked.

"It's my birthday," Zed said sullenly. "They're waiting for me downstairs."
Addison didn't say anything after that. She just stared at him, a little sad and surprised and completely conflicted. "Um, what's gonna happen? Will you be back later so we can celebrate your birthday?"

_Hopefully._ Zed nodded and slowly wrapped his arms around her. "You still have time before you need to get ready for school. You should get some more sleep. I'll see you later, okay?"

Addison wrapped her arms around him tightly. She could tell that something was off in the way he spoke and how tense everything was in the house.

"Are you gonna come home later?" Addison asked. "Honestly. I need you to tell me the complete truth."

"I don't know," Zed said, sadly and miserably. "I don't want to think about what could happen. It's…it's scary."

Addison pulled her arms back and up into his hair, pulling him in for a deep kiss. When she pulled back she said quietly, "Remember that I love you. I love you so much and I'll be there with you. My heart beats for you and only you."

"My heart beats for you and only you," Zed repeated.

One of the officers called for Zed and they pulled apart. Zoey gave him one last hug before he went down the stairs and followed the officers out to the van. Zoey and Addison watched from Zed's bedroom window as he climbed into the van and it drove off.

Zed was the only Zombie who was born on March sixth. His examinations went faster than most, but it also meant they could do more to him. He rode to Zombie Containment alone and all the attention was on him the whole day.

There were only seven doctors and examination rooms for yearly inspections, and, since Zed was the only one going in, all seven doctors liked to be around him during his inspection. He was also the first Zombie to be born (a pretty big deal).

Usually, they would give him a Z-Band update, then test the intensity levels of the electromagnetic pulses to see how much he would need for the year. That was probably the most dangerous part of the yearly check ups, especially if the doctor was distracted (which they often were).

But because Zed had had so many Z-Band issues in the past year, and was wearing a temporary Z-Band, he got a whole new band. They tried to do something about the swollen veins and irritated skin on his wrist and gave up quickly after. The only solution they gave was moving his Z-Band to the other arm, which Zed said no to.

Zed made it out of the replacement stage a little worse for wear but alive. And it was pretty much smooth sailing from there.

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Zoey and Zevon didn't leave the house because they were related to Zed. Addison had to go to school because she didn't have an excuse to skip. She spent the whole day distracted until they called her down to the office during the period before last.

Both her parents were waiting for her, looking both nervous and serious. Addison looked between them nervously. "You should sit," Missy said.

Addison sat down in one of Principal Lee's chairs immediately. "What's going on?" Addison
questioned.

"I checked in on Zed an hour ago," Dale said. "He's fine. Right now, at least. I already talked with Zevon about what's going on and we want you to know too."

They sat down on both sides of her which made her feel a little angry. She didn't need to be coddled by them, she just wanted to know what was going on with Zed.

"They've started a new initiative at Zombie Containment," Dale explained. "Remember when you learned that in prehistoric times, humans would use their wisdom teeth to chew raw meat?"

Addison nodded, not necessarily following the conversation.

"Well they've decided that, unlike humans who's wisdom teeth grow in, Zombies are born with theirs." Dale said. "To help with the eating brains process. So this year they're removing all four wisdom teeth in any Zombie who's twelve or older."

"The long term goal is to get everyone," Missy added. "The point is that they're gonna remove Zed's wisdom teeth today. It's a pretty serious surgery. Zevon said he'll take you with him to pick Zed up."

"I thought they would drop him off?"

"Transportation is only provided for basic check ups," Dale said. "Budget cuts."

"That's bullshit," Addison grumbled.

"Language young lady."

Addison rolled her eyes at her mother. "So they're pulling his teeth against his will?"

"Basically," Missy said. "You've heard of how miserable it is for humans to get their teeth pulled, right?"

Addison nodded. "Let me guess: something will be horribly unpredictable because Zed is a Zombie?"

"Zed is usually the test subject in these cases," Dale explained. "Because—"

"He's the first Zombie to be born and they're too petty to use Bonzo even though he's the actual first Zombie to be born."

Her parents exchanged looks over her head. "The point is, there are a lot of things we aren't certain of. So many outcomes can happen, since Zed is the first patient to get his teeth pulled."

"He could go offline and attack you and we don't want that."

"That's where this was going?" Addison asked with folded arms. "I've been with Zed for a few months, he's gone offline like, three times. Technically two because the States game doesn't count."

"Two?" her parents asked incredulously.

"It's not like you guys ever ask about what happens in my life anyway," Addison grumbled. "And before you ask, I will not go back to your house. I trust Zed more than I trust either of you. I know that he will never hurt me. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to get back to class."
Addison didn't go back to class. She went to the computer lab and did research on questions she couldn't bring herself to ask her parents. She texted Bucky and asked him to cover for her in gym and stayed through the remainder of the school day.

When the last bell finally rang, Addison grabbed her bags and left through the front of the school. To her surprise, Zevon and Zoey were waiting for her in an old truck. She squeezed in and gave them a small smile.

"Where'd you get this truck?" Addison asked.

"It was Mommy's and now it's Zed's once he gets a license," Zoey answered with a bubbly smile. "We aren't supposed to be driving it. Daddy doesn't have a license."

"Ssh," Zevon said with a smile as he drove off.

It was clear everyone was in brighter spirits than the morning and Addison couldn't help but smile. "We're gonna stash the truck a little before we get to Containment and you'll wait here with Zoey while I get Zed."

"What? No." Addison stated. "Why can't Zoey and I go down?"

"Zed says you aren't allowed anywhere near Zombie Containment," Zoey said slowly.

"I'm a big girl," Addison argued.

"You don't wanna see Containment," Zoey assured her. "It's not fun. Plus we could have some car fun."

"I…Okay." Addison agreed. "If you guys say I shouldn't go, then I won't go."

"Good," Zevon said.

The drive to a few blocks away from Zombie Containment was silent after that. Zevon put the car in park and got down, leaving the two girls alone. Zoey turned to Addison and smiled.

"When I go in it takes all day," she said. "There's like ten people there on my day. I don't go home until super late. But Zed goes super fast and I'm so happy because everything is fine! He's good!"

Addison smiled. "Today was so stressful," she admitted. "My parents came to school and told me but I was so worried something bad might have happened."

Zoey grinned. "We saw Eliza and told her to go get a birthday cake. But Daddy said that Zed won't be able to eat anything for a really long time. Like, until the holes close."

"Okay." Addison said with a nod. She was still a little confused, but figured Zoey wouldn't have the answer to all of her questions.

A few minutes later, Zevon came back with Zed, who was leaning heavily on his father and looking a little worse for wear. He got squeezed in on Addison's side and Zoey moved to sit in her lap to make enough space (when Addison asked if it was even safe she was just reminded that they weren't even supposed to be driving).

Zed was high off his ass on nitrous oxide. He spoke in a mixture of Zombie Tongue and English that Addison couldn't decode.

She understood when he showed off his brand new Z-Band (instead of upgrading the system they
released a whole new band which is why he didn't take as long).

Because Zed was drooly and his jaw was still pretty numb and he himself was pretty out of it, they decided to celebrate his birthday the next day (when he could actually try to blow out his candles).
Zed continued to be a babbling mess until Zevon managed to coax him to sleep. "You don't have to sleep in his bed, by the way," Zevon told her. "With the Z-Band change…"

"It's okay, I'll be fine." Addison said. "I trust Zed. I trust his Zombie, way more than I probably should. But I do. Don't worry, I will be okay."

"Addison…"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Necrodopolus," Addison said. "I understand your reserve. But this is Zed we're talking about. He's like an actual teddy bear."

Zevon nodded in agreement. "It's a little strange."

"That's your son."

Zevon laughed and Addison smiled. When he stopped she said to him, "In all seriousness, I know Zed. This has to stay between you and me because my parents would flip if they found out, but Zed went offline once with me and he…he had the 'opportunity' to eat me. And didn't."

Zevon looked at her in confusion. "I'm gonna need you to elaborate more."

Addison leaned back against the wall. She glanced at Zoey's room to make sure the door was closed before explaining. "It was back in November. There was a lot going on, I don't remember the exact details. Zed was getting targeted by humans, and had missed school. I came here to find him, we talked. Etcetera."

"Uh huh."

"So then, we were kissing," Addison said. "Because that's what we do. And then he went offline…"

Zevon's eyes widen and Addison just nodded in confirmation. "Nearly bit my lip off," she said. "He got through most of it but not clean off. The point is that he was all, full Zombie, and had the opportunity to kill me. And he didn't. Because his Zombie has some…ideas."

"You don't have to keep explaining," Zevon said. "I've got the idea."

"The point is, I'm not afraid of Zed's Zombie," Addison said. "Thank you for your concern though. I wish…I wish I could be this open with my parents."

"Why can't you?"

"They would never let me be with Zed if I told them a fraction of what I tell you," Addison said. "But that's not important. It's a good day."

"It is," Zevon said with a smile.

"Can I ask you something?"

"You just did."

Addison rolled her eyes with a smile. Zevon and Zed were so much alike (it made sense,
considering they were father and son). "If Zed and Zoey get Z-Band inspections on their birthdays, when do you get yours? Since your birthday was like in December, and I was here in December. And also Bonzo's birthday passed and he didn't get a Z-Band check or even his teeth pulled and he's older than Zed."

"We get Z-Band checks on the anniversary of when we got our Z-Bands," he explained. "The kids got theirs when they were born. Bonzo got his in like September. It's just about when they got it. And they also like to pick on my poor son, make him an 'example' or a 'test subject.' It sucks, but I can't do anything about it."

"Oh, that makes sense," Addison said with a nod. "One last question. Then you can go to bed."

"Oh I don't mind."

Addison smirked a little and asked, "Can I skip school tomorrow? Since you and Zoey will be gone I think someone should stay and make sure Zed doesn't drive himself insane."

Zevon laughed and raised an eyebrow. "Is that the only reason?"

Addison feigned hurt. "Yes! It's not like I could do anything, his face is swollen. I do care about him."

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "Get some sleep, alright?"

"Okay, good night." Addison went into Zed's room and Zevon went to his own.

Zed was laying on his back for the first time in a while, pushed as far against the wall as he could go. To her surprise, he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"I can't shleep on my shide," he murmured. "Sorry."

"It's okay, I can take the couch if you'd like."

"No, I miss you," he whined. "Lay with me?"

"How can I tell you no?" Addison crawled into bed and curled into his side, fitting just barely on his bed. "This isn't too uncomfortable, actually."

"Thish is gonna be hell," Zed muttered. "My moush hurts so bad."

"You'll be okay, you're strong. Now let's get some sleep. Maybe your dad will let me skip tomorrow."

"Hopefully."

"Ssh, go to bed."

Zed's alarm for school went off. Addison woke up before him, a few minutes after the time she would usually wake up for school. She managed to detangle herself from Zed and walk to the door, finding a note saying that she could stay home with Zed. Addison grinned and went back to bed, not getting up for a few more hours.

Zed woke up a little after her. They took care of his mouth, rinsing it out and getting Zed some pain medication for his aching jaw (and throbbing gums).
"Your cheeks are swollen," Addison sympathized. "I'll get you ice, how's that sound."

Zed gave her a small smile. Addison went into a kitchen and hunted for packs of frozen food that were clearly freezer burned or close to be thrown out. She wrapped them in a towel, then brought them to Zed. He put the frozen items on his cheeks and physically relaxed, making Addison giggle a little.

"You hungry? Want a smoothie or some soup?"

Zed nodded and shrugged. It took a little for her to decode what he was trying to say (yes, he was hungry and he didn't care what he got). Addison went into the kitchen and got fruits from the fridge (the fruits they would buy for her even though she told Zevon she didn't need anything special).

She made enough for both her and Zed, then brought them out to him.

"You know, I wouldn't have expected you to be in too much pain," Addison said. "I was told that your wisdom teeth were in already. I know that humans' teeth grow in when they're older and it's deep in their gums or crooked or shit."

Zed barred his front teeth and pointed at the base of his gums. "They were rooted deep," he explained. "The holes are deep. Lots of pain."

"Mm, that makes sense." Addison said. "Drink up. I have a suspicious feeling my dad will come later and make you go take your driving test."

"He is." Zed said, showing her his phone. "I told him three so he wouldn't find out you skipped school."

Addison nodded. "Let's go in the den and watch movies."

Zed had fallen asleep after the title card. Addison let him sleep with the ice packs on his cheeks for another ten minutes, then took them off. She wasn't watching the movie, just making sure he didn't start choking in his sleep. He looked tired even in his sleep.

Zed had his arms around her, keeping her from leaving (not that she wanted to). While he slept, she read through the 'Welcome Brochure' for his new Z-Band.

Zed woke up a few hours later, groaning and asking for his pain meds. "Sorry I was holding you hostage," he muttered after taking them.

"What? We were cuddling."

"I had you caged in, which isn't cool. What if you wanted to live your life?"

Addison shrugged. "I like cuddling you. You're cute and cozy."

Zed gave her a small smile, then winced. "Geez fuck," he muttered. "My mouth hurts so bad."

Addison gave him a pout. "Ice?"

Zed shook his head. "It's like, inside. I mean, my jaw doesn't hurt too bad but...yeah."

"You just stop and say 'yeah' a lot," Addison pointed out. She tangled a hand in his hair and kissed his forehead. "It's cute. I get what you mean."
"Mm. Will you kiss me again?"

"You like forehead kisses?"

"I like all the kisses you can give me," Zed whispered. "I've been without your kisses for too long."

"Yesterday morning to be exact," Addison stated. She kissed his nose. "That's the last mouth kiss you'll get until you can eat something that isn't liquid."

Zed pouted and turned his head to her. "Cheek?"

"I don't wanna hurt you."

"I'll tough it out," Zed said. He gave her his best puppy dog eyes and Addison relented, pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek, a little ways under his eye.

Zed sighed and Addison peppered more kisses around his face. She only stopped when she heard the sound of other people in the room. Addison and Zed both looked up at her parents standing in the doorway.

"Why aren't you at school?" Missy asked.

"Zed needs a nurse. You think you can just pull out four teeth and leave him alone?"

Zed gave them a smile then groaned. "Oh, shit. That hurt," he muttered.

"It hurts to smile?" Missy asked in confusion.

"It hurts to do everything," Zed said.

"Look how huge his cheeks are," Addison pointed out. "I'm currently blaming you two until I find the dentist who did this to him. His face is swollen!"

"I don't work in Containment," Missy pointed out. "And this was part of the agreement for more Zombie rights. Kind of how they let lions or tigers or snakes around small children if they're defanged or declawed."

Addison just rolled her eyes. "What brings you here?"

"Follow up to the procedure," Dale explained. "Everyone is dying to know what's happened in the twenty-four hours since."

"Oh how I love being a lab rat," Zed muttered. He looked at Addison and said, "You know I've known your dad since I was nine?"

"Bet you were super respectful back then." Addison said.

Zed hummed in agreement. "I was, but I still must stay in his good graces."

"Hello?" Missy asked. "We're still here."

"Unfortunately," Addison hummed.

"Addy," Zed muttered. "Don't be so rude."

"Sorry," she said offhandedly. She kissed his nose briefly, then looked at her parents. "So how
does this work? You ask him questions or something?"

"Just check the information on his Z-Band," Dale said. "It works better if it's actually connected rather than wirelessly."

Zed turned his head to Addison and whispered, "I'm a little hungry, would you mind making me some soup or something?"

"Do you want me to leave because of—"

Zed shook his head before she could finish. "I don't know if you realize it, but a smoothie five hours ago is not filling."

Addison rolled her eyes and pinched his arm. "Whatever you say."

She got up and went into the kitchen. She was pouring the broth from the can into the bowl when her mom came into the kitchen.

"You can't just keep skipping school, Addison."

"Who would make sure Zed doesn't die? You and Dad seem more interested in his Z-Band then his actual wellbeing."

"You know that's not true."

Addison raised an eyebrow. "I don't believe that, Mom."

"We do care about Zed," Missy argued. "But first and foremost we have jobs to do. We gotta make sure everything goes smoothly before the interview tomorrow."

"Interview?"

"Yes, sweetheart. After Zed's birthday, after a new breakthrough in Zombie technology, people want updates. Do some research, Addison. You'll find some interesting things out about your boyfriend."

Addison frowned but didn't say anything. Addison remembered when Taylor had told her a few months ago about Zed's birth being in the newspaper. Even after finding this out, Addison didn't do any research.

"What're you making him?" Missy asked.

"Potato leek soup," Addison answered. "He has holes in his gums and is very pouty about not being able to eat real food." She turned around and said loud enough for Zed to hear, "He can be such a baby!"

Addison laughed as she heard Zed bitching in the other room. He couldn't open his mouth wide enough to yell back which was the most amusing part.

"You know I didn't even think you could cook," Missy pointed out.

"I'm pouring soup from a can into a pot. There's literally nowhere that I can fuck this up."

Missy sighed but didn't say anything. She had clearly given up on trying to keep Addison from cursing.
"But Zed doesn't really let me near the stove. He doesn't trust that I won't burn down the house."

"I don't trust you either," Missy said. "You managed to burn cereal."

"In my defense, I was six."

They both laughed, then Addison moved to head back to Zed. Her mother shifted a little and Addison frowned. "Were you trying to stall me?"

"We don't want to risk you being around a wild Zombie," Missy explained.

Addison placed her hand on her hips and narrowed her eyes. "Why can't you guys just trust my judgement? I'm pretty sure I know Zed way better than you guys. If he were to go offline I know he wouldn't hurt me."

"You don't know that. He's a Zombie he just wants brains."

"He doesn't want my brains!" Addison argued.

"How do you know!"

"Because I'm his mate!"

Missy gasped and Addison covered her mouth. She looked between the doorway to where Zed was, then back at Addison.

"I wasn't supposed to tell you that," Addison breathed out.

Missy's eyes went wide and her face morphed into horror. "I-Oh my goodness."

Addison shook her head. "Wait, no," she whispered quickly. "We aren't fu—we aren't having sex!"

Missy whimpered a little, clearly not wanting to hear any more of the conversation.

"Mom, you cannot tell Dad! He'll flip out and then who knows what'll happen!"

"Oh sure, I won't tell your father that his teenager daughter and her boyfriend—who live together—are mates."

"I didn't mean that!" Addison said, trying to amend the situation. "I'm fourteen and am not saying that I'm gonna stay with Zed forever and have his babies or whatever! I mean, not that that would be bad but I'm too young to be thinking like that. And so is Zed! He isn't thinking of that! But he told me once that the reason his Zombie won't hurt me is because it considers me as a mate!"

"Oh my god," Missy muttered, fanning her face. "I need to go sit."

"Please don't tell Dad."

Missy just waved her off and went back into the den.
Life still went on, even though Zed and Addison were still in the house, away from school.

—Eliza—

They had only been in home room for a few minutes before Eliza noticed something off with her girlfriend. She was concerned but still giddy, thinking of Eva as her girlfriend. She would never get used to saying that.

Then Eliza went into protective girlfriend mode. "What's wrong?" Eliza asked.

"It's the first game today," Eva said glumly. "For flag."

Eliza made a face. "What's flag?"

"Flag football," Eva explained. "I was on the team at my old school. It was small so I was a linebacker, running back, and wide receiver."

"You played football?"

Eva nodded. "You guys don't have a team and I'm sad because all my friends are posting about their first game today and I miss playing."

Eliza frowned and reached over. "You should go to the game."

"It's at four and way too far. I'll just stay here, glum." Eva sighed a bit dramatically. "I wish you guys had a flag team. I really liked playing."

"Why don't you just join the actual football team?"

"What?"

Eliza nodded. "I'm pretty sure there's no rule against a girl playing. Plus, that's a lesbian power move in my opinion."

Eva laughed and shook her head. "No way they'd let me play with the boys."

"We can check the handbook during study hall to be sure. The rules and shit. I think it's the N-double H-S-A-A."

"Why did you say 'double H' but not 'double A'?"

Eliza shrugged. "That's just how we do in New Hampshire. Now, we'll check the rules and see if you can play."

"Aw, you're the best, Babe."

Eliza felt fluttery inside and smiled warmly. "I know."

—Bucky—
Since Valentine's Day, Bucky had been receiving little notes in his locker, all from the same Secret Admirer. He wasn't used to any romantic interest in him; though he was just assistant captain last year, everyone was too afraid of him to even treat him like he was one of their classmates. Whoever his Secret Admirer was had balls, to say the least.

It took a week for Bucky to figure out how to respond. His Secret Admirer was barely using half of the page, so Bucky would scrawl a reply out on the bottom and stick it in the vents of his locker with only a corner peeking out.

The Aceys didn't know about the notes and neither did Addison. Bucky didn't share them with anybody.

They had started out as sweet little notes. They were filled with metaphors and little poems and song lyrics that made Bucky blush. Now they were actual letters that were sweet and only vaguely addressed to Bucky.

Dear Bucky Davis,

Today is Wednesday which is the only day of the week when you don't sit with the Aceys. You sit with your cousin and her friends, which is only a few tables away from where I sit with my friends.

I have a clear view of you if I switch seats with someone, which I've been doing for the past few Wednesdays just to see you.

When you're with them you seem a lot nicer and softer. I think it's because of Addison. You act protective, like you're her big brother and it's so cute. If everything you did wasn't cute I'd say that's the cutest thing you could ever do.

~Your Secret Admirer

Bucky forced a frown so people in the halls wouldn't be suspicious. He scrawled out a response and stuck it in his locker, then went off to class.

—Eva—

Cinematography class came and they were in the computer lab again. They couldn't record audio in the loud lab so they worked on matching audio to scenes and putting them in a semblance of order.

Bucky complained like he did everyday about how the movie made him out to be. At this point, Eva had grown to ignore his complaints.

"Dude, you are so obviously the bad guy," Eliza said for the nth time. "Just look at your face! You've got that 'I'm evil' smile."

Eva nodded in agreement. "This is all true information. Based off of what cameras picked up and the script that was written from the point of view of Addison and Zed."

"Yeah but Zed hates me!"

"I wonder why." Eliza stated. "Maybe it's because you literally ruined his life, and the lives of every Zombie in Seabrook."

Eva raised a finger and said, "Which is something a bad guy would do."
Bucky groaned and dropped his head on the counter. "You guys are the worst."

—Bree—

Ever since their schedules got changed in January, Bree and Addison only had two classes together, not including lunch. Bree only heard that Addison and Zed weren't at school from Bonzo. During lunch is when she finally got to ask Eliza where they were.

"Zed got his wisdom teeth pulled," Eliza explained. "He can't talk properly or eat anything real and he's still pretty unstable so he can't come to school until tomorrow. And Addison is playing nurse."

"Why is Addison playing nurse?" Bree asked.

"Zevon can't take more time off and Zoey has to go to school." Eliza shrugged. "We have bigger things to worry about."

Bree raised an eyebrow. Eliza didn't elaborate though, because Bucky sat down across from her. They all gave him a curious look and he shrugged. "I always sit here on Wednesdays."

"When Addison is here," Eliza pointed out.

Eva rolled her eyes. "You're always welcome at our table dude."

Bucky spared her a glance. "Where is Addison?"

"Zed got his teeth pulled and she's taking care of him." Bree explained.

"Anyway," Eliza said. "We are trying to find a rule against girls on the football team?"

Bucky made a face at her. "You wanna play football?"

"God no. Eva does."

"I played flag football which is a lot softer than actual football, but you guys don't have a flag team." Eva explained.

"Good luck with that," Bucky said. "I can send you the N-double H-S-A-A's website. I've had it saved and taken notes so I can challenge anyone who wants to fuck with my team."

"Why do you guys say 'double H' but don't do the same for the A?" Eva asked with slight exasperation.

Bree tilted her head. Eva had a point. Bucky saw her consideration and shook his head. "Don't you dare start rethinking life, Bree," he told her. "Just cuddle your boyfriend."

Bree narrowed her eyes at him. Before she could retaliate, Bonzo—ever the peacemaker—took her hand under the table and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

Bree didn't mind telling Bucky off, but headed Bonzo's silent advice. He liked to keep things civil between everyone rather than letting fights and arguments draw out. Bree didn't mind either.

—Eliza—

"Page 15, Section was 4, Subsection F, Part 4: Interscholastic athletics involving mixed competition is prohibited except in those instances where the member school does not offer equivalent activities for girls. In these situations, girls shall be eligible to try out in any activity
and, upon becoming a member of the team, will be eligible for NHIAA sponsored competition."
Eliza read. She looked up and pretended to think. "I'm pretty sure Seabrook High doesn't offer an
equivalent to football for girls."

Eva giggled and shook her head. "I think you're right. I guess that means I must play football."

"Perfect," Eliza said with a smile. "We can go to Zed after school to get his opinion. I'm sure he
could even train you to tackle 6'2" 200 pound guy like a fucking pro. If he's still being mopey we
can talk Zephyr into helping you. He plans on trying out next year but him and Zed and a few
others play in Zombietown."

"That'd be great," Eva said. "Who's Zephyr again?"

"He's in Bowling for Zoup. He plays guitar but not lead, because his boyfriend is lead."

"Ah."

"Also," Eliza said a little reluctantly. "It's called the New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletics

"How were you and Bucky both wrong?"

Eliza shrugged. "He's only human. I'm not, but I guess I make mistakes too."

Eva just rolled her eyes with a slight laugh. "You are too cute, Babe."

—Bucky—

It was unusual for him to find more than one letter a day. But when Bucky went to his locker after
lunch, he had a response to his question from before on the very bottom of the page.

I want you to get to know me without knowing me before you know who I am.

Bucky glanced around but the hallway was too busy to spot anyone who might have left it or been
watching. Bucky crumpled the paper a little aggressively, shoving it in the bottom of his locker. He
took a notebook out and tore a sheet of paper out, writing one word at the top: Zombie.

When Bucky checked back after his math class, he found another note. I bet you're disappointed
and don't want anything to do with me now.

Bucky wrote out a response. It didn't matter how long he would take, considering his next class
was Study Hall and he just had to flash the librarian a smile to not be marked as late.

Not disappointed. Not happy. Content. I'm willing to see where this goes, but we should go digital.
Save some trees and shit. You can email me using a secret email if you'd like, I don't care. Here's
my email.

Bucky tucked it into the vents of his locker, swapped his backpack for his gym bag, then headed to
the library. He had one class after Study Hall and it was gym, so Bucky would be fine with
browsing the shelves or going online until then.

Twenty minutes into study hall, Bucky got an email from 'treblenbass.'

—Bree—

Addison and Zed were both in Bree's last period. They usually all hung out, walking laps around
the gym or the track until the teacher was looking.

Last period gym was reserved for all athletes. Any one who played a varsity sport was placed in the class. If they were in season, they'd start early practice.

Bree spent most of last period bouncing between friend groups. They were all nice enough, but had been friends for long enough that after a few minutes Bree felt a little excluded from the conversation.

It made her feel a little sad that, while Addison was gone and Bonzo was in Learning Center, she didn't have any other friends. Bree knew she'd have to change that. She'd have to join clubs of her own interests and branch outside of their main friend group.

How hard could that be?

---Eliza---

Eliza had hunted down Zephyr and convinced him to include Eva in his training routine. Football's spring training wouldn't start until after spring break, which gave them two weeks to prepare.

Two weeks, starting right after school. Coach had given Zephyr and Zed permission to use the weight room to build strength. He had mostly given it to Zed but Zephyr was allowed to use it even while Zed was gone.

Eliza accompanied her girlfriend to the weight room, sitting on one of the benches and doing her homework.

She only managed to get through half of her math assignment before being distracted. She had never seen Eva's arms—they were always covered by loose, long sleeved shirts. And Eva was fit as fuck. She wasn't female-bodybuilder fit, but her arms were muscular and her thighs were toned and her calves were just amazing.

'Fuck,' Eliza thought.

It wasn't long before Eva and Zephyr got into a bench-press contest. Zephyr won easily, mostly because he'd been training in the weight room with Zed for weeks. But it was close. Apparently Eva had been doing some light lifting at home.

"I didn't know you were fit," Eliza complained once they were done.

"We've known each other for two months," Eva said, smiling. "It's cold! I'm gonna wear long sleeved. Does it bother you?"

"Uh, yeah," Eliza said as if it were obvious. "You're not just muscular. Zed if kinda muscular but tall and had horrible posture so you don't know until he's working out. You're clearly muscular!"

Eva laughed and shook her head. "I'm gonna go shower. I don't wanna walk home all sweaty."

She kissed Eliza's cheek then went off to the girls' locker room.

Chapter End Notes
Last year today, I was at flag football practice. And we were doing this super hard and horrible challenge and we called it Death Day. When practice ended and we all made it through, we sat down on the field and my coach asked us if we knew any at Stoneman Douglas. We all said no.

Little did we know what had happened while we had been practicing. Broward county is huge and MSD is 30 miles from my school. But it still hit home. I was terrified to go to school for the next month.

I just wanna say Happy Valentine’s Day to all, and we are all MSD Strong. Please let’s never let this happen again (because I am still afraid to go to school).

Also (and this is just story stuff) coincidentally, on this day of love, we get our first signs of Zacky! And some cute Elizaline fluff!!

Stay tuned later for a Valentine’s Day Fic!
Even though Zed complained a lot about singing, he got through recording both versions of *Someday* on the Monday of their spring break. The next day, Bucky got keys to the school and a few people to play 'extras' and they recorded *Someday*.

Wednesday they were back to recording. They stuck to recording audio while Bonzo worked with Bowling for Zoup to get the music ready for *My Year*.

By spring break, Zed was back on solid foods. He wasn't particularly fond of chewy foods or things like sprinkles, but he was back to eating pizza and scarfing down burgers. Bucky went out and bought lunch for everyone—sometimes burgers, sometimes pizza, sometimes subs; whatever Bucky was willing to buy, they would eat.

On Wednesday, Addison was accompanied by her parents to the studio. It was the last day they were recording music and Addison had promised them they could watch one day.

"I didn't even know there was a recording studio in Seabrook," Missy said.

"It's privately owned," Addison shrugged. "You guys stay here. I have things to do."

Her parents sat on the couch and Addison went to find Bowling for Zoup and Bucky and Eva and Eliza. All of them save Eliza were in the back room, which was just her luck.

Addison went inside and closed the door behind her. "Hey guys. We're gonna record *Stand* today, right?"

"Yeah," Eva said. She glanced at the members of Bowling for Zoup and asked, "You guys ready?"

They all nodded in some semblance of an order. "After *My Year*, right?" Zephyr asked.

"Yeah," Eva said. "Once the Aceys get here we can start."

"Zed isn't here," Addison pointed out.

"What? Don't you guys travel together?"

"Zed has his own life, ya know," Addison said with a shrug. "He's at Zoey's school, 'cause private school has spring break next week and he's standing in as her 'parent.'"

Eva rolled her eyes. "Let's go make sure we're all set for *My Year*.

When Addison went back to her parents, Zed was already there, sitting and talking with them. He smiled brightly when he saw her and Addison wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing his cheek.

"Hello handsome."

"Buenos dias, mi amor."

"Oh la la, I didn't know you knew Spanish."

Zed shook his head. "Do you know what they learn at that private school? They taught me one Spanish sentence. Zoey and her little friends, not the teacher."
"Do you even know what you said?"

Zed shrugged. "Something something 'my love.'"

Addison giggled and kissed his cheek. She turned her attention to her parents and said, "We're gonna record in a few. You coming?"

They did more voice recording before heading into the studio to record *My Year*. The first thing they did was match microphones to names. The music was already recorded, so the members of Bowling for Zoup got to be in the recording booth and not the music booth, which actual microphones.

The opening music was upbeat, of course. This wasn't their first time recording and knew they could dance a little, as long as they didn't stray too far from their respective microphones.

Addison sang first. "I'm fired up! Tryouts today, I'm gonna blow 'em away, yeah. Dad says I can't go wrong, no. As long as I keep this on. Oh. Seabrook's been the best like forever. Mom's counting on me no pressure. Cheer's in my family genes come on let's do this thing."

"Now what up everybody, lemme set the scene. Fresh new start for your boy young Z. Now you saw Pops for a dad he's cool. He's just a little stressed about my first day of school. They say be careful those humans can be mean, but I'm still going out for the football team. This might look rough but it's home sweet home. Just a little bit of dust and a little bit of mold." Zed rapped. "But it ain't so bad on this side of the tracks. We make it work with a little bit of swag."

"On this side we can all keep winnin', if we just try to fit in." Addison sang.

Then, both her and Zed sang, "Watch it come together. Be the best one ever, because it's my time. This is gonna be my year. Been waiting for this moment. Yeah I'm gonna own it. You can watch me shine, this is gonna be my year. My year, my year, my-my-my year."

"My year," Addison sang and Zed said right after, "My year."

"My year," Addison sang and Zed said right after, "My year."

"This is gonna be my year," Addison finished.

"Now lemme introduce you to my friend Eliza," Zed said.

"We'll never be accepted Zombies need to rise up," Eliza sang. "Fight the good fight, stand for what's right. We get the worst jobs and a curfew at night. They make us wear these uniforms that all look the same. Why's it just us being treated this way? I say we stick it to their institution. You want justice? We need a revolution!"

"Yeah, you've got a point but today's an improvement. Cuz baby steps are still movement. Hey Bonzo, come and spit a verse."

"A zig zig, quid quad, ziggy got got. Ziggity got go, zag ziggy got zone."

"he just dropped that in Zombie." Eliza said.

"Yeah, all he said is he's hungry." Zed said (Addison saw him roll his eyes too).

There was a long music break after that. Zed looked at Addison and did silly little dances in her direction, striving to make her laugh. Addison covered her mouth to stifle her giggles, not wanting
to be the reason they had to start over.

Instead she focused on the music, waiting for her cue. "My cuz, Bucky's the man. Look at how perfect he lands. Our very own cheer rockstar—"

"No more autographs. Please, stay where you are." Bucky sang with a slightly cocky smile. "Another year and I only get better. Another cheer, 'nother varsity letter."

"This year we just can't lose!" the Aceys sang.

"Well I'm gonna win, y'all can come too."

Then (finally), everyone in the booth sang together. "My year. My year. My year. My year. My year. My year. Watch it come together. Be the best one ever because it's my time. This is gonna be my year. Been waiting for this moment. Yeah I'm gonna own it. You can watch me shine, this is gonna be my year. My year, my year, my-my-my year. My year, my year."

Addison had the last line, singing, "This is gonna be my year."

The music faded out. Then after a second, Eva's voice came through the headsets. "We're clear!"

The booth erupted into cheers because to most of them, they were finally done with recording music. Addison pulled off her headphones and put them over the microphone. She turned her attention to the members of Bowling for Zoup and Bonzo and said, "Were those trumpets? Were those fucking trumpets, because that ending was fucking fire!"

Bonzo blushed a little bit and said happily, "Ga zar!"

"I think this calls for a party! We're finally done!" Lacey exclaimed.

"Um, not quite," Eva said. "Why don't you guys come out here, huh?"

Zed glanced at his girlfriend who just shrugged innocently, pretending like she knew just as little as he did. They all made their way out, and Alonzo, Zephyr, Roz, and Zach went to the adjacent booth to get their instruments tuned up.

Addison moved to stand next to Eva. Everyone was listening, but Addison focused her words on Zed. "There's one more song—my song—that I didn't tell you about in case it was a flop."

"But it's not," Bucky added. "So we're gonna record it now."

"You don't have to stay, of course," Addison added. "You could...go get lunch!"

The Aceys agreed to go and get lunch for everyone. As they left, Zed made his way to his girlfriend. "So you've got a song?"

Addison nodded a little nervously. "I didn't tell you 'cause I didn't want you to be disappointed if it didn't work out."

"What? Addy, I could never be disappointed with you. I'm your number one fan, always." he stated.

"Still," Addison said.

Zed sighed and said, "What part is it? I thought we got every song?"
"You'll know once you hear it."

"Addison," Bucky called. "Let's go."

Addison gave Zed a smile before following her cousin into the booth. Zed moves to the glass to watch his girlfriend. Her parents were a few feet away from him.

There was a musical interlude before Addison started singing. "I wanna scream top of my lungs."

Zed remembered those words vaguely. He still couldn't pinpoint a time.

"Not sitting back, won't hold my tongue. No, some things are different than we thought. There's more to life than what we're taught. I'm speaking up enough's enough. Cause' I can't go on this way. I gotta wake up and be brave. But I know I'll face the fire if I say:"

"I'm gonna stand strong, nothing's stopping me. I'll be loud, you'll hear me now. I'm gonna stand tall. Take it to the top, I'll be free, can't bring me down. So I'll rise, won't turn back, I won't hide who I am. I'm gonna stand."

Addison glanced toward Zed and saw him smiling, feeling a little more relaxed. He looked like he was liking the song which made her feel a lot happier and more confident in it. "Done living life inside the lines. Following the rules and playing nice. Yeah, I'm stepping up with all my strength, even if they think it's a mistake. Won't turn my back, I won't close my eyes.

"On the edge, I'll risk it all. It's worth the chance that I might fall. So I'm not backing down believe when I say. I'm gonna stand strong, nothing's stopping me. I'll be loud, you'll hear me now. I'm gonna stand tall. Take it to the top, I'll be free, can't bring me down. So I'll rise, won't turn back, I won't hide who I am. I'm gonna stand, yeah. I'm gonna stand, oh."

"How can I just forget all the things in my head?" Bucky sang.

"Just stand." Addison sang.

"Oh," he sang.

"You just stand."

"And if I stand, will I fall," Bucky sang. Then together, they both sang, "Trying to knock down these walls?"

"What if I don't know where I stand?" Bucky sang. Then Addison joined him. "Stand!

Addison sang the next part, but everyone in the recording booth—Bucky, Alonzo, Zephyr, Zach, and even Roz—sang harmonies. "I'm gonna stand strong, nothing's stopping me. I'll be loud, you'll hear me now. I'm gonna stand tall. Take it to the top, I'll be free, can't bring me down. So I'll rise, won't turn back, I won't hide who I am. I'm gonna stand. Yeah. I'm gonna stand."

Zed wanted to be a little bitter about Addison not telling him about the song. But then she sang the ending and he remembered exactly when it was from: he had gotten arrested, she had taken off her wig. It made sense that she didn't want anyone to know while she was working on the song; it had a deep and personal meaning to her.

It didn't make up for the fact that he wasn't just 'anyone' but he could let it slide. Besides, Addison looked so much happier than she had in weeks.
Addison looked at him and smiled even brighter. Then she pulled off her headphones, going to Bucky and giving him a tight hug. The cousins moved through the door to go join the celebrating band.

From a few feet away, Missy turned and asked Zed, "How did you like it?"

"I think everything Addison does is amazing," Zed said on instinct. He shrugged, then turned to look at her parents. "It was amazing. I love hearing Addison sing. Did you see her face? It's the same look she gets when she talks about Zombeans."

Dale nodded, both in understanding and slight confusion. "You pay a lot of close attention to Addison."

Zed smiled and shrugged sheepishly. "I love her, is all."

Addison ran out from the booth and charged at Zed. She was going at a speed that she nearly knocked him over. Zed laughed and wrapped his arms around her.

"Someone's excited."

"It went so well!" Addison exclaimed. She smiled up at him and asked, "Did you like it?"

It wasn't the same way she asked things, like she was looking for his approval. She didn't need his approval and that made Zed happy.

"Are you kidding? I loved it! How many times do I have to tell you that you're an amazing singer?"

Addison giggled and pulled away from him. She held his hand and walked over to her parents. "I hope you guys liked it," she said.

"It was beautiful, sweetie," Missy gushed.

Addison smiled brightly. "Now we just gotta do our movie magic. But Eliza's a computer whiz so I'm not worried."

"I think your family would benefit a lot from a song like this." Dale said.

"What? You guys heard it." Addison said, confused.

Addison may not have gotten the hint, but Missy did. She nodded in agreement with her husband. "Not just the song, possibly the whole movie."

Addison seemed to catch on to them. She gasped in surprise, dropping Zed's hand only to shake him by his shoulders. "Holy shit! Are you guys serious?" she exclaimed excitedly.

Missy smiled and nodded. "I'm sure we could convince them. I'll leave the plans to you."

Addison squealed and ran to them, giving them a quick hug. She turned back to Zed and grabbed his arm, urging him to the exit.

"We have so much to do!"

"I'm still very confused."

Addison grinned. "Mom says we can have a movie event to stick it to my cousins and aunts and uncle!"
May the Odds

May meant the many things. It was finally the end of freshman year, which they'd all barely survived. Eva, Eliza, and Bucky had gotten a low A on their movie project. They had turned in a few parts late and, of course, nothing was ever perfect. They weren't mad about it, mostly because it was one of the highest grades in the class. The highest score was for a movie called 'Limelight' by some senior named Molly and three other people.

Eva had shown up to football's spring training with a physical copy of the NHIAA rules and regulations. It didn't take long for her to prove to Coach that she wanted to play and there was nothing against her playing. She hung around with Zephyr and other Zombies throughout their training days.

It was the end of Bucky's junior year. People would ask him if he was ready to be a senior and graduate and he'd smile and lie, saying how excited he was to finally be graduating. Him and Addison made a list of colleges with amazing cheer programs so they could get in contact with before the next season came. They wanted the coaches and scouts to watch a performance rather than sending tapes.

It was about mid-May, Addison was in her home room with Eliza and Eva when their teacher—Mrs. Baker—called their attention. They sat right next to her desk so it wasn't like the whole class wouldn't have to listen to their conversation.

"Ladies, student government elections are coming up."

"I know," Eliza said.

"As your class moderator, I am involved with your class president and vice president and secretary. The works. And I'm not technically supposed to tell certain people to run, but I've already talked with Bree—"

"Wait, you want us to run?" Addison asked.

Mrs. Baker nodded. "My dream team is you as President, Eliza as Vice President, and Bree as Secretary. Of course, if you guys disagree—"

"Why," Eliza asked, "do you think we could work together?"

"I see you guys everyday and how you guys work together." Mrs. Baker said. "The three of you have been planning events for Zombeans."

"Oh I don't wanna be president," Addison stated. "Thank you for the consideration but…I'd be bad at it."

Eliza snorted. "You'd be amazing. I'd be horrible."

"Why do you think I said Addison should be president?" Mrs. Baker joked. "You're both incredibly smart and passionate. But Addison is caring, which you are not. Addison takes others into consideration and does her best to accommodate everyone. You're both full of ideas, yes. Addison is a people person and you, Eliza, are not."

"Oh."
Eliza glanced at Addison, who looked wildly uncomfortable with the whole conversation. "We'll get back to you," Eliza said.

"She wants you to be president?"

"That's what I said," Addison said defensively. "I'd be a horrible president."

Zed groaned and shook his head. "No, you'd be an awesome president," he said. "And I'm not just saying that because you're my girlfriend and I have to tell you nice things."

"You don't have to tell me nice things. I'm already your girlfriend." Addison pointed out.

"Still. You'd be amazing because people love you. You're nice and caring. I think it's a good idea." Zed looked at her and gouged her frowning expression. "If you don't wanna be president, don't be president."

"But if you think…"

Zed stopped and moved in front of her. Addison looked up at him, her expression pouty. "Addy, you shouldn't do something because I think it's a good idea. You should do something because you think it's a good idea."

"But…but how do I know it's a good idea if I don't get your opinion?"

"Because…because you're independent." Zed stated. "You don't need me to make decisions."

"Right," Addison said with a nod. "But…isn't the decision to make my own decisions coming from you telling me to make my own decisions?"

"Let's not overthink this!" Zed exclaimed. "Do you wanna be president?"

"I don't know!"

Zed grabbed her by the shoulders. "You need to figure it out! We will continue this later. I have to get to practice."

Addison nodded and Zed leaned in and gave her a kiss. "I'll see you later."

Zed turned and ran down the hallway; Addison watched him as he went, still with no idea what to do. She'd spent her whole life doing what other people told her to do. And now everyone was telling her to make her own decisions. That it was up to her to decide.

Addison went out to the football field and sat in the bleachers. Watching practice might help her clear her head. And if it didn't, she'd get to see Zed working out which was better.

Addison ended up making a pros and cons list while she watched practice. It was nearly a full pages by the time Zed finished on the field and in the shower. He jogged up the bleachers and plopped down next to her.

"Nice," he noted. "Made a decision yet?"

"Not at all."

"Well, you made a pros and cons list," he pointed out. "Just figure out if the pros outweigh the cons."
"There's at least four more pros than cons."

"I meant personally. Their weight in your mind. You could have one con but that con could be really horrible and the reason you don't do something."

"Oh," Addison said. "Well, they're all pretty stupid cons." She scanned over the list before adding a little reluctantly, "Except this one."

"I don't wanna be like Mom," Zed read. He looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "This seems pretty big to me."

"It is," Addison said. "She's kind of a horrible person."

Zed ruffles his own hair. "I mean, if it were me, I probably wouldn't do it. Just because of this."

Addison nodded.

"But," he went on. "You could take everything you've learned from growing up with your mom and do better. Learn from her mistakes and be amazing. Etcetera."

"That…that is a good point." Addison said. "I could do that. Plus, it's not like it's a real government position. I won't actually be like her. It's just high school."

"Mhm."

"I think I'm gonna do it."

Zed smiled at her and gave her a peck. "Now all you have to do is win the election."

Eliza became Addison's running mate, even though they technically didn't have running mates. The two of them and Bree worked together to endorse each other in their campaign.

There was four days until voting closed and they had gathered in Zed's living room to brainstorm campaigning techniques. "You've definitely got the Zombie vote," Zed told Addison. "Of all the candidates they'd want you. And Eliza."

"What about the humans?"

"You're pretty and can sing," Zed stated. "You've got blue eyes and flawless skin. Humans love you."

Addison hummed. "Gee thanks. Glad to know I'll win for being pretty."

Zed laughed and shook his head. "Also 'cause you're smart and shit. But they'll definitely vote for you because you're pretty."

Addison rolled her eyes. "Okay. Eliza's pretty by she's so gay. And very mean."

"I am sitting right next to you."

"You are very mean, Eliza," Zoey pointed out.

"Yeah Babe, very mean."

"This is not attack Eliza hour," Eliza grumbled. "We have to win."
"Guys, just relax. We're a shoe in for this. Dynamic squad." Bree shrugged. "Let's do something fun! Like plan the movie night!"

"Yes!" Zoey exclaimed in excitement.

Addison stood up from her spot on the floor (it was actually Zed's lap but it was still on the floor). "I have to get my binder from upstairs. BRB!"

Addison returned a second later with a speaker and her planning binder. She planned all her events in the same binder, separating them by the month and putting tiny as much information down as she could.

The movie day was simple. It was the day after school ended and from seven thirty until the sun set, Bowling for Zoup would perform. Then when it was dark enough, they'd set up an outdoor movie screen and play Eliza and Eva and Bucky's movie. And, like every event Addison had planned, any money they made went straight to Zombeans.

"I grabbed my speaker so we could listen to some Bowling for Soup," Addison explained as she took her seat between Zed's legs again. "Alonzo gave me a list of twenty-one songs they could perform. Twenty of them were on Apple Music, and I added in the Phineas and Ferb theme song because it's not a summer party without it."

"What Bowling for Soup?" Eva asked.

"Not important," Addison said. "It should fill an hour and change. The only problem is that a lot of the song are inappropriate. Like wildly inappropriate. And there will be kids there."

"Zed lets me go to their concerts," Zoey pointed out.

"I'm not your dad," Zed countered. "I'm your older brother who's trying to show you some fun!"

Zoey laughed and laid down across Addison's legs. "You could put warnings!" Bree exclaimed. "Like ratings! Sorry for shouting, my bad."

"You're fine," Addison said. "That's smart. When we advertise, we could do like a design where one half shows BFZ and warns for PG-13 and the other half is for the movie and says PG."

"Who's gonna get Bonzo so we can design this?" Eliza asked.

"Please. The only guy we need is Zed because he's a comfy pillow." Addison stated. "We can design a flyer ourselves."

"Girl power!" Zoey exclaimed.

"Exactly!" Addison and Zoey high-fived.

They spent the rest of the afternoon working on plans for student council elections and the movie night in a few weeks.

"Voting closes this morning."

"I know."

"Are you nervous?"
Addison nodded. "Can we just not go to school? Who would know!"

Zed chuckled and kissed her cheek. "I have practice after school. If I'm good I might be captain next season. Though I'm afraid Evangeline might take my spot."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"I'm not leaving you here alone," Zed stated. "Besides, I'm with you all day. Just you and me, Baby."

Addison pouted and turned her face into his chest. "What if you were wrong? What if I lose? What if people don't like me?"

"Then we move on," Zed stated. "Not everyone in the world will like you. But I know lots of people who do, and that should be enough."

Addison sighed blissfully. "Why do you always know what to say?"

"It's my specialty. Now get up!"

Because they were freshman, their results were announced first. It all happened over the announcements during their last period on the Friday, two weeks before school let out.

Addison had spent the morning distracting herself by promoting her charity concert and movie night. Principal Lee never gave her permission to post flyers, so she just went around and handed them to as many students as possible. Eliza shoved folded copies in lockers and Bree stuck them to the windshield of cars.

The announcements came on at the very end of the day. Zed, Addison, and Bree were out in the bleachers, listening to the announcements with their class. The gym teacher had them running laps the whole period so they were all exhausted beyond belief, too tired to talk over the announcements.

The current school president, Jenna Tyler, spoke over the speaker. "Good afternoon Mighty Shrimp! Jenna Tyler, Your President, here with the results of class elections! We've tallied the votes three times this week. We've got your student government for next year!

"As always, the sophomore class is first. You spoke, and you guys chose your secretary as…Bree Jefferson!"

There were a series of weak whoops among their gym class. Addison didn't want to move from where she was laying mostly on the bleachers but partly on Zed's lap, but have Bree a slight kick in encouragement.

"The sophomore Vice President is…Eliza Scythes!…And your sophomore class president is…Addison Davis!"

Bree patted Addison's leg and Zed pinched her cheek. "I knew you could do it, Babe."

Addison smiled tiredly and fought the urge to sleep.
The party took place in Zombietown, the same place Addison was hosting her first Zombeans event. They spent the entire afternoon putting together the stage and setting up Bowling for Zoup's equipment.

They didn't start the performance until close to eight. The sun was getting low in the sky but they waited until there was a fairly large crowd before starting.

"How's everyone doing today?" Alonzo said into the microphone, earning loud cheers from the crowd. "If you don't know, I'm Alonzo. These are my friends Zach, Zephyr, and Roz, and we are a Bowling for Soup cover band."

The crowd cheered more. It was a mix of humans and Zombies, ranging in all ages. Addison and Zed were at the donations booth a little ways lateral to the stage, enjoying the show from their spot.

"We're gonna get the night started with a classic. You all know this one, but I'm guessing you didn't know it was by Bowling for Soup." Alonzo went on. "This is *Today is Gonna Be a Great Day.*"

Addison leaned over to Zed and said, "This was the only edit I made to their set list."

"The Phineas and Ferb theme song?" Addison nodded.

"There's a hundred and four days of summer vacation, 'Til school comes along just to end it. So the annual problem for our generation, is finding a good way to spend it. Like maybe—"

"Building a rocket, or fighting a mummy, or climbing up the Eiffel Tower. Discovering something that doesn't exist, or giving a monkey a shower." Cue the guitar riffs.

"Surfing tidal waves, creating nanobots, or locating Frankenstein's brain." Another guitar riff.

"Finding a Dodo bird, painting a continent, or driving our sister insane!"

"This could possibly be the best day ever," Alonzo sang, with his three friends singing the harmony, "This could possibly be the best day ever."

"And the forecast says that tomorrow will likely be a million and six times better. So make every minute count, jump up, jump in, and seize the day. And let's make sure that in every single possible way, today is gonna be a great day!"

"Crossing the tundra or building a roller coaster. Skiing down a mountain of beans. Devising a system for remembering everything, or synchronizing submarines. Racing chariots, taming tiger sharks, constructing a portal to Mars, building a time machine, stretching a rubber tree, or wailing away on guitars."

"This could possibly be the best day ever, And the forecast says that tomorrow will likely be a million and six times better. So make every minute count, jump up, jump in and seize the day. And let's make sure that in every single possible way, Today is gonna be a great day!"

"Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Let's put our heads together and design a master plan. We may miss dinner, but I know mom will understand. We've got our mission and some pliers, yogurt, gumballs, and desire. And a pocket full of rubber bands, the manual on handstands. A unicycle, compass, and a camera that won't focus. And a canteen full of soda. Grab a beach towel,"
here we go!

"This could possibly be the best day ever," Alonzo sang, with his three friends singing the harmony, "This could possibly be the best day ever."

"And the forecast says that tomorrow will likely be a million and six times better. So make every minute count, jump up, jump in and seize the day. And let's make sure that in every single possible way..."

Before Alonzo could continue, Zephyr interjected, "Seriously, this is gonna be great."

"This could possibly be the best day ever." Alonzo sang, and Zach sang, "Today is gonna be a great day."

"This could possibly be the best day ever," they all sang, then finally Alonzo finished with, "Today is gonna be a great day."

They only had time for half of their set. They did crowd favorites like I Am Waking Up Today, I'm Gay, and Stop Doing That. They did personal favorites like Catalyst, Sometimes, Love Sick Stomach Ache, and I Gotchoo. Then they did two other songs Addison wouldn't let slide (High School Never Ends and Much More Beautiful Person).

They finished when the sky was fairly dark. "Alright, we do have much more songs," Alonzo said. "But it's getting late and I'm sure you're all dying to see the movie!"

"Oh my god," Zed groaned next to Addison. "I love Alonzo," Addison defended. "Stop judging and go help them!"

Zed laughed and moved from behind the booth. Addison followed him, making her way to the stage.

"Until next time, we are Bowling for Zoup, have a good night!"

Addison climbed onto the stage and Alonzo stepped back to give her access to the main microphone. She waited for the crowd's volume to die down before stepping up.

"Hey! So in about fifteen minutes the movie will be starting," Addison announced. "In the back we're selling food and drinks and popcorn. All money goes to Zombeans. And right over there is the donations booth if you just wanna donate more. Be back here in fifteen for the premiere of Zombies!"

The audience cheered and Addison grinned, turning back to Alonzo. "You guys are truly spectacular," Addison told him. "I think you're turning me into a Bowling for Soup fan."

"They're amazing! You'd be the most deserving fan."

"Aw!"

From across the stage, all the way at the back, Zephyr called for Alonzo. "Okay. You guys gotta set up the screen and I need to find some food," Alonzo said. "See you in...fifteen minutes."

Addison waved as he ran to join his band. Climbed down from the stage to go back to her donations booth. She was there for five minutes without any type of business before an older lady came up. "Is this where I can make a donation?" the woman asked.
"Yup. All our donations are for food, uniforms, rent. Any expenses we need to make, we need donations for." Addison explained.

"Can I write you a check?"

Addison nodded a little too enthusiastically. The lady pulled out a checkbook and began filling it out. She tipped it out and handed it to Addison.

"Oh no, this must be wrong," Addison said once she looked at the check. "Maybe you forgot a decimal?"

The lady—whose name was Nancy McAlister—chuckled. "That's correct. Fifty thousand should cover the summer, right?"

"I-This is insane," Addison breathed out. She looked up with a spacey look of wonder. "This will get us through the summer and can start us off for next year. This is perfect!"

Nancy McAlister smiled. "Do good work with those kids, and you'll see another one of those for next summer."

Addison nodded quickly. "Of course! Thank you so much!"

"It's no trouble, really," Nancy McAlister said. "I'll go pick up a popcorn. I'm very excited for this movie, sounds promising."

Addison nodded, at a complete loss for words. Nancy McAlister walked away and Addison squealed excitedly. She sealed the check off in an envelope, then into the donations box and locked it in there. Then she ran off to go find Zed.

Bucky waited backstage after the concert ended. It was good and Bowling for Zoup was an amazing band. It was part of the reason he was waiting for them to come from the stage.

Roz was first to come down. Then it was Zephyr and Alonzo, taking off their guitars and laughing and talking. Right behind them was Zach, taking off his own bass.

Bucky grabbed Zach by his elbow and pulled him to the side. Zach squeaked in surprise as Bucky turned him around to face him. "Good job out there," Bucky told him.

"Oh! Thanks!" Zach said. "I didn't think you'd enjoy it mostly because we're a Bowling for Soup cover band and even I have to admit that it's not the coolest thing ever and you're the king of cool."

Bucky chuckled a little. "Nah man, that was pretty cool. You're friends are really good, and you killed on bass."

"You're sweet," Zach said with an adorable smile. "Totally not a bitch. Not that anyone's ever called you a bitch—"

"They call me a raging bitch, a complete douche, and an insensitive asshole." Bucky interjected. "Trust me, I don't care."

Zach let out a little chuckle. "Cool. You really liked the show?"

"You in particular."

Zach made a whiny sort of noise in surprise. "Me?"
"Anyone else named Zach Fairmourn? Or, should I say, treblenbass?"

"Grut," Zach cursed.

Bucky grinned a little smugly. "I may be an insensitive asshole, but I'm not stupid. There's five Zombies who are musically gifted. You're the only single one."

Zach looked down, then back at Bucky nervously. "You're disappointed, aren't you?"

"Haven't decided yet," Bucky stated. "Not completely, at least. You're cute, to say the least."

Zach smiled. "You're cute too."

"Don't need you to tell me that but thanks." Zach laughed at that. "Why didn't you just talk to me?"

"It's not like I would have hurt you or something."

"Dude, you're scary as shit," Zach stated. "First you're the most popular person in Seabrook. Second—well I only had one point. But still."

Bucky rolled his eyes. He grabbed Zach by his collar and pulled him down, giving him a searing kiss. Zach made a noise of surprise.

Bucky pulled back and took a second to gauge Zach's startled expression, then turned to rejoin the crowd. He stopped and faced Zach again.

"I almost forgot." He pulled a marker from his jacket pocket and grabbed Zach's arm. Zach just stood there, surprised, while Bucky wrote on his arm. "That's my number. Use it."

Zach gaped like a fish, unable to formulate actual words and settling for nodding. Bucky rolled his eyes and turned away. "I can't believe I find him attractive," he muttered as he walked away.

Meanwhile, Zach stood there for another minute in complete shock. He turned around and his three friends were watching from a few feet away excitedly. They charged him, giving him hugs and high fives.

"You are so in!" Alonzo exclaimed.

Zed and Addison had reserved seats in the middle of the second row for them and some of Addison's family. He had gotten a large popcorn and candy, mixing them in with the popcorn just the way Addison liked it before finding their seats, right next to her cousins.

The last time they'd met was at the Sports Banquet and it hadn't been pretty. Zed expected the cold shoulder from them but was surprised by the warm smiles he got. "Hey man, it's been too long," Mikey, the twenty-nine year old lawyer who was Bucky's oldest brother, greeted.

"Hey," Zed said.

"How you been?" Anthony, the twenty-six year old pursuing a PhD in engineering, asked.

"Uh, good," Zed said. "Just chilling, you know. Glad it's finally summer."

"Any summer plans?" Anthony asked.

Zed shook his head. "Just football. All summer." He put his food and drinks down on his and Addison's seats.
"No vacation?" Raina, Bucky's twenty year old sister who was pre-med, asked.

"Zombies can't leave Seabrook without visas," Zed answered. "We're supposed to be working and not doing fun stuff. I mean, they can technically make me work now since I'm sixteen but since I'm contributing to society in other ways they let it slide."

"Everything you just said made me very sad," Raina said.

Zed shrugged. "C'est la vie."

"You know French?"

"I can say common phrases in other languages, just like you guys," Zed stated. "How have you guys been?"

"Also glad it's summer," Mikey answered. "I get to spend the next three months with my baby bro and my baby cuz. It's gonna be awesome."

"They're both in charge of cheer camps, dumbass," Raina said. "You won't see them once they start. Plus, Addison lives in Zombietown."

"Where?" Mikey asked Zed.

Zed turned and pointed down the street. "Z-224-A."

"Be warned we may crash your house someday this summer." Mikey told him.

"Alright."

"Zed!" Zed turned around at the sound of his name, just as Addison jumped up and threw herself at him, throwing her arms around his neck to be at face level. Before he could ask, Addison kissed him hard.

She wrapped her legs around his waist then pulled her head back, giggling slightly. "Sorry," she apologized. "Got excited."

"About what?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, that's what."

"What?"

Addison nodded and laughed a little. "Someone donated fifty thousand! It's amazing!"

"It is amazing!"

From behind Zed, one of the guy cousins cleared his throat. Zed turned so they both were facing the group of cousins, holding Addison's legs so she didn't fall.

"Hi family," Addison greeted. "Did you guys like the concert?"

"It was good. Why is Zed holding you?" Anthony asked.

"Because he can," Addison said. "Don't rain on my parade. It's a good day."

Alonzo and Zephyr can't up behind Zed and Addison. They turned to face them and Alonzo said,
"You know how Zach's been sending letters to—"

"Yes!" Addison interrupted. She gestured with her eyes to her cousins on the other side of her. It was enough of a clue for Alonzo and Zephyr, who nodded then continued.

"He figured it was Zach and went up to him after our set and they kissed and he gave Zach his number!" Alonzo rushed out excitedly.

Both Addison and Zed's jaws dropped in surprise and excitement. "Really!" Addison gasped.

"I know right!"

Over the speakers placed around the open space came the sound of someone tapping on the microphone. They all turned to look to the front, seeing the screen all set up and Bucky, Eva, and Eliza standing center stage.

"Movie starts in a few minutes, everyone please begin making your way to your seats," Eva said politely. "We have a few acknowledgements to make beforehand just in case no one wants to pay attention during the intermission or at the end."

Bucky pulled the microphone from her and added, "Yes, there's a ten minute intermission about halfway through, so you can pee and buy more food."

Eva watched him and when he finished, she put the microphone back in front of her face. Everyone made their way to their seats as Eva pulled out a notebook and began reading. "Acknowledgments. The city of Seabrook and Zombietown, for allowing us to play our movie tonight. The folks at Zombie Containment, City Hall, and Seabrook High for giving us access to footage used in the movie. Mayor Missy Davis, Chief Dale Davis, and the Zombie Patrol for being cooperative in the filmmaking process. Seabrook High for allowing us to film after hours. The Izaki Family for giving us access to their recording studio."


Eliza passed the microphone over Eva to Bucky. "The events in the movie are all based off of the actual life of Zed Necroapolis and Addison Davis. Everything in this actually happened. Except one song that was added because it was awesome and the movie deserved it. There are many, many scenes involving rogue Zombies. You have been warned."

Eva snatched the microphone from him and smiled politely. "Without further ado, we give you: Zombies."
"There's a few things you should know before we go inside," Zed told Addison.

"I've been living in your house for seven months. What more could I need to know?"

Zed raised an eyebrow, taking it as a challenge. "So Zombie Containment shuts down the air conditioning for all of Zombietown until November. Starting today."

"What?"

Zed laughed a little at her surprise. "Aren't you glad you aren't a Zombie? Because it sucks."

"That's... that's awful. And definitely illegal."

Zed shrugged. "It's more like there's inflation and it's either we pay for air conditioning and water or we pay for food and rent."

"Wait, we aren't getting water either?"

"We'll have water. Just not as much as usual." Zed said. "Ever take a five minute shower?"

"You're kidding me."

Zed chuckled and unbuckled his seatbelt. "You might get more time. I plan on using all the hot water I need at school after practice. You can take my shower time if you'd like."

Addison unbuckled her own seatbelt and turned to face him fully. "This is ridiculous. You shouldn't have to pick between your utilities. You shouldn't have to give up your water and your air conditioning to be able to afford food and a place live."

"People don't care about Zombies. This isn't anything new."

"It's not fair."

"C'est la vie."

Addison rolled her eyes at him. "I hate whoever taught you French."

Zed chuckled and kissed her nose. "It was you, silly. Let's go inside."

"In this heat? No way. It's not like we pay for air conditioning for the truck."

"Just gas."

Addison rolled her eyes again. She snaked an arm around his neck and pulled him closer, pressing a firm kiss to his lips.

Zed pulled back first and gave her a smile. "I think you'll be fine. You'll spend every weekday with your little Zombeans and I'll spend every weekday training. We literally only have to be here for dinner and breakfast and sleep time."

"And the weekends."

"We usually just hang out outside," Zed said. "There's always something going on. Plus, it's better
to be outside than inside. You could definitely use some sun."

"So could you!"

Zed laughed and shook his head. "Zombies don't tan, Babe. But I will gladly go outside with you and watch you tan."

"Watch me tan?" Addison asked with a raised eyebrow. "I bet you'd like that. Me laying out in a bikini."

"I'm just a guy," Zed said sheepishly.

"I'll allow it. But you have to be shirtless."

"Just shirtless?"

"In swim trunks of course," Addison added.

"Sounds like a date," Zed said. "Saturday. You, me, the beach, tanning in the sunlight."

"Yay," Addison said with a smile. "I have to pick out a bathing suit from my house."

Zed chuckled and turned, climbed out of the car. "Let's go!"

Two weeks after school got out was the very first day of Zombeans. Zed dropped Addison and Zoey off at the warehouse before heading to the school for summer training.

They were there a few hours earlier than they expected the other kids. Zoey and Puppy stayed in the 'lobby' while Addison and her friends set up for the day.

The kids started showing up around ten in the morning. Peggy and Malcolm checked them in and guided them into the large open space where they sat on the (clean) floor. Everyone had checked in by ten thirty, so the eleven teenagers split the kids up into six groups. Five of the groups had five kids and two volunteers. The last group was Addison and four kids.

Addison had Zoey, Zoey's friend Zola, a ten year old named Jaziel, and an eight year old named Lynzi.

"Why did we get split up?" Lynzi asked.

"It's easier to manage smaller groups," Addison explained. "We have a lot to do before we start cheering. Well not a lot, but work. Nothing too difficult."

Jaziel raised his hand politely and Addison pointed to him to speak. "Why does Zoey get to bring her dog?"

Zoey made a face at him. "Puppy can be here because there's no one at home to watch him," Addison stated. "If you guys have a similar problem, just let me know and we'll do something. Anyone else have questions?"

Zola raised her hand and Addison smiled at her. "Yes?"

"If corn oil is made from corn and vegetable oil is made from vegetables. What is baby oil made from?"
Addison just stared at the six year old, confused and without anything to say. Zoey just laughed.

"Moving on," Addison said. "First thing we need to do is measurements. The earlier we get sized the faster we can get uniforms. Then we'll figure out where you guys best fit."

"Best fit?" Jazi asked.

"If you can learn to do stunts. If you're strong enough to hold people up. All those things."

"What do you do?" Zola asked.

"I fly and I stunt," Addison answered.

"My mommy said that zombies can't fly," Lynzi pointed out.

"Not that kind of fly. Like when they toss you in the air."

"Why would you want to be thrown in the air?"

"Because it looks really cool."

This seemed to be enough of an answer for the kids. They stopped asking her questions and Addison smiled a little proudly. "First things first: measurements. We need to make sure the uniforms fit perfectly for when we order them. It takes about six weeks to get them all made but they should be here before the end of the summer."

They went through the morning itinerary, ate lunch, then did a few workouts in the afternoon. Addison figured out who could already do cartwheels and handsprings and who could be taught within the next few weeks. The children left around four in the afternoon. Addison and Zoey left after seven.

It took a week and a half to get into a good rhythm. Zed would take them in the morning then go to football practice. Addison and Zoey and the other volunteers would set up and go over the schedule for the day. Eliza or Bonzo would watch Puppy during the day. Zed would finish practice hours before Addison and Zoey finished, so he'd go back to Zombietown and hang out with his dog and his friends until Addison and Zoey needed to be picked up. They'd eat dinner then shower, then go straight to bed.
"I have practice today," Zed told Addison one Saturday morning in early July. "Coach wants us to go and check out the new field. Give it a go. Should be interesting."

Addison spun around in Zed's desk chair to face him where he sat on his bed. "Interesting?"

"We're starting official tryouts on Monday," Zed said. "Should be interesting. You got plans for today?"

"Dr. Jan suggested me and my mom do a 'day out' which is bullshit but I'm going so." Addison shrugged. "Should be interesting."

"Keep me updated," Zed said. "You want a ride to your house?"

"I love driving with you," she stated. "I'll just text my mom. Let her know."

"Okay," Zed said. He stood up from his bed and went over to his closet. "Gotta get dressed."

Ten minutes later, after Zed got dressed and they grabbed a bite from the kitchen, Zed dropped Addison off at her parents' home. "Text me when you're ready to be picked up," he told her, giving her a kiss.

"Okay. Bye Zed."

She climbed out of the truck and made her way to the front door. Zed watched her, waiting until she was inside and gave Mayor Missy a wave before driving off.

"You are quite possibly the hardest Zombie to track down."

"What're you talking about? I told you exactly where I was gonna be."

Bucky rolled his eyes and sat down next to Zach. "I had to walk here. It's so hot out there. And in here. What the hell? Are you trying to kill me?"

Zach laughed at him. "Some of us don't drive and walk everywhere," he said pointedly.

"Whatever," Bucky said with an eye roll. "Let's go eat or something. I'm starving."

Zach raised a curious eyebrow. "You wanna go get lunch with me?"

"No shit," Bucky stated. "I asked you on a date, so I obviously wanna go out with you. Maybe not in Seabrook though."

"Okay." Zach nodded and smiled. "There's a cozy little restaurant not too far from here. I just gotta take my bass back home."

"Mind if I tag along?"

"Not at all."

Zed locked his belongings in his locker, making sure to unlock the supply room and the girls'
The only other person there was Tomas Kaye. He was a rising senior and would be captain along with Zed. Of course, no one else who was trying out knew that those two were going to be captains.

"Hey Z," Tomas greeted. "If you go to the top of the bleachers you can see the whole field."

Zed whistled a little as he looked around. "I can see a little now and damn is it nice."

The bleachers were now fenced off from the field. Tomas unlocked one of the gates with his key, then unlocked a gate to get into the stands. They climbed up to the top, standing in the middle and looking over their new football field.

It was a combined football and soccer field, with the proper markings for both sports. The touchdowns were the neon pink and green dotted ombré with the big 'SHRIMP' label in the center of both. At centerfield was the Shrimp crest, facing toward the bleachers.

"I cannot wait to play on that," Zed stated. "It looks so fresh."

"It's so crisp and clean," Tomas agreed. "It's turf too! No more dirt and grass. Especially you, considering how much dirt you ate last season."

Zed rolled his eyes. "You're so funny," he said sarcastically.

"Coach said he might make us run track next year. Keep us in shape. At least we have a nice new track."

"I love this."

"They're gonna get a new baseball field and a new softball field. They're doing the gym right now. It's mostly to get more bleachers because there are rumors of you playing basketball next year."

"I hate rumors."

"We're just getting a completely new athletic complex," Tomas summed up. "This year's gonna rock. You should've done your singing-dancing shit for this year instead."

"I feel like you mention the movie every practice."

Tomas shrugged innocently. "You're a tough football guy who also doubles as a singing-dancing guy. Me no comprende."

"Give it a try sometime. It's fun."

Tomas just returned his attention to the field. "We got lights too. Games at night!"

"Oh I love being at school for that long."

"You're so negative," Tomas said with an eye roll. "I don't know what Addison sees in you."

"I'm only like this for you. You should feel honored."

"Ha ha," Tomas deadpanned.

From the locker rooms, Evangeline walked out and across the track. She stopped and looked
around, then spotted them up top. "What are you guys doing?" she screamed up.

"Looking at the field!" Zed called back.

Evangeline walked along the track, heading to go join them. They began walking down from the top of the bleachers. "You really think Coach will let her play?" Tomas asked.

"Evangeline's good. She's got the aggression for defense but Eliza would kill me if I let her play there. I'd put her on offense. Girl's got hands."

"She's a girl."

"She showed everyone the rulebook. If she can prove her spot, she can play. Point, blank, period."

They reached the bottom of the bleachers as Evangeline reached the gate. "Hey," Zed greeted. "What time is it?"

"Time for everyone to get here." Evangeline stated. "Why do you guys get here so early everyday?"

"I drive lots of people around," Zed answered.

"I saw Addison and her mom on my way here," she said. "I think they went to a brunch place. Not my business, just telling you what I saw."

Zed nodded along. "You like the field?"

"It's sexy as fuck," Evangeline said immediately. "I wanna play on this right now."

Tomas laughed a little. "You and Zed are the same, it's kinda scary."

"It's a sophomore thing," the two of them said in surprised unison. They looked at each other suspiciously, then laughed.

Tomas rolled his eyes. "You underclassman suck," he grumbled.

"You love us," Zed said.

Tomas didn't answer. He unlocked the gate and Zed and him stepped out. The three of them walked along the track and back to the locker rooms.

"They should renovate the girls' locker room next," Eva said. "It's smaller than the school's bathroom. The cheer lounge is bigger. It's incredibly hurtful."

"There aren't a lot of girls who play sports," Tomas pointed out.

"It can barely fit the softball team. I know, I was in there during softball season."

"Come on, Evangeline, you already know our class is here to shake up Seabrook." Zed said. "By our graduation, we'll have a new and improved Seabrook. Guaranteed."

Evangeline grinned and went to lean against the wall while Zed and Tomas went into the locker room. They all put on their cleats and went out onto the field, walking along the outer ring of the new field. They weren't gonna work out that day, but they did do a few circuit drills around the new field.
After an hour, they all sat down in the grass and hung out. They switched their shoes and agreed to meet for lunch at a vegan restaurant downtown.

After lunch, Zed drove Evangeline to Zombietown where she and Eliza were going to hangout (in the Power Plant, away from Eliza's family). Dinner time came and Addison got dropped off by her mom. Even though they invited her in, she didn't stay for dinner.

Later that night, after they had finished getting ready for bed, Addison and Zed sat on the floor. The house was hot and sitting on the floor felt a lot cooler than in a chair or on the bed. "What'd you do today?" Addison asked.

"Checked out the new field. Got lunch with the team. You?"

"Hung out with my mom." Addison shrugged. "She made me plan my birthday."

"Did she?"

Addison nodded. "It's a pool party at Bucky's house. I'm gonna hate it, I already know. Are you gonna come?"

"Am I invited?"

"Of course. I don't care what my family thinks, you know that."

Zed hummed. "Zoey's birthday is the next day," he pointed out. "I think she'd like to go to a pool party before…"

"I feel you," Addison said. "You and Zoey and Zevon are all invited. Bree's gonna go and maybe Eva. I might be able to convince Taylor to come too. Eliza said she would try to come and Bonzo is super excited."

Addison squealed excitedly. "And then I can finally start planning my Sweet Sixteen! I've been waiting for years to plan it! I started but my parents made me promise to wait until I was fifteen."

"I bet it's gonna be everything you hoped for. And more."

"It is! I can't wait!" Addison said excitedly. "Oh my god, now I have a boyfriend. I get to pick out your suit and you get to be involved! This is gonna be great."

"Okay okay," Zed laughed. "Calm down so you can go to bed, Babe."
A/N: Look who totally didn't miss a few posting days. I honestly just didn't feel like posting last Thursday. I was tired and...yeah. And the previous Thursday, no update here because I finally updated the band!au. But hey, if you really really love this story, check me out on tumblr. There's always sneak peaks there, including little passages and pictures and everything. Just head over to .com (slash) tagged (slash) always (dash) had (dash) a (dash) feeling. Anyway, on with chapter 29!

Zevon had to work on her birthday but would come in the late afternoon, which was better than nothing. They didn't have to be there until one anyway, even though both of Addison's parents had tried to convince her to make it earlier. She had to remind them that it was her birthday, so she got the final call.

Addison, Zed, Zoey, and Puppy sat in the truck while they gathered up their friends in the back. It started with just Eliza and Bonzo. Then they got the Styx twins, Alonzo, Zach and Roz. Zane came from his cauli-brain stand with Paizley.

All of the Zombies were excited for their first pool party. Eva, Bree and Taylor were going to meet them at Bucky's house, a few minutes after they got there to avoid having to spend time with her family.

"They're all dicks but my dad and uncle make really good burgers and you guys can definitely eat meat," Addison told them when they got there.

"They can't be as bad as Bucky," Alonzo optimistically said.

Zed chuckled. "Bucky's siblings are like Bucky on steroids," he told them.

"But the party is for Addison!" Zoey exclaimed. "I wanna swim! Let's go!"

Zed picked up his little sister and took Addison's hand. They led their group into the backyard, where you could hear music from the front yard. As soon as they were in sight, Raina screamed out, "There's the birthday girl!"

Her family cheered and Addison grinned, twirling under Zed's arms. They were clearly less excited to see the Zombies with them.

Her parents went up to them first. "Happy birthday sweetie," Missy said, giving her a hug. "Fifteen! Are you excited?"

Addison shrugged. "I'm alright! Sixteen is gonna be awesome though!"

Missy and Dale both laughed. "So who are your friends?" Missy asked.

"Cousin," Zed simplified, though it wasn't technically true. It was easier to say they were cousins then explain everything to every person they encountered.

"Well it's nice to meet all of you," Missy said. "We've got food over there and the pool. Have fun!"

Missy and Dale turned to go rejoin their family. Addison looked at her friends and smiled. "Enjoy the party! I'm going to the pool!"

Slowly, the group dispersed around Bucky's backyard. Instead of going straight to the pool, Addison went over to Alonzo and Zephyr.

"I totally forgot to mention this," she said. "Bucky's parents are…very homophobic. Obviously they can't do anything to hurt you because you can sue if they do, but I'd recommend just to tone it down a smidge. For the sake of the party."

"What?" Zephyr asked. "I think Bucky—"

"Yes, they're hoping it's a phase and that he'll end up with a pretty blonde cheerleader. I'm talking about Lacey."

"But—"

"Not my business, that's his. I just wanna make sure you guys know what to expect, and hopefully decide to keep the peace since it's my birthday?"

Alonzo couldn't help but smile a little. "Peace will be kept. Promise."

Addison smiled. "Okay, go have fun! Find me if you need anything but don't need anything."

She ran over to where Zed and Zoey were sitting by the edge of the pool. She sat down next to Zed, sticking her legs in the water.

"What're you guys waiting for?"

"Zoey's scared of the water."

Addison looked around her boyfriend at Zoey, who nodded in confirmation. "Don't worry Zoey," Addison said. "It may be a little cold, but once you're in you'll barely feel it. And me and Zed will be in the water and we won't let anything bad happen to you."

"It's so...deep," Zoey said quietly.

"I can show you how to float too," Addison said. "The only person who can actually stand in this water is Zed and his tall self."

Zoey cracked a smile.

"How about me and Zed go in first," Addison suggested. "Then you can jump in and we can have fun in the water."

Both Zed and Addison looked at Zoey, who slowly nodded. "Okay."

Addison stood up, then Zed. They walked a few steps away and to the side to avoid running into Zoey. "You gonna swim in your shirt?" Addison asked.

Zed shook his head and said, "Just minimizing damages."
He pulled his shirt over his head then grabbed Addison's hand. "You ready?"

Addison nodded, sparing a glance at the veins spreading out across his chest. "On one?"

"What!"

"One!"

They both charged the pool and jumped at the edge, hitting the water and sending a splash all over. Everyone within three feet of the pool got hit with water.

Zed and Addison were under the water for a few seconds. Addison felt her feet touch the bottom, which was a surprise considering they were in the deep end. She pushed off the ground and broke through the water first. Her hair was plastered to her face and she laughed, pushing it out of the way. Zed came up next, laughing too.

"Oh is that what we're doing?" Zach called.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Addison said, grinning and being completely honest.

"Biggest splash contest!" Zach announced.

Addison laughed, then looked at Zoey. "You coming in?"

Zoey shook her head and stood up. "Call me when your contest is over!" she called, then ran off toward Bucky.

Since Zach had made the contest, he went next. It wasn't just about splash size but also jumping techniques. Zach jumped, twisted his legs together and flipped one hundred and eighty degrees, landing in the water with his legs above his head.

It wasn't a splash as big as two people jumping at once by it was still big enough to 'annoy' Rizzo (she wasn't really annoyed).

Zach broke through the water and grinned. "This is so cool!" he announced. "Score?"

"Nice technique," Alonzo said. "Splash was alright."

"Eight and a half," Rizzo decided.

"I say seven," Zane said.

"Damn." Zach grumbled.

"I can do better," Zephyr said with a shrug.

He did do better. He jumped, grabbed his ankles in the air and did a nice front flip before hitting the water. The splash was enough to draw Bucky's attention at the outdoor patio (it didn't hit him, just got his attention). The judges gave him high eights.

None of them managed to score a nine or higher. Eliza did a simple cannonball. Roz did the same, mostly to appease her friends and their persistence that she participate.

The winner in the end was Bucky. He came at the very end, running from the deck and doing a few handsprings and flips before diving into the pool.
"Didn't think you'd join us in the pool," Addison said.

Bucky laughed and splashed her with water. "My mom was bitching to your mom about how you don't have human friends. Then your human friends came and your mom was like ha and I had to keep the peace because our dads are having a biggest dick contest at the grill."

"What the actual fuck did you say?" Zed asked.

Both humans laughed and splashed him with water. "I'm gonna go talk to Zach. For no apparent reason."

"Right. None at all." Addison hummed. "Watch out for your mom. I've warned Eliza and Alonzo and Zeph. You should know better."

"I know what I'm doing, calm down." Bucky said, then swam off to the other end of the pool.

"What did he say?" Zed asked. "There was a lot of 'your mom' and 'my mom' and blah blah blah."

"Aunt Kitty—"

"Who's name is Janet but you call her Kitty for reasons."

Addison nodded. "She was complaining about me inviting only Zombies to her house. Then Bree and Eva and Taylor came and my mom was like 'what was that?' And Bucky had to keep the peace between them because my dad and his dad are competing at the grill, which is stupid because when your dad comes he's gonna get the grill."

"Okay?"

Addison laughed and wrapped her arms around his neck. "It's stupid, don't worry about it."

"Mkay." He leaned forward to kiss her, then was hit with a jet of water. They both shrieked and looked, seeing Missy holding a super soaker.

"None of that!" she called with a smile.

Addison rolled her eyes. "It's my birthday Mom!"

"You're fifteen!"

Addison's aunt said something to her sister that made Missy's face twist in disgust. Missy actually slapped her sister across the face.

Addison gasped and pulled away from Zed. Before she could get out of the pool, her aunt stormed off and into the house.

"What was that?" Zed asked his girlfriend in confusion.

"Kitty said something that made my mom mad enough to slap her," Addison rushed out. "I'll be right back."

She swam to the edge and pushed herself out of the pool, then walked quickly to her mother.

"What's happening over there?" Zed jumped and turned to see Eliza holding onto the edge to his right.
"No idea."

"Aren't you her boyfriend?"

"I don't know everything about her and her family. It's a lot to keep up with."

Eliza laughed and shook her head. "You really plan on marrying into this family?"

Zed nodded immediately. Eliza just looked at him and he swam over to her. "You got a problem, Eliza?"

"Nope," she said. "These humans are crazy though."

"I'm not the only one dating a human," he pointed out.

Eliza sorrowfully sighed. "I wanna be with her so bad. But Addison's stupid family is fuckig homophobic. Ah who gives a fuck? I can make out with my girlfriend if I want. What're they gonna do, throw me out?"

"And clearly Mayor Missy is the scariest of the family. And she had no problem with homosexuality."

"You really think this is a good idea?"

"What kind of best friend would I be if I didn't encourage you to do stupid shit?"

Eliza laughed and shook her head. "Plus, everyone will be more focused on either my chest or all the times they'll catch me and Addison to worry about you. It's not like you or Eva are related to them." Zed added.

"Okay," Eliza said. "Um, could you help me get to that side of the pool? I don't wanna drown."

Zed smiled and held out his arm for her. He didn't need to actually swim. He was tall enough to stand at most on his toes. Eliza wasn't that fortunate and relied on Zed to get across the pool, where Eva was sitting on the edge with Zoey.

"Oh hello," Eva greeted. Eliza smiled and grabbed onto the pool wall.

Zed turned his attention to Zoey and asked, "You coming in?"

Zoey shook her head immediately. "S'too deep."

"You don't trust me, Zoe? I can help you swim and it's really nice in here."

Zoey shrugged sheepishly.

Zed sighed a little. "I won't force you if you don't want to, but you should at least try. You'll never know what it's like to swim if you don't try. You don't think Paiz was scared?"

Zoey and Zed looked to the other end, where Paizley and Rizzo and Zane were goofing off in the shallow end of the water.

"I bet she was terrified. But she trusts her friends and us." Zed went on. "If it makes you feel better, we can go to the shallow side. You can stand there and we can play in the water."

Zed nodded and Zoey stood up, walking along the edge of the pool to the three foot side.

"Zed's here to rub it in our faces that he can go all over the pool and still touch the floor!" Rizzo complained.

Zed laughed and moved to the edge. "You gonna jump Zoey?"

"B-But Alonzo said it hurt," Zoey whined.

"It stings for a little bit but the water feels really good on your skin," Zed said.

Addison finally returned, walking over to Zoey. "My mom got you these," she said to Zoey. "They're floaties. You put them on your arms and they keep you from going under the water."

"They do?"

"Yup. Me and Bucky used to use these and life jackets, because we were afraid of drowning." Addison leaned down and whispered, just loud enough for Zed to also hear, "My cousins would make fun of us and call us babies but they're just jerks."

Zoey brightened and let Addison put the blown up floaties on her arms. Addison looked back at Zed and smiled. "I could've sworn we were in deeper water."

Zed just laughed. Addison sat on the edge, then slipped into the water, floating over to Zed. "You ready to jump in Zoe?" Addison called.

"Woo!" Zane cheered. "Yeah Zoey!"

"Zoey's gonna jump!" Rizzo called out. "Bet it's gonna be the highest score!"

"Yeah Zoey!" Bucky shouted from the other end of the pool.

"Yeah Green Bean!" Paizley called. Then everyone in the pool started chanting, "Green Bean! Green Bean!"

Addison looked at Zed with a raised eyebrow but he was focused on Zoey. Zoey took a few steps back, took a deep breath, then ran toward the pool. She let out an excited shriek and jumped.

Zed found her under the water and waited for her floaties to do their job. Once she was up he wrapped his arms around her and lifted her slightly. Everyone around them cheered excitedly.

"Nice jump Green Bean," Paizley said, ruffling Zoey's hair.

"It's so cold!"

"That's definitely a ten," Rizzo said.

"Definitely," Zane agreed.

Zoey giggled and stuck her hands in the water. "Why is it so cold!"

"Aw! Come here lil' bean," Paizley said, holding her arms for Zoey.

She wasn't going to move from her spot. "Okay I'm gonna push you through the water Zoey," Zed told her.
"Okay," Zoey said a little nervously.

Zed counted from five, then pushed Zoey through the water with as much force as he could muster. Paizley reached out and grabbed Zoey's arms pulling Zoey toward her.

Zed turned to Addison who was already swimming away to the deep end where most of their friends were. "Hey!" Addison stopped and turned around, waiting for him to catch up. "What happened with your mom?"

"Kitty said to my mom that I'm probably already pregnant with a bastard half Zombie since Mom let me live in your house." Addison stated.

"Ouch," Zed said, offended.

Addison rolled her eyes. "I definitely hate that woman," she said. "But my mom slapped her and then my dad asked what happened and he refused to defend Janet and even Uncle Dylan said that Mom had the right to be offended."

Zed frowned. Addison looked at him and smiled softly. "We aren't fucking so I don't care what any of them think," she said. "Plus, we'd have awesome kids. They'd be so cute!"

"What?" Zed asked with slight amusement.

"You're cute, I'm cute. Two cuties make a whole heck of a lot of cute!" Addison said excitedly. "Blue eyes, brown eyes. Your nose, my nose. Your smile. Your hair. My hair." Addison gasped. "Candy cane stripes! Could you imagine white and green! So cute!"

Zed couldn't help but laugh. "How much time do you spend thinking about this?"

"You have a cute nose," Addison said.

"You also have a cute nose," Zed said with a smile. "But you didn't answer the question."

"When we were doing genealogy in biology," Addison said. "Your hair is green. But it's really brown. So would the baby have green hair or brown?"

"Or white."

"Or blonde or brown? Because my parents have brown and blonde hair," Addison said. "So I started mixing and matching and ended up spending a lot of time thinking about it."

"You're so cute," Zed said, leaning forward and kissing her nose.

"I wanna go hang out with my friends! As the birthday queen I demand it!"

Zed laughed. "As you wish, your majesty!"

Zach moved along the pool wall until he was next to Bucky. "Didn't see you there," he commented.

Bucky turned and rolled his eyes at Zach. "You enjoying the party?"

"Yeah," Zach said. "Though I do miss feeling the ground under my feet."

"What? You can't swim?"
Zach shook his head. "It's not really very 'Zombie' to swim."

Bucky hummed in acknowledgment. "If we weren't at my house, with my parents and brothers and sister literally watching my every move, I'd teach you."

"Maybe some other time then."

"Maybe."

From across the pool, Alonzo called, "Zach! We're gonna do a chicken fight, you in?"

"I'm so in!" Zach called back.

He looked at Bucky who laughed and shook his head. "I'll pass. Go have fun."

"Hey Addy, how did you learn how to swim if you had to wear a wig?"

"Why do you think the fence is so high?" Addison asked. "I was only allowed to swim here. Anthony became a certified swim instructor so he could teach me."

"Seems a little extra."

Addison shrugged. "If I didn't know how to swim, what would we have done after the cheer championship?"

"What're you talking about?"

"We went on a date the day after the competition," Addison explained. "We got pizza then came here. It was the first time I saw you shirtless. Remember?"

Zed thought for a second, then nodded and laughed. "I think the real question is how did you remember that much?"

"What can I say? I have good memory."

"Your name is Rizzo, right?"

Rizzo turned from the drink station, her water halfway to her mouth. "Uh, yeah? Who are you?"

"Bucky's older brother, Michael," he greeted. "It's good to meet you."

"You too," Rizzo said. "Anything you need?"

"You're kinda blocking me from a Gatorade," Michael said.

Rizzo laughed a little awkwardly and stepped to the side. Michael grabbed a Gatorade from the cooler and twisted the lid off. "So what's up? You liking the party?"

"It's fun," Rizzo said with a nod. "The only human party I've been to was that block party and Addison’s movie thing, if you can call it a party."

"Block party?"

"The last scene in the movie."
"That was real?"

Rizzo nodded. "Well, I didn't think Addison had so many Zombie friends," Michael said, changing the topic.

"I came because Paizley came and Paizley came because Zed was coming," Rizzo explained. "I mean, my brother is here but he's less of a concern. I'd rather hang out with Paizley."

"Brother?"

"He's the idiot who keeps losing at chicken," Rizzo said boredly. "On top. We're twins. I'm older."

"Cool, I think."

'What a riveting conversation,' Rizzo thought. "I must be getting back to my friends. Have fun." she said, then walked away.

Addison was right in that Zevon got control of the grill. Dale backed off once Zevon showed up and convinced his brother-in-law that Zevon deserved the grill. He didn't disappoint either.

Missy got them all out of the pool around six for burgers and ribs. After they ate, she brought out the pink and green sheet cake. It had little cheerleaders and pom-poms on it. In fancy neon green writing it read 'Happy Birthday Addison & Zoey.'

Zoey gasped in surprise when she saw the cake. "It says my name!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Someone's turning seven tomorrow," Addison said with a smile. "I wanted to make sure everyone remembered your party."

Zoey squealed and hugged Addison's legs. "Thank you!"

Missy watched the interaction, then reached for the box of matches. "Let's not light the candles," Addison said, glancing around at the crowd of Zombies. "Let's just sing, light the candles for a quick second then blow them out."

Missy nodded without questioning her daughter. She led the singing (they sang twice, once for Addison and again for Zoey). Then she put the 15 candles next to Addison's name and the 7 candles next to Zoey's. She lit them and both Addison and Zoey let the candles burn for less than a second before blowing them out.

Neither of them noticed the way that Zed and Zane blocked Paizley from the view. Or the way that all of the Zombies, especially Bonzo, tensed up at the sight of the flame. It was just a quick flicker before they were blown out though; Bonzo barely had time to react.

Paizley pushed through the wall blocking her but only saw Addison and Zoey standing up and everyone cheering.

"Cake time!" Zoey announced,
Hey, you aren't following me on tumblr? So you didn't know about the shot show that was coming, huh? Well you should get on it. Or just go to fist(it)out . tumblr . com(tagged(always-had-a-feeling) to catch story updates or pictures or anything related to Always Had a Feeling during the time that it's not being updated.

Anyway, welcome to the five part special event. Always Had A Feeling: New Girl. Oh this is gonna be fun.

"I'm gonna miss it here," Addison said sadly. "I don't wanna leave."

"We can still hang out everyday," Zed said hopefully. "And we have school on Monday. We have almost all our classes together."

Addison frowned. "It won't be the same," she complained. "Why do I have to go home? Why can't I just stay here forever?"

Zed wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head. "We'll be okay. You'll be okay. I have a phone now, we can call each other and video chat and everything."

"You always know what to say," Addison said with a sigh. "You wanna help me pack?"

"Sure thing, Gorgeous."

Zed was perfectly fine with Addison taking a whole drawer full of his shirts. She hadn't asked but he didn't say anything as she took them and put them in her suitcase. With the clothes she took from Zed, plus all the shopping she had done in the nine months of living away from home, she needed to borrow another few bags from Zed.

Zed drove her home in the afternoon. Addison ate dinner with her parents silently. She went up to her room once it got late and video called Zed.

"Hey!" Zed greeted with a smile.

Addison smiled brightly. "Hello. I miss you."

"I miss you too," Zed said. "The bed feels so big without you."

Addison laughed. "That sounds so weird. Your bed is literally a twin bed."

"I'm so used to being on my side, against my wall, leaving you as much room as you want. I don't really wanna spread."

"Me either," Addison said.
"Are we gonna hang out tomorrow?"

"My Dad is taking me shopping for back to school," Addison said with an eye roll. "I need supplies and a new bag and clothes. It's stupid but they said since I haven't been home all summer we need to cram it into tomorrow."

"Aw," Zed sadly. "So Monday then?"

"I'll ask if you can come for dinner tomorrow," Addison offered. "But yeah, probably Monday."

Zed sighed and looked at something behind the camera. Addison watched him quietly as he sat in thought; then his eyes refocused on her and he said, "Remember back in January? When you went to that sleepover and you slept in my shirts?"

"What do you think I'm doing tonight?"

Zed smiled a little, then continued. "I wish you'd left something of yours. You took my bags and my clothes and all I have is your smell on my pillows."

"I'll bring you sweatshirts on Monday," Addison decided. "They're like a large, so a little squeeze on you."

"You'd give me your sweaters?"

"Of course. You're my boyfriend."

Zed smiled softly. "I really wanna gift you a kiss."

"Tomorrow night?"

"You said your parents won't go for it."

"Screw them," Addison stated. "Come over. They won't make you go home. I'll text you when we're done shopping."

Zed grinned. "Okay."

"Do you wanna talk until we fall asleep?" Addison asked.

"Of course."

"Why is Zed pulling into our driveway?"

"I invited him for dinner," Addison said with an innocent smile. "And to hang out."

Dale frowned. "You didn't ask," he pointed out.

Addison shrugged. "I didn't think you would mind."

"I do mind. You can't spend every minute of your life with him. What about your family?"

Addison folded her arms over her chest. "If I wanna spend every minute of my life with Zed, then I can. What are you gonna do about it? He's already here!"

They both stared at each other challengingly. It lasted a few seconds before Zed knocked on the door; Addison smiled, went and opened the door.
"Long time no see," Zed joked.

Addison giggled and jumped up, wrapping her arms around his neck. Zed laughed and held her by her waist, giving her a chaste kiss.

"I've missed you," Addison said as he put her down. "Come inside. We're sorting school supplies."

"Okay?" Zed laughed a little and stepped inside, closing the door behind him. They walked from the doorway to the kitchen, where Dale had moved and emptied all of their shopping bags.

"Afternoon, Chief," Zed greeted. "It's actually been a long time."

Dale forced a smile and held out his hand for Zed. "What brings you here? Shouldn't you be getting ready for school tomorrow?"

After Zed let go of the chief's hand he said, "Nope. They give us stuff tonight. All the leftover or damaged supplies and stuff. It's all free so, I'm not complaining." Zed shrugged. "This is…a lot."

"I had to buy clothes too," Addison said. "Have you read the new handbook? It's insane!"

"Principal Lee and the school board are one hundred percent talking about you," Zed stated with a laugh. "You just stopped wearing pink and blue. And now we have uniforms. Well I've always had to wear a uniform but now you have actual dress code. Which is bad. Lack of freedom per say."

"You done?" Addison asked with a teasing smile.

"Har har. Yes I'm done."

"Well," Dale said, standing up. "I will leave you two to it. Get some work done. Let me know when your mother is home or when your boyfriend leaves."

He left the kitchen, heading upstairs to his office. "Don't mind him, he's just moody 'cause I didn't tell him you were coming today."

"Okay," Zed nodded. "So what should we do first?"

Zed felt so weird without Addison there. His family continued on as if nothing had changed; the only person who seemed to miss her as much as he did was Puppy.

He had to keep reminding himself that he'd see her at school the next day. And that he'd just gotten back from her house. His curfew was only midnight and he had a car and a license. They could hang out whenever.

It didn't change the fact that he didn't feel up to doing anything at home. It all felt like a chore: showering and brushing his teeth and sleeping. It was all just filler until the next morning and then he'd get to see Addison again.

He couldn't sleep though. He felt anxious and alone and oddly worried in his own home. Every time he looked at the clock it had only been a few minutes. The night dragged on and on, time practically mocking him.

By the time the sun was up he had had enough. He got dressed and left at the crack of dawn, going for a run through Zombietown…and maybe a little of Seabrook. Definitely not to see Addison though. She wouldn't be up for hours. Just to clear his head and do something aside from waiting.
He had never gone running in the morning before and nearly trampled over another runner—a girl, maybe around his age. They both nearly fell. "Woah! Sorry!" Zed apologized immediately.

"No, it's my fault," she said. She had red curly hair and brown eyes and was tan and tall. She smiled up at him. "Woah, you're a Zombie."

Zed laughed a little awkwardly. "Yup. I'm Zed."

"Ava," she greeted. "I moved here a few weeks ago. My neighbor said there were Zombies roaming around town but I didn't think he was serious. Cool."

"Thanks? I think."

She laughed again. "You're funny Zed. And sorry if I messed with your running route. I was nervous—first day at a new school."

"No trouble. I don't ever run in the morning. Plus, I know how it feels. I remember my first day at Seabrook High. It was...a mess."

"Wanna walk and talk?"

"Sure. That'd be cool."
First Days

Chapter Notes

A/N: Ha ha, welcome back for part two of the mini story: New Girl! We are also at the halfway point of Always Had a Feeling! Yep, there are gonna be 60 chapters in this bad boy. But hey, I may do a sequel, I may not do a sequel.

Back to the mini story. I bet you're all excited to get more of Ava, who in no way should be confused with Eva, Eliza's girlfriend. Just clearing that up. Anyway, enjoy part 2!

The first day of sophomore year. No fence separating Zombies and humans. No cheerleaders trying to keep Addison and Zed apart. Hopefully Zed wouldn't hack his Z-Band again and they could keep the peace.

Bucky had told Addison how lame sophomore year was. It was uneventful and boring and it would probably pass with nothing happening. Plus, he was a senior now so he thought everything at school was lame except for cheer.

Like always, there was a pep rally at the end of the first week. Then there was a football game that afternoon—the first home football game on the new field. No one was allowed on the field aside from the football team.

Monday morning, Zed went and picked up Addison from her house. Addison knew he was coming from Shoreside because he had to drop off Zoey, which explained why he hadn't taken any of his friends to school.

"Morning Gorgeous," Zed said with a smile.

Addison smiled back and climbed into his truck. "Hey Handsome." She closed the door and scooted close to him, pecking his lips. "Ready for school?"

"This year is gonna be epic!"

Addison laughed as he pulled into the street. "We have almost matching schedules so I get to see my amazing girlfriend all the time." Zed went on.

"Except for the no PDA rule. We could get written up if we're caught kissing during school hours."

Zed raised an eyebrow and smartly said, "Better not get caught then."

They had been in homeroom for a few minutes, scooping out who else was in there. They already knew that no one from their inner circle of friends was in there, but were looking for more secondary friends.

"Oh my god, Zed?"

Addison looked up at the unfamiliar voice. Some girl was walking over to where her and Zed were
sitting. She was grinning at Zed; her pink shirt and skirt were also showing off her ass and boobs and making Addison jealous, especially with the way that Zed was smiling at the new girl.

"Ava, hey," he greeted. "Strange seeing you here."

The girl—Ava—laughed. It was awfully cute, especially the way her dimples became more prominent and her nose scrunched up.

"Oh! Ava, this is my girlfriend, Addison. Addison, this is Ava. We met running this morning."

"Running? Since when did you go running?"

"It's a long story," Zed said. "Sit with us. We're people watching."

"Sounds fun." Ava said, sitting in the empty desk next to Zed.

People watching had been fun until Ava showed up. Soon it turned into Ava and Zed talking and Addison feeling extremely excluded.

The bell rang and their teacher droned on about her responsibilities as a homeroom teacher. Addison didn't pay attention to it; instead she pulled out her student government binder and went over the plans for their first big event of the year: the pep rally on Friday.

Once the bell rang Addison closed her bag and stood up. She turned to Zed who looked from Ava to her. "Hey Addy, would you mind if I walked Ava to her class? She's new and all and I wouldn't want her to get lost."

Addison put on a pleasant smile. "Sure. I'll see you later?"

"Yeah." Addison stood on her toes and Zed bent down and they kissed for a second. Zed pulled back first. "Don't get us in trouble, now," he said in amusement.

Addison giggled and shook her head. "Have fun in art!" she called as she left the classroom.

"Who's that busty redhead hanging around Zed?" Eliza asked.

Eva raised an eyebrow. "Busty?"

"Have you seen her, Babe? No way is she in high school. Her tits are huge."

"Her name is Ava," Addison said venomously. "And they met while running this morning."

"Since when did Zed go running in the mornings?"

"That's what I said!" Addison exclaimed. "And she laughs at all his jokes, totally excluded me from the conversation that I started, and she's hot as hell!"

"Keep your eyes on your man," Eliza said warningly. "I find her hot, you find her hot, so he finds her hot. I don't wanna see things go south between you two, okay? Give me the word and I'll make sure this 'Ava' girl doesn't bother us for the rest of our lives."

"No, Eliza. As much as this pains me to say, I trust that Zed knows what he's doing. He's just being nice."

"Whatever you say."
Like the year before, Addison had gym last period. Unlike the year before, Zed didn't. It wasn't important now, because she had a student government meeting and then she had to run back to the gym for cheer practice.

Surprisingly enough, Bucky had promoted Stacey and Tracey (who were seniors with him) to captain, and made Addison and Jessica assistant captains with Lacey.

"Legacy," Bucky said. "In the wise words of Lin-Manuel Miranda, it's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. As you can see, we're building the Seabrook cheer programs legacy. We've got three new freshmen recruits, three transfers, and about eight Zombies to replace the nine seniors we lost last year and members who didn't return. I have handpicked the captain for next year—Lacey, and her two assistant captains. I am building a legacy."

Addison felt a little bad for the freshmen who weren't used to Bucky's dramatics. Tryouts had been a month before the first football game and they had performed at the first three games. But this was their first taste of the true Bucky.

"Welcome to your first day of high school," he went on. "It only gets worse from here. Figure it out right now if you can't handle high school and this team. I don't take quitters. We are cheerleaders. Everyone who is here wants to be here. Are you with us?"

It was silent as Bucky walked between the lines. "Answer my question!" he snapped.

There was a chorus of answers all saying the same thing: they all wanted to be there and were willing to work for it.

"That's cute," Bucky laughed humorlessly. "I'll believe you for now. We have two major performances this week. The pep rally Friday afternoon, and the first home football game. We need two new and unique routines, one for each. So guess where you'll be during your last period everyday?"

Bucky pauses for effect, then said, "Here in the gym, until five. If you aren't up to expectations don't expect to go home."

He moved to the front of the lines and looked around. "Let's get started, shall we?"
Zed and Ava got very…close during the first week of school. Closer than Addison would have liked. Like, every time Addison passed his locker, he was talking and laughing it up with her. He even sat with her at lunch. He enjoyed it too, by the way he was grinned and laughing and waving his hands around as he talked.

Sure, she understood. Zed was a nice and friendly person all around.

But then he hugged her and all the gears in her head stopped trying to make sense of anything. Ava was in a lot of their classes and occupied all of Zed's attention. She never even addressed Addison anymore. She was every guy's dream, and she was swooping in on Addison's man.

Addison tried her best not to make a big deal out of it. Zed talked to everyone, and would sit with anyone and laugh with anyone. He didn't hug anyone—especially the way he hugged Addison (and now Ava)—but it could just be her imagination running wild.

Things changed when she saw them talking before the football game. She hadn't spoken with her boyfriend—just the two of them—since Ava came in the picture. And now she was stealing away their pregame time.

From behind her, one of her fellow cheerleaders asked, "Did you guys break up?"

"No," she stated angrily.

He whistled behind her. "Looks like him and Ava are getting pretty close."

"No shit, Bryan."

Then she got a crazy idea. She never would've thought of doing it, if she wasn't so…she didn't want to say she was jealous, but she was so jealous.

She looked behind herself and gave Bryan a slight smile. "Hold my hand so he gets jealous."

"What?"

"You can kiss my cheek for good measure too if you'd like," she added. "Just...help me make him jealous, please?"

Bryan thought for a second then nodded. He grabbed her hand and gave it a tight squeeze and smiled. "Let's do it."

It definitely worked. As they walked past, Zed stared at them and their intertwined hands. He barely even paid attention to whatever Ava was saying. It was all going perfect. Zed was decently jealous and confused, which made Addison a lot less jealous.

After a second Zed snapped out of it though. He didn't excuse himself from Ava before walking over to stand in front of Addison and Bryan. And he looked angry.

"What's this?" Zed asked, shifting his gaze at their still linked hands.
"Bryan was walking me to the field," Addison said. Then, to prove a point, she added, "Usually my boyfriend does that, but he seemed a little preoccupied."

Zed narrowed his eyes, then glared at Bryan. With his arms folded over his chest, he said to Bryan, "Scram."

Bryan lost any type of confidence and dropped Addison hand. "See you guys on the field."

Bryan ran off toward the field on that note. "Well?" Zed asked. "Care to explain why you were holding hands with whoever that was?"

Addison crossed her own arms. "Care to explain why you were hugging the transfer student?" she asked challengingly.

"I gave her a hug, I give lots of people hugs," Zed stated.

"You don't go around hugging hot girls the same way you hug me, your girlfriend."

"I was being nice and friendly," Zed stated.

"You're being an ignorant dick. You haven't talked to me all week, Zed."

Zed scoffed. "Yes I have," he protested.

"Without Eliza and Bonzo and Bree around?"

"Well..."

"You don't wave to me or even acknowledge me in the hallway, you don't sit with us at lunch. You ignore my texts and flaked in the Safe Room on Monday. You don't walk me home anymore or even give me any type of attention." Addison sighed defeatedly. "I don't feel like your girlfriend. I don't even feel like your friend. Just...just someone you pass in the hall."

"Addison..."

"I gotta go," she stated, not looking up to meet his eye. "Good luck on your game I guess."

Addison walked past him, her shoulder running into his, and marched off toward the field. Zed turned and watched her as she left, staring hopelessly.

"What was that about?" Ava asked.

Zed didn't look back at her. "I'm losing my girlfriend," he whispered.

He ran after Addison. As soon as he was out by the bleachers though, one of his teammates grabbed him by his arm and dragged him back to the locker room. "No more canoodling Addison, we need your magic pep talks Captain."

Coach had taken Zed out before the first quarter even ended. It was like their first game the year before all over again, except the rest of the team could pick up Zed's slack.

Coach didn't even waste his time lecturing Zed. They were down nineteen points and if they didn't score they'd be mercied. Of course, they had until the third quarter to score but they wanted to win.

They didn't even pay him any mind during their halftime game plan. Zephyr had managed a
touchdown during the first quarter and Gavin got a touchdown on an interception.

There was still a few minutes before they had to be back on the field during halftime. They were chilling outside of the locker room, because it was where they could all talk since Evangeline wasn't allowed in the boy's locker room.

"What's up with you, man? Why are you sucking so bad?" Evangeline asked.

"Addison is mad at me," Zed said. "She's gonna dump me, again, and it's all my fault, *again*. God I'm so fucking *stupid!*"

"Woah! What happened?"

"I've been stupid and a bad boyfriend all week and I didn't even notice cuz I'm so fucking stupid."

Evangeline nodded in understanding. "Just, as soon as you get the chance try talking to her. Addison is a reasonable girl."

Jamari snorted and turned to join their conversation. "You know they broke up last year, Evangeline."

"What?"

"Zed got the two of them arrested and he was lying and shit so Addison dumped his ass." Jamari explained.

"Can we not talk about it?" Zed asked.

"Zed played his worst games during the period they were broken up. Worse than today. But Coach let him play longer last year."

"I will kill you," Zed warned.

"Not my fault you don't know what you've got until it's gone," Jamari shrugged. "You always fuck up with Addison. I'm surprised you guys made it this long."

"Dude," Evangeline warned. "Not helping."

"Addison's a catch and we all know Zed can't hold on."

Zed stood up and walked away from the group, heading to the locker room. He heard them calling after him but he ignored it, going inside and heading to his locker.

Jamari was right. He didn't deserve Addison, he knew it. He'd known it all along. She was amazing and perfect and everything to him and he was being so stupid. But he thought she wouldn't mind if he was helping out a new student. He thought he was just being nice, but he hadn't noticed that he was hurting their relationship.


"I can't play Coach! Sorry!"

He jogged toward the field, heading to where the cheerleaders were watering up. Addison was easy to pick out—she was the only cheerleader with white hair.
"Addison!"

She turned at the sound of her name and looked at him in surprise and confusion. "Zed? Why aren't you in uniform?"

Zed stopped in front of her. "I can't play today knowing that you're mad at me. And I'm not saying this so you can feel bad because you have every right to be mad at me. But I just want to talk with you. Please."

The official blew the whistle. Addison looked at the field, then back at Zed. "Zed, you're just gonna abandon your team? I have to perform, and you should get out of your head and be there for your team."

"I can't, Addison." Zed looked at the field and sighed. "If you're willing to hear me out, I'll wait for you in the Safe Room. After the game."

"Isn't the school locked?"

"You've got a key and I've got a key. Don't worry."

Zed spent the next forty minutes pacing the length of the Safe Room. He didn't know what he was going to say or if Addison would even show up. She didn't have to and he wouldn't blame her for not showing up either.

The sound of the Safe Room door opening drew his attention up and he watched as Addison walked over to him.

"I'll hear you out, Zed," she said. "Go ahead."

"Thank you," Zed said. "Listen, Addy, I'm really sorry that you felt like I was ignoring you or that I was interested in Ava. I was just trying to be nice to her. She just moved here a few weeks ago and I didn't want her to have a horrible first week. I was just trying to be nice. I didn't want her to feel alone here, ya know?"

Addison nodded slowly. "Yeah. That's what I thought. I know you're just a nice guy and you're friendly. It's just how you are. It's your nature to make everyone feel like they matter and shit. I don't care who you're friends with, Zed. And I'm not asking for you to just do everything with me. I just... I shouldn't go a whole week where you basically ignore me."

"I know, and I'm sorry," Zed said. He reached out and slowly picked up her hands, waiting for her to protest which she didn't. "Addy, it's been really hard adjusting to you not being around all the time. I miss you being at my house and hanging out with you."

"So missing me makes it okay for you to go and find another girl?"

"No! No, it doesn't. What I'm saying is that I was missing you and then I met Ava and we bonded because we were both missing someone. But I should have realized that you were always right here, that I could just go and find you. I can make friends and tell stories whenever, but you're here right now. And I should be focused on that."

Addison gave him a little frown. "Where did she move from?"

"Florida," Zed said. "She misses her friends and her family. I just didn't want her to be lonely."
"I understand," Addison said. "Do you understand that I'm fine with you guys being friends? As long as you're only friends."

"We're only friends, trust me. And I'll stop with the hugs if you want."

"That'd be nice."

"And you get all my pregame attention. Aside from the team." Zed said.

Addison smiled a little. "That sounds good."

"So we're good? You're not mad at me?"

Addison shook her head. "It's hard to be mad at you. You're so sweet."

"You're amazing," he said. "Let's go on a date tomorrow."

"Oh?"

Zed nodded. "I've got an idea of what we should do, but I'm gonna surprise you."

"You've already got an idea?"

"Yep! And you're gonna love it. Trust me Gorgeous."

Addison giggled and squeezed his hand. "I trust you. I always trust you, Zed. That's why I'm fine with you being friends with that whore."

Zed made a face of disgust. "Why are you calling her a whore?"

"Have you seen her? Her tits are huge, like a whore."

"First, why are you looking at her tits? Should I be worried about you cheating?"

Addison rolled her eyes. "I'm just observing."

"Uh huh. And it's not like she did it on purpose. That's just how she's developed." Zed shrugged. "You're the only person I have eyes for. I'm only looking at your tits."

Addison rolled her eyes and pulled her hands from his. "I'll fight you," she warned as she headed for the door. Zed laughed and grabbed his bag. "Will you drive me home?"

"Of course. Come on!"

Chapter End Notes

He he he. You think it’s over don’t you? There’s still one more chapter in this mini series friends. Hehehe
Chapter Notes

Well here it is, the final part of the mini series within a series, New Girl.

Enjoy this, friends.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So let me get this straight. Zed is friends with this busty transfer, and they're so close that you thought he was cheating. You guys talked and now Zed gets to continue being friends with her as long as he keeps giving you attention?"

Addison nodded. "A few other things but yeah, that."

"You're insane."

"I trust Zed," Addison stated. "He's faithful. He wouldn't cheat. Would Bonzo?"

Bree gasped at her. "Of course he wouldn't! He's so sweet and caring!"

"Exactly my point," Addison said. "Zed is sweet and caring. We went stargazing on Saturday. He's so cute."

Bree hummed in agreement. "Hey, do you want some candy? It's really sour so I'm not a big fan."

"Sure. What flavor is it?"

"Lime or something. It's green is all I know."

Addison shrugged and Bree handed her the bag of candies. Addison ate a handful and grimaced at the taste. "This is sour. Damn."

Bree laughed as they rounded a corner. They both stopped as they saw what was going on: Zed was being pushed against his locker by Ava and she was feeling him up. Addison's vision tunneled and she surged with anger. All she could think about was how much she wanted to gut the transfer; Zed got lucky that it was very obvious he was trying to push her off.

Addison stormed over to them, forcing herself between Ava and Zed. She pushed Ava harshly, then turned and swung a fist at her jaw. Ava's head gave a satisfying 'snap!' and Addison growled a little. She punched Ava again, sending her to the ground.

"Addison!" Zed grabbed her from behind, lifting her off the ground.

Addison kicked in protest. Her brain was foggy, filled with anger and a strange feeling of bloodlust. She wanted to make Ava bleed, crack her skull open, do anything to make her suffer. She couldn't think of actual words, only focusing on hurting Ava for trying to take what was hers.

Addison managed to slip out from Zed's arms and gave a hard swing of her foot into Ava's
stomach. She didn't care about the growing crowd and focused on beating the shit out of Ava.

Zed grabbed her again. This time he held her arm tightly; Addison shrieked as she felt a surge of electricity coarse through her veins. She could hear Zed holding back his own scream behind her.

Addison blinked as the electricity faded; her mind cleared like the dam holding back all her thoughts was finally released. She felt sensitive to the light and crumpled onto the ground, Zed behind her.

Addison looked at the scene she'd created: Ava was lying on the ground in the fetal position, cradling her bloodied face. It was disgusting and Addison would get in so much trouble. But she was surprised she even managed to get that result with two punches and a few kicks.

Addison turned back and look at Zed, who was crouched over, holding his stomach in pain. She must not have realized she had hit him in her blinding rage.

Then teachers and Principal Lee came and broke apart the crowd. Addison looked at her bloodied hands as she was forced to her feet and ushered away. She looked back and saw Zed being taken away too, and Ava being helped to her feet and walked to what she presumed was the nurse's office.

Addison's parents were furious. They were called down to the school on account of Addison getting into a fight. "What were you thinking!" Dale shouted furiously.

"I-I don't know! I was just so angry and...I'm sorry."

"Sorry!" Missy scoffed. "Sorry can't even begin to cut it! Aside from how bad this looks on us and the rest of the family, you committed a crime! You could be arrested, again!"

Addison looked down at the ground in shame. "I know."

"You assaulted someone over a boy!" Dale shouted furiously.

"She deserved it!" Addison protested.

"I don't care if she deserved it or not," Missy snapped. Addison ducked her head down again.

Missy sighed. "Do you only act up when you're with us? Is that what is it?"

"No!" Addison stood up.

The door of Principal Lee's office opened and Zed walked in. "Oh great. It's just the guy we wanted to see." Missy complained.

"Give me one good reason to not end this right now," Dale threatened.

Zed held his hands up in defense. "Excuse me. I stopped Addison, if you're all forgetting. She went all Zombie which is not what I was expecting."

"What?"

"Addison can't go Zombie—"

"I can't go Zombie! I'm not a Zombie!"
"That's what I thought!" Zed said. "Addy if you saw yourself you'd believe me. I had to force you into a Z-Shock."

"What?"

Zed nodded. Addison frowned and folded her arms. "I think we should be focusing on what the fuck was going on between you and Ava?"

"No! You're relationship drama is on hold because we're waiting to find out if the girl you attacked is going to press charges!" Missy interrupted.

Zed didn't listen to her though. "If you wanna know before you go blindly attacking people, I was explaining to Ava the boundaries of my friendship with her."

"Oh really? That didn't look like just explaining."

"That's because you were right, obviously! You're always right! She wanted to do…inappropriate things with me. I told her no, obviously, because I have a girlfriend."

Addison shifted on her feet. She had a bad feeling that she knew where this was going and she wouldn't like it.

"And then you come in swinging like a psycho," Zed told her. Zed shook his head. "I have to go. Find me when you're ready to talk, like normal people do."

Addison wasn't the only problem Zed had to deal with on Monday. He hadn't faced the repercussions for skipping out on the game from Friday yet, considering it was Monday morning. Zed was pretty pissed off with Addison but knew he had to be respectful for his coach. Zed got called out of his next period to meet with Coach in his office.

"I don't even know where to start with you Zed," Coach said. He sighed and shook his head. "Tell me what made you think it was okay to leave in the middle of a game?"

"I don't have an excuse," Zed said. "I was a bad captain. I left the team when they needed me and didn't show any leadership skills, I'm sorry."

"Sorry can't even cover it, Zed," Coach said. "If this is how you act when the slightest thing goes wrong in your personal life, I don't think there's a spot for you on my team anymore."

Zed gave him a look of horror. "No, no. I can do better, Coach, I swear. Punish me any way you want just please don't kick me off the team."

"What are your priorities?"

"What?"

"Tell me, honestly, the ranking of your priorities. Right now."

Zed sighed and sat back in his chair. He thought for a minute, then said, "Family. Addison. Football. School."

"In that order?"

"In that order."
Coach sighed. "I'm putting you on probation. You'll currently be relieved of your title as captain, and you're a second substitute in the lineup."

"That's it?"

"No. You'll be doing more...in practice. You'll find out then."

"Okay, thank you Coach."

"Yeah yeah. Get back to class."

Zed went back to Principal Lee's office during lunch. Addison and her parents were still there. Addison was sitting in the corner pouting, while her parents were sitting across from Lee's empty desk, both on their phones. All three looked up when they heard the door.

"You again," Dale said. "Why are you here?"

"It's lunchtime," Zed said. He looked at Addison and said, "I'm supposed to eat lunch with my girlfriend."

Addison slouched down in her chair. "I can't leave the office."

"I kinda figured." Zed said. He walked over and sat in the chair next to her. "Zoey packed me lunch. Half is for you, as usual."

"You don't have to keep feeding me lunch," Addison grumbled.

"I know."

"Why are you even here? I'm psychotic and will probably be expelled. I'm irrationally jealous and always jump to conclusions and—"

"Addison, the only thing that keeps me from attacking any person I catch flirting with you is my Z-Band. And trust me, a lot of people flirt with you."

"But it's not like you've ever hurt someone," Addison grumbled.

"If I were to hurt someone I'd get in real trouble and this—" he gestured between them, "would be over. Trust me. I would gut some people the way they look at you."

"So...you're not mad at me?"

"I'm feeling a lot of things," he said. "I'm surprised you actually beat her up. I did not think you had that much strength."

Addison laughed and sat up a little. "What did you say? I went 'Zombie' even though that's physically impossible."

Zed laughed and put his bag on the floor. He reached in and pulled out his lunch bag. "We'll ask Eliza and see who's right."

"I'm definitely right."

"No I am," Zed said. "You weren't exactly Zombie but you weren't human either. It was weird."
"Well I did have some very tasty, limey candy before. Bet it activated my 'inner-Zombie.'" Addison joked.

"Hey, you know that's super offensive, right?" Zed teased.

Addison laughed. Zed smiled and opened his lunchbox, handing her the container full of fruit. "We still have a lot of your breakfast left in the freezer. So expect a lot of these gross bowls of fruit. Still cold because of an ice pack."

"Aw, thanks."

"So what's gonna happen with Ava?"

"I'm gonna assume you're talking about busty Ava and not fun Eva."

"Evangeline?"

Addison nodded. "Anyway. They called the paramedics. Broken nose, broken jaw, probably bruised some internal organs. The works."

"Ouch."

"Principal Lee says that I'm suspended indefinitely. They have 'cause for expulsion' but hopefully nothing too bad happens."

"I also hope you don't get expelled. Sandwich?"

"No thank you."

"I'm sorry," Missy said, turning to face them. "I don't understand what's happening here."

"We're eating lunch," Addison simply said. "Do you and Dad not have lunch dates?"

"It was my understanding that both of you were extremely upset with the other," Missy said.

"We talked it out," Zed said. "Had some time to cool down, got our thoughts together. Apologized. We're good now, so we eat lunch as a peace offering."

"But...you can't just solve everything at once."

"Mom, we're not gonna drag this out over days. We talked. We've reached an understanding. We're good."

"Yep. No more beating people up and no more letting girls flirt with me." Zed said. "We're good."

"You teenagers are so weird."

One of Seabrook many anti-Zombie laws was that Zombies weren't allowed in hospitals. And even after everything that happened, both Zed and Addison wanted to know how Ava was doing.

Zed had to sit across the street (the law said he had to keep more than a fifteen foot radius or he'd be off to Containment) and wait while Addison and her parents went to visit Ava.

They were gone for about fifteen minutes. Zed played games on his phone that he'd downloaded for when Zoey was bored. They were pretty interesting and intense and he couldn't even reach
Zoey's high score.

"Zed!" He looked up and saw Addison running across the street.

"Drogi Z! Don't run across the street!" Zed stood up and shouted.

Addison laughed as she stepped up onto the sidewalk. "What does that mean?"

"Dear Z. Don't run across the street, okay?"

"Yes, of course," Addison said. "Come on, we're leaving."

"How was Ava?" Zed asked.

"Angry. She tried to fight me." Addison rolled her eyes. "But she agreed to not press charges or anything so long as we pay her medical bills. It's a good thing my parents have separate bank accounts."

"What? How did you get to that?"

"Thinking about the big scandal if people investigated my mom and saw how much she randomly dropped, out of nowhere."

"You have a random train of thought, you know."

"You've told me that before."

Zed laughed and laced their hands together. "You know I love you, right?"

"I love you too." Addison said. "Here comes my dad."

Addison had called Zed over to her house that Saturday. When he got there, her dad made Zed swear to secrecy before he let Zed in. Addison thought it was stupid but it was their house so they got to make the rules.

Addison was sitting in the kitchen when her dad and Zed approached. Zed raised an eyebrow at her and asked, "What's going on?"

"You were right," Dale said. "Addison was... she was in a state of Zombism when she attacked Ava."

Zed raised an eyebrow. "Oh? How'd you figure that out?"

"A DNA test," Addison answered. "Apparently everyone on my mom's side carries dormant Zombie genes. That become... not dormant, when we eat something with lime. Now my mom is crying in her room."

"Addison."

Addison shrugged. "Shouldn't you be up there comforting her instead of being a helicopter?"

Dale pursed his lips, but moved to the stairs to go find his wife. Addison rolled her eyes once he was gone. "He's so weak," she muttered. Then, to Zed, she said, "All of this is off the books so you can't tell anyone."
"Does Bucky know?"

"No way! We're keeping this between us. My mom doesn't want anyone to find out. Especially her sister and especially Bucky."

"Okay," Zed said with a nod. "So what am I supposed to do with this information?"

"I don't care."

And that was that.

Chapter End Notes

So…what’d you think? I liked writing this, ya know. I like writing tough Addy. She’s fierce, it’s fun. And oh the things you can do with money…

Anyway, leave a review!
Because of all the money they raised during homecoming week, they got the entire week of Thanksgiving off. Addison had spent Monday and Tuesday hanging out with Zed. Then on Wednesday she had to go to Bucky's house to help start prepping for Thanksgiving. This year it was held at Bucky's house.

They had made an agreement that Zed and Zoey could come for dinner. The invitation was extended to Zevon too, but as an adult Zombie he was required to work on major holidays.

Thanksgiving was on Thursday though. Until Thursday, Addison was stuck with her cousins in their overly large house, prepping food. After lunch, Bucky pulled her aside and up to his room.

"Whaaaat do you want?" Addison dragged out, clearly annoyed. She just wanted to hang out with her friends and not her annoying family (Thanksgiving had bad memories).

"I need your help," Bucky said. "I need to sneak out."

This got her attention. "Sneak out?"

Bucky nodded. "I…I made plans with a…friend for today, because we had the week off. I didn't know we'd have to do this 'forced family fun' crap!"

"A friend? Who is it and why do you have to sneak out?"

"This stays between us," Bucky warned.

Addison nodded, leaning closer. Bucky sighed and looked around his room, then muttered, "Zach."

Addison gasped then squealed; Bucky covered her mouth with his hand immediately. "Shut up. Okay? No one needs to know."

Addison nodded and he removed his hand. "So am I the only one who knows? You know I've been helping him flirt with you for months. How long has this been going on? Why didn't you tell me!"

"Addison!" Bucky whispered harshly. "You're the only one I've told and we've agreed to keep it casual because I'm going to college soon. No point in starting a relationship. Now I need you to help me sneak out because I was invited to one of his shows today."

"Say no more. I've got this covered."

Bucky looked at her expectantly. Addison stood and thought for a minute, then grinned as an idea hit her.

After she explained it to him and made sure he understood, they went back downstairs and to the kitchen. "Mom, I need to leave," Bucky said. "It's an emergency."

"What is it?" his mom asked.

"I got a text from like, four of my best cheerleaders saying they won't be able to make it in time for the game Friday so I need to find replacements ASAP who can learn cheers and the whole routine and everything in two days and I need to leave right now so bye."

He grabbed his car keys from the hook and bolted before anyone could ask. "Your son is very..."
strange," Missy pointed out.

"He'll be enrolling in White Mountain in the fall," Janet bragged.

"They don't hand out cheer scholarships until December," Addison pointed out. "How do you know he'll even get an offer?"

"Because we're alumni and he's bound to get in."

"Did you pay someone off?" Addison asked, knowingly.

Janet gasped in shock. "I most certainly did not! I can't believe you would even suggest something as horrible as that."

Addison shrugged. "Moving on—"

"Where do you want to go to college, Addy Cat?" Anthony asked.

Addison threw him a glare. "I'm a sophomore. I have more important things to worry about before I start thinking of college." she stated.

"Like what? What you're gonna name your first zom-baby?" Mikey teased.

"You're just mad because your fifteen year old cousin is getting more than you," Anthony joked, earning a forceful shove from his brother.

Addison rolled her eyes at them. "I'll have you both know that I have done no such thing. The closest I've got to seeing Zed naked was when we went swimming."

"Who knows what was happening when you were living in Zombietown," Raina pointed out.

"I introduced Zoey to my magnificent collection of Disney movies," Addison said proudly. "Because Zombies get media content years after they've been released. It's so sad."

"Uh huh," Raina said. "So what really happened? You're not telling us something, I know it. You're keeping a secret from us Addison."

"I have been nothing but honest with you all," Addison stated. "If you have a problem take it up with my complaint department."

"Or her bodyguard," Raina muttered.

"Don't have one. I can kick your ass in heels," Addison said in a sickeningly sweet voice, which she used a lot when she was with her family.

"You're not gonna control your daughter?" Janet asked, looking at her sister.

"Uh, no," Missy stated. "Addison is free to express herself and defend herself when she's being provoked. This is America, not conservative Britain or whatever."

Addison smiled at her mom. It wasn't the first time her mom had come to her defense, but everytime it did, Addison felt more and more like their relationship had improved. It definitely wasn't perfect but they had met in the middle ground instead of being so separate.

"Conservative Britain does sound fun though," Addison said. "Picture it: a million and a half years ago, wearing a big dress and talking funny." Addison laughed to herself at the thought, and
continued to smile when she noticed her mom laughing with her.

"You're a strange one," Raina muttered.

Addison laughed at her. "I've been told. Mostly by Zed."

"Always back to the boyfriend," Janet grumbled. "Watch, they'll be married by graduation."

"I have to be eighteen which won't happen until the July after graduation. Or sixteen with parental consent."

"See, she knows the marriage laws. She's so ready to elope." Raina pointed out.

"I learned it for a project," Addison said matter of factly. "And be nice, because Zed isn't as nice about this as I am."

"What's he gonna do? Eat me?" Raina asked provocingly.

"Okay, that's enough," Missy interjected. "No fighting. This will be a lovely family gathering. No mishaps or surprises. Just good old fashioned family fun."

"Except two Zombies will be here," Raina said. "And your son is sneaking off to meet up with someone all the time."

"Who's son?" Janet asked.

"Bucky, Mom," Mikey said in exasperation.

"As if Aunt Missy has more than one kid." Anthony grumbled.

"Bucky's not sneaking off," Addison said.

"I saw him texting some dude named Zach," Raina said. "Like all the time. Always texting Zach."

"Zach is a kid at school in my grade," Addison explained. Then she went ahead and made up a lie about why Bucky was texting Zach. "He wants to be a cheerleader so Bucky is helping him learn."

"My son is not gay," Janet said decisively. "He's helping a friend, securing his cheer scholarship. My boy is wholesome."

Addison frowned and looked at her aunt. "The only thing being gay does is change who you fuck, Janet," she said plainly.

Everyone froze or gasped or dropped whatever they were holding.

"I'm not saying Bucky is gay. What I'm saying is that you can't just judge someone based off of their sexual choices. I mean, you decided to fuck a guy named Phillip. Ew. So I doubt you have the right to judge who people decide to fuck."

"Get out of my house," Janet squeaked. "Get out!"

Addison smiled sweetly. "Gladly. Tomorrow will be amazing, Janet."

"So tomorrow will be a disaster," Addison concluded.

"I can't believe you said that. To my mom."
Addison laughed bitterly. When her aunt kicked her out, she went and found Bucky sitting on the roof of the warehouse she had rented that summer for Zombeans. So now they were sitting, eating fast food and catching up on their days.

"If you haven't realized by now, I am sick and tired of letting our family walk all over me. I'll call them on their bullshit."

Bucky gazed at her, then offered her a fry. "Thanksgiving is gonna be a shit show."

Addison hummed in agreement. "I'm gonna warn Zed later. But tell me how the concert went."

Bucky smiled wistfully. "We made out under the stage." He turned and smiled at her. "He's awesome. I wish I could date him."

"You can," Addison pointed out. "Six months of dating is better than nothing."

Bucky mused over it for a second. Addison looked out over Zombietown, eating her fries. "You wanna know a secret? Since you told me about yours."

"If you wanna tell me," Bucky answered.


"Scout's honor."

She scoffed. "You weren't a scout."

"Than captain's honor. Spill."

"We've got dormant Zombie genes," Addison said. "When that Zombie bit Pops's ear off, he got infected. Not enough to turn Zombie, but enough to pass the mutation down to us."

Bucky furrowed his brows in confusion. "That makes no sense. How can we be part Zombie?"

"Remember back in August when I beat up that transfer?"

"Yeah."

"Zed said I 'went Zombie.' I got a DNA test and so did my parents and...yeah. You can't tell anyone in your family. Only my parents and Zed know."

"Huh."

Addison looked at him. "What do you think of that?"

"...Last year I would've flipped out."

"Now?"

"Now? I...Just shrug, I guess."

"Okay. Cool." Addison took a drink of her soda. "Let's get out of here."

"Let's do it."
Addiska, 1:11pm

I'm having a horrible time babe

Addiska, 1:11pm

I don't think I'll make it

Addiska, 1:12pm

Ugh will you pick me up after?

Addiska, 1:12pm

Make up an excuse to need me? Pleaseeeeweeeeeeeee

Zedekiah Jacob Necrodopolus, 1:13pm

Lol Addy you're at your cousin's graduation! You're supposed to be happy for him

Addiska, 1:15pm

Have you been to a Seabrook graduation? They're awful! And then I have to do forced family time. Save me! I look cute today!

Zedekiah Jacob Necrodopolus, 1:17pm

I'm not getting you because you look cute, only because you asked nicely.

Zedekiah Jacob Necrodopolus, 1:18pm

I'll be there in twenty, waiting out in the front.

Picture pictures pictures. Everyone wanted pictures with the cheer captain and his family, the mayor and her nephew who was graduating, the chief of Zombie Patrol and his graduating nephew.

Addison had to be in all of them. Her and her mom had come to an agreement: Addison got to plan the vacation that summer and Missy got to pick out her dress for graduation.

The dress was horrible. It was pink and knee length, covered her shoulders and had no designs. "Simple, modest, and pretty," is how Missy had described it.

Addison had been pulled into every picture imaginable. It was the middle of the day so there wasn't a need for flash. She put on a smile and took every picture they wanted, even the obligatory family picture of the mayor, the chief, and their daughter.

After thirty miserable minutes of snapping pictures, Addison turned to her mom and said, "I need to go."
"Go where?"
"Zed came to pick me up. He…wants me to watch Zoey."

Missy gave her a disbelieving look. Addison put on a pouty face. "Please Mom. I came and I put on the stupid dress and heels. Let me go have fun."

Missy rolled her eyes. "We're supposed to go to Bucky's graduation party."

"I'll be there later. I just need a break from...them."

"You mean your family?"

Addison nodded. "Please? Pretty please?"

"Ugh, fine. But I need to see you get in his car."

"Thanks Mom!" she said excitedly. "Let's go. He's in the front."

Addison led her mom back through the gym and the empty halls. "Are we even supposed to be here?" Missy asked.

"I have the keys to get in," Addison explained. "For cheer purposes but, yeah, I have master access."

Missy took that as a good enough answer. They went through the main doors; Addison looked around and spotted Zed's truck across the parking lot. They walked over and saw Zed sleeping on the steering wheel, the windows rolled down.

Addison reached in through the open window and poked his shoulder. Zed groaned, then sat up. He blinked tiredly, giving her a slow smile. "Sorry, I'm just so tired," he said, then yawned.

"Why are you so tired?" Missy asked.

"Zoey has the flu," Zed explained. "So I've been sleeping on Eliza's couch. We were half sleeping and definitely watching movies when someone asked to get picked up."

"Oh! Movies!" Addison exclaimed, laughing.

"I want her back at seven," Missy told Zed.

"Yes ma'am," Zed said. Addison walked around the hood and climbed in on the passenger side.

"Bye Mom."

Bucky had signed on as Addison's first real employee. He and Addison had similar responsibilities, except he was in charge of the nine to twelve year olds and Addison had five to eight year olds. They operated in the same building in two different studios, with the same company name and did everything but practice together. It was like Bucky was captain, making routines and supervising, and had volunteers (or assistant captains) helping the kids learn (the same for Addison).

Zombeans was expanding more that summer. They had even accepted twenty-two humans. They were still mostly funded by Nancy McAllister. They had sixty-four kids and sixteen volunteers. Along with Bucky, Addison had hired an intern from Southeast New Hampshire University to do the paperwork and another college kid to help with the finances. Neither of them were happy with a
sixteen year old girl as their boss but sucked it up for the references and money.

"I'm surprised you applied for the job," Addison said to her cousin during prep week. "Doesn't cheer at White Mountain start in June?"

"I'm, uh, taking a gap year."

"What?"

Bucky nodded. "Yeah. Don't worry, I still get my scholarship. But…I just needed a break."

Addison raised an eyebrow. "From what?"

Bucky looked at her sadly. "My parents kicked me out."

Addison's face crumpled. "What?"

"I was getting milkshakes with Zach and someone took a picture and sent it to them and the next thing I know I'm on the street."

"Bucky…"

"It's fine," he assured her. "I'm staying with Tracey, until he leaves. And then…"

"Stay with us," Addison offered.

Bucky shook his head. "My mom cut me off. You aren't allowed to get involved, according to Mom. It's bad."

"That's so stupid! She can't control me!"

"No, Addy," Bucky said. "Her and your mom made a deal last summer. Mom doesn't meddle in your affairs and your parents don't meddle in ours. Plus…" He glanced around the empty studio. "Your dad's been helping me out under the wire anyway."

"But-but you have no place to live! A-and—"

Bucky sighed, then placed a hand on hers to quiet her. Addison looked at his hand, then up at his face. "We both knew this was coming, Addy. I stood up for myself and they told me their beliefs. Uncle Dale says to give them some time before trying to come to peace. But I need you to trust me."

"But I'm worried about you."

"I'll be fine, don't worry," Bucky said with a reassuring smile. "I got to keep my car, I've got a job, and I have two people who I know love me."

She furrowed her brows. "Two?"

"Zach, and you."

Addison softened up. She wrapped her arms around his torso and hugged him and he hugged her back. "Okay, I trust you. But just call me if you need anything."

"I will."
Addison looked up at his face and smiled. "You have your phone?" she asked.

"I have a new one, same number," he answered. "Uncle Dale rocks. Helped me with finances and shit."

"My Dad is pretty awesome."

Bucky laughed and patted her shoulder. "Now let's get back to work. I need some dolla dolla bills y'all."

Addison laughed and pulled away from him. "You're so old school."

"I don't understand this agreement you and Janet made."

"It was at your birthday last year," Missy explained. "Kitty had been on my case a lot about you and I was sick of it. We made a deal not to mess with the others parenting styles. Then at Thanksgiving, after you snapped on her, we made a...a contract, of sorts."

Addison raised an eyebrow. "A contract?"

"We used to do it a lot as kids," Missy elaborated. "It says that she can't argue or correct or even make a snippy comment about my family. And I can't with hers. Those are the terms."

"But I didn't sign this 'contract,'" Addison pointed out.

"You're not even sixteen," Missy stated. "Contracts signed by minors aren't legally binding."

"So then why do I have to listen to your stupid terms of agreement!"

Missy tapped her nose repeatedly. "Bingo. Only me and Dale have to. So you—"

"Can help Bucky!" Addison exclaimed, catching on.

Missy grinned and nodded. "Dale's been wiring him money but it'd be easier if we did it from your account than ours. Are you okay with that?"

Addison nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, of course. Anything to help."

"Good. I can't just let my favorite nephew suffer."

"I'm telling the cousins you said that!"

The kids were on their fifteen minute break. Addison never made her share of volunteers come in early or stay late to learn the routine so they used break time to their advantage.

Addison was in the middle of teaching when Zed and Eliza came running in. She groaned and paused the music, waiting for them to reach her. "It's operational hours, so this better be important," she told them. But she let her 'anger' fade when she saw how frantic they both were.

"Can you do me a favor, like I did with you?" Zed asked.

"What're you talking about?" Addison asked, more curious than angry.

"I got Bucky a place to stay for the summer," Zed explained in a rush, "because of your parents and
"All you did was tell me to let him stay here," Addison pointed out.

"That's besides the point," Zed stated. "Eliza's mom just kicked her out and she's turned all of Zombietown against Eliza so please just let her stay at your house for a few days."

Addison looked from Zed to Eliza. She looked worse for wear; her clothes were dirty and ripped and she had cuts on her exposed skin. Eliza wouldn't even look at her.

Addison looked back at her group of volunteers. "Go watch the kids. And tell Bucky I need to see him." she told them. When they didn't move, she shouted, "Go!" which had them all running toward the yard.

Addison returned her attention to her boyfriend and friend. "E, are you okay?" Addison asked gently.

She sniffed, running a hand under her nose and shook her head. Addison was shocked to see Eliza so broken and fragile.

"Come on to my office."

"You have an office?" Zed asked in disbelief.

"I've always invited you down here," Addison reminded him as she led them out of the studio and toward her office. "There's a bathroom in there, a first aid kit, and a couple of outfit changes. If you want."

"Um, that'd be nice," Eliza whispered.

Addison bent down and used the keys on her I.D. badge to unlock the door. She grabbed her cheer bag from the chair and handed it to Eliza. "First aid kit is in the bathroom, clothes in the bag. Bathroom is right there." She pointed to the closed door.

"Thank you," Eliza muttered, then went into the bathroom.

Addison looked at Zed. "What happened?" she asked.

"Evangeline wanted to see Eliza before practice," Zed started. "They were hanging out at this underground coffee shop—the usual—and then Azalea caught them. Azalea is like her parents because they're all from like, the fifties. Racist, homophobic, I've told you all this."

"You have."

"Long story short, Eliza got in trouble. They don't let Zombies leave Seabrook so they couldn't send her to conversion therapy—thank god. But, they said she had to choose between being a Scythes or be a dirty lesbian. Mind you, all of this was happening in the middle of Zombietown."

"Where was Eva?"

"I don't know, I didn't get there until everyone started…they threw rocks and dirt and anything they could get their hands on at her. They publicly humiliated her and—it was awful."

"But…but there are tons of nonstraight Zombies."

"You think anyone's gonna stand up to a crowd of angry adult Zombies? We may be undead but
Addison frowned. "That's stupid and awful. How could everyone just standby while Eliza—who's everyone's friend one way or another—was being demonized for who she is? Where were you?"

Zed held his hands up in defense. "I was home with Puppy. Then Mitzi came and found me. But by the time I got there, it was swarming with the Patrol. They were dealing with the mob and..." He shivered and said lowly, "The fire."

Addison jaw dropped open. "Fire!"

Zed nodded solemnly. He sat down in one of her chairs and Addison sat on her desk. "They burned all of her stuff."

"Like..."

Zed nodded, not needing to hear the rest. "Except it was her own family. I've...I've never seen her like this. I didn't know who to go to. I don't even know what to do."

"That's..." Addison didn't even know how to describe it.

Eliza came out from the bathroom dressed in a pair of pink jeans and a plain pink tee shirt. She kept her jacket and her boots, throwing off the usual Seabrook attire.

Both Zed and Addison looked at her, a mix of concern and expectancy. Eliza cleared her throat and brushed a curl from her face. "Addison, could you text Eva for me?" Eliza asked. "Just to check on her."

"Yeah, of course."

Addison straightened up, pulling her phone from the pocket of her leggings and sending a text to Eva. As she was waiting, someone knocked on the door of her office. Zed looked at her in question and she nodded, letting him open the door for Bucky.

Bucky looked around, from Zed, to Addison, then stopped on Eliza. "Eliza? Why are you wearing Addison's clothes?"

"Not important," Addison said. "I need to leave. So you're in charge now."

"What?"

"There's only three more hours until their parents come," Addison said calmly. "They've eaten, and now they're tiring themselves out. Extend playtime for another fifteen minutes. Then gather them in the big room and put on a movie."

"Wait. Why are you leaving?"

"I'll explain later," Addison said. She walked around her desk and sat in her chair, opening the drawer. "Gotta Kick It Up isn't a cheer movie but it'll do. And after, just put on like Finding Nemo or something. I dunno. No more cheering today. I'll let the volunteers know."

Bucky nodded along even though he was still confused. Addison handed him a stack of DVDs. "If you need help with the projector, ask Bree," Addison added. "And if you need anything, just text me."
"Okay."

Addison's phone buzzed and she tossed it to Eliza, who barely caught it. Addison closed her laptop and stuffed it in her backpack. "See you tomorrow, Cuz."

"Bye?"

"Don't forget to lock up," Addison reminded him.

She got up and ushered everyone out of her office. She made sure she had her stuff then locked the door. Her and Bucky went their separate ways.

Eliza handed her back her phone. Addison didn't look at the messages with Eva, opening her group chat with the volunteers. She told them simply that something came up, Bucky was in charge, and to watch the kids during movie time.

Zed drove them back to Addison's house. The ride was silent except for the radio and Zed humming along to the music (and muttering the words to the commercials). Once they got to her house, Addison asked him if he would be going inside.

"Nah, I have to do a grocery run," Zed said.

"Okay. Come by later though?"

"Yeah. Love you."

"Love you too."

Eliza closed the door and followed Addison up to her front door. "You didn't have to leave your cheer thing early for me," she grumbled.

"It's fine," Addison assured her. She unlocked the door and let the two of them in. "I get three whole sick days which I never use anyway."

Eliza shrugged and followed Addison up to her room. "Turn on the tv or read a book, I don't care. But I need to shower, since I've been working out all day." Addison told her. "You'll be fine for an hour, right?"

"Yup."

"Alright. Mi casa es tu casa."

Addison went into her bathroom and Eliza sat on the edge of her bed, grabbing the remote. A little more than thirty minutes later, Addison came out of the bathroom. She grabbed clothes from her drawer then went back in, getting dressed and drying her hair, then joined Eliza on the bed.

"You watch a lot of children's cartoons," Eliza pointed out.

Addison laughed and shook her head. "Have you been judging my watch history this whole time?"

"I've been watching Spongebob."

"Ah."

"What did you tell your mom?" Eliza asked.
"I asked if I could have a sleepover. It'd be easier to explain once her and my dad are home but one of them needs a warning that you'll be here."

"Okay."

"So how are you?" Addison asked. "After everything, that is."

Eliza shrugged. "I…don't know. I didn't think it'd be like this, you know. I mean, I know that my parents are homophobic but…I'm their daughter. I'm their youngest, the baby in the family. I thought they would be upset for a little, then get over it. Now I can't even show my face in Zombietown."

"I'm sorry," Addison sympathized. "I can't promise it'll get better. But I know that you'll get through this, Eliza. Because there are people who actually care and who will actually support you. Like Zed, and Bonzo, and me and Bree."

"No offense, but I'd rather have my parents over you."

"None taken. I completely understand." Addison looked from the television to Eliza. "I talk all this big talk, but I'm really happy that things worked out with my parents. I'm just a kid, not even sixteen. I can't do anything without them."

Eliza nodded. "Must be nice."

"Don't worry," Addison said. "My mom says to give them time to cool down. Then organize a meeting to talk through it. It's what we're doing with Bucky and his parents. Except we aren't technically allowed to get involved so hopefully my Sweet Sixteen isn't a shit show."

"I love your optimism, but I doubt what might work for Bucky might not for me."

"It doesn't hurt to be hopeful." Addison shrugged.

"Can we just watch a movie? I don't wanna talk about this anymore."

"Sure."

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I'm sorry about this chapter. Not really a win for the gays, unfortunately. Don't worry, I'm just setting up some good plot! But until all is revealed, send me your thoughts!

Until Thursday!
Since Eliza was laying low for a few days, Addison put her to work. She got the filing cabinets filled with everyone's paperwork and a makeshift workspace in the hallway with all the offices. Addison had her making sure everyone's papers were in the correct files, then making a digital version of everything so it'd be easier to access.

The day after the incident, Zed showed up again. He walked around aimlessly in search of his girlfriend, finally stumbling upon Eliza and her workspace. "Where's Addison?"

Eliza looked up at him. "She's crying in her office."

"What?"

Eliza nodded. "She had a breakdown like an hour ago. Put Bree in charge and locked the door to her office."

"And you're just sitting here?"

Eliza nodded again. "Figured I'd wait it out until she wanted to talk."

Zed groaned and rolled his eyes. He made his way to Addison's office. Eliza had been wrong, considering the door wasn't locked and he managed to go right in without any trouble.

Addison looked up when she heard the door open. Her eyes were red and watery and she had tears still running down her cheeks. She sniffed and wiped her cheeks to no avail.

"Oh, hey," she said in a thick voice. "What're you doing here?"

Zed furrowed his brows. Instead of answering her question, he asked, "What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

"Just felt like it." She shrugged sarcastically. "Totally not completely overwhelmed and feel like I'm dying and everyone needs my help and I don't get a minute alone."

"Addy..." he said gently.

She dropped back against her chair and groaned. "I just want a break! Why is that so much to ask? Bucky needs me and Eliza needs me and the kids need me and the volunteers need me. I have to keep this place running and my Sweet Sixteen is in two weeks. I have to keep my parents happy and I need to tend to you and give you attention. I want attention too! I wanna be able to sleep at ten o'clock and wake up at eleven and ugh!"

Zed moved around her desk and crouched down next to her. "Hey, Babe, it's okay."

"Stop saying it's okay because it's not!" Addison snapped. She sat up and looked at him. "Why does everyone keep coming to me with their problems? I'm not a therapist for fuck's sake!"

"Addy, you just have a lot on your plate," he said in a calm voice. "It's a lot, and it keeps piling up. And it may be late but at least you understand that you can't do everything the world needs you to."

Addison sniffed and looked at him. "It's not like I can tell everyone no. They're gonna call me a selfish bitch. I still have to be class president and assistant cheer captain and it's just—it's too much!"
"I know it is," Zed said. "How about we start lightening your workload, huh? You could get an assistant."

"I can't afford an assistant," she grumbled. "Only Bucky and Mark are getting paid. All my checks go into my savings account 'cause my parents insisted."

Zed gave her a soft smile. "I'll work for free."

Addison looked at him in understanding, then confusion. She shook her head at the idea. "No, you have football and I can't ask you to do that."

"Football is from ten to one," Zed said. "Three hours. I'll be here in the morning and afternoon. You do your work here, I'll handle your party and anything else you need."

"Zed…"

"We're a team Babe. No one gets left behind and we work together to lift the other up," he told her. "Now what were your other problems?"

"Eliza and Bucky."

"Leave Eliza to me. I'm working on her family, don't worry."

"And Bucky I need to fix before the party…"

Zed pursed his lips as if he wanted to say something. Addison sniffed again, wiping her cheeks. "Just say it," she told him.

"Will you be mad?"

"Probably."

"Well, in my opinion, I'm happy that you care so much about your cousin. But he's an adult now, and he has a job and a scholarship to college and a car. Leave it to him to fix it. Focus on yourself."

"Then I'm being a selfish bitch."

"I remember a certain someone saying to let them talk if they wanna."

Addison's lip twitched in a slight smile. "Don't you dare start," she warned him.

Zed stood up and smiled, leaning in and giving her a soft kiss. "Don't worry, it'll all be okay. High school is almost over."

"Then we're on to the real world." She rolled her eyes. "It won't be better."

Zed picked up her hand, leaned down and kissed her knuckles. "But we'll be doing it together, which will make it better."

"You really know how to make me feel better," Addison told him. "I love you."

Zed kisses her knuckles again, then stood up.

"I love you too." Zed said. "Now, let's get to work. What can I do to help with your party?"

"I left the binders at home."
"Binders? As in plural, multiple binders?"

Addison nodded. "Yes. But for now just check on all the orders. It's less than two weeks away, Zed. I've got a list of all the things that were ordered on my laptop, the links, the logins, everything. The shoes are the biggest issue, the party favors, and the decorations. I'll bring the binders tomorrow."

"Alright."

"Let me go clean my face," she said, standing up and heading to the bathroom.

She came back a minute later and told Zed to sit in her desk chair. She unlocked her laptop and gave him a quick rundown of what to do.

"And, I'm gonna sit here for a little longer too," Addison said. "Just a few more minutes. Then I'll go back."

"Take your time," Zed told her. "You've been working nonstop all summer. Have some Addy-time."

Zed put on her playlist on her laptop. Addison stayed for fifteen minutes, listening to music and relaxing with her eyes closed. Then Jaziel came to get a band-aid and Addison went back out to her class.

______________________________

It was later that same day that Addison confronted her cousin. Classes had ended a few hours before and it was just her, Bucky, Eliza, and Zoey cleaning up. Addison and Bucky were cleaning the lunchroom.

"So, how are you?" Addison asked. "With the sleeping arrangements and everything?"

"Fine. Though I feel like I owe you rent or something."

"Don't worry," she said. "How…how are you doing with your parents?"

"Raina's helping us figure our shit out," Bucky said. "Mom has finally agreed to talk to me."

"Really? That's awesome!"

Bucky smiled up at her. "Yeah, we're having brunch on Sunday. Hopefully it goes well. I'm not expecting them to just let me back in but maybe we'll be able to meet up more, talk more. Work our way back to what we had. Or something."

"That's good."

Bucky looked at her with a knowing look. "You were gonna say that you can't keep helping me out because it was overwhelming you?"

Addison nodded, a little embarrassed. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I should be solving your problems, not the other way around."

"But I wanna help."

"Addy, you wanna help everyone all the time. It's what you do." Bucky told her. Bucky wrapped an arm around her shoulder. "Don't worry about me, Baby Cuz, I'll be fine."
(And, over the next few days, they worked out their flow. Addison focused on teaching, Zed handled all of her party and school work. Eliza continued to digitize applications. Her intern kept their paperwork sorted and up to date. Mike worked with the intern with keeping their finances in line.)
The weekend. It was the first weekend since Eliza had moved in with Addison’s family. It was the first time they were both free and could go and buy Eliza new clothes (on account of what happened to all of her stuff).

Eliza had been sleeping in the guest room for the past few days. Dale had gotten her extra clothes from Zombie Containment. It was a violation of the rules, considering Zombies no longer needed to be in uniform, but Dale managed to sneak them out without anyone noticing. Eliza needed clothes to get by, after all.

On Saturday, Addison woke up a little after eleven. She was still tired and wanted to break her alarm clock, even though it hadn't even gone off. Just the idea of an alarm made her upset. She just wanted to get more sleep.

She brushed her teeth and went downstairs for breakfast. In the past year she had grown to hate waking up, becoming more and more grumpy in the mornings until she was exactly like her dad (unpleasant until his morning coffee).

Eliza was already at the counter, reading some book, when Addison got down. Addison made a detour for the coffee pot, pouring herself a generous mug full then chugging half of it, a little thankful it wasn't piping hot still. She then walked over to Eliza, already starting to feel the effects of the coffee in her system. It wasn't much but she did feel a little more awake (it was probably just the bitterness of the black coffee that woke her up more than anything).

"Good morning," Eliza said offhandedly.

"Ready for today?"

Eliza paused in her reading, looking up at Addison. "Do we have to? I'm perfectly fine with the clothes I have. I don't wanna put you guys out of pocket!"

"You're not fine with these clothes because you can't even customize them," Addison grumbled.

"Then let's buy some sewing needles," Eliza said with a smile. "I can work this out, Addison. You don't have to keep treating me like a charity case or something."

Addison rolled her eyes. "How many times do I have to say this? You're my friend. I would hope you'd do the same for me, if the situation was the other way around. Besides, if I don't spend five hundred every month then my parents lower my card balance. It's a win-win."

Eliza raised an eyebrow in surprise. "You spend five hundred dollars every month?"

"My allowance used to be seven fifty." Addison shrugged. "But so far it's just food and dates, sometimes clothes."

"So you spend five hundred dollars on Zed, every month?"

Addison shook her head. "Every once in a while. That's besides the point. We're going shopping, one way or another."

"I'll be unpleasant," Eliza warned.
Addison shrugged. She finished off her mug of coffee, going back for a refill. After she poured it, she went back to Eliza. "It's not like you're ever pleasant. Who even says 'pleasant'? You're such a grandma."

Eliza laughed at her joke. "Did you eat?" Addison asked and Eliza nodded.

"Your mom made pancakes. Like two hours ago."

"Why have you been up since nine in the morning? Actually, I don't care."

Eliza chuckled as Addison went over to the fridge. Addison pulled the tray of fruits from the drawer, moving to the counter. "Do you think Zed would be willing to drive us?" Addison asked.

"Where to? Can't you text him?"

"Shoreside has an amazing mall."

Eliza snorted. "Zed hates driving to Shoreside but for you, he'd do it in a heartbeat."

"That's why you're gonna ask. He tells me yes like, all the time. I need an honest answer."

Eliza nodded in understanding. "Are you gonna get your license once you're old enough?" she asked.

"Next year, maybe. I wasn't allowed to get my permit until last month because of the fight with Busty Ava."

"Oh, I forgot about that." Eliza said, smiling distantly. "Good times."

Addison giggled and made herself a bowl of fruit. She put the tray back, grabbing the gallon of orange juice then closed the fridge door. She rinsed out her mug, then filled it with orange juice, moving to sit next to Eliza.

"So we'll go to the mall in Shoreside," Addison concluded. "They have a Wendy's there too. I think you'll like the food."

Eliza made a face. Addison was quick to say, "Trust me, I'm not usually a fan of fast food—"

"Not true, you've gone to McDonald's like, once every two weeks."

Addison ignored her and continued, "but it's really good. And the fries! God, I love it there."

"Don't have a food-gasm."

"Ew."

Eliza laughed and shook her head. She slid Addison's phone across the counter, unlocking it and going to call Zed. She waited for it to ring for a bit. "I am not your girlfriend," was the first thing she said, making Addison laugh. "...Well I am at her house, and considering I'd like to contact my best friend and I don't have a phone, this is the only alternative....You wanna go on a little road trip today?...Shoreside....We wanna go shopping but we can't drive and the buses are crusty as fuck. ...Yes, it's all Addison's treat....Awesome, thanks....Yes, noon, I got you. Bye."

Addison ate while Eliza talked to Zed. When she finished, Addison looked at her for an answer. Eliza passed her her phone and said, "He said he'll be here at noon and you have to buy him breakfast."
Addison chuckled and nodded. "Seems fair." She slid out of her chair and put her dishes away. "Alright, I'm gonna go shower."

"Yeah, you stink."

Addison gave her the finger as she walked to the stairs, heading up and going to her room. Zed got there a quarter after twelve. When they opened the door he was still half asleep, 'napping' against the door frame.

Addison giggled when she saw him. "Hey sleepyhead," she greeted as he opened his eyes.

"Good morning."

Eliza walked up and corrected, "Afternoon."

"Whatever. Let's go eat."

"We're getting Wendy's," Addison told him. "They don't have one in Seabrook—obviously. It's in Shoreside."

"Aw, but I'm hungry now," Zed whined.

Addison just giggled and her and Eliza left the house. They walked down the path to Zed's truck; Addison got the middle seat between them. She connected her phone to the aux, pulling up maps and putting on music.

"Why are you always so tired? Do you not sleep?" Addison asked.

"I'm up all night, doing drugs and gang shit."

Eliza snorted. "Name a drug, Z."

Zed paused and Eliza laughed. Then he said, "Um, cocaine?"

Eliza laughed harder. "Really? You're doing crack, Z?"

Addison laughed now too and Zed blushed so hard he actually turned a tiny bit red. "Okay. Not sleeping because I'm getting together the perfect birthday present for my amazing girlfriend."

Eliza made a face of disgust while Addison made one of surprise and adoration. "Aw!" Addison gushed, while Eliza groaned, "Ew."

Zed chuckled and glanced at them. "Zed, you should be sleeping. Not driving me around." Addison told him.

"I'm mostly doing this for the promise of food," he admitted, making them laugh again.

After the mall, Eliza went out with Eva for dinner at Eva's house. Zed went back home and Addison hung out with her parents. They ordered a pizza and put on a movie, waiting for it to come before moving to the kitchen to eat dinner.

To Addison's surprise, Bucky showed up for dinner too. She was still under the impression that her parents weren't allowed to communicate with him, which clearly wasn't the case since he came over like he was invited and ate dinner like he used to do.
They all carried on as if everything was perfectly fine, to the annoyance of Addison. Just days ago, Bucky was sleeping restlessly on a cot in an empty office of her warehouse, eating the food Addison and Zed would sneak him.

Bucky seemed to catch on to her unspoken questions. He waited until they finished dinner and her parents retired to bed to confront her about it, though.

"My mom and dad agreed to a cease fire."

"What?"

"From now until after your Sweet Sixteen. No fighting and screaming and threatening. As long as I 'keep my devilish gay shit on the other side of the border' which isn't too bad, considering Zach doesn't even really like coming on this side."

Addison was still confused. That didn't sound all that better than what was happening before, but Bucky seemed excited about it.

"That's good?"

Bucky nodded. "I was mostly worried about what would happen at your birthday. But don't worry, it'll be your night."

"Oh? And do your parents know Zach is gonna be there too?"

Bucky nodded excitedly. "Yep. We're gonna avoid each other all night. Oh! And they've agreed to pull your parents out of it. So I can come over all I want and use up all your internet and food, the way god intended it to be."

Addison couldn't help but chuckle a little. She was still confused by most of it, but Bucky was so excited and he was telling jokes and she couldn't help but laugh.

"So what's gonna happen after my party?"

"Another peaceful meeting, hopefully. My brothers are acting like mediators, which is good."

"Okay? I think."

"This is good! I get to sleep in a real bed—"

"Eliza has the guest room." Addison shut him down before he could get his hopes up.

"No, I'm going to Zach's house."

"Wait, hold up," Addison stated. "How long have you and—"

Bucky made a face of disgust. "I'm just sleeping there. His parents insisted after they heard about what happened."

Which was even more confusing. As far as Addison was concerned, the adults in Zombietown had been dicks to the gays. This whole conversation was messing with her head.

"It's getting late, I'd better go," Bucky said. "See you tomorrow, cuz."

"Um, okay?"
Bucky left and Addison sat in the living room, trying to figure out everything Bucky had just told her. It was still confusing and stupid and didn't make any sense but she left it alone. Nothing really made sense in Seabrook anymore.

'Just two more years. Then I'm out of here.'

Bucky had told Addison he was leaving, but he stayed on the porch, waiting for Eliza to come back. It had been a while since they had just hung out, away from work and other people. And on top of all that, he wanted to check in with her. She had a tendency to act big and strong but Bucky knew first hand what it was like to lose your family.

It wasn't long after he 'left' that Eliza showed up. Eva had driven her home and waved at Bucky from her car before driving off.

"What are you doing here?" Eliza asked Bucky.

"This is my family's house."

"I thought…"

"We're at a cease fire until after Addison's birthday," Bucky explained.

Eliza nodded in understanding. "So is there a reason you're sitting outside? Is it because you like sitting on hard cobblestone or something?"

"I told Addison I was leaving, then I remembered that I wanted to talk to you, so I stayed out here." Bucky shrugged.

"Me?"

Bucky rolled his eyes. "Yes you."

"What's up?"

And, to her surprise, Bucky said, "I wanted to see if you were okay."

"Huh." Eliza figured it'd be best if she sat down and did so, sitting on the step next to him. "I-I'm fine."

"Really? Or are you 'fine' so people don't worry about you?"

Eliza sighed, muttering, "The second one."

"I figured," he said. "It sucks, I know. Well, I probably don't. I had the option to go to college. Not come back, just leave this all behind. You…don't."

"That is so comforting."

"I'm trying my best," he told her.

"Yeah, sorry. Sarcasm is a default." Eliza sighed and looked at him. "Is that all you wanted to tell me? Let's bond over our shared trauma."

Bucky chuckled at that. "Don't be so morbid. I just wanted to make sure you're okay is all. It's tough, I know. And it's only gonna get a lot worse."
"You suck at pep talks."

"You're ignoring your feelings," Bucky countered, effectively silencing her. "I know you've got Addison, and you've got Zed and Eva and all those people. But none of them know what it's like to be thrown out like yesterday's garbage. And yeah, we both have it pretty bad. After next week, I can't talk to anyone in my family. You can't even go back to Zombietown, and you can't just leave town. It sucks, Eliza."

"Why are you telling me this? As if I didn't know that my life currently sucks and your life currently sucks and everything just sucks right now."

"Because I want you to know that if you ever need anything, I'm here. If everything goes to shit, you can count on me. It doesn't matter where I am, because I'll be there for you."

Eliza was stunned to say the least. Sure, her and Bucky had become a lot closer in the past year and a half. But she hadn't thought that he would ever be so…nice to her. It made her feel warm inside, more sure of herself than before, because she had been contemplating breaking up with Eva just to smooth things over her with her parents. Not anymore. Not ever again.

She couldn't find the words to say, so instead she leaned over and gave him a slow hug. "Thank you," she muttered.

"It's what friends are for."
Addison's birthday fell on a Friday, which meant that her Sweet Sixteen was on the actual day of her birthday. She was up at nine, getting cleaned up and heading over to check on the venue. Her hair appointment wasn't until two thirty, and her makeup was at four thirty. Eliza had left early that morning to meet Eva for 'secret birthday stuff' (Eva had a car, so Addison figured she was driving Eliza around since Zed was busy).

Zed was meeting her and her parents at the venue for final preparations. Addison didn't have to worry as much about her party after she put Zed in charge. He took care of everything, with as much attention to detail that she had. When she got there, he was directing the banquet hall staff on where to put the tables.

"Zed!" she called. He stopped and turned, smiling at her.

"Good morning Gorgeous," he greeted. He made his way over to her and said, "Happy birthday."

He hugged her and kissed the top of her head. "Thanks," Addison said with a smile.

"Took you long enough to be sixteen," he teased.

Addison rolled her eyes at his comment. He looked over her head at her parents and gave them a wave. "Morning Mr. and Mrs. D!"

"Oh is that what we're doing now?" Missy asked with an amused smile.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Zed smiled cheekily.

Addison looked behind him and saw the banquet hall director, Ms. Sanders, walking over with a smile. "It's the birthday girl and her parents," she greeted excitedly. "Good morning and happy birthday, Addison."

Addison giggled. "Thank you."

"I've had the pleasure of spending the morning with your lovely boyfriend," Sanders said. She then looked at Addison's parents and said, "This right here is a fine young Zombie. He's been nothing but a pleasure to have around for the past hour."

"Only the best for our Addy," Dale said with winning smile.

Addison was focusing on the last thing Sanders had said. She looked at Zed and asked, "Hour? We were supposed to meet at nine."

Zed shrugged. "I couldn't sleep and the last time that happened, I went running and we all know what happened."

Addison laughed a little. "So you just came here early. Naturally."

"Naturally."

They laughed then looked back at Sanders. "So a couple of friends are coming in about an hour to
help with the decorations," Zed told her.

"Friends?"

"Bonzo insisted he come and make this place look awesome. Paizley's coming too. And Alonzo and Zeph wanna check out the space for their—" He opened the binder in his arms and flipped to a page, then read, "maximum ten minute performance."

He closed the binder and shrugged. "I said if they come they have to help set up. Oh and Zach is coming too, totally not because Bucky asked to help me set up."

"Totally."

"The extra hands will be amazing," Sanders assured them. "Mom, Dad, you wanna come take a look at the menus and the door decor?"

"Sure. Will you two be fine here?" Missy asked.

"Yes, go Mom."

Missy and Dale followed the director back to the main hall. Zed moved his arm to around Addison's shoulder, walking with her to the wall.

"Why didn't you sleep last night?" Addison asked him.

"I can't sleep when I'm anxious. I want this party to go really good."

Addison giggled. "It's really 'well,' Z," she told him. "But yeah, me too. But you need to be well rested for my grand entrance tonight."

Zed raised an eyebrow. "It's not that grand."

"It's a grand entrance, it'll be grand!"

Zed laughed and shook his head. "Yes it will. I can't wait to see it come together."

They had rented out the rooms on the second level of the banquet hall for Addison and a select group of others to get ready in. The hairstylists and makeup artists were working in the rooms upstairs; the girls were top priority and the boys would get them after all of the girls were finished.

The color scheme for her party was "macaroni and cheese" orange—color code #FAB680 (a kind of pastel orange)—and lavender purple. The only people who were wearing the colors was her grand entrance circle and her parents (and herself). There were variations of orange and lavender suits and lavender dresses (Addison refused to be upstaged by her friends). They all looked amazing and gorgeous but Addison made sure that they wouldn't top her dress, which, according to the website, was a tulle ball gown with strapless sweetheart neckline, re-embroidery appliques, basque waistline, pleats and beading accent, tiered skirt, lace-up back, gauntlets and bolero in peach and ivory.

The hairstylists tightened her curls and put her hair in a fancy high ponytail. Her makeup was simple and natural, and the entire getting (everyone) ready process took a total of six and a half hours.

Technically, the boys weren't allowed to go into the girls' changing room. But none of them really minded Zed, especially since he covered his eyes and had them lead him to Addison.
Once he saw Addison, his jaw fell open in wonder. "Wow. You look…wow."

Addison giggled. "You look dashing yourself. I love the purple suit."

Zed breathed out a laugh, still staring at her, completely mesmerized. "You look like a princess,"
he breathed.

"Wait until I get a tiara."

Zed laughed, trailing his gaze down to her feet. "Converse?" he asked with an amused smile.

Addison laughed and held out her feet. "What? You don't like?"

"No, you just didn't seem to be the kind of girl to wear converses with a fancy dress."

"I'm not. But I like sneakers way more than I like flats."

"Of course."

"What's up?" Addison asked. "You're not gonna do your hair or makeup?"

"What? You don't like my hair?" Zed asked with a teasing smile.

Addison laughed. "You look very handsome, Z."

"Why do you call me Z? Like, I'm curious. I've noticed it but never actually asked but—"

"In places that aren't America, the letter 'Z' is pronounced 'zed.' But also it's just shorter and faster
then saying your name." Addison shrugged. "Unimportant. Tonight's my night."

"Yeah it is. You look beautiful. I can't tell you that enough. But I wanted to tell you that we're
gonna get started in five minutes."

"Okay. Go back to your guy friends or whatever."

"Kiss?"

"No way! Not until I've taken at least a hundred pictures."

Zed laughed and held out his first. "Okay, fist bump?"

Addison laughed and they bumped fists. "See you in five," Zed said, then turned and left.

Addison was standing out in the hall, waiting for it to be eight o'clock. Her parents were doing a
final run through before the grand entrance, making sure everyone was there and everything was
taken care of.

The hall had a giant, grand staircase at the back, with two staircases leading up to the second floor.
Between the seven people who were apart of her grand entrance, four were lined up for one
staircase and three for the other. Since the party's main theme was red carpet, they would enter one
at a time coming down the stairs. There were fifteen "paparazzi" who were on the first floor, taking
pictures as they entered with music in the background.

Zed had picked the walk-out song for them (he had picked Money by Cardi B, the clean version).
Each person would get exactly twenty-six seconds to walk down the first staircase, pose for the
cameras, and get to their designated spot on the main staircase (there would be two seconds left
over in the song).

Zed went first from the right, throwing poses and winks as he got to his standing spot. Then, on the left was Eva, wearing a lavender high-low dress. Her hair was in a half-up, half-down ponytail. She posed, flaunting for the cheering ‘fans’ which were just party guests. After Eva was Eliza from the right, wearing a short, ruffly dress with a tie across the middle. Her hair was down and she did goofy, flaunty poses whenever she could.

Coming from the left was Bonzo in a pastel orange suit with a bow tie that had little oranges on it. His hair was even pulled back in a ponytail. After Bonzo was Bree, on the right, in a short, cold shoulder dress. Her hair was braided back into a bun and even her glasses matched her dress.

On the left was Taylor, in a pair of lavender slacks and a lighter dress shirt, the sleeves rolled up to his elbow. He got to pose for longer then most of them because he was closer to the top of the main staircase. And the last person, from the right, was Bucky, in a pastel suit. He was last and had the most time to pose before getting his spot at the top of the main staircase.

Addison entrance song played next. She picked Angel by Fifth Harmony. She went down the left stairs first, taking her sweet time, walking along with the beat. She stopped once she reached the end, striking multiple poses. It took a full twenty seconds for her to pose for the cameras before her parents came down, one from the left and one from the right.

They took several family photos before beginning the first ceremony of the night. Dale produced a shoe box, opening it to reveal the gold, open toe heels that were going to replace Addison's white sneakers. And after changing her shoes, Missy crowned her with a matching tiara.

Her parents stayed at the top of the stairs as Addison went the rest of the way down the stairs. By the time she reached the bottom, the next song (Sweet But Psycho by Ava Max) started playing. Addison held out her hand and Zed stepped off the first step, taking it. They walked down the red carpet, smiling and posing for the cameras. After Zed and Addison, everyone else came down the stairs in pairs, posing and smiling and living the red carpet experience.

Most of the party was spent dancing, which Addison did mostly with Zed. It wasn't long after the party started though when someone came and interrupted. Addison turned when she felt someone tap her shoulder, seeing Anthony smiling at her. Her cousin looked at Zed and asked, "Can I steal her for a minute?"

"Be my guest." Zed kissed Addison's cheek. "I'll be back, Babe."

Addison smiled at him, waiting for him to leave then turning to face her cousin. "Hey, how are you liking the party?"

"It's great. Better than all the Sweet Sixteens I've been to that's for sure."

Addison smiled brightly. "Really? Even Raina's?"

"Oh especially hers. This party is awesome, Addy. Nice work."

Addison squealed excitedly. Anthony nodded toward the snack table and they started walking over. "So I heard from Zed that Bucky's boyfriend is here," he said. "And I can't ask Bucky myself because of my mom."

"Zach? Of course he's here, I love Zach."
"Where? I wanna meet him."

"Why?"

"I wanna meet the guy who's dating my baby brother, duh."

Addison thought for a moment. Anthony did have a point and it was only fair. Addison knew about the deal her Aunt Janet and Bucky had come up with for the party: they'll avoid each other and won't make a scene no matter what happened. Unfortunately for her cousins that meant that they also had to avoid Bucky too. But, like always, Addison wasn't included in those arrangements, which meant she played as a messenger between them.

She looked around the hall. She wasn't necessarily tall enough to see over the partygoers but she knew what she was looking for. Zach was wearing a deep purple suit with actual sneakers (and his hair was green which was a usual giveaway). It took a second to find him but he was with his friends, standing in line for the photo booth.

Addison grabbed her cousin's arm, pulling him toward the photo booth. "Come on!"

They got in line behind Zach and his friends. Addison took a second to stop and breathe, before tapping Alonzo on his shoulder. Like she had hoped, they all turned to face her. "Hey birthday girl!" Alonzo greeted. "Finally sixteen, eh?"

"Finally," Addison agreed. "I would like you guys to meet my cousin, Anthony. He's Bucky's older older."

"Bucky has a brother?" Zephyr asked.

"He has two, actually," she said. She started pointing them out to her cousin, "Anthony, this is Alonzo and Zephyr. They're dating. That's Roz. She's dating a cheerleader."

"Why is this necessary information?" Zephyr muttered.

Addison pointed at Zach and said, "And Zach, who's dating your brother."

"That's why," Roz noted.

Zach looked a little surprised at being put on the spot. "Oh, hey! It's nice to meet you."

Addison looked at her cousin, seeing him smile slightly at Zach. "Damn you're cute. Not surprised though, it runs in our genes to pick hot men. Well just Addison and Bucky. But still."

"Just me and Bucky?" Addison asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I remember you guys at Addison's party last year and on YouTube and—"

Alonzo gasped excitedly. "You watch us on YouTube? Zeph, we have fans!"

Zephyr rolled his eyes, though he was still smiling. "It's nice to meet all of you though," Anthony said.

"Yeah, you too," Zach said with a smile.

"Addison you wanna join us in the picture? After the mandatory band picture, of course."

Once people saw Addison at the photo booth, it became 'take pictures with the birthday girl.' Addison didn't mind, doing different props and faces and poses with all the different people who wanted a picture.

After dinner were the two tributes her friends had insisted on doing. Bowling for Zoup had played her three favorite Bowling for Soup songs (*Shut Up and Smile, I'm Gay,* and *Sometimes*). They also got in some free promotions too, which was even better.

Zed's gift to Addison was a video that he had made, with the help of Eliza and her family. It had baby pictures and videos that were all of baby Addison, with her little baby hats and hair accessories. It was enough pictures and videos that basically showed her through the years. The song in the background was a silly one they had recorded for the hell of it back when they were doing the movie project (Bonzo had expertly called it *Bust a Left*). Addison didn't necessarily like her baby pictures (the hats, the headbands, all of it), but the video was incredibly sweet.

In the simplest terms, the party was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

It’s not unusual for me to have to take our parts from the actual chapter. I do it a lot. Not everything makes the cut. I just found a whole scene that I deleted from either *This is The Beat of My Heart* or this story. Idk man.

So anyway, Eliza built a website for Zombeans, with the help of Eva because Eliza doesn’t have a real computer, just some junk, partially functional one. Um, I think that’s the only thing I took out. Anyway, hope you enjoyed this!
It was the first year that Addison was going to school without Bucky being there, and it felt really weird. And with the other Aceys gone, Lacey was hanging around Addison a lot. She was the only senior who was a cheerleader so she hung out with the juniors, who were also her assistant captains.

The one thing that didn't change was Zed, luckily. There weren't any surprise transfers who took his attention. Everything was going fine back in Zombietown—fine was an odd way to put it, but there weren't any other words to describe it. Things were still tense in Zombietown and the Patrol had doubled their numbers after the numerous riots during the summer, but no one was hurt, so it was alright.

And Addison's cousins managed to make things a little better between Bucky and his parents. All it took was Mikey reminding their dad about his business. Considering he was the CEO of an athletic-wear company, his stocks would plummet and his business would be destroyed if word got out about the CEO throwing out his gay son.

"It's not ideal but I always knew he cared more about his business than his kids," Bucky had told her. And, it wasn't the end of that, but it was the end of Addison's involvement in it.

Zed and Eliza came from the same class to study hall. Addison was in their study hall too, but she tended to have student government meetings during study hall. Zed and Eliza would snag a table in the back of the library, getting started on their homework.

While Eliza was doing her homework, Zed was googling baby names, for some odd reason.
"What're you doing?"

"Looking at baby names," Zed said, as if it were obvious. "It's very hard to find any with Z, ya know."

"Okay, but why?"

"A really long time ago, Addison and I were talking about what color hair our kids would have. And then in English we were talking about bloodlines and it got me thinking…and yeah." Zed shrugged.

"First things first," Eliza started. "How do you even know Addison would want to name her baby something with a Z? She's not a Zombie, and she doesn't even know why we do it."

Zed shrugged. "I could always just explain to her the significance of Z."

Eliza rolled her eyes. "Onto the next point. You're seventeen, you shouldn't be thinking about starting a family. You should be worried about the SAT and college applications, your grades, if your dad would let you leave the state, if Zombies can even go to college."

Zed rolled his eyes. "All that stuff makes my head hurt and makes me really worried," he said. "I want to be happy."
"Which is exactly why you're doodling the name of your future children in your notebook like a twelve year old girl."

Zed flicked an eraser at her.

"How do you even know Addison wants to have kids?" Eliza questioned. "What if she refuses? Wants to keep her body snatched or some shit."

"There's such thing as adopting," Zed pointed out. "Besides, we'd make cute babies. Even if she didn't want kids before, she'd wanna see how they would turn out."

"You can just ask me."

Both Zombies jumped at the sound of her voice, turning to see Addison standing behind them with a smirk on her face. Zed felt his face heat up immediately. "For the love of Z! How long have you been standing there?"

Addison just smirked, then turned to walk away.

"How long!" Zed called as she left.

Elite laughed at the expense of her best friend. "This is why you shouldn't do this, you're embarrassing as fuck."

"Shut up."

Usually after they both finished practicing, Zed would drive Addison home. Unfortunately, Zed's truck had been a victim to issues in Zombietown, and was out of commission until Zed got enough money to repair it. So they were stuck walking home, because Addison wasn't allowed to get her driver's license yet.

"So what was the whole naming thing about during study hall?"

Zed groaned. "I was hoping you forgot about it," he admitted. "That was so embarrassing."

Addison tilted her head in confusion. She didn't understand why it was embarrassing. "It was cute, Zed. I'm more curious with what you came up with."

"Really?"

Addison nodded and Zed grinned. "Okay so I really really love the name Alexander, but it's gotta have a 'Z' so like, A-L-E-X-Z-A-N-D-E-R."

"Why does it have to have a 'Z' in it?" Addison asked.

"What?"

"Why do Zombie names have to have the letter 'Z'?"

"Oh well," Zed stopped himself. "There's a story, I know. It's like…ig gobleg pukka Z."

Addison gave him a confused look. Zed sighed and said, "I don't know how to explain it, for you to understand. It's a long story, which I only know in Zombie Tongue."

"Not to be rude, but can't you just translate?"
Zed shook his head. "I'm not good enough with English or Zombie Tongue to get you to understand it all."

"Oh…"

"But! But Paizley can tell it! She's the one who told me the story. She knows *all* the stories. She's like, um, I think the English word for it is historian?"

"Your cousin but not really cousin Paizley?"

"Yes. Come on!"

Paizley was beyond excited to have someone want to listen to her stories. Zed hadn't seen her this animated and excited in a long time.

"To get why we use Z, you have to understand where it came from and Z's significance to our Zombie culture," Paizley told her. "Someone had to be the first, Addison."

"The first what?"

"Zombie."

Addison looked at her in surprise, then at Zed. "It goes that far back?" she asked.

"It's a good story," Zed told her. "Ssh, and listen."

*ten minutes later…*

"And we still mourn. Every year, on the anniversary of Z's death, we observe a day of remembrance. We uphold the naming tradition in his honour. And we talk about him as if he was a saint. Because to the first Zombies, to our parents and grandparents, he was."

"Woah," Addison breathed out. "That…that was the most amazing story I've ever heard. I…wow."

"I think I broke your girlfriend," Paizley said, nodding seriously.

Zed laughed and shook his head. "I should probably get her home. Will you be here later?"

"Yes Zed. Why?"

"So we can hang out."

"Okay. See you in a bit."

Zed turned back to Addison, seeing her standing and shouldering her school bag. "Um, thanks, Paizley," Addison said. Zed took her hand and led her to the door with Paizley following behind them.

"Come back if you want more Zombie stories!" Paizley called as they headed down the step.

Addison turned back and gave her a smile. "I will!"

Once they were on the sidewalk, Addison said to Zed, "One, I love Paizley."

Zed laughed. "She's amazing, of course you love her."
"Two, I'm one hundred percent behind Z names," Addison went on. "Who named you?"

"What?"

"Did your parents name you? Or did Zombie Containment?"

"I don't know," Zed shrugged. "Why?"

"The letter Z in other languages is pronounced 'zedd,'" Addison explained. "I thought that maybe, Zombie Containment gave you that name to identify the first Zombie baby."

"What?"

"They called him Patient Zero, right? The first one infected. Which they shortened to Z. What if, because they already had Patient Zero, they just gave you the letter, which stuck as your name."

Zed was silent. He never really thought about where his name came from. He knew about it being the letter, but he'd just assumed his parents gave it to him. But Addison raised a good point.

Before he could respond, though, a voice behind him made him freeze. "Well, if it isn't Zed Necrodopolus. Walking around Zombietown, with a human."

"Don't turn around," Zed whispered to Addison. He pulled her along the sidewalk, trying his hardest to increase their pace without being noticed.

"Don't ignore me!" Ziryan snapped furiously. "I know you can hear me, Necrodopolus."

Zed felt a cold hand on his shoulder before being turned around forcibly, coming face to face with his childhood nightmare.

"Hey Ziryan," he said, trying to swallow his nerves. "Haven't seen you in a while."

Ziryan gave him a sick smile. "A while, huh? Maybe it's because you got me locked in Containment for ten years."

From the corner of his eye he saw Addison furrow her brows. Ziryan also noticed, shifting his gaze onto the small cheerleader. "I heard rumors you were screwing a human, but never thought shrimpy Necro would have it in him."

Addison made a noise of disgust. "Don't bring her into this," Zed stated, shifting so he was shielding her from his gaze. "You hate me, remember."

"I'm not an idiot, Necro," Ziryan hissed. "And I was just getting to know humans. They're not all bad, right Zed?"

Ziryan reached out and stroked Addison hair, earning a dirty look from her. "Don't touch me," she said in disgust.

"The human can talk," Ziryan noticed. "You picked a good one, Zed."

"I am a person, you know," Addison stated. "Or do you not remember anything about social cues from the years you spent in Containment?"

Zed gave her a warning look. "No, Addy, don't," he said in a pleading tone. "You shouldn't be in this."
"Tell him to stop treating me like some piece of meat and like an actual person."

"I'll just kill you instead."

Addison rolled her eyes. She stepped around Zed and looked her most intimidating. "Watch it, Dumbass. The only thing more deadly than my high kick, is my low kick."

Ziryan licked his lips. "You picked a feisty one, huh Necro? Mind if I get a bite?"

Before Zed could react, Ziryan had pounced on Addison—and promptly gotten served her cheerleader threat. He wasn't sure if she'd been hurt or not, but she had definitely gotten in a good punch to her attacker. Once he was down she kicked his side.

"Touch me again, I fucking dare you," Addison hissed.

"Addy, let's just go while he's down," Zed told her, lifting her off the ground and carrying her a few feet away.

Once they were far enough from the scene Zed pulled her aside, looking her up and down. "Did he hurt you?"

"You know I can take care of myself, right?"

Zed nodded quickly. "He's just…he's bad news, Addy."

Addison gave him an incredulous look. "Are you scared of him?"

Zed nodded without hesitation. "To be honest, I would've fled if you hadn't been there," he admitted. "Childhood nightmare and all that."

"Don't worry, Babe," Addison said. "You protect me and I'll protect you."

Zed was still worried, glancing back at Ziryan on the ground. He reached for Addison's hand. She winced and he felt the obviously split knuckles and blood over her fingers.

"You're bleeding," he noticed.

"That means that bastard will have blood on him too."

"Come on, I would rather be on the human side, away from Ziryan."

"So, why does Ziryan hate you?" Addison asked from her bathroom.

"Why doesn't he hate me?" Zed muttered. He laid back against her bed, letting out a sigh.

Addison snorted a little. "Another zombie backstory? I'm very excited for this one."

"It makes me sound stupid, just warning you."

"You're my knight in shining armor. You'll never sound stupid." Addison came out of the bathroom, her hand freshly wrapped with an ice pack over her hurt knuckles. She sat on her bed next to Zed and asked, "Story time?"

"Well, we met when I was…six. Kindergarten." Zed shivered dramatically. "We got all the shit Seabrook didn't want, so you can imagine what the school was like. It was the first time they had
even considered giving Zombies school so we got reject notebooks and textbooks, chairs and tables and chalkboards with lumps of left over chalk. It kinda sucked."

Zed shrugged. "So recess came and we were all wandering around. Most kids didn't know each other. I hung out by this overgrown tree alone. The only other kid I knew was Paizley, but she was homeschooled. Then I met Ziryan. He had friends and he was obviously cool. And he took me in, took me under his wing. He made me popular."

"He made you popular?"

Zed nodded. "This was before I became friends with Eliza, by the way," he added. "We were the coolest Zombies around. Me and Ziryan were the oldest ones, along with his lackies. Kids looked up to us. We had a reputation of being the best because we were the first."

Zed sighed, sitting up to look at her. "Then we met Bonzo."

"Bonzo?"

Zed nodded. "It was a huge scandal. His parents hid their pregnancy from Zombie Containment. They didn't want to risk Zombie Patrol ruining their baby or their pregnancy. They had been pretty close with Z, and you know what happened to him when the folks at Containment got involved. I won't get into the details of how that decision royally fucked up Bonzo's childhood now."

"Okay."

"Ziryan wasn't too happy to have someone so much older than us. And Bonzo was...he was pretty weird. Ziryan was constantly bullying him, making his life a living hell. I didn't bully Bonzo, but I didn't stop Ziryan from bullying him."

"Uh huh."

"Then Ziryan got sick and was quarantined at Containment. His lackies had to stay home as a precaution, but since I didn't really hang out with them after school ended I was fine to go to school." Zed explained. "I was back to my lonely tree. To my surprise, Bonzo was also at my tree. We started talking and...and I realized that he was actually pretty cool."

"Let's just say that when Ziryan found out I was hanging out with Bonzo, things went very badly. I was dropped in an instant, and they hated me more than they hated Bonzo."

"So that's why he hated you? Because you were nice?"

"Basically. And there's more...like why it's my fault he got ten years in Zombie Containment."

"Why?"

"It's a bad story, and it's a doozy. Maybe another time."

"Is he gonna go to our school now? You know, because Zombies go to Seabrook High?"

"I really don't want to think about that, right now," Zed told her. "Um, how's your hand?"

"Hurts a bit, but I'm fine," Addison answered. She smiled a little scandalously, saying, "I think we might just have to test if it's still functioning normally, though."

Zed looked at her, confused. "What do you mean?"
Addison rolled her eyes playfully. She moved so that she was straddling him, wrapping her arms loosely around his neck. "I just think we should see if I can still…do some basic tasks. And I know the perfect way, where we'll have at least two hours to 'test' this."

Zed's mouth formed an 'O' in sudden realization. "We should, shouldn't we?"

Addison giggled a little. "Yes, slow poke," she teased, then kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

Hey. How you been? I'm doing good, ya know. Totally not posting two chapters today as a birthday gift to you (though it should be the other way around). Totally…

Anyway! You know I love shouting out my friends so this chapter goes out to CallMeLy on! If you can tell, I hinted at her story, A Zombie History Lesson. It's all very good. So the story Paizley tells is the second chapter in that, make sure you check it out. It's the whole reason I didn't even mention it. Go read it. And while you're on her page, read her other stories. Don't worry, you won't regret it.

Keep reading and reviewing! We're nearing the end! Only twenty more chapters to go!
Zed didn't stay for dinner, saying his dad didn't want him walking around Zombietown after dark. Addison was home alone for half an hour before her parents came home from work. Her dad was the first to notice the bandages on her hand.

"Addison, what happened to your hand?" Dale asked.

"I punched a dude."

"What!"

Missy groaned, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I thought we were done being irrational? I thought we left that in the past?"

"It wasn't a girl, and I wasn't being jealous," Addison explained.

"Then who was it?"

"A zombie, named Ziryan," Addison stated.

Both her parents stiffened, making Addison more suspicious. "Do you guys know him?" Addison asked with a raised eyebrow.

Instead of answering her, Missy turned to her husband and said quietly, "I didn't know he was getting out yet."

"I didn't realize it would be so soon," Dale responded. "It's October already?"

"What're you guys talking about? Who's Ziryan?" Her parents looked at her, then back at each other.

"Ziryan is the type of Zombie that we've warned you about," Missy said slowly. "Please tell me you haven't talked with him."

"He was bothering Zed when we were walking home," Addison explained. "What did he do? Why is he so bad?"

"He's…the product of a few failed experiments," Dale explained.

"...What?"

Her parents sat down across from her. "You know that after the outbreak, there were tons of experiments to figure out how to make Zombies human again," her dad started.

"Yeah?"

"It took awhile to figure out there wasn't...there wasn't a safe and sound way to reverse the zombism," Dale stated. "So we moved on to studying the biological differences between Zombies and humans. Like reproduction. And it took a bit of time but we did get some successful pregnancies. And there were a lot of stillborn and infant deaths."

Addison looked at them in surprise. "This is the part of the story that most people don't hear about, the not-so-perfect parts," Missy added. "There were a lot of failed experiments."
"That's horrible!"

"It was in the past, Addison. Nothing we can do now." Her mother shrugged.

Addison gaped at them. "But-I-Why would you do that? The poor people! The poor babies!"

"That's not the point of the story," Dale said, slightly frustrated. Addison scoffed, ashamed but not surprised by his uncaring nature toward all the experimentation.

"You know that Zed was the first," Missy said. "When he was born, they realized they couldn't put a shock collar on a live baby. That was when they developed the Z-Band, to be adjustable to wrist sizes and still provide the same effect of the shock collar, just where it couldn't potentially choke the newborn."

"Naturally," Addison said sarcastically.

Missy rolled her eyes. "Anyway, Zed and his parents stayed in a cozy little 'apartment' in Containment so they could observe his development and growth. His parents had to answer many questions, all so they could figure out how Zed survived past birth. And a few weeks later was the next Zombie baby. A boy, named Ziryan. The scientists at Containment had been begging to run tests on Zed, but he was a miracle in himself. He was the first. But Ziryan was number two, so the scientists got free reign with him."

"They kept them in the same environment, using Zed as a control for the experiments they did on Ziryan," Dale explained. "More Zombies were born, which meant more test subjects. Once they perfected the Z-Bands and understood everything about the anatomy, they moved it to the miracle baby. It only took a few months to get everything perfected."

"So basically you guys fucked up a bunch of babies for the joy of experimentation, am I getting that right?"

Dale and Missy shrugged. "Yes. I was on the Council at that point, aiding with the decisions for Zombies. Your father was just a lieutenant then. It took a lot of work to get these stories; they were classified."

"So then why'd you tell me?"

"The governor is getting on us about the Zombies cover-up," Missy shrugged. "We have to tread this lightly. And maybe...we wanted your help to minimize the collateral damage."

Addison rolled her eyes. "This is stupid," She stated, standing up. "I'm out of here. I'll be back in the morning."

Her parents stood up too, mirroring her as she marched to the stairs. "Where do you think you're going?" Her mother demanded.

"I'm gonna spend the night with sane people," Addison said as she walked up the stairs. "I'm going to Zed's, where his dad isn't crazy and expects me to help him cover-up a freak accident!"

"Addison!"

She ignored them, disappearing into her room. She packed a bag of pajamas and clothes for school and to shower in the morning, then grabbed it, her backpack, and her cheer bag. She stood at her room door, pulling out her phone and calling Zed.
Hey Babe, what's up?

Addison sighed, running a hand through her hair. Can I stay at your house tonight?

Of course! Is everything alright?

Kinda, sorta, not really. I'll explain when I get there.

I'll meet you at the barrier. I don't want you walking through Zombietown this late. Especially with Ziryan out there.

Okay, I'll see you in a few.

Zed waited patiently at the barrier for Addison to show up. The sun was setting when she showed up, walking around the semipermanently opened gates. Zed smiled at her and she returned it, weakly. He moved and took her overnight bag from her shoulder, then laced their hands together. Let's get back home, he said.

Okay, she said with a smile. Thank you, by the way.

You don't have to thank me. I wouldn't want you to stay there if things were going bad.

They walked quickly to Zed's house. He made sure to lock the door once they were both inside, then turned and called, I'm home!

Addison was busy greeting Puppy; Zoey came running down the stairs, grinning at Addison and her brother. Addy! she exclaimed excitedly. Addison had enough time to straighten up before Zoey was hugging her excitedly.

Hey Zoe, it's been a while, Addison said with equal excitement.

Are you gonna come live with us again? Zoey asked hopefully.

Just got tonight, Addison told her, instantly crushing Zoey. But I promise I'll visit more often. We can even schedule play dates!

It's not the same, Zoey said sadly. She let go of Addison and stepped back. I liked it when you were here. You were fun and you braided my hair, played games with me and showed me movies and songs and—I wanna have never ending fun with you! You're like my big sister.

Zed felt his heart melt and break all at once. It had been a little more than a year since Addison had left, and Zoey hadn't been the same since. She was still Zoey—she was a ball of excitement and life, running around cheering and singing. But there was a lingering sadness that Zed could see, one that was never there when Addison would come over.

I miss you too, Addison said. How about we plan a fun girls weekend while I'm here?

Zoey gasped, her smile widening. I'm gonna get a notebook! And glitter!

She ran back to the stairs, taking them quickly to head back to her room. Zed chuckled, shaking his head and turning to Addison. You're so...I don't even know. Zoey's so happy when you're here.

Addison gave him a smile. Where's your dad? Addison asked.

Kitchen, he responded. After a second, he added, I may not have mentioned that you were
staying here."

"I'm not even surprised."

Zed ignored her, walking into the kitchen where his dad was finishing dinner. "Can Addison sleepover?" Zed asked.

Zevon gave him an odd look. "Why? I thought Eliza was staying at her house?"

"What does Eliza have to do with this?"

Zevon shrugged. "Figured Addison would stay if Eliza was there."

"Well, Eliza is with Eva and her family, protesting for Zombie rights."

Zevon nodded in understanding. "Gotta love Eliza," he muttered. He asked Zed, "So why does Addison need to stay?"

"No idea." Zed shrugged. "Trust me, though?"

"I don't," Zevon honestly said. "But Addison…I trust a little."

Zed rolled his eyes.

"Door open, dinner's almost ready."

"Alright Dad."

Zed turned away from the kitchen, heading to where Addison was waiting (by the stairs). They went up together, going into Zed's room, putting Addison's bags down on his bed.

"So…you wanna talk about what happened?"

Addison sat down on his bed and he did the same. "My parents told me some very troubling information about when you were a baby," she said vaguely.

Zed furrowed his brows in confusion. "What?"

"They were doing experiments on Zombie babies," she explained, then quickly added, "Not you."

"What kind of experiments?"

"All kinds. It's still 'classified' or some bullshit. All I know is that, according to my dad, the experiments royally fucked up Ziryan or whatever."

Zed's jaw fell in shock. He had never heard of experiments except for the ones they did on Zombies like Z. And his had remained classified until a few years ago, after the incident with Zed's mom.

"Is that the excuse they're using for why he's such a dick." It wasn't a question, but an annoyed statement.

"I dunno," Addison said with a shrug. "I left because they talked about everything as if you guys were…were nothing. Like 'oh a bunch of babies died and we experimented on them and cut open their dead bodies to study their anatomy and physiology but it's fine since they were just Zombies.' It's sick."
Addison made a disgusted face, shaking her head. "My parents are horrible."

Zed scoffed, muttering, "And they call us monsters."

Addison turned her head and looked at him, tilting her head in confusion. "You didn't know about that, did you?" she asked.

"I knew that I spent a year in Containment after I was born. But…I didn't know they were experimenting on us."

"Not you, you were the miracle baby," Addison said. "They had to keep you in perfect condition to cover their trails. Disgusting."

Zed sighed, wrapping an arm around her shoulder. "It's inhumane," he told her. "Humans are the worst."

Addison gave him a look. "I haven't considered you human since you got that DNA test," Zed said in defense.

Addison chuckled a little. "So then what am I?"

"The same thing I would call our kids?"

"You mean the kids we don't have?"

"Yep, those kids," he agreed, then said a little wistfully, "Alexander."

Addison chuckled. "Is someone you know pregnant? 'Cause it ain't me and I have no idea why you're so obsessed with babies."

"Jamari's sister," Zed answered with a smile. "She had a baby a few weeks ago and let a couple of us go see her. Human babies are so cute."

"What about Zombie babies?"

"They're also cute," Zed said. "And a…a hybrid? A zoman? A humbie?"


Zed laughed and kissed her temple. "Okay now a girl's name," he said. "Kizzie?"

Addison snorted a little. "How is that the first thing that came to your mind?"

Zed just shrugged, making her laugh full on. From downstairs, Zevon called them for dinner.

Eliza would be back from Concord around midday, which meant Addison would have to go home. Addison didn't want to have to see her parents without Eliza there, because they acted more understanding whenever Eliza was around. There were more important things to worry about anyway, because Ziryan was at their school.

Zed and Addison were at school, minding their own business and walking through the halls before the day actually started, when they ran into Ziryan and two other Zombies who Addison didn't know all that well. She felt Zed tense beside her and felt a lot angrier at the thought of this guy making Zed so upset.
"So we meet again," Ziryan said with a malicious smile. Zed didn't say anything in response. He had a few inches on his harasser but Ziryan was still broader and a lot more threatening. If Addison looked close enough, she could see the skin around his Z-Band dark and veiny, like his Z-Band had been messed with for long periods of time. It wasn't red like Zed's but it was still concerning.

"What's the matter? Is little Baby Necro scared? You're gonna let your little bitch fight your battles for you again?"

Addison rolled her eyes. "I don't have time for Zombies like you."

"Addy," Zed said warningly.

"Oh is that your little pet name?" Ziryan stepped closer and bent down to her level, mocking her by placing his hands on his knees. He got close to her face and hissed, "How much do I need to pay to get a good handjob, huh?"

"Get out of my face before I hit you." Addison snapped.

"Get away from my girlfriend," Zed said in a voice close to a growl. He clearly was going to defend Addison rather than himself.

Ziryan licked his lips and turned his head to look at Zed. He gave Addison a side eye. "Oh? Did you hear something, you frosty-haired freak?" he taunted as he stroked her neck.

Addison's eyes widen in surprise and then anger. Before she could do anything, Zed dropped her hand and shoved Ziryan away from Addison.

Ziryan hit the ground and Zed stepped over him, nailing a punch to the former's face. "Touch her again!" he growled angrily. "I fucking dare you!"

The two Zombies who had flanked Ziryan stepped forward but were swallowed up in the growing crowd.

Addison gasped as Ziryan grabbed her boyfriend by his shirt collar and turned them over, landing a few punches while Zed wrestled around. The people in the crowd were cheering on Zed as he managed to get them back to their feet and slam his aggressor into the lockers.

"Holy shit!" Addison jumped at the sound of Eliza beside her; she didn't even notice her walk up. "Zed's finally done it."

Addison couldn't find any words. She watched in horror as Zed and Ziryan threw punch after punch, throwing each other around.

"Hey! Break this up! Break it up!"

The crowd broke parted as Principal Lee and Coach came through. Then pulled Zed and Ziryan apart and moved them several feet away from each other.

"That's enough! Get to class!" Principal Lee announced.

She said something to the two boys that Addison didn't hear as she fought to stay at the front of the dispersing crowd. She tried to follow them to the office but Principal Lee stopped her.

"You get to class too, young lady."
Addison groaned but complied. Eliza pulled her along toward their next class.

"I didn't realize that Ziryan got out," she said.

"Can you explain to me who the fuck he is? Because Zed gave me a story filled with holes, my parents were terrified at the thought of him, and I honestly don't have any other friends."

"Sure," Eliza said with a smile and a shrug. "Let's cut class, go somewhere ominous for storytime."

Bree materialized beside them. "Storytime?"

"Zombie Safe Room," Eliza decided. She pulled the two cheerleaders toward the safe room, checking the halls before they went inside.
There were Zombie kids who grew up together and were best friends. There were Zombies who were complete loners. And kindergarten was hell for both of them.

I was a kid who was cool because I had a big sister from before the Outbreak. It was a good kind of cool. People would come to my house to play games and ask Azalea about life before the Outbreak. We didn't know that they didn't remember life before the Outbreak; Azalea would just make up stories to appease us kids.

That's all beside the point. I was a good cool. There was the bad cool. Ziryan was the bad kind of cool. He was cool because he was one of the Firsts.

Everyone had heard the story of Zed Necrodopolus, the first Zombie baby. And as we grew up everyone bragged about their number. I was eleven, if you're wondering.

Our numbers were our values. Top ten were the coolest. Though after the Incident, only five of the Top Ten were alive.

"Alive? What do you mean? Were they killed?" Addison asked.

"Hush, listen to the story," Eliza assured her.

Zed kept to himself as a kid. He was so pure, always hanging out with weirdos (Paizley). All the kids avoided him because he had been seen as some gift from Z himself, someone we should never touch or we might destroy him. Everyone was so cautious around Zed, because he was the First.

Everyone but Ziryan. He had no precautions or fear. I had never seen the playground more silent than the day Ziryan talked to the First.

"I guess you could say he was the first to talk to the First," Bree joked.

"Stop interrupting!" Eliza snapped, faking annoyance. "Anyway..."

I wasn't there so I don't know what they said to each other. But they sat next to each other in class and ate lunch together and played together during recess. Ziryan's friends were cool with Zed—they were Three, Four, Five, and Seven. I bet you can imagine why they liked Zed.

"Because he was the First," Addison exasperated.

"Hush!"

I've mentioned that Ziryan was a bad kind of cool. He used his ranking over us constantly to get whatever he wanted. If you had Taffy Tongues and he saw them, he'd call you out by number and say hand them over. Things didn't get better now that he had the First with him. Ziryan was king of Zombie Elementary.

And then Bonzo showed up. I remember the day the Zombie Patrol raided his house; I didn't know at the time that it was because of suspicions of Zombies harboring other Zombies to avoid
Containment. But low and behold, they produced Bonzo. He was shy and terrified of everything around him.

It wasn't until months later that I'd learn that his parents made him an outcast, telling him lies to keep him from interacting with other Zombies. They raised him like a human and even pretended he was one; they said that there were monsters out there who spoke a strange language and who'd hurt him if he left, monsters called Zombies.

"I'm confused," Bree said.

"It doesn't make much sense, trust me," Eliza stated. "It's weird and confusing and stupid. But that's as much as Bonzo will tell us."

"I—Somethings are hard to talk about." Addison shrugged. "I get that part, at least."

"Anyway…"

You can imagine how Bonzo affected the hierarchy of the Zombie kids. The teacher—some dude from Zombie Containment—made Bonzo introduce himself and talk and Bonzo only spoke in Zombie Tongue, which wasn't a problem for us since we'd all known it since birth. But then we found out Bonzo was born in January, the same year as a lot of us.

You could hear the anger bubbling inside of Ziryan. Zed didn't care much, he thought it was pretty cool. The guy from Containment reported it immediately. We spent a week being questioned and every house in Zombietown was invaded in search of any other unknown babies. Of course, only Bonzo's parents were awful enough to do something like that.

Either way, Ziryan was hella pissed. He got his posse all riled up too, talking all that crap about Bonzo lying to knock them down a peg, thinking he was better than them because he only spoke in Zombie Tongue, et cetera. Zed wasn't as convinced but he just did whatever Ziryan did because Zed was First and Ziryan was Second and they were born to be best friends.

Bonzo was the first victim of Ziryan's torment. It was awful. They pushed him and teased him and broke his crayons and pencils and spit on his worksheets. They were jerks.

Then one day, Ziryan got the flu. He immediately was sent to Containment, and Three, Four, Five, and Seven were sent too, as a precaution. Zed went for a check up but once they verified he didn't have the virus they sent him back.

"Why didn't he have to stay as a precaution?" Addison asked.

"He was the First. It's bad publicity. You know what bad press is like."

Addison shrugged. "I guess."

Zed was back to being a loner. Except, someone was at Zed's tree.

"Zed had a tree?" Bree asked.

"I didn't mention it?" Both cheerleaders shook their heads. "Zed would sit under a big shady, very radioactive tree. It wasn't very harmful radiation, especially since we were already mutants. Anyway…"

Bonzo was sitting under Zed's tree. With the Firsts gone, Zed didn't have any other friends. He had no choice but to sit with Bonzo.
Bonzo had every right to be terrified of Zed. Even though Zed never actively bullied him, he had been a witness. Witnesses are just as much to blame as the attacker's. He actually tried to run away, which was when Zed realized how much of an asshole he had been.

Zed was seven though, so he didn't think he was an asshole. He just thought he was a big jerk (in Zombie Tongue we call it ozk).

It took a whole week for Zed to gain Bonzo's trust. But by the end, they were sitting together (in complete silence), under the tree. They walked home together, again in silence. Bonzo's parents were very livid when they saw their son with another Zombie and pulled Bonzo out of school after that.

"They can do that?" Addison asked.

"Claimed it as homeschooling," Eliza said with a nod. "That's what Paizley's parents did, but they had good reason."

Even though they couldn't be friends, Bonzo showed Zed a true almost friendship. Bonzo didn't like Zed because he was the First, he didn't mind Zed because Zed was trying to be nice.

Zed realized that the other Firsts only liked him because he was Number One.

Addison and Bree both started laughing. "What's so funny?" Eliza all but demanded.

"He was number one!" Bree and Addison said simultaneously, laughing and mocking the line from Spongebob.

Eliza rolled her eyes.

So Zed learned his friends sucked. He told his friends that they were being mean to Bonzo. It did not go well. Ziryan got so mad. He beat the living snot out of Zed. He shouted obscenities at him, telling him that he was nothing but an accidental lab experiment gone wrong and that Ziryan was supposed to be the first because he would be so much better at it.

Ziryan broke his Z-Band off. A lot of people say that it was because he wanted to be the First, but I know it was because he wanted to make Zed bleed. He wanted to punish him for not being the little lackie he wanted.

Everyone involved in the Incident was sent to Containment. Zed got out a few hours later with mediocre fixes to his wounds. We never saw Ziryan or any of the first ten after that.

Azalea told me what happened a few weeks after the Incident. Ziryan got ten years in Containment for violent tendencies, violation of uniform, attacking a fellow Zombie. The list goes on.

But…But when we got sent to Containment back in freshman year, we found out what was really happening. The nine people left of the first ten had been used for experimentation in the ten years they were kept there. I don't know if it was the entire ten they were being experimented on but they were just lab rats by then, eight years later.

"So that's the story," Eliza said. "I don't wanna find out why they finally let him out and actually let him near other people—especially humans."

"Me either," Addison grumbled. "He tore off his Z-Band to fight a Zombie. And I'm sure he either wants to eat me sexually or…not."

"How can we get him back there?" Bree asked.

Eliza thought for a moment. "Well, I'm sure if something were to happen to a certain man's daughter—"

Addison's jaw fell open. "What! Absolutely not! I don't care what he's done to Zed, I won't go through with that!"

"Relax, Adds," Eliza said. "He's already done the work. We just need evidence now."
Zed got in school suspension, which was proctored by his football coach. To say Coach was disappointed was an understatement.

"You got into a fight, Zed? You're captain for god sake! You're supposed to lead the team with Eva and now you're fighting new kids!"

"Coach, you don't understand."

"Oh I do. I bet my salary it had something to do with Addison."

Zed hung his head because Coach was right. He lifted it immediately and said, "He was touching her! He was treating her like some cheap whore and not a human being! I had to do something!"

"Violence is never the answer, Zed," Coach said in exasperation.

"Coach!" Zed exasperated. "He-He's a bully! He hates me! It's my fault he was in Containment for ten years and now he's out and he's seeking revenge!"


Eliza went to her locker and found Eva waiting for her. "Where were you last period?" Eva asked.

"Safe Room with Bree and Addison," Eliza answered. "This Zombie who was a huge dick got out of Containment yesterday. Things are not going well."

Eva raised a curious eyebrow. "You gotta give me more than that, Babe."

"I just spent the entirety of last period telling this story," Eliza said in a whiny voice.

"Synthesize."

Eliza rolled her eyes but did as she was asked. "His name was Ziryan and he was an asshole who didn't like it when people questioned his decisions. He got ten years in Containment for a list of stupid Zombie laws."

"Wait…this happened when you were…six?"

"Ziryan is only a few weeks younger than Zed," Eliza explained. "But yes, I was six."

Eliza opened her locker and dumped her bag inside, then slammed it closed. Standing on the other side, much to her surprise, was Ziryan, giving her a predatory smile.

"Eliza Scythes," he said in lieu of greeting.

Eliza gave him an unamused look. "Ziryan."

"Still as charming as ever I see."

"What do you want? You wanna harass me too?"
Ziryan rolled his eyes with a smile. "I didn't think you went to school here, though I should've figured that wherever Zed was, you were," he said. "Was surprised that you weren't in Zombietown last night. Thought you'd throw your favorite First a welcoming party."

"It's been a decade, rankings have no value in Zombietown," Eliza stated.

"Still."

Eliza rolled her eyes. "I'm going to lunch. Though this conversation is making me lose my appetite."

Eliza turned around and walked away, grabbing Eva's arm and pulling her along. "That guy's a douche," Eva grumbled. Eliza snorted and laced her hand in Eva's.

Unfortunately for them, Ziryan was annoyingly persistent. He jogged until he was in front of them. "Come on Eliza, can't we be friends?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you're a dick to my friends," Eliza stated obviously. "You don't think Addison would tell me how you treat her? Girls are more than just objects for sex."

"I know that," Ziryan said. "But...but she's a human! How can you side with a human, Eliza? You and me! We hate humans!"

Eliza rolled her eyes. "If it isn't obvious, things are different now," she said. She held up her and Eva's intertwined hands. "My girlfriend. Human. She's cool."

Ziryan made a disgusted face. "You're gay and you decided dating a human was a good idea? What happened to you, Eleven?"

"Eleven?" Eva muttered.

"I grew up, Ziryan," Eliza said matter-of-factly. She stopped walking, making him stop. Then, in a calm and controlled voice, Eliza explained, "I'm sixteen now, not six. I've had social interactions. I've been lied to and hurt and I've cried over stupid things. I've gone to football games and school dances and I've been to a real sleepover. I've been through the jaws of hell that people call life, and you haven't. You've been rotting away in Zombie Containment for ten years because you can't deal with the fact that someone is better than you, and until you learn to get over yourself, you're still gonna be the stupid seven year old who ripped off his own Z-Band to attack one of his own."

Ziryan gave her a deadly look, but she didn't pay him any attention. She pushed past him, heading toward the cafeteria with Eva.

Before they got to the cafeteria, Eva pulled on Eliza's hand; she pulled Eliza back and toward her until they were facing each other. "Have I ever told you how hot you are when you're telling people off?" Eva asked with a slightly amused, slightly seductive smile.

Eliza giggled. "I am pretty awesome, aren't I?"

"Hella."

Instead of going to the cafeteria, Addison went and sat in the library. She wasn't up to sitting in the
cafeteria without Zed there, especially since she wasn't hungry and he would usually force her to eat something.

She didn't know what to do anymore. Eliza had suggested for her to tell her dad that Ziryan had been harassing her, which wasn't necessarily true. He was being annoying and rude and disgusting, but Addison wouldn't say it was harassment. Addison couldn't lie, no matter how horrible of a person Ziryan was.

Textbooks dropped in front of her and Addison looked up, seeing Ziryan sit across from her. "Speaking of the devil."

"Your name is Addison, right?"

She nodded. "And yours is Ziryan."

He nodded. "So how you been?"

Addison looked at him, slightly confused. "Why do you care?"

"I'm trying to be nice."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a person with layers," he stated obviously. "Aren't you like, a champion for Zombie rights or something?"

"You know I thought the Terrible Trio were the absolute worst Zombies I'd have to deal with. And here you are, annoying me with just your presence."

Ziryan chuckled. "You sound like you're into me."

Addison made a face of disgust. "I'd rather run into oncoming traffic."

"You're getting much more creative with your suicide attempts."

Addison scowled at him, making him laugh. "I can see why a pussy like Zed likes you," Ziryan said. "I mean you clearly wear the pants in your relationship. Hypothetically, because everyone knows you're a cheerleading skank, parading her ass around in that sweet little mini skirt."

Addison hummed, returning her attention to her homework. Ziryan wasn't worth her time.

"Okay, seriously, I have a question for you."

"What?" she asked without looking up.

"Your dad is the Chief of Zombie Patrol, right?" he asked and Addison nodded. "And your mom is the mayor?"

"That's two questions," Addison pointed out.

Ziryan gave her an eye roll. "You and Zed are perfect for each other, you're both so lame," he complained.

Addison giggled, then asked, "What do you need with that information anyway?"

"I wanna know what happened to my friends," he said seriously.
"What about those dudes who were with you this morning?"

"Not my friends, just my fanbase."

Addison rolled her eyes. "Okay. So why would I know what happened to your friends?"

"Because of your parents! Isn't there like a database or something where they keep tabs on everything?"

"I don't know," she shrugged. "I'm sixteen, I'm at the point in my life where I don't care about what my parents do for a living."

"I bet if Zed was asking—"

"Don't even try that," Addison interrupted. "If Zed was asking I might try to help. And it's not because he's my boyfriend or because he's cute. It's because Zed would've asked nicely. He wouldn't have called me a slut or whatever you've been saying about me. He sure as hell wouldn't touch me without my expressed consent first. So maybe the next time you want something from someone, you learn some manners and maybe you'll get what you're looking for."

Ziryan's lips pursed in a thin line. "Just because your boyfriend is a pussy doesn't mean everyone has to be to be seen as something in your eyes."

"I think what you're talking about is being a decent person."

"So you won't help me?"

"Undecided," Addison said. "How about this: if you can ask politely by the end of the day, I'll consider helping you."

Ziryan just looked at her. "Final offer, take it or leave it. I don't care either way."

Addison didn't see Ziryan again. The rest of the day was incredibly boring, especially without Zed. And after school they both had practice. They had seen each other for a brief period between the end of school and practice, where Zed said he had to go to practice, though he wasn't allowed to practice until he did his daily punishment (running, cleaning the gear, the works).

After they both finished practice, they walked home together like the day before. Addison walked with him to his house, like she had promised Zoey she would do the day before. Though both Zed and Addison knew how much trouble Zed was going to be in because of the fight and the suspension, which meant he'd be confined to his room while Addison played with Zoey.

"When is your truck gonna get fixed?" Addison asked her boyfriend.

"Dezmond—Paizley's Dad—is gonna take a look at it this weekend," Zed explained. "I can't even get it to start anymore. I might have to get a whole new car."

"Car or truck?"

"Don't know," he said with a shrug. "Though you'll be the first one I ask for input when the time comes."

"Aw."

"Because your parents refuse to let you get a license because of all the bad, bad shit you've done in
the past few years."

Addison chuckled and shook her head. "You just ruined it," she told him. "I might have let you get a little farther than…third base?"

Zed chuckled and shook his head. "Zoey is home. I wasn't even planning on trying. Especially after the day I've had."

"Who said anything about going to your house? There's plenty of alleys between here and your house."

Zed looked at her with a raised eyebrow and an excited smile. Addison giggled and turned down the next alley, pulling Zed along with her.

"Are we really gonna have dirty alley sex?"

Addison dropped her head back and laughed, backing up against the wall. "I dunno, maybe," she said with a shrug. "Just kiss me. It's been way too long."

Zed chuckled and put his hands on her hips, bringing his head down and closing his lips over hers. Addison brought her arms up, wrapping them around his neck and moving her lips against his.

Zed's hands froze on her hips when he heard the faint sound of groaning in the distance. Addison moved her mouth down to his jaw and muttered, "What's wrong?"

Zed turned his face away from hers, looking further down the alley. "I hear something," he mumbled.

Addison gave him a curious look, tilting her head. She listened too but didn't hear anything unusual. Zed pulled away from her, taking a cautious step further into the alley.

"Something's out there," he muttered.

"What is it?" Addison asked.

As soon as she asked, a tall and broad figure jumped out from the darkness, tackling Zed to the ground. Zed screamed and groaned when his head bounced off of the jagged concrete, his vision going black with white flashes.

Addison screamed and jumped back in terror as she registered the rogue Zombie. He got up off of Zed and snarled in her direction, before charging at her. Addison felt frozen in fear. Zed was definitely hurt on the ground, and a rogue Zombie was going to attack her. She wanted to run but she couldn't leave Zed there, alone and hurt on the ground at the mercy of the rogue Zombie.

The rogue Zombie was on her, a hand on her throat, choking the life out of her. Addison was pushed up against the wall and off the ground. She gasped and struggled to breath, her airways being closed off by the rogue Zombie. She didn't even think rogue Zombies were coherent enough to kill in such a way. Addison believed they would just eat brains, but here he was, strangling her to death.

Addison looked from Zed on the ground to the Zombie killing her and noticed for the first time that this was Ziryan. Ziryan was rogue and he was going to kill her and Addison regretted every word she's said to him in the past few days. She grasped at his arm, trying and failing to break free of his death grip.
Finally, he let go and Addison fell to the ground, gasping for air. Addison wanted to go over and check on Zed but her head was fuzzy from all the air it had been denied.

Before she could do anything, though, Ziryan had kicked her in the stomach, knocking her into her side and making it all the harder to breathe. Ziryan pounced on her, grabbing her arm and sinking his teeth in just below her elbow.

Addison felt searing, red-hot pain flare through her body. Black spots went from the corners of her vision to engulfing her sight entirely. She screamed—or she assumed she screamed, since she couldn't hear anything but excruciatingly loud white noise.

'Oh god I'm gonna die here. I'm gonna die I'm gonna die.'

However, her vision cleared in the slightest bit. She could hear more than just white noise: there were sirens and people shouting all around her. The pain had gone from searing to numbing, which made her even more concerned. She barely registered Zed's voice above her, but when she did she focused as much as she could on him.

"...kay, Addison, you're okay. Just stay awake, stay awake for me."

Addison felt a tightness in her chest and something hard and heavy turning her over. She was facing up next, staring at Zed's blurry and concerned face. She could feel his hand on her face. Zed was pulled away immediately after he touched her, being dragged back forcefully.

Without thinking, Addison shot up and grabbed Zed by his extended arm. The numbness in her body vanished and was replaced by piercing pain, but she didn't care. Her vision was blurry and unfocused but she recognized the face of Gus.

"Addison! Addison!" That was her dad this time. All the people and the noises and everything was making her head hurt worse than it already did.

"Addison, you need to stop moving," her dad said in a panicked (yet calm) voice.

"Zed," she whimpered, grasping at his arm.

Zed gave her a helpless look. "Addy, just stay with your dad," he said. "You have to go to a hospital."

"No. Not without you."

"Addy…"

"I'm not going anywhere without you."
Best Big Sister

**A few hours earlier…**

Addison had cheer practice after school, so Eva would drive her girlfriend back to Addison's house. Neither of Addison's parents got home until after five so Addison had given Eliza a key to get in.

To Eliza's surprise, when her and Eva got there, Azalea was sitting on the steps outside. Eliza hadn't seen her sister since the summer, after Eliza was thrown out. Eliza was happy to see her, of course. Azalea was her big sister, her role model, her favorite person in the world when she wasn't ruining Eliza's life. She was also incredibly nervous to see her older sister, with the events of the summer and the fact that she was walking up with Eva.

Except Azalea didn't even seem to flinch when she saw her sister and her sister's girlfriend approaching. Eliza sucked in a breath before stopping in front of her sister.

"Hey. What're you doing here?"

Azalea stood up and smiled slightly. "Tomorrow's your birthday," she stated. "I brought you a birthday present. And a letter from Zombie Containment."

"Oh? Do you...wanna come in?"

"Is that allowed? I mean, this isn't your house or anything…"

"Yeah. We were just gonna do some homework and Addison doesn't mind when Eva comes over while she's gone."

Eva smiled at Azalea. "Come on. I'll text Addison a heads up too."

Eliza led the way up the steps and unlocked the door, letting them in. They settled in the kitchen at the table. "I didn't think I'd ever see you on this side of the barrier, Lea," Eliza noted.

"I wanted to see my baby sister."

"Aw," Eva gushed (quietly). Eliza tilted her head at her girlfriend.

"I wish I had an older sister," Eva explained. She turned to Azalea and added, "Eliza talks about you a lot and it's so sweet and nice and I thought you were a jerk after what you did during the summer and Eliza had clouded judgement but I mean, clearly you're a good person."

"I—You talk about me?"


"Oh." Azalea glanced down at the table. "I-Uh—I'm sorry about everything. I didn't mean for it to turn out like this."

"I know," Eliza said.

"I was just trying to protect you! I didn't want you to get hurt or—I don't know, I just wanted to keep you from all the terrible, terrible zongro out there."

"Lea, I know," Eliza stated more forcefully. Azalea looked up at her sister, her eyes sad but
hopful. "I know what was going through your head. I'm not mad. I was never mad. You're my big sister, you were doing what you thought was good. I’m sure you would've told Mom and Dad even if I was out with a boy."

Azalea laughed a little embarrassed. "I probably would have."

Eliza smiled. "You're welcome to hang here if you want. Or go home. It doesn't matter. We're gonna do some homework until Addison gets here."

"Addison? She's…Zed's girlfriend, right?"

"Not just his girlfriend," Eva said pointedly. "Class president, cheer captain, and all around badass. She's amazing and shouldn't be known for her relationship status. Just saying."

Eliza chuckled, shook her head and rolled her eyes. "Eva's big on women's rights and Zombie rights and rights for everyone. We went to Concord yesterday and were going this weekend again."

"Sounds fun. What do you do in Concord?"

Eliza and Eva went into a full, excited explanation of all of their fun Zombie Rights adventures. Eliza got them snacks from the fridge and pulled up websites to show her sister. Afterwards, they starting doing their homework. Azalea was pretty good with math and helped them both, then sat back and read Eliza's history book while they did science homework.

They were all sitting peacefully for a few hours until Eva got a text from Zed.

"Holy shit," she gasped.

"What?" Eliza asked.

"Ziryan ripped off his Z-Band and attacked Zed and Addison," Eva said in complete shock, still reading her phone. "He bit off a chunk of her arm. They're going to the hospital now."

Eliza and Azalea gaped at the human. "What!"

"Concussion watch. Stay awake, and look out for any headaches or nausea or dizziness. If anything feels wrong or weird, if you get blurry visions, anything, call the nurse."

Zed shouldn't have been allowed in the ambulance, let alone the hospital. Yet there he was, sitting in a waiting room with a Z-Patrol Officer on each side of him and a squeamish nurse checking him over.

"Can you tell me your name?"

"Zed."

"Your full name please."

Zed sighed, annoyed because he had already answered the same question twice before. "Zedekiah Jacob Necrodopolus," he answered.

"Can you tell me what day of the week it is?"

"Thursday."
"Do you know the date?"

"October seventh."

"Who's the president?"

"Some dickwad," Zed said with an eye roll. On his right, he heard one of the officers snort at his response.

The nurse (Jenny or something) wasn't fazed by his response. "Can you tell me what happened Zed?"

"I…I was walking with my girlfriend, back to my house. And we went down an alley…” Zed glanced up, remembering why they made the detour but not wanting to say why in front of Missy, who was sitting several seats down. Fortunately, Missy was on her phone, so Zed muttered, "to makeout."

"Uh huh." Jenny the nurse seemed to be taking notes, so Zed waited for her to look up before continuing.

"I heard something down the alley. It sounded like someone was rogue, which should've been impossible with all the Z-Band upgrades, but the next thing I know I was jumped by a rogue Zombie."

"Then you fell and hit your head?"

Zed nodded and winced; when he nodded his head felt like it was full of thick water being pushed around.

"I think I blacked out after that," he admitted.

"It's okay. Just tell me what you remember happened next."

"Um…” There were a lot of blank spots in his memory, all of it fuzzy and empty. "The next thing I remember is the Zombie Patrol pulling me off of the rogue Zombie. And then Addison losing her shit when they tried to handcuff me. The ambulance ride, coming up here. Blah blah blah."

"Alright." Nurse Jenny wrote some more on her clipboard. She looked up at the officers next to Zed and said, "We need to go to an exam room. Have you called his parents?"

"Zombies aren't allowed in hospitals," the officer on the left stated in a gruff voice. Zed just closed his eyes and nodded along. It wasn't like his dad would should up; Zevon was taking up as many extra hours as he could for the inevitability of Zed going to college.

"We have already broken code to allow Mr. Necrodopolus to come up here," Left-Officer went on.

"A terrible choice, really," Missy mumbled.

Nurse Jenny looked between the mayor and Zed. Zed just shrugged, so his nurse got up and said, "Come with me, Zed."

It was after dark when Addison's anesthesia wore off. Zed was sitting in the chair beside her bed, now with only one Patrol with him. Luckily it was Officer Stanley (the one who laughed at his joke). Dale had left work and was with his wife on the other side of the room, talking quietly and avoiding Zed.
The room was dark except for the light coming from the bathroom. Nurse Jenny had insisted on the room staying dark, because of Zed's concussion, which was also why he was sitting and staring into the darkness and not napping.

It was hours later when Addison finally regained consciousness. She was groggy, delirious, and confused. She was mumbling incomprehensible words as she woke up, drawing the attention of everyone in the room.

Zed made a move to get closer to her, but the heavy hand of the officer on his shoulder kept him in place. Missy and Dale rushed from across the room to their daughter's bedside. It only took a few seconds for them to realize that Addison was asking for Zed, nothing else.

"Zed…Zed. Where's Zed?" she was still groggy and half asleep but opened her eyes, her breathing quickening as she started to panic. All the machines she's hooked up to start to scream as she wakes up and panics, calling out for Zed while her parents try and fail to comfort her.

Zed understood why he wasn't allowed to move closer to Addison. She'd just had part of her arm eaten by a Zombie. Zed could smell the fresh flesh of her body, perfectly exposed for easier access. He could also smell it in other parts of the hospital, his Zombie itching to get out and go to town on all the unsuspecting bodies and brains.

Still, Zed ducked out from the officer's grip and moved toward Addison, immediately taking her uninjured hand in his. Addison's head snapped in his direction, her face relaxing at the sight of him. "Zed," she breathed out. "You're here. You're okay."

Zed's eyebrows creased in confusion. She was speaking like he had suffered the worst of the damage. "Of-Of course I'm okay. Addison you got bitten."

She ignored what he said though. She looked a little ways past him, her face now showing worry. "How's your head?" she asked.

"I'm fine," he insisted. "How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. You fell and hit your head so hard."

"Addison you were being strangled."

"Zed," she said. Her voice dropped to a whisper so low that Zed had to lean in to hear, which made the officer behind him reach for his Zombie-shock pads. Zed didn't pay him any mind though, focusing hard on what Addison was saying. "They took me to a hospital. I had a chance. They didn't do the same for you. They would've left you in that alley."

They would've taken him to Containment, but he got her point. She was human, he wasn't. She would've gotten medical attention. The only person who was ever concerned for Zed was Nurse Jenny.

Zed softened up. Addison's eyes danced across him, searching for any sign of injury, which made Zed happy that she couldn't see the sizable bump on the back of his head.

"I just have a little concussion," he said softly. "Just ice and rest and no football."

Addison let out a breath, her features again softening as she relaxed. She gave his hand a slight squeeze and managed a small smile. Zed smiled too. He glanced at her other arm next, wrapped up in bandages to hide the grafted part of her arm.
"How do you feel? How's your arm?"

"I don't feel anything." She sighed. "You're gonna have to tell me what happened Babe. I have a lot of memory gaps."

Seabrook news was always so boring. Bucky never understood why his parents insisted on watching it every morning. Nothing ever happened in Seabrook. Everything was always so perfect.

The anchors, Alexandra and Claire, we're finishing up a report on a cute cat doing cute things, when Bucky walked into the kitchen. "I'm sure many of you heard last night that there was a Zombie attack, just inside the borders of Zombietown."

Okay that was news. Bucky had never heard of an actual Zombie attack. He had assumed those had died out once the Z-Bands came into play. He looked up at the television with his bowl of cereal, his mom coming in from the kitchen. "What happened?" she asked.

"A Zombie used a rock to break his Z-Band off and attacked a couple walking through Zombietown," Claire explained. "Christine Goode at the satellite station with more. Christine."

The camera switched to another reporter, holding a stack of papers in her hands and a serious look on her face. "Thank you Claire. The full story is still yet to be but what we do know is that the Zombie Patrol has identified the rogue Zombie as Ziryan Ajal, the second Zombie to successfully be born."

"At around six fifteen last night, reports came into Zombie Containment that a Z-Band had been tampered with. At the same time, young and prominent couple Addison Davis—the daughter of Mayor Missy Davis and chief of Zombie Patrol Dale Davis—and Zed Necrodopolus—the first Zombie to be successfully born—we're walking back to Mr. Necrodopolus's home in Zombietown."

"Oh my god," Bucky muttered, his spoon halfway to his mouth. They were talking about his cousin, his baby cousin. He needed to call her or call Zed. He needed to know she was okay. But he was frozen in place as the newscast continued, unable to tear away from the story.

"Ms. Davis and Mr. Necrodopolus detoured down an alley. Mr. Necrodopolus was attacked first by Mr. Ajal. Mr. Necrodopolus lost consciousness while the rogue Zombie moved onto his living prey. Mr. Necrodopolus regained consciousness just as the rogue Zombie took a bite out of the daughter of the Mayor."

"Zombie Patrol arrived on the scene after Mr. Necrodopolus beat the rogue Zombie within an inch of his life. The rogue Zombie was returned to a stable state and apprehended by the Patrol, while emergency services tended to Ms. Davis. Both Ms. Davis and Mr. Necrodopolus were taken to the hospital, where they remain this morning, both in stable condition. Zombietown has been placed under a five o'clock curfew, where no one is allowed in or out, while the investigation continues."

"All parties involved have yet to release a statement regarding the attack," Christine went on. "However, a motif behind Mr. Ajal's behavior has been released. As many of you may remember, Mr. Ajal has spent the past ten years in Zombie Containment for removing his Z-Band and attacking Mr. Necrodopolus. While this had not yet been confirmed nor denied by the investigators in Zombie Containment, they believe the motif behind the attack lays in the never ending feud between the two Zombies, as well as the violent tendencies of Mr. Ajal. Channel Six news will keep you updated as the investigation continues."
Bucky's dad muted the television after that. The three of them looked at each other, complete surprised and dumbfounded. They gaped like fishes, until Janet muttered, "I have to call my sister."

Bucky stood up, putting his breakfast down on the coffee table. "I-I'm gonna go get dressed. Go see her."
Dale had sent the officer home after Addison woke up, insisting he had the proper equipment in the event of Zed going offline. The rest of the night was spent with doctors and nurses, checking her vitals and her arm and everything. Everyone was wary of Zed being there but Addison made it clear that if anyone tried to remove him, she'd be more uncooperative than a baby with an ear infection. And she proved it the one time they tried to kick Zed out, kicking and screaming and nearly tearing the stitches on her clavicle.

The doctor told Addison to get some rest and that she'd be back in the morning to check on her. Once they were all gone and talking with her parents in the hallway, Addison pulled Zed into her bed.

"I don't think I'm supposed to lay here," he pointed out.

"These beds can hold like, five hundred pounds," she argued. "We'll be fine."

"Addison—"

"Just lay with me. Please." She sounded much smaller now, actually pleading with him to stay with her.

So he did. And they fell asleep, cuddling on the hospital bed. It wasn't hard, considering they mastered the art of cuddling in Zed's bed which was much smaller than the hospital bed.

Dale woke them up the next morning. Zed knew it was early because it wasn't very bright outside. The lights in the room were on now and Zed groaned, turning and hiding his face in Addison's back.

"You can't be there when the nurse comes back in," Dale stated, too loud.

Zed grimaced as the dull ache started in the back of his head again. Sleep had been so good just a few minutes ago. Now everything was too bright, too loud, too much.

Still, Zed didn't want to break any more rules that might get him kicked out of the hospital. He closed his eyes tightly and pulled away from Addison, managing to get her off of his arm and slide off the bed. He's had lots of practice anyway. He always slept with his back to the wall and would have to get around Addison to turn off his alarm on the other side of the room.

He peaked his eyes open and whined. "What's wrong?" Dale asked, not sounded concerned but annoyed.

"My head hurts," Zed complained.

"That nurse brought you some ibuprofen," Missy stated, tossing him the bottle.

It hit him in the forehead and Zed groaned in response. Neither of them seemed to care though. Zed scowled at them and picked the bottle up off the floor. It took a minute for his eyes to focus on the instructions and the dosage and the warnings. He popped out two pills and went over to the sink, swallowing the pills dry then washing them down with tap water. Painful and stupid, yes, but he didn't have any access to water and it was obvious that Addison's parents were upset with him.

Zed went back over to Addison bedside, plopping down in the chair beside her bed. Addison was
waking up, most likely because Zed had gotten up. Addison rolled onto her back, turning her head and opening her eyes slowly to look at Zed.

"You got up," she mumbled sleepily. "Come back to bed."

"It's against hospital policy," Missy pointed out.

"Fuck hospital policy," Addison grumbled.

"Addison," Missy said warningly.

"Shut up," Addison snapped. "I want to cuddle Zed. I'm gonna cuddle Zed. He's my boyfriend."

"He's a Zombie. You just got attacked by a Zombie!"

Addison sat up, wincing a little. It didn't stop her either way, because she was angry with her parents. "Zed saved my life!" Addison shouted. "He didn't attack me and he never would! He saved me! Get that in your heads!"

"Addison—" Dale started, but Addison interrupted him.

"Don't you think I'm scared?" Addison asked, her voice breaking. Zed looked up at her, his eyes filled with sadness. Addison was looking at her parents as she continued, "I'm terrified, okay? But it's not like either of you could follow me around for the rest of my life. You can't protect me forever." Addison paused for a second, looking down at her lap. "Zed's saved my life twice now. He-he protects me from bullies and myself and everything. I'm not leaving his side, at least for now."

Her parents didn't know what to say. Addison sighed. "You guys don't get it," she muttered. "You never do."

Zed looked between the dumbfounded parents and his girlfriend, then moved to sit on the edge of her bed. Addison saw him and scooted over, giving him more space to sit beside her.

"Do you wanna talk about it or do you want a distraction?"

"Distraction," Addison muttered. "How's your head?"

"I'm fine. It's just a concussion."

"Head injuries are serious," Addison told him, her tone stern. "You could get amnesia. You could pop something out of place and end up blind. You could have a stroke and die!" Zed winced a little as her voice grew louder. "So stop telling me you're fine because you're not!"

"Okay I'm not but please stop yelling," Zed complained.

Addison softened up. She reached toward his face, pressing the pad of her thumb under his eye. "You're crying."

"It's so loud and bright," Zed whined. Truth be told, he hadn't noticed that tears had slipped free. And crying would make his headache worse. Too bad he couldn't stop the crying. All he could do was try and make as little noise as possible, so as to not draw too much attention to himself.

"You should go to sleep," Addison said. "Rest is good for a concussion." She turned and looked at her parents, who were both standing across her room, and added, "and darkness and quiet. Please."
Missy grumbled under her breath, went and turned off the room lights. Addison halfheartedly pushed him back. "Lay down." Zed easily complied, turning his head into the soft pillow.

It was peacefully for a solid four seconds, before the door flew open and two voices both exclaimed, "Oh my god Addison!"

Addison looked at the door, ready to scold whoever was barging in, but couldn't help but smile when she saw Bucky and Eva rushing to her. Zed had told his girlfriend the night before that he texted Eva and told her what had happened. That was all Addison knew on the matter though, because Zed had her phone too and he hadn't said more on the subject.

Of the two of them, Bucky reached his cousin first and said, "I have to find out you're in the hospital from the news!"

"I need you to lower your voice," Addison said quietly. "Zed has a concussion and we don't wanna make it worse."

"Oh no Zed has a concussion," Bucky mocked. "What about you, huh? You're in the hospital!"

"I'm fine," Addison stated. "Just a little bite nowhere important. Easy fix."

"Your arm is in a cast," Eva pointed out.

"It's mostly bandages." Addison shrugged. She motioned for Eva to sit next to her. "Look, they took skin from my shoulder—"


Addison just glanced at him. She pointed at the stitches along her right clavicle. "They used it to cover the bite wound." She pointed at the cast on her right arm, outlining the specific wound a little below her elbow. "The stitches will heal pretty fast, but it'll take a few weeks for my arm to 'heal.'"

"Why did you use air quotes?" Eva asked.

"Heal means the blood vessels and skin like, link up or some shit. I won't be able to feel the area for months. Maybe years. And I can't leave this fucking hospital for two weeks."

"I'm just happy you're okay," Eva said with a smile. "We came last night, but they wouldn't let Eliza and her sister in so I stayed outside with them while Zed gave us updates." She turned and looked at Zed, saying more harshly, "I didn't know his dumbass got a concussion though."

"It's not a big deal," Zed said, his voice muffled by the pillow.

Eva and Addison looked at each other and rolled their eyes. "How long are you out for, Zed?" Eva asked.

"Two months," he complained. "I'm gonna miss every game and it sucks and thanks for reminding me."

"Don't be such a baby, you'll get to play in the playoffs," Eva said, patting his back. "Now go back to your nap."

Zed turned his head away from them. Bucky rolled his eyes and asked Eva, "Don't you have to go to school?"
"Yes I do." Eva stood up. "I'll be back later to check on my bestest friend though. Feel better Addison."

A few weeks later, after Addison got discharged but before Zed was off of concussion watch, Addison managed to sneak away from her friends and family to head to Zombie Containment. It wasn't very hard, considering Zed went home early with a bad headache and nausea, and both of Addison's parents were working until six that night. Eliza had a club meeting, Bree was at cheer practice, Eva was at football practice, and Bonzo had band practice. Bucky was off somewhere, living his free life away from Addison for the first time since she got discharged.

Addison had overhead her parents talking one night, saying that there was an old law that said any Zombie who tasted human flesh was not to be released from Zombietown, and be placed under consideration for euthanasia. Addison wouldn't find out what the final decision would be with Ziryan. She didn't get a say in the matter either, which she thought was stupid considering it was her flesh he'd eaten. No matter what happened though, she'd never get to see him again. So she snuck out to go visit him before he was moved to the maximum security section of Zombie Containment.

The guards were skeptical of letting her visit him, but agreed on the condition that they use the phones and glass dividers.

Seeing Ziryan was terrifying, and not because he tried to eat her. It had been less than a month since the incident, but he looked like he had been beaten and bruised and mistreated for years. His coveralls hung off his body, his face was hollow, and he looked more sickly than a Zombie should.

"Didn't think they'd let you see me."

"You'd be surprised how much weight my name has around here," Addison said, her tone light. "We gotta make this fast though. They called my dad, who's on sublevel ten, and he's on his way up and will force me to go back home."

"Why are you here then, if Daddy doesn't want you?"

"I wanted to know why you took off your Z-Band," Addison stated. "You're smart. You could've figured something out. Now you're either gonna get killed or rot in here."

"You wouldn't believe I just wanted a little snack?"

"If you wanted a little snack, you wouldn't have wasted time with Zed. You wouldn't have strangled me and you would've gone straight for my head." Addison said. "You barely even got any muscle where you bit me. You barely left a mark. Which makes me believe you thought this all through."

Ziryan rolled his eyes, slouching further in his chair. He sighed, then muttered into the phone, "Zed was supposed to be the first. And when he wasn't, people got mad, and took it out on Two. And Three, and Four, all the way to Ten." It took a moment for Addison to understand what he was referring to. She'd heard the story from Zed and from Eliza, and now she was finally getting Ziryan's side of the story. And it was heartbreaking. "I was supposed to die in those experiments, like everyone else."

"So...So you came after me," she said, quiet and slow, "so you could get back here and they can kill you too?"
"I was kind of hoping Zed would finish the job." He laughed, maniacal and bitter and Addison suddenly realized she shouldn't have come. She could've gone her whole life without knowing the horrors of Zombie Containment or the dark thoughts of the Zombies in Containment.

"Bet you're glad you were born human." Ziryan said in a mocking tone. Addison didn't say anything in response, so he sat up and concluded, "Have a good life, Addison. You've deserved it. And keep doing what you're doing, so this Zombie Containment bullshit can end."
Some days really sucked. Some days were mashed potato days, where everything just felt meaningless, hopeless, straight up bland. And some days were just so good, Addison would pinch herself because it felt like dream.

It was on good days like those that Addison really thought about how far they had come. Five years ago she wouldn't have even guessed she would be dating a Zombie, that they'd be in Seabrook, that her parents would actually like Zombies. Hell, a month ago they had gone back to their old ways. And yet, no matter how cheesy it sounded, they had changed because of the power of love. Or maybe it was because they knew in the grand scheme of things Addison would chose Zed over anything, every time (which Addison still considered to be the power of love).

It was a Thursday in early December. Football ended several days before with another state title, which left Zed with not much to do after school since Addison still had cheer. Zed usually hung with Eliza and Bonzo after school or would wait for Addison.

Except this particular day, he wasn't anywhere when Addison finished. Addison figured he went home to do homework but was surprised to find him in her kitchen, cooking with her parents.

He was part way through a story when he noticed Addison, his grin widening at the sight of her. Dale looked over when he noticed the shift in Zed's attention and smiled. "Look who's finally home!" Dale laughed.

Addison chuckled fondly, greeting each of them one at a time—her dad at the bar, then her Mom at the island, then Zed next to Missy. "How was practice Sweetie?"

Addison shrugged. Practice was average, like it always was. "States are next week, which is good I guess," Addison shrugged. "Maybe we'll place nationally this year."

"Oh you definitely will, Captain," Zed said proudly, placing a kiss on her lips. "And if you don't, then next year—when it's just you and Bree and Jess as captains—you'll make nationals cause you guys are fucking fantastic."

Addison blushed, poked his side, and muttered, "You're fucking fantastic too." She turned away
from Zed to look at the food on the counter and asked, "So what're you guys making for dinner?"

"Zed is making steak," Missy answered. "I'm making sides because he doesn't want my help."

Zed chuckled and shook his head. "I'd love for you to help," he lied, "but I'm just so far into the process and I don't want to slow you down on the potatoes and green beans and..." he paused, looking at the marshmallow covered dish in confusion, "whatever that is."

Missy and Addison shared a laugh, and Addison said, "It's okay, he doesn't let me help either."

Missy chuckled some more while Addison looked past the island to her dad. "Dad, what're you doing?"

"Working from home. Going over some data sheets, numbers, paperwork. All that good stuff." He looked up from his laptop and spread out papers, saying, "Hey, while we have both of you here, we wanted to ask you—"

"We want to ask Zed but this kinda concerns you too, Addy," Missy added.

"Yes, that of course," Dale agreed. "Anyway, we wanted to ask if you would like to join us on our family vacation this year?"

"You mean in Colorado?" Addison asked disbelievingly. "Snowboarding? With everyone there?"

Missy nodded, as if there was no problem. Addison, in fact, was worried about all the attending family. It was both sides of her family, for two weeks, in a huge estate in the mountains of Colorado. Everyone from Bucky to her grandparents would be there, which included the half-deaf grandfather (who lost his ear to a Zombie).

"Is there a problem, sweetie?" Dale asked.

"Yeah, Addy, something wrong?" Zed asked.

"Uh, Pops will be there," she stated as if it were obvious. "And, no offense Zed, but Pops hates Zombies. I told you why, Zed. And I doubt that you and Pops meeting would be the best thing in the world."

"I'll just win them over with my quick wit and charming smile," Zed said with a wink.

"It's true he's very good at that," Mom agreed with a little laugh.

Addison groaned. "You guys can't be serious."

Zed turned his head down to give her a serious look. "I won't go if you don't want me there."

"No, Babe, I definitely want you there," she said. "But I don't want you to hate it, or for them to hate you."

Zed leaned down and pecked her lips. "I think I can handle a vacation. How long is it, Missy?"

"It's two weeks," Mom said.

"I have to ask my dad first, but I'd love to come."

"That's great then," Mom exclaimed cheerily. "We leave town usually once Addison finishes her last midterm, so once you both finish we can go. Do you know what your schedule would look
They continued planning the vacation. Addison chewed her lip, thinking over all the ways the vacation could go terribly wrong. Zed noticed her mood, tilting his head down and whispering, "If you don't want me to go, I won't. Seriously, Addy."

"You're much better company than my six older cousins," she told him earnestly. "Just remember my grandparents are very old fashioned and lived in the era when Zombies were bad, so don't expect them to instantly love you."

"Oh I'll just woo them Addy, I got this," Zed said confidently. "Who's the Zombie?"

Addison giggled and Zed smiled at the sound. He leaned down and kissed her lips gently. "I'm the Zombie, and this Zombie's gonna win over your grandparents."

Since Bucky's parents practically ran all the family events, Bucky would stay with Addison and go up with them. School had ended a few days before and Eliza was off in Michigan, doing a four week program at MIT (highly selective, everyone was very proud of her acceptance).

Bucky was left out of the knowledge of Zed going with them until the morning they were leaving. "You've got to be kidding me," Bucky said when Zed and Missy came into the kitchen. "You're bringing Zed?"

Zed grinned at Bucky's comment. "Good morning to you, Bucky," he said.

"Do you even know how to ski?"

"Oh of course not," Zed said. "I've learned that people tend to laugh and enjoy watching me learn something new."

"It's true," Addison confirmed. "When he learned to roller skate it was hilarious."

Zed frowned, coming over to the breakfast table to make sure Addison saw him frowning. She grinned mockingly, stabbed eggs and bacon onto a fork and held it up to him as a peace offering. Zed took the food, eating it obnoxiously before kissing her cheek.

"Good morning," she greeted with a smile.

"My my, something looks delicious," Zed said cheekily, eyes trained on his girlfriend. "Oh sorry, I meant gorgeous."

"Ugh," Bucky groaned. He looked at his aunt and uncle, saying, "They're disgusting. You really want their love festering inside Pops's house? For two whole weeks?"

"I think it's sweet," Missy said. "You hungry, Zed?"

"No thank you, ma'am," he said politely. "I ate at home."

Missy just smiled, letting it drop. Instead, she asked, "You have all your paperwork?"

Zed nodded.

Dale looked up from his paper and asked, "You have a charger for your Z-Band?"

Zed nodded again. He picked a piece of bacon off of Addison's plate, stuffing it in his mouth and
eating it quickly. "I have the charger, a spare battery, and if these few weeks end up like most important things in my life, Chief of Zombie Patrol."

Zed grinned, Addison and her parents laughed, and Bucky just groaned. "So we'll just finish up breakfast and be on our way," Mom said.

Addison took it as her cue to get out of her chair, grab Zed's hand, and head to the stairs. "I have to go get my stuff from my room," she announced. "I'll come back to clean this up."

"You don't both have to go," Bucky pointed out.

Addison nodded in protest. "Big strong Zed. I can't carry it by myself."

Dale gave the couple a warning look, but Missy was quick to assure him. "It's not even anything to worry about. It's not like they're having sex or anything."

Zed seemed to choke on the air, making the family laugh. Addison pulled him up the stairs, rushing to her room. They both went in and she pushed Zed against the door, standing on her tiptoes and pulling his head down to kiss him. Zed reached down, wrapping his hands around her waist to hold her off the ground.

They made out for several minutes before Zed pulled back, completely breathless. "Uh...did you actually have bags to bring down?" Zed asked.

"Yes," Addison breathed out. "But...we can keep doing this for a little while more."

"Yeah, that works," Zed whispered, the end of his sentence swallowed up in another kiss.

Zombies weren't allowed in first-class, so Zed and Addison sat in coach while everyone else was in first-class. Zed took a nap during the three hour flight, while Addison spent the trip reading books and drawing on him (under his shirt where he wouldn't find it until later).

They landed in the early afternoon, Bucky's sister picking them up at the airport in Pops's van. Raina moved to the back row with Addison while Bucky got in the middle seats. Zed and Addison's parents were stuffing their bags in the trunk. Once they'd finished, Missy and Dale climbed in the front while Zed climbed in beside his girlfriend.

Raina openly stared at him for the first few minutes of the drive. Zed didn't seem to notice or mind, so Addison asked, "Is there a problem?"

"I didn't know you were bringing your boyfriend," Raina stated.

Zed just grinned before returning his attention back to the passing landscape. "Mom and Dad were supposed to tell everyone," Addison said.

"We told your sister, right dear?" Dale said from the front.

"That's right," Mom agreed. "I didn't think everyone needed to know."

"No shit Mom," Addison muttered, earning a gasp from Raina and a pointed look from Zed.

"I think Pops might have a heart attack when he sees Zed," Raina grumbled.

Even though it was exactly Addison's argument, she hated hearing it from her cousin and argued back, "Zed is a pleasure. He's sweet and kind and he's cute."
"I'm also right here, Addy," Zed stated. "Stop talking about me like I'm not here."

"You shouldn't be," Bucky snapped. "He can't even ski, Rai."

Raina leaned over to glance questioningly at Zed. "You're kidding, right?"

Zed shook his head. "This is my first time out of Seabrook in my life. I'm loving it, you know. I've never seen mountains in real life."

Everyone quieted at that, feeling a tad bit uncomfortable with the fact that they were busy arguing over Zed while ruining his second trip outside of New Hampshire (first time where he didn't have to do anything).

Five minutes later, Raina leaned over to address Zed. "Don't be worried, Zed. I'm sure our grandparents will like you. Especially considering they love Addison the most, and you seem to make her very happy."

"Seem? He does make me very happy."

Zed leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Aw, I love you too."

They got to the estate and were greeted by Nick and Chris, the latter saying, "What's Zed doing here?"

Zed just grinned at them. "He's my bodyguard," Addison deadpanned. "Protecting me from yetis."

Zed wrapped his arms around her from behind, drawing her in close and kissing the side of her face. Addison giggled, to the annoyance of three of her cousins.

"They've been in this godforsaken 'honeymoon phase' since they were freshmen," Bucky grumbled.

Addison laughed and kissed Zed again. Anthony came out from inside the house, gagging on sight. "Break it up, newlyweds," he joked, walking over. The two of them pulled apart. "So you brought a Zombie, huh?"

"Guys," Addison said. "I've got this all figured out. Pops loves me, so I'm gonna go in there right now and tell him."

"You're gonna kill the old man, that's what," Chris stated. "You're gonna tell him you lied about still wearing a wig, and you're dating a Zombie—which you've brought with you?"

"I'm right here," Zed said.

"I'm wearing a hat, he won't be able to see my hair," Addison corrected. "So for now, I'm gonna cover the most important bridge: Zed."

"Aw!" Zed gushed.

Addison turned and said to her boyfriend, "Take as long as possible out here. Don't come in for at least six minutes."

He nodded. "Got it. Good luck, Gorgeous."

Bucky groaned again; Addison walked over to the house with Nick, Chris, and Anthony—who had the house key. Nick pointed her in the direction of the adults, who were sitting in the kitchen.
Addison went around doing her formal greetings with her aunts and grandparents, talking and laughing before getting to the main event.

Anthony—her life-saving, favorite cousin—started it off for her. "Hey Pops, you know Addy has a boyfriend."

The old man seemed surprised, looking at his granddaughter curiously and asking, "Is that true?"

Addison nodded. "His name is Zed and he's really nice and sweet and funny. We've been dating for two years; we met as freshmen. He's on the football team and he's a Zombie and he makes amazing steak. He's so cute and sweet and nice and he's here because I talk about you guys so much he's been so excited to meet you." She spoke as fast as she could so that everyone in the room needed a few seconds to dissect it.

Pops, who probably missed the part where she mentioned that Zed was a Zombie, asked, "How did you two meet?"

"It's a long but great story, but I'm sure Zed would tell it better—he usually does."

Nona squinted. "He's here?"

Chris and Nick groaned. Addison ignored them and explained, "Yes, he is. He's outside helping Mom and Dad with the bags."

"Well I can't wait to meet the boy who won over my granddaughter," Nona said politely. She leaned closer, saying in a quieter voice, "Does he know about your hair?"

Addison nodded again. "I told him when we were freshmen. It was before we had started dating. We were talking about how unfair it was that the cheerleaders didn't want me hanging around him because he was a Zombie and he said that I wouldn't know what it's like to be judged because I'm perfect and then it came out."

"Smooth," Chris whispered. Even Dale's parents looked at Addison curiously, even though they weren't a part of conversation.

"I don't think I heard you right, Addy-Catty," Nona said.

"Zed is a Zombie," Addison repeated. "Green hair, Z-Band, lives west of the barrier, pale skin, has the capability to eat brains. The total package. He's super sweet though, and wouldn't hurt anybody."

Pops's eyes narrowed at his granddaughter. "You invited a flesh-eating monster into my home?" He got out of his seat, moving toward her.

And, by the same miracle that put Zed in every horrible situation he'd ever been in, Zed came into the kitchen, mid-conversation with Missy and Dale. Pops growled, picked up a glass orange and threw it at Zed's head. The glass shattered against his skull; he screamed and fell to the ground, while everyone around either screamed or gasped (dramatically).

"Zed!" Addison shouted, rushing to him. Pops grabbed her by her arm, yanking her back.

"You stay away from that Rotter, Addy," he said venomously.

"Dad!" Missy gasped, because calling a Zombie a Rotter was like calling a black person the N-word (in slavery times and in now times).
Addison glared at her grandfather before wiggling out of his grasp, moving to the floor beside Zed. The glass had missed his eyes but had cut into his forehead and a lot of the left side of his face. He had glass shards stuck in his skin and his jacket and hair, blood already dripping onto his clothes.

"Zed," she said carefully, reaching out to grasp his shoulder gently.

Zed flinched away. "I'm fine," he muttered quietly, though he definitely wasn't. He was bleeding and his eyes were screwed shut, and he was clearly in a lot of pain.

Pops and Missy were arguing about something—probably Zed—which Addison tuned out. Everyone else was in stunned silence, looking between the bickering adults and the teens on the ground.

"Zed," Addison said gently. She moved to sit in front of him, reaching out and turning his face toward her.

She helped him to his feet, walking him over to the downstairs bathroom. Closing the door was like shutting out the outside world of fighting adults and zombiphobia and everything. It was peaceful in the bathroom. Neither of them said anything as Addison cleaned the broken glass off of him, using tweezers she found in the medicine cabinet to get the small pieces. She ran a washcloth under some cool water, gently pressing the cold compress to his skin.

After a quiet minute, he said in a whisper, "I-I'm sorry Addy."

"Sorry for what?"

"I gonna ruin your vacation," he explained. "Maybe I shouldn't've come. I should've stayed home."

Addison couldn't find the words to say to him, so instead she sang softly, "I know it might be crazy, but did you hear the story?"

Zed let out a quiet laugh. "I think I heard it vaguely," he sang. Then, taking back his part, "A girl and a zombie."

"Oh tell me more boy, sounds like a fantasy."

"Oh what could go so wrong with a girl and a zombie?"

Chapter End Notes

Yo yo yo its me, reading reviews and being hungry. I posted this chapter a few hours ago and forgot to add in this little tidbit. The Ziryan chapters weren't supposed to be that long. It was two chapters reserved for that little bit, but shit got wild. I had to go back in the outline and rearrange shit, which meant we lost a lot of free space. I IMPROVISED!

I mean that I had to gloss over when Zed and Addison's parents reconcile. I mean it is up there, at the beginning. Just not very, detailed. Thank you for understanding.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Somehow, Missy had diffused the situation. When Zed and Addison left the bathroom twenty minutes later with his face cleaned and bandaged and Nona's handtowel sufficiently soaked in blood, everyone had gone about their business. Bucky's parents, Addison's parents, and the grandparents were working on lunch in the kitchen, Raina and her brothers were in the living room, and Aunt Carla and her boys were somewhere upstairs.

When they went into the living room, Bucky told her, "Your mom wants to see you both in the kitchen."

Zed glanced at Addison nervously, which she returned with a hand squeeze, leading him to the kitchen. The area had been rearranged, with anything breakable completely out of reach. Conversations and movement stopped as the couple entered the kitchen.

Missy was the first to speak. "Zed, how're you feeling?"

"I'm fine," he stated. He gestured vaguely to his face and said, "No more bleeding and all. Addy really works miracles."

Missy nodded then looked at her daughter in a way that was telling her to do introductions. "Um, Nana, Papa, Nona, and Pops, this is Zed. He's my boyfriend. And, he's a Zombie. And you don't have to like him—though it'd be awesome if you did—but I want you to understand that he is the love of my life. And he's not going away either. So you can chose to hate him forever, and I'll be fine with that, or you can be supportive of me, your granddaughter who you also love."

It was silent after that. Addison glanced around, feeling a little awkward. "So yeah."

"Sorry we got off to a bad start," Zed said from beside her. "But I honestly am looking forward to getting to know you all, if you'll allow it. I know that my being here may bring up some bad memories, so I'll understand if you don't give me a chance."

"But please try," Addison added.

After a long pause, Nona was the first to speak. "So, 'Zed', you make my granddaughter happy?"

Zed nodded once. "I know she makes me happy, and I hope that I do the same for her. I can't speak on her behalf."

Nona looked at Addison next. "Does he, then?"

Addison grinned and nodded quickly. Nona sat back in her chair, seemingly satisfied with her answer. "I can't speak for everyone, but I can say that you do seem very happy. And I do love seeing my Addy-Catty happy."

Zed snickered under his breath, while Addison stood their and blushed at the childhood nickname. Her grandparents asked Zed questions which he was happy to answer, talking animatedly about his relationship with Addison and his life and anything they asked.
After lunch was time to pick out a Christmas tree. Addison and Zed snuck away and cuddled in the tree lot, eating snacks and just talking. They were barely bothered, minus a minuscule snowball war between them and the cousins.

Dinner wasn't as peaceful as tree picking. It started after Zed's forehead wound just started bleeding. The gauze was still covering it but it was random nonetheless. And when Addison asked about it, Zed shrugged and said, "Blood clotting in Zombies isn't something we're known for. It'll stop eventually."

"Maybe you should get stitches," Raina suggested.

Zed made a face of disgust. "Maybe I shouldn't," he stated.

"Zombies aren't allowed in hospitals," Addison said. "To get stitches we'd have to go back to Seabrook to Zombie Containment and hope that his doctor is there."

"Also needles are horrifying," Zed added. "And hospitals. And doctors and technicians. And every person who works in Zombie Containment."

Dad just grinned from his seat at the table. "Tells me I'm doing my job right."

"That you are," Zed agreed. "I was shaking on my shoes the first time I met you."

"As you should be when you meet your girlfriend's dad," Nana stated.

"I remember when my first boyfriend met my parents. You guys hated him." Raina said.

"We did not hate him," Janet protested.

Her husband nodded in agreement. "We preferred others to him, sure."

"You never called him his right name," Mikey pointed out.

"You even said my name," Bucky added. "And pretended it wasn't your son's name."

Everyone around the table let out a good laugh at the thought. Nona looked at Addison and asked, "How did it all go down, Addy-Catty?"

"Well for starters, they didn't find out Zed was a Zombie until a lot later," Addison said, rousing a laugh from everyone. "The only reason they were meeting was because I snuck out the night before and when I got caught they said that they needed to meet 'this boy' or I'd never cheer again. Mind you this was right before the big Homecoming game and the cheer championships, so it was a big deal."

Anthony mockingly leaned on the table to look at the couple. "Why'd you sneak out?"

"We went to a party in Zombietown," Zed explained. "Great times. We danced and sang, she met my sister. And then I nearly I got sent to Zombie Containment for being out past curfew."

"It's how I got caught there," Addison added. "So anyway, I was going to tell Mom and Dad that Zed was a Zombie, when he decided to show up at our door. He had adjusted his Z-Band to look human, so he could impress them and so I could cheer without any problem. " She gave Zed a pointed look. "It also nearly killed him."

He just smiled sheepishly. "That was two years ago, Addy. I'm fine now."
Addison rolled her eyes fondly before continuing. "He brought Mom flowers. Him and Dad bonded over football." She smiled at the memory. "Then we went out for ice cream because at the time the shop was for humans only and how could we pass up an opportunity like that."

"And we won the football game," Zed added. "And placed second in the cheer championships."

"Because of your awesome moves."

"Because the best cheerleaders in the world were leading."

She smiled and leaned into his side and he kissed the top of her head. The sweet, loving moment was ruined by Pops on the other side of table, saying, "You lost because there were dozens of Rotters there ruining the show."

Addison glared at her grandfather. Bucky gave her this look, trying to tell her to drop the subject. Everyone was content with leaving the grandparents as they were—prejudice and discriminatory toward Zed and Zombies—but Addison was sick and tired of it. It had barely been one day and Zed, who was more excited for this than anyone, already wanted to go home. He felt unwelcome and he was definitely unsafe.

So, ignoring the warning from her cousin, Addison stood up and said to her grandfather, "Pops, I believe I told you this earlier, but I love Zed. Zed is always there for me, always supporting me and always there to save my ass. It was his idea to have Zombies and cheerleaders together that first time, and it was because of it that we placed second. Bucky's routine sucked ass, and Zed saved us."

Everyone was looking at her now. Addison continued in a harsh and angry tone, "Zed was the first person to encourage me to take off the wig. Zed loves me, dammit. He loves me more than anyone here ever has, does, or will. And if it comes down to choosing between my family and Zed, you can bet your asses that I'm choosing Zed in a heartbeat."

Addison turned and stormed off, heading back to her room. Zed looked around the stunned table for a second, before smiling and getting up, going after his girlfriend.

They didn't talk about what had happened during dinner, instead making out (and doing other stuff worse than making out).

Zed took a nap after they finished their "fun" so Addison went and took a shower, got ready for bed, and called Bree and Zed's dad. Zed woke up when she finished on the phone with Zevon. He rolled over onto his back and groaned, scrubbing a hand over his face. Addison smiled at him and moved toward the bed. He gave her a sleepy smile and said, "Have you been creepily watching me this whole time?"

She shook her head and said, "I was just getting cleaned up."

Zed just laughed, a little sheen of nervousness underneath it. "Uh, sorry."

Addison just shook her head, telling him not to worry about it, then leaned down and kissed him. "It's okay, just remember you owe me."

Zed laughed lightly and stretched. "I'm tired, but I need a shower," he stated. "And if I get in the shower, the water will wake me up."

"Just...use a towel and wet it and do a half-shower sort of thing," she suggested. "Then you can
shower in the morning."

He leaned over and kissed her cheek before standing. He went over to his luggage, getting his shower supplies and pajamas together. "You're the best, I love you!"

Addison watched him disappear in the bathroom. When the bathroom door closed, there was a knock at the bedroom door before it opened and her mom walked in.

"Hey Sweetheart," she greeted. "Where's Zed?"

"Bathroom."

"Mind if we chat for a second? About dinner?"

Addison nodded. She was probably going to get scolded for yelling at her grandfather. Addison would sit and listen to her mom lecture her like she always did. Addison had thought her mom had changed, but the way she looked at Zombies—especially Zed—after the incident with Ziryan had proved Addison was wrong. And it was daunting to try and change Missy's opinions again.

Missy sat down next to her daughter. "Addison," she started. "I'm really proud of you for what you said to Pops." Addison looked up at her mom, her eyes widening in surprise. "It was a very brave thing for you to do. I would never stand my ground like that, and it makes me really happy that you aren't like me."

Addison chuckled a little before asking her mom, "So you aren't mad at me?"

"Why would I be?" Missy asked. "For almost three years, you've been reminding people that they can't treat Zombies like they're monsters, because they're people too with feelings and lives. And just because your grandparents haven't been around to hear it, doesn't mean they should be excluded from hearing it."

Missy wrapped her arms around her daughter, pulling her into a hug. "Can I say you're my perfect little girl? Because you're my perfect daughter who I just love so much and you're growing up and...you're my strong, perfect little girl."

Addison chuckled a little. She pulled away from her mom and rolled her eyes. "Yes mom, you can say that I'm your perfect girl," she said, mocking her only a little bit. "But am I perfect the way I am? No changes?"

"No changes," Missy said. "Nothing could make you any better than the fact that you're you. You're so you."

"Mom," Addison complained. "You're acting like...like I'm moving out or getting married or something."

"Oh Sweetie," Missy reached up and cradled Addison's face in one hand, "I'll be way worse when you're getting married."

Addison laughed (she actually snorted but would never admit it). "I don't doubt it. You're kinda insane, Mom."

"Oh you love me."

Addison rolled her eyes. Missy just smiled and stood up. "I'm gonna go up to bed because I have my man waiting for me."
"Gross Mom."

"You're the only one allowed to get some?"

"I don't know when you got some comfortable talking about stuff like sex with me, but it needs to stop."

Missy ignored her, saying, "Everyone's gone to bed. Your cousins are waiting for me to go to bed so they can go downstairs. Think I don't know what they're up to." Missy shrugged. "You and Zed can go down. You can stay here. Don't take too much advantage of being downstairs though. I know everything. And so does the Z-Band."

"Mom," Addison groaned.

Missy just giggled. She kissed the top of Addison head. "See you in the morning, Sweetie."

"Night Mom."

Missy went and left, closing the door behind her. A second later, Zed came out of the bathroom, sprawling out on the bed. "Hey Babe," he said sleepy. "What'd your mom want?"

"She wanted to tell me that I kick ass, basically."

"Oh I could've told you that."

Addison breathed out a laugh. "Okay. Do you wanna sleep? Or..."

Zed perked up at the sound of an 'or.' Addison shoved his shoulder playfully. "No dirty ideas," she laughed.

"Can't blame a guy for trying."

Addison chuckled. "The or I was talking about is this basement hangout me and my cousins like to do when the adults go to sleep. There's pool and foosball and video games. It's fun, if you wanna go. We can hang out here if you don't wanna go. I know you're tired."

"Nah," Zed sat up and stretched, then finished, "let's go have fun."

Chapter End Notes

Yo yo yo it's me again. If you didn't notice, I did not update on Monday. It's because, over the weekend, I announced a hiatus for all my stories on tumblr. But here I am, with an update. I figured the people who don't check my tumblr should know what's up.

So AP tests started this week, and I haven't been able to focus on writing fics and studying. I have no more prewritten chapters for anything. So AP tests take two weeks, I have one tomorrow and one next week. And then the week after, I'm taking some of my finals. And then two weeks after that I'm taking the rest of my finals. And school has to come first, so I'm putting everything on hold until early June. Maybe later, we'll see how everything goes.
Wish me luck guys! And if you're curious, I'll probably be posting little snippets of what I've got for different stories on tumblr. Same name, just with dashes between the words. Each story has its own tag: this story is 'always had a Feeling', All the Strings Attached is 'strings', the superhero!au is 'superhero!au', and naturally I have new things in the works. And everything is always under my writing tags!
Damn, I really couldn't wait until morning. I am back with all my stories! I'm even gonna post a second chapter right after this one! Um, things have been well. I finished everything that was stressing me out and now I've got two more (easy) finals. I will be starting a summer job next week but that shouldn't get in the way of updates!

Now I do have to warn you: this chapter stinks. The first half was written before the hiatus. The second half came after a long few weeks of me figuring out my writing voice. Which is why I'm posting two chapters: this one, plus a good one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Zed was an awful skier. They hadn't even been skiing for more than a few minutes before he fell and broke his leg, cutting their ski day short. Addison's parents drove Zed (and Addison) to the hospital, where they set his leg, gave him painkillers, and sent him on his way. It was against protocol to even treat a Zombie, but Dale had waved his badge around and convinced them to treat Zed.

They went back to the house after, Zed high on morphine. He had slept for the majority of the drive back, which was around two hours because of how far the hospital was from Pops's home. Addison was tasked with waking him up when they got close.

The hospital refused to lend out a wheelchair and instead gave them a pair of lost crutches, which kind of sucked but they dealt with it. The problem was that Zed was on morphine and completely out of it. He nearly fell in the snow-covered grass at least six times, to the point that Addison and Dale practically carried him inside. They put him in his room and Zed knocked out in bed immediately.

Addison and her parents found the rest of their family in the den. They paused the television and looked at Addison for answers without saying anything.

"He's sleeping," she said obviously. "They gave him morphine."

"Oh the good drugs," Nick joked. "Got anymore?"

"Nicholas," Carla scolded.

Nick just laughed while Addison rolled her eyes. She crawled onto the floor beside Bucky, resting her head on his shoulder. Her parents went and sat somewhere else, probably next to Janet.

"So what happens now?" Nana asked. "Do you think he wants to go home?"

"I don't know," Dale said.

"Maybe we can change his flight for earlier," Missy suggested.

"No way we can get a ticket this close to Christmas."
"Well we can't keep him here if he wants to leave. He's got a broken leg, Dale."

"Well do you expect us to drive him back to Seabrook?"

Addison closed her eyes and sighed. Her parents were arguing about Zed, whether no one wanted to admit it or not, and it was getting on her nerves. "We could just ask him," she suggested. "He is a person."

"You could ask him," Raina countered.

"I will," Addison stated, her tone confident and challenging. "I'm not afraid of confrontation or Zed."

"When he wakes up," Bucky added.

Addison nodded and turned her head to the side. She stopped listening to the conversation. The events of the day were exhausting and all she wanted to do was go to bed and for it to be a new day. Except it was only three in the afternoon, and she couldn't nap in her room because Zed was there (which was stupid but she didn't have the energy to argue anymore).

Addison ended up falling asleep on Bucky's shoulder. Or, that's the last thing she remembered. When she woke up though, she was in her room, cuddling with Zed. And he was awake this time, drawing circles on her back over her shirt.

Addison lifted her head and smiled sleepily at him. "How you feeling?"

"I woke up a while ago." Zed sounded tired and sluggish still, but he's definitely still awake. "Your dad came in carrying you 'cause you were knocked out. I asked him for some more of the...happy drugs."

Addison snorted softly. "Happy drugs? It's called morphine."

"It makes me happy and loopy so it's the happy drug now," Zed said with a stupid smile. "Dale only gave me half, but s'till did the trick."

Zed started giggling and Addison just watched him in amusement. "You sound crazy," Addison said with a laugh.

Zed laughed more. Finally, after he stopped laughing, he said, "You're so cute. Look at your little nose." He groped at her nose, missing it and palming her face. Addison laughed and so did Zed, fixing his hand so he was pinching the tip of her nose.

"Ohmygod," he slurred. "I love you so much. Mm, you're so cute."

"Zed, you're insanely high," Addison laughed. "Are you sure you only got half?"

"Mr. Dale cut it in half and said 'I don't think you should get this much because I have no idea how it'll affect your Zombie." Zed shrugged. "I wanna go outside. It's boring in here."

"You broke your leg, Zed," Addison explained. "You can't walk. Especially on drugs."

He pouted and gave her his best sad eyes. "But s'boring and I wanna go hang out with the cousins," he whined.

From the doorway, Bucky said, "You can't leave this room."
Both Addison and Zed turned and looked at Bucky. He was leaning against the door frame looking rather smug.

"What do you want?" Addison asked, a little annoyed that he was interrupting.

"I'm your babysitters while your parents go get dinner," Bucky said. "I've been listening to Zed's doped up stupidity for ten minutes."

"I'm not stupid," Zed muttered.

Addison patted Zed's chest affectionately. "No Baby, you're not stupid," Addison said. "You're just very drugged up. They should lower your dosage."

Zed just chuckled sleepily. He would probably fall asleep soon, so Addison would be left with Bucky.

"What time is it?" Addison asked her cousin.

"Seven, you slept for four hours. On me."

Addison blew a laugh out through her nose. "Don't be a little bitch about it."

Bucky rolled his eyes. "Get up and shower so you can take care of your doped up boyfriend."

"We're cuddling," Addison whined. She put her head back on his chest and snuggled into him. "Wake us up when dinner's here. And you should also give me the other half of that morphine pill."

"Addison!"

Addison burst into laughter. "I'm kidding! Don't be such a prick, Buck. I don't do drugs."

"How would I know?" Bucky grumbled. He moved closer to the couple until he was standing over them. "Seriously Addison, get up. Otherwise you won't be able to fall asleep tonight."

Addison groaned but complied, wiggling out of Zed's embrace and sliding out of bed. Zed whined in protest but ultimately fell asleep again.

Addison went and took a quick shower, then got dressed in a tee shirt and leggings. When Addison got out of the bathroom, Zed was awake and ending a phone conversation with his dad.

"Hey Gorgeous," Zed greeted. "Sorry about ruining your family outing this morning."

"There's nothing to apologize for," Addison told him. "If anything I should be apologizing. You broke your leg today. It's kinda my fault too."

"Let's agree that neither of us are at fault then."

She grinned and leaned up, giving him a light kiss. After, she started running her fingers through his hair (in an affectionate, petting way).

"Zed, do you wanna just...go home?"

Zed laughed lightly and asked, "What? Why would I?"

Addison shrugged. "It's been a crappy two days. There's still a lot more days left."
Zed shrugged mockingly. "I came here to be with you, Addy. I'm fine as long as you're fine."

She then gave him a serious look. "I don't want you staying here if you can't. You've got a serious injury and should be at home."

Zed picked up the hand that wasn't in his hair, giving it a soft squeeze. "Addison, I love you. I wouldn't want to be here with anyone else. I wouldn't want to be home without you."

Addison smiled softly. He tilted his head down to kiss her, soft and slow. He cradled her jaw in one hand and had the other tangled in her hair, while she kept her arms around his neck, almost completely in his lap.

Bucky cleared his throat from the doorway and they pulled apart. He rolled his eyes and said, "Come on, it's dinner time guys."

---

**Best Frrruunnd, 12:16pm**

Breeeeeeeer guess what

**BEST FRRRIIEEENND, 12:27pm**

What

**Best Frrruunnd, 12:28pm**

I may or may not have lost my virginity

*incoming FaceTime from Best Frrruunnd...*

---

Addison laughed and answered Bree's FaceTime. She was still laughing as it connected and Bree popped up on screen, clearly shocked and at a loss for words.

"Addison what the heck! Please tell me you're telling the truth!"

Addison laughed, turning the camera to Zed. Zed smiled at the camera and said, "Yes Bree, we had sex this morning," he said, "and it was fantastic. And then I got more morphine after. Big bonus!"

He laughed and Addison rolled her eyes in amusement, turning the camera back to her. "His morphine will run out today and then he's onto ibuprofen," Addison explained. "You should've seen him yesterday when we were giving him full capsules. Now we just give him half and it does the same trick, and it's less addictive."

"I'm not addicted to nothing," Zed slurred and Addison giggles again.

"Hush Baby," Addison said sympathetically.

Bree laughed on the other end of the line. "How was it? Was it amazing? I can't even imagine!"

Addison laughed. "Bree, I'll tell you all about it when we get back to Seabrook. Which will probably be soon. We need to see a Zombie doctor."

"Okay! Call me again soon, okay? I have to go!"

"Love you boo!"
Addison's parents managed to get a flight a few days after Christmas. And as soon as they get home, Zed went to Containment to get a real cast and see his Zombie doctor. Addison wasn't allowed in Zombie Containment so she had to go home with her parents. She took a long nap instead of unpacking and only woke up after Bucky violently shook her awake.

"What the hell," Addison said groggily. "I thought you were coming back with your parents?"

Bucky was bouncing excitedly. Addison sat up and raised her eyebrows at him. "After you and Pops had a fight and you left and Pops was shittalking you and then I was telling everyone that I'm gay and I'm dating a hot Zombie guy and then Pops and Nona kicked me out but I didn't care because it felt so freeing!"

Addison blinked. Everything he said came out in one breath and she caught only a few words. "Can you say that again? Like a lot slower?"

Bucky sat down on her bed, took a deep breath, and said, "I came out to our grandparents and they absolutely hated it but I didn't care! They're gonna cut me out of the will but who cares! No way am I gonna keep my love life a secret, not after what you've shown me these past few, like, years."

"Really?"

"Yes really," Bucky said. "I always thought they'd all be dead and I'd never have to mention being gay but...this feels really great."

"Then I'm happy for you," Addison said. She stretched and yawned. "What time is it?"

"Four in the afternoon," Bucky answered. "You wanna do something? We've still got all of winter break left."

Addison shrugged. "I guess," she said. "Let me check on Zed first."

Bucky rolled his eyes. "I'm surprised you aren't with him. You're practically attached at the hip."

"I wasn't allowed in," Addison said. She grabbed her phone from her nightstand and unlocked it, going to text Zed. "Plus you know, Dad and Zed feel very strongly about me not going inside."

Bucky hummed. Addison sent him a quick check-in text, which he responded with a selfie of him and his doctor grinning at the camera. Addison responded with a selfie of her and Bucky, also grinning.

Addison locked her phone then asked, "Okay, what do you wanna do?"

"I dunno," Bucky shrugged. "We could...do something winter themed. Like...ice skating?"

"Oh sounds fun," Addison said. "Let me get dressed."

The next time Addison saw Zed was four days later. He had to stay in Zombie Containment for three days so they could monitor him because the Colorado doctor shouldn't have prescribed a Zombie such a strong drug and they needed to make sure it all cleared out of his system and didn't leave him with any side effects. Addison didn't find out he was home until a day after he was discharged because he fell asleep as soon as he got there.
Addison had to walk because no one would be home to drive her, plus it had snowed the night before and the roads in Zombietown don't typically get plowed (even though Zombies have to plow the roads in Seabrook, they're not allowed to plow their own roads and have to wait for the snow to melt).

Addison used her spare key to unlock the door. Zed had texted and told her that Zoey was hanging out at her friend's house so it'd just be the two of them and Puppy.

Zed was on the couch with his leg propped up on the coffee table. He was asleep and looked so incredibly adorable that Addison couldn't help but snap a few pictures.

She got on the couch and snuggled into him, making him stir before slowly waking up. He looked at Addison and smiled sleepily. "How long have you been here?" he asked.

Addison shrugged. "I just got here," she said, "didn't wanna disturb you."

Zed just laughed, then stretched and yawned. Addison eyed him until he had settled in the chair. "So how you feeling?" she asked.

"Tired," he answered. "I've been on three different drugs in a week and it's awful. I feel like my body wants to kill me."

Addison pouted and patted his arm. "Poor Baby," she sympathized.

Zed ducked his head down and gave her a pout. "I can't remember anything," he complained. "That whole vacation is so fuzzy 'cause of all the drugs. Could you please remind me?"

Addison's face fell. The idea of the whole vacation being a blur of nothing would extend over their first time. If he can't remember then what even was the point? She was fine if he didn't remember snowboarding or all the awful interactions with her grandparents, but sex? It's really soul crushing.

Zed saw her expression and immediately went into damage-control mode. "No no!" he rushed out. "Not like that! I definitely remember that."

Instead of being crushed, Addison fills with joy and a small amount of embarrassment. So it wasn't just for nothing after all.

"Oh," she said. "You do?"

Zed Zombie-blushed and nodded. "I-A few things are clear. That, breaking my leg…that's it."

"So the important stuff then," Addison joked.

Zed chuckled and kissed her temple. "Of course. Did I miss anything else?"

"Just me disowning my grandfather," Addison said. "So nothing much."

Zed blinked at her blatant nonchalance. "You did what?"

Chapter End Notes
Okay so you know how a lot of the past few chapters have been rewrites of that other story? WARM MY FROZEN HEART? Well during the hiatus of me hating everything I was writing and wanting to cry everything this chapter flopped, I cut out basically everything. I’m not saying you have to go read that story because it does contain smut that some people don’t like.

The gist of it is that Addison gave her grandfather an option. She wasn’t asking him to be best friends with Zed but to just not be an asshole. He said no. So Addison cut him off. We good? Yeah.
The Inheritance Be Crae

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The couch in the den pulled out into a sofa bed, which meant that the den was Zed's new room while he had his cast. He couldn't get upstairs to his bedroom, so if he needed anything, he had to call for Zoey to get it. Luckily, Addison went over just about everyday during winter break and played doctor with Zoey.

On the Thursday before they have to go back to school, Eliza and Bonzo went over to hang out with Zed. They were hanging out in the den, watching a time travel movie. Addison's phone started ringing and she frowned at her screen.

"Why is my mom calling me in the middle of the day?" she muttered to herself.

Zed glanced at Addison. She answered her phone and got up, leaving the den. Zoey turned back and looked at her brother. "Pause the movie?" she asked.

"Yeah," Zed said.

Zoey hit pause and crawled up onto the couch, taking Addison's spot. Wherever she went, she was completely out of earshot, so they couldn't eavesdrop on her conversation.

"What do you think that's about?" Eliza asked.

Zed shrugged. "Dunno," he said, "Missy's been trying a lot to be, like, a new mom with Addison. It's nice but really weird."

Eliza raised an eyebrow. "Missy? You call the mayor by her first name?"

"She insisted," Zed said. "Everything I try, I get a lecture from both of them."

"Huh."

"Humans are a little weird."

Addison came back in the room. She looked shocked, to say the least, but before Zed could ask Addison said, "My grandpa died."

Zed's mouth opened a little in surprise. "I-Are you talking about your mom's dad or your dad's dad?"

"Pops," she said. "My—he had a stroke. This morning. I-I think I'm gonna go home."

"Addy," Zed said softly.

"Zed, I'll call you tomorrow," she said, turning and leaving.

Zed heard the front door close and he sighed. "Zoey, go lock the door," he instructed.

She got up and ran out of the room. Eliza and Bonzo look at him, slightly concerned, but he had nothing to say to them. He wanted to go with Addison and make sure she was okay, but because of his stupid cast he can't go anywhere. His car is back in service and he can't drive anywhere and it's
getting on his nerves. He wanted to be there for Addison and he couldn't.

"This sucks," he grumbled.

"Guess we aren't finishing the movie," Eliza muttered.

Zoey came back in, and, after hearing only the end of the conversation, asked, "Aw, why not?"

"We have to discuss whatever is going through Zed's head," Eliza complained.

Zed rolled his eyes at Eliza. "No, we're going to Addison's house."

Eliza snorted. "How? You can't walk. You can't even put on winter pants! There's no way you can walk in this weather."

"Za."

Zed got to his feet, grabbed his crutches from where they leaned against the couch, and started hobbling over to his dresser. "We can take my truck. Pick up Addison if we pass her."

"You can't drive!"

Zed pulled a pair of sweatpants out of the drawer. He turned and headed back to the couch, dropping down. "You can, E," he said, "you may not have a license but you know how to drive a truck. Just don't get pulled over."

Eliza glared at him. He just tilted his head, giving her pleading eyes. "C'mon, it's Addison," he said. "She's our friend."

"Ugh, fine," she complained.

Zed grinned and started pulling on his sweatpants because he may have been laying around in his boxers and a sweater since he's been home. It's a struggle to get the sweatpants over the cast, but luckily they're wide legged so they actually fit.

"Didn't Daddy say you weren't supposed to leave?" Zoey asked a little knowingly.

"He didn't," Zed pointed out. "He told me to rest up, which I can't do knowing that I should be with Addison."

Then, for good measure, he added, "You have to stay though because you can't leave."

"That's not fair!"

Zed ignored her and asked Bonzo, "Can you stay with her and Puppy?"

And Bonzo, being the saint he is, nodded. Zed grinned and grabbed his boots and socks from beside the couch, pulling them on his one good foot. He pulls the other sock over his cast, then another and another, all of them going over the cast. It's cold out and he has to protect his toes.

He got up and Eliza followed. "We'll be back later," Zed said.

"Yeah whatever," Zoey grumbled.

Zed just rolled his eyes and made his way out of the den. Eliza helped him into his winter coat, put her own on, then opened the front door for him. His car keys were on the same hook as their coats
which Eliza grabbed before they stepped out, only to find Addison sitting on the steps. She turned quickly and wiped her cheeks furiously, trying and failing to hide the fact that she had been crying.

"Zed what're you doing out here?" Addison asked, her voice thick and strained.

"I could ask you the same thing," he said. "I thought you left?"

"I…" Addison looked around, thinking of an answer, then asked, "I thought you weren't supposed to be up?"

"We were going to go check on you," Zed explained and Eliza held up the keys to verify his point. "And give you a ride if we ran into you. But you're out here."

"I…" It's clear she had no excuse and just looked to the ground. Addison started taking in sharp and short breaths and just as Zed's about to ask her what's wrong, she broke out into tears.

Zed dropped his crutches and thrust them into Eliza's hands, then embraced Addison in his arms. Eliza grumbled behind him but Zed ignored it. Addison sniffled and looked up at Zed. "You're putting a lot of weight on me," she told him.

"Ssh," he said. "Just cry it all out."

And she did.

Addison left on Friday for the funeral in Colorado. She came back early Monday morning and Zed met up with her in the student parking lot, because Eliza drove his truck so they wouldn't have to walk to school.

Addison jogged up to Zed as he and Eliza got out of the car and grabbed his backpack from the trunk, then slipped her arm around his back. "I've missed you," she said into his side.

Zed kissed the top of her head. "I've missed you too," he said, "but I can't walk like this. I'm gonna fall over."

"I know," Addison said. She moved around until she was in front of him, tilting her head up at him. "But I… I want to hold you. I've missed you. And holding you and…” she trailed off and Zed raised an eyebrow at her. She blushed and Zed gave her a confused look.

Addison stood on her toes and whispered to him, "The bed was so cold without you there." And she kissed him on his neck, soft and slow.

Zed stiffened and blushed. Addison was implying that, while she was in Colorado for her grandfather's funeral, she was thinking about all the very inappropriate things they had done for the few days they were both there.

"Addison," he whispered harshly. "We're going to school."

"Or," she said suggestively, "we could go to the Safe Room for homeroom. Getting marked late isn't that bad."

Eliza came around the front of the car and said, "Save it for when you're at home. We come to school to learn not fuck."

Addison stepped away from Zed and frowned. "You're a party pooper," she complained.
Eliza just rolled her eyes. "Class, now."

"We'll catch up," Addison told her.

"Sure you will."

Eliza headed toward the school and Addison smiled up at Zed. "There's thirteen whole minutes until the first bell," she told him.

She nodded toward his car and Zed nodded in agreement. Addison dropped his bag and hers in the bed of the truck, then opened the door, climbing in first with Zed following behind her.

What followed was a very intense make-out session. Addison was half in his lap with her hands roaming all over him, starting in his hair and working their way down until they worked under his winter coat and then his sweater and then his under shirt until they're on his bare stomach. They were cold and sent shivers through his whole body. She trailed kisses from his lips down his jaw until she was biting and sucking at his neck.

"Addison," Zed moaned out. Regretfully, he pushed on her shoulders and she moved back, frowning at him.

"What?"

"You need to talk to me," he said. She just looked at him and he sighed. "Baby, this is great and everything, really, but you gotta talk to me."

"About?"

He just tilted his head. "Addison."

She sighed and moved off of him. Her focus shifted to out the windshield so she wouldn't have to look at him and it hurt just a little.

"Pops died thinking that I hated him," she said, her voice quivering. "And now there's nothing I can do to change that and I'll never get him back. He thought I didn't care about him. That I cared more about my stupid boyfriend than my aging grandfather."

Zed made a disgruntled face and Addison glanced at him. "You asked for this," she warned, which was fair. She was being emotional and hopefully didn't mean what she had said.

"Okay go on."

"I don't want to think about how horrible of a human I've been," Addison said. "I just…I want to be with you right now. You make me feel like I haven't been the worst granddaughter ever, because you don't care about how mean I am to my family. Because that doesn't affect you the same way it affects me. When I'm a bitch to my family, it benefits you. And it makes me look like a bitch."

"Addy you're not a bitch."

"I chose my boyfriend over my family."

"Rightfully," Zed said. "What have they done for you?"

"Give me life."

Zed raised an eyebrow. "Let's be honest, anyone can technically make life. That's not 'giving.'"
"What about food and clothes? My nice house?"

"Basic necessities."

"Are you saying my family doesn't do anything for me?"

"I'm saying that your family has acted horribly to you for fourteen years and you realized it and you've pointed it out to them many times," Zed explained. "But now you think you've done something horrible because your grandfather died and you think it's your fault."

Addison looked at him with watery eyes. "You're not making me feel any better, Zed."

"I wasn't really trying," he admitted, making her snort. "Do you wanna go cry in the Safe Room for all of homeroom? Cuddle and cry?"

Addison looked hesitant at first, but eventually nodded. "That would be nice."

They didn't go to class until halfway through second period, but it was worth it because after a good cry and a short nap, Addison felt a little better, which is all Zed could ask for.

In February, Addison had to miss school to go to the will reading. Somehow, she convinced her parents to let her 'lawyer'—Eliza—miss school too and go with them. A day off is a day off. Zed was bitter that he didn't get chosen. But he was on crutches, so he couldn't go even if Addison picked him.

They both went over to Zed's after the reading, looking rather shocked. Zed looked at them curiously but they didn't say anything, just sat down on the couch next to him.

"What happened?" Zed asked.

"I got everything," Addison said in a chillingly stoic voice.

"What?"

"Everything. I got everything," she said. She turned to face him and started listing, "The properties in Hawaii, the property in the Hamptons, the one in the Florida Keys, the ones in Switzerland, France, and Japan. I got the cars, the houses, even the island in the Caribbean."

Zed's jaw dropped. He had no words to say, nothing coherent would come from his mouth even if he tried. Addison started grinning and said, "He didn't cut me out! I mean, he cut Bucky out, which makes me think Bucky and I are gonna split the estates, but—fuck! I own an island!"

"Everyone was hella pissed," Eliza added. "Her mom got the money, her grandma got the house in Colorado, and her aunt got his jewelry. But your girlfriend is now fucking loaded."

"I get control over them once I'm eighteen, as per his request," Addison explained. "But, like, we can still visit them. They're mine."

"That's..." Zed trailed off, not knowing what to say.

"It's insane," Addison said. "Do you wanna go to Hawaii this summer? I own a house there. And like, nine classic cars. In perfect condition."

"I-No."
Addison and Eliza looked shocked at his blunt rejection. Zed sighed because it came off a lot harsher than he had meant it to. He just—he knew Addison's family was rich. He'd seen Bucky's house, been to the giant house in the mountains of Colorado and it made him feel incredibly incompetent and just—he felt like he wasn't enough for Addison. Which was stupid because Addison clearly loves him because he's Zed but he can't help but think of the fact that someday, probably someday soon, Addison will have to give up her lavish life where she never had to worry about anything just to be with him: a Zombie with nothing but the clothes on his back and probably some crappy job where he can't even provide for her the way he wants.

And now she inherited all this property and luxuries things he never even dreamed of one person having ever. Things he'd never be able to give her in a million years no matter how hard he worked because he's a Zombie and it just didn't work that way. It got him thinking of how Addison would probably give him handouts like take him on vacations to her houses all over the world and give him her cars and she'd start thinking he's a leech and he could lose her because of their own kindness and—

He's spiraled. He's spiraled until he was too far gone to even know where it all started then he thinks 'the fucking will' and it all cycles through him again and within a minutes he's spiraled ten times over and they all end with him losing the love of his life over stupid cars.

Zed stood up suddenly and grabbed his crutches. "I have to go to the bathroom," he announced, hobbling toward the downstairs restroom.

Addison said something that he didn't hear because he was too obsessed with his own thoughts.

He's not enough for her. He's known it all along. Addison deserved some equally rich handsome human who can provide for her and give her everything she wants. He couldn't do that.

He closed the bathroom door and sat down on the closed toilet. His leg was hurting. He wanted pain pills. Dr. Tompkins said he was allowed any more pills though because they could cause a bad reaction for his Zombie. She said they'd have to do research on how certain drugs reacted with the mutation, which Zed thought was bullshit.

He can't even get drugs because he's a Zombie. If he were to get hurt again he'd be a moping mess and Addison would have to care for him and make him as comfortable as possible because he has to just deal with the pain and she wouldn't have to do that with a human. Humans got all the drugs they needed. They could take over the counter pain pills and buy cold and flu medicine but Zombies had to suffer through it and hope they didn't die. Addison's life would be so much easier if she just stopped being with him and was with a nice rich human who could take pain pills without worrying about going Zombie despite his Z-band.

If she were dating a human, she'd never have to worry about being eaten either. She got attacked by Ziryan because of Zed, she's always in so much more danger because of Zed. Zed himself bit her because he just couldn't stop himself. He's tasted her flesh and it was so good and he wanted more and it took everything in him at that point to not just devour her.

Zed looked at the door and watched the lock twist, before the door opened and Addison slipped into the tight space, closing the door behind her.

"Zed," she said. "You've been in here for a really long time and I know you haven't been using the toilet."

He just looked at her, his head swimming with too many thoughts to make a coherent sentence.
Addison’s brows furrowed and she sat in his lap, straddling him. Her hand went to his face and cradled his cheek, encouraging him to look at her. "What's wrong, Z?" she asked. "Talk to me Baby."

He opened then closed his mouth. "I-I just—Do you remember when we broke up? Freshman year?"

"Uh yeah?"

"Do you remember why?"

"I was being very unfairly mean to you," she said.

"It was because of me," Zed said. He leaned into her hand and closed his eyes. "I'm a mess. You deserve someone better than me. A nice rich human who can give you the world. I can't do that. I can't even take pills without my doctor freaking about the possibility of me going full Zombie and not being able to turn back."

Addison stroked his cheek. "Zed," she said softly. "I think I know what this is about."

"You do?"

"You think that, because I got all these things in my inheritance, I'm gonna get all snobbish and shit," she said. "But I'm not. I've had money my whole life, and I honestly don't care about it."

He opened his eyes slowly. "You don't?"

"If I cared about money, I would make Zombeans a for-profit business," Addison said. "I honestly don't care about the money, Zed. I just think it's cool to have, like, an island. It's a really nice island, by the way. I think we could honeymoon there."

"Huh?"

"You know, after we get married," Addison said. "Only a few people live there. And I own it, which means we won't have to pay much money. Just travel costs. And there are cool cars there. All the houses have car collections. I think you'd like them."

Zed can't help but smile a little. Addison always knows what to say, how to keep him from losing his mind.

"Can't believe you actually wanna marry me," he said.

"You're kinda cute," she shrugged. "Now give me a kiss."

Zed kissed the inside of her wrist and she giggled, leaning down and kissing his lips. He put his hands on her waist and she moved hers to around his neck. They made out in the bathroom for several minutes until Eliza banged on the door.

"You better not be doing something gross in there!"

Addison giggled and pulled away from Zed. "We should get back there," she said. "And talk more about my inheritance, 'cause that shit is crazy."

"You own an island."

"I know! It's crazy!"
Eliza banged on the door again. "Out!"

Addison rolled her eyes but called back, "Yeah we're coming."

Chapter End Notes

 Totally didn’t forget to add this but! The original idea of the amazing great inheritance of Addison came from the amazing quietlyscreaming! From fanfiction and Instagram! Amazing really! Stories are great! LOVE!!!
The Summer Of Us

Zed had his cast on for about four months, then had another two months with a brace he could walk on. A week after school ended in June, Zed was scheduled to get the brace off and to get cleared completely. Addison drove Zed's truck to Zombie Containment and waited outside while he hung with the doctor. Zed relayed the news to her: he got completely cleared and even did some physical therapy with the doctor. To celebrate the occasion, they got pizza with steamed cauliflower and pepperoni (Zed's choice).

Addison woke up to the smell of fresh waffles, steaming eggs and bacon, and sweet kisses from Zed. They were lazing around because for the next few days, they had no plans but to be with each other until Zed had to go to summer practice and Addison had to work at Zombeans.

However, their lazy morning kissing was interrupted by the sound of Addison's door slowly opening. Zed rolled off of Addison and pulled the cover up to their shoulders. Missy walked into the room still in her pajamas with her hand over her eyes.

"Is everyone in here decent?" she teased.

"We're under the cover, Mom," Addison told her. In the corner of her eye, she saw Zed turn and wipe his face on the pillow.

Missy uncovered her eyes and gave them her typical early morning smile. "I just wanted to make sure you both woke up, considering we're going out today."

"We are?" Zed asked, an eyebrow raised at Addison who just rolled her eyes.

"Not you, we. We as in Mom and me," she explained.

"You can come if you'd like," Missy said.

Addison shook her head. "I love you, but you can't," she told him. "Nothing personal, it's a mother-daughter day."

Zed just smiled and kissed her cheek lovingly. "I get it."

"Breakfast is waiting for you guys," Missy said. "You don't want it to be cold so you'd better skip the early morning sex session and get downstairs."

"Mom!"

Missy didn't answer and just left, closing the door behind her. Once she was gone, Addison turned to face Zed. "Morning cutie," she said.

Zed got right down to business. "Last night you told me we'd have the whole week to just cuddle and be together before we had to start doing actual work."

"I forgot," Addison shrugged. "What's a few hours?"

"Don't get me wrong," Zed said, "I love that you and your mom have bonded and are hanging out all the time. But we're gonna be seniors in August. We're gonna get busy with college applications and last minute testing, not to mention cheer and football. We aren't even gonna get this summer to be together. I just wanna spend as much time with you as possible."
"Aw," Addison said, softening up. "You're so sweet. How about we make a deal, huh?"

"What kind of deal?"

"Next summer, no matter what, we'll spend every day together," Addison said. "We could go on a vacation or something. The details can be figured out later. But the point is that it'll be Zed and Addison time. All summer."

"What about Zombeans?"

"I can get Bucky or someone to take over for the summer. Details to be figured out later." Addison said. "Does that settle for clinginess? Can I go hang out with my mom?"

Zed pouted. "No way. I was in the middle of kissing my girlfriend senseless."

Addison giggled and let Zed roll them over and resume making out with her.

Eliza had spent the first two weeks of summer with Eva and her family on vacation in California. She was only allowed to go because Eva's mom was a Zombie doctor and had Zombie training, but it did show that the Zombie Patrol was becoming much more lenient with Zombies and their boundaries.

They got back the Saturday before Zombeans would start. Eva and Eliza, Bree and Bonzo, and Zed and Addison all went on a triple date at North Seabrook Beach, which was the same as the regular beach except there were more hotels and restaurants along it, as well as six different beach houses. One of which Addison inherited. Of course, Addison didn't even remember this house until she told her parents her beach plans for the day and they reminded her. After Zed picked her up, they drove to her grandfather's lawyer's office to grab the key to the beach house.

Addison sent the new meet point to their friends and they all waited outside for her and Zed to show up. "What exactly are we doing at this house?" Eliza asked.

"I own it," Addison said. "We can leave our stuff here while we beach it up."

"Wait," Eva said, "what do you mean you own it?"

"Baby keep up," Eliza said. "Addison's rich and inherited a whole bunch of houses."

Addison gaped. "I'm not rich."

Eliza hummed and Addison wanted to say more, but Zed put his hand on the small of her back and rubbed her bare skin with his thumb. "Don't worry about her," he said, "she's ridiculous. Let's get inside."

Addison nodded and led the way up to the front door. She unlocked it and went in first, trusting whoever was at the back to lock the door.

"Holy shit," Zed breathed from beside her. He stopped walking and Addison looked to see him gauging in the expanse of the foyer and what he could see of the living room.

She looked at all her friends who each had surprised and awestruck looks on their faces, and started to get uncomfortable again. She hated the inheritance and how the minute Zed found out about it, he got insecure and thought that Addison would think so poorly of him because he didn't have money. If it had happened during the first year of their relationship, she knew it would have
been a huge strain on their relationship. Worse than the lying had been.

"It is an old house," she said. "This is the house my mom and aunt grew up in. I didn't even remember it."

No one was listening to her talk because they were all marveling at the large beach house. It was filled with wide open spaces and perfectly clear, marble floors. Everything was pristine and perfect, nothing like any of them had ever seen.

"I bet there are some really cool cars in the garage too," Addison offered. They all turned and looked at her, blinking disbelievingly.

"Let me guess, you own those too?" Eva joked.

"Uh, yeah," Addison said. "When my grandpa was young, having all the cool cars was a thing. Literally every property he owned had at least five cars. Which are all mine now. But it's not like I need all them. I didn't even remember this place, I obviously don't need—"

"Addy," Zed interrupted. "You don't have to explain yourself."

Addison blushed and shuffled her feet. "I just—I don't want you to think—"

"That you're the coolest person ever?" Bree finished. "Too late. We already think that. Now is it beach time or what?"

Addison smiled; Zed slipped his hand in hers and she led the way to the back of the house. They dropped their belongings in the living room and everyone who still had to change did so, then they went out the back door and down to the beach. Addison and Zed went first because they were both already in their bathing suits and dragged beach chairs from the deck down to the sand.

"I don't understand why your grandparents moved to Colorado," Zed said. "And how they got so much money."

"My grandpa started a business," she said. "It was kinda like how Nestle is. It was like a brand that did a bunch of shit. Bucky's dad runs it now, which is why they're loaded. Pops officially signed it over when I was five and bought a retirement house in Colorado."

"Why didn't they give this house to one of their kids? I would."

"Pops wasn't in the business of giving handouts to his kids," Addison explained. "The house in Colorado went to my grandma. My uncle had the business. I got all the properties and cars. Everything else went to some charity."

"Huh."

Addison nodded and stopped first. They were just below the hill that separated the houses from the beach and she laid her towel out on one of the chairs and sat at the end. Zed sat behind her, wrapping his arms around her middle and pulling her back to him.

"You okay?" he asked. "You're very tense."

"I'm fine," Addison answered. "I just hate bringing up the inheritance. It makes me sound so… snotty."

He put his head on her shoulder and gave her an adorable pout. Addison gave him a small smile
and bumped her cheek against his.

"Trust me Adds, they don't think you're snotty," Zed said. "You're the nicest, purest, most kind-hearted and generous person I know. Anyone who thinks you're snotty is blind."

"You're so sweet," she said. "I love you."

"I love you too," he said, kissing her cheek. He turned and looked back at the house, then said, "They're coming now."

Addison turned and looked to see their friends coming down the hill from the house. She cupped her hands around her mouth and called, "Bring the beach umbrellas!"

"Okay!" Bree called back.

Addison grinned and Zed let out a whine, one that had no preamble and caused her to look at him curiously. Zed twisted his hands on her stomach until she was facing him fully and smiled.

"I'm needy," he said as an explanation, "I want my Addy."

Addison giggled and put her hands on his shoulders, leaned forward and kissed him. She giggled between kisses, making Zed giggle until they weren't even kissing anymore.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Addison breathed. She let out another giggle and shook her head.

Zed laughed because she was laughing. "What?" he asked.

"I just—you're being so clingy lately," she said. "And it's so cute. I love you. I mean, I know why you're being so clingy and I don't mind. But you're just so cute. I love you."

"I don't know if you remember but you imprinted on me and now I can't live my life without you."

"That's too bad," Addison said, "I was planning on finding a hot young pre-med stud once we go to college."

Zed laughed, his head falling back. Addison laughed too because he was laughing. She put her hand on his cheek again and pressed her thumb into his soft skin. "You're so cute, Zed," she said. "I love you."

His laughter turned to a soft smile. He looked at her with a twinkle in his eyes. "You keep saying you love me," he said. "Should I be concerned?"

"No I just love you," she shrugged. "I don't think I say it enough."

"Mm, okay." He pecked her lips again, before their friends joined them.

"You guys have been making out the entire time we were in there," Eliza stated.

Addison rolled her eyes. "I'm allowed to kiss my boyfriend if I so chose," she said. "You wanna leave us alone so we can make out more?"

"Are you even going in the water?" Eliza asked, crossing her arms.

Eva pushes her girlfriend's arms down. "Stop being annoying," she said.
Eliza stuck her tongue out at Eva. Addison rolled her eyes and said, "We're gonna strip right here if you guys don't leave."

Bonzo dropped the umbrellas, picked up Bree, and bolted. "Look! You scared him," Eliza said in mock annoyance.

Eva chuckled and grabbed Eliza's arm, pulling her to the water. Once their friends were gone, Addison scooted closer to Zed and put her hands on his shoulders. "Now where were we?"

After sunset, Addison and Zed set up the fire pit for a bonfire. They went and picked up dinner for everyone, and when they returned they all gathered around the fire.

"You know earlier this week," Addison said, "Zed and I were talking about taking a super cool vacation next summer."

"We were?"

Addison giggled and pinched his cheek. "Yes, when my mom walked in on us," Addison explained, and he nodded once he remembered.

"A vacation next summer?" Bree asked.

"Yeah," Addison said. "It'll be our last summer where we're all together. Because we all know that Eliza's going to MIT."

"Oh my god," Eliza groaned, though she was blushing. "Their acceptance rate is like, eight percent."

"She knows that by heart," Zed pointed out.

"You're gonna be the first Zombie at MIT," Addison said, "which is insane!"

"I have to be accepted first," Eliza reminded them.

"You basically are," Eva said. "You went to two programs there in the past year. And you got like a 1540 on your SAT."

"It was a 1570," Zed corrected.

"Can we stop talking about me?" Eliza asked. "What were you saying about a vacation?"

"Oh," Addison said, "well it'd be cool if we all went on a vacation during the summer. We can do whatever, I'm down for anything."

"Well, Zombies can't leave the States," Eliza said. "Not yet anyway. So whatever we do has to be in the country."

Addison nodded in agreement. "I've got houses all over the country."

"I thought you had to be eighteen?" Eliza asked.

"That, my friend, was a personal choice, if it wasn't obvious," Addison said. "What do I need with all those houses now?"

Eliza nodded in understanding. Another issue came into her head and she asked, "Well then where
would we go?"

"Zie nyze zigee doo?" Bonzo asked.

Bree gasped and nodded excitedly. "Yes that's perfect! We could rent a van and go all over the country!"

Addison glanced around, seeing her friends all nodding and agreeing to the idea of a road trip. She grinned because things were finally happening.

"So a road trip?" Addison asked. "Sounds like a plan."

"What about your job?" Eva asked.

Addison shrugged. "I can get someone to run it for the summer. It won't be too hard. Plus, I'd rather spend all summer with you guys."

Zed grinned and threw his arm around her shoulder. "It'll be the summer of us!" he declared.
Sunday, Addison and Zed woke up a little after dawn to head out and get some food for the day. They wouldn't be returning home until after dinner and Addison refused to make a trip to the store before every meal. Instead of taking Zed's old truck, though, Addison took him to the garage. Addison flicked the lights on and pointed her phone at Zed, recording his reaction. She had thought that he wasn't really the type to obsess over cars, but ever since he found out about her inheritance he made it his personal mission to learn about every car she now owned (there were a lot). Online research was one thing though. Now he was seeing nine classic cars, in the flesh, for the first time ever.

He sucked in a breath, nearly dropping his phone. He gasped at the sight—nine classics, all lined up in the perfectly white garage, shining as if they had been freshly polished. And then—"Drogi Z."

Addison giggled and only then did he look at her, his eyes wide and his mouth open. He started talking but in Zombie Tongue, too fast for Addison to translate. He caught himself though, then said, "Please tell me you have the keys for these cars."

Addison giggled and stopped recording, putting her phone back in her pocket. "I do, but none of them have gas," she said. "There are gas tanks in the supply closet though. Take your pick, Babe."

Zed threw his arms around her and kissed her. It was sloppy and all over and Addison couldn't stop laughing throughout. He put her down then walked through the garage. He was marveling at the cars, muttering under his breath in Zombie Tongue.

Addison went to the box on the wall and unlocked it with the house key, revealing the box of keys for the cars, two for each car.

"You know which one you wanna drive?" Addison called.

"How could I pick!"

Addison laughed and looked at him, seeing him grinning like a little kid. Zed said, "They're all so sexy!"

Addison laughed again. "Not as sexy as me though, right?"

"I dunno."

Addison laughed and gave him a mock scoff. He laughed and said, "Just kidding. Though I'd kill to see you behind the wheel of one of these."

"Just pick a car," she said.

"Really?"

"Of course, they're mine."

Zed squealed—actually squealed. He looked around then pointed at the maroon corvette. "That
one," he said.

Addison put her hands on her hips and asked, "Think you can name it?"

He put a finger on his chin and thought for a moment. "It's a 1965 Chevrolet Corvette L76."

Addison grinned and picked out the keys, then skipped over to him. Zed smirked and raised an eyebrow. "I thought I was driving?"

"You just said you wanted to see me behind the wheel," she explained. "Take your pictures, Babe."

It only took a few minutes for both of them to get their pictures of the other. Zed drove them to the grocery store in Seabrook and they bought food to cook and snacks, and after paying they went out for breakfast without their friends.

They went back to the house and Zed and Addison made breakfast. Actually, they put their groceries away and made out in the kitchen, until Eva walked in on them. Then they made breakfast. They' meaning Zed cooked while Addison sat on the counter, being a cute distraction.

"You guys are already dressed?" Eva noticed.

"We had to buy food," Addison explained.

"You should see her car collection," Zed added.

Eva just laughed. Zed transferred the bacon from the pan to their plates.

"I'm sure all you did was go and buy food," Eva said sarcastically.

Addison laughed, nudging Zed's hip with her foot. "I'll never tell," she said with a smile. Zed stuck his tongue out at her and they laughed some more.

"Right," Eva said, "we totally didn't hear anything last night while we were trying to fall asleep."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Zed stated.

Eva laughed and Zed stuck his tongue out at her. He lifted the pan and poured the still steaming cauliflower onto their plates.

"Addy, you gotta get up," Zed said. "You're blocking the waffle maker."

"Move me," she challenged.

Zed rolled his eyes but moved between her legs. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her to the edge of the counter. "If I lift you up you have to move to my back," he told her.

Addison beamed and nodded. She wrapped her arms around his neck and hopped off the counter as he pulled her off, then moved around so he was giving her a piggyback ride.

"You know, I'm starting to see why Eliza always torments you guys," Eva said. "Disgustingly cute."

Addison giggled and kissed Zed's temple. It was difficult to finish breakfast but Addison refused to get down so Zed struggled. They each got a waffle and finally Zed passed around their plates. Addison moved into her own chair but put her feet up into his lap.
"So what're the plans for today?" Eva asked.

"More beach stuff?" Addison suggested. "I don't have to be home until midnight."

Eva looked at Zed with a questioning look. "Me too," he said, "but we do have early practice tomorrow so we should probably leave before then."

"Or we could blow off practice," Eva suggested.

"Except we're both captains."

"What is it you say?" Addison teased. "That's a mere technicality."

Zed laughed and pushed her legs out of his lap. Addison kicked his shins in retaliation. Zed breathed out a laugh and kicked her back.

Eva scoffed in disbelief. "Are you seriously playing footsies?" she asked.

Addison laughed and nudged Zed's foot again. She could hear someone walking down the upstairs hallway, then the staircase. She turned and saw Bree walking over and grinned. "Morning bestie!" Addison called.

"I thought I was your bestie!" Eva said incredulously.

Zed gasped and kicked his girlfriend. "I thought I was your best friend!"

Addison just rolled her eyes. "Bree is my best friend," she stated. "Zed, you're my crazy hot Zombie boyfriend. And Eva is my crazy hot human best friend-muscle."

"Ha! I out rank all of you!" Bree cheered.

"Yeah whatever." Zed rolled his eyes.

Bree sat down next to Eva. She looked around at their plates and frowned. "Hey! Where's my food?"

"Maybe if you didn't sleep all morning you'd have gotten some," Addison teased.

Zed looked at Addison and rolled his eyes. "I'll make you some after I finish eating."

Addison put her feet back in his lap. They continued having meaningless conversations; eventually, Eliza and Bonzo made their way downstairs and Zed went and made more food (with his crazy cute annoyance on his back, of course). They got showered and dressed, then congregated in the living room. They spent the day doing nothing in particular, just hanging out before they get plagued by their busy summer schedules.

There were three weeks between the end of Zombeans and the first day of school. Addison and Bree had to go straight into cheer practice. They were captains and held practice on the track because the gym was being renovated. Not for the small fact that they could hang out with Zed and Eva on breaks because that would be unprofessional of them, as captains.

The first football game was on the Thursday before school started and was an away game that they won. The six of them spent the weekend at the photographers office taking their yearbook pictures.

On that Sunday, Zed's truck refused to start while he was hanging at Addison's house. Zed and
Addison pushed it back to Zombietown (only took an hour and a half, no big deal), only for Paizley's dad to deem it unfixable.

"Sorry kid, I know how much this truck meant to you," the Zombie named Dezmond said. "The engine's completely out. The best we could do is scrap it for parts."

Zed frowned. "Really? Nothing you can do?"

Dezmond shook his head. "I'll give you a couple days to get out everything you wanna spare, but I'm gonna scrap it Zed."

"But…what if I don't wanna scrap it?"

Dezmond raised an eyebrow. "You wanna keep it? It's pretty useless. Is parts could be repurposed but not its whole."

"I-I'll let you know," Zed said, "thank you."

"No problem," Dezmond said, "you can leave it here and get back to me whenever."

Zed nodded and gave him a forced smile. "I'll see you later, Uncle Dez."

Addison watched the entire exchange standing awkwardly to the side, but after Zed hugged his uncle, Dezmond gave her a smile and wave, which she returned. Zed grabbed her hand and walked with her back to his house.

She looked at him and saw his face scrunched up. "Penny for your thoughts?" she asked.

"Thinking about the truck."

Addison hummed. She could understand why he wouldn't want to get rid of it; it was his mom's truck and currently the only thing he had left of her. And now it was useless and he'd have to get rid of it.

"I don't wanna scrap it," Zed complained. "I want to keep it forever. Pass it down to my own children."

Addison can't help but smile. "Alexander?"

Zed chuckled and nodded. "Yes of course Alexander. It would've been great."

"Zed, that car is from at least 1950, maybe even earlier," Addison said. "I was honestly surprised it lasted this long."

Zed gave her a pout. "That's not what I want to hear right now."

"Coming from the guy who told me my family didn't care about me while I cried about my grandfather's death."

Zed hummed in understanding. "Maybe Uncle Dez is just wrong, maybe I should take her to a professional mechanic."

"Zed," Addison said, "that truck is over seventy years old."

"You have cars from 1960!"
"My cars weren't in Zombietown for like, fifty years," Addison said. "I'm sure you could salvage something from the car that means more than the car itself."

Zed just pouted. "You're being mean."

"If it makes you feel any better, while you're deciding you're welcome to drive one of my cars," she said. "Or I could finally convince my parents to buy me my own car that's not from the twentieth century."

"Or you could drive one of the cars you already own."

"Or you could shut up," Addison mocked.

Zed chuckled and leaned down, kissing the top of her head. "How could I get to this nice car that's all the way at North Seabrook Beach?"

"We'll take an Uber. Let's go now."

Zed shrugged. "Okay, what else are we doing?"

Zed picked out the 1997 Acura NSX-T, which he left at Addison's house for the night. He walked to her place before school and when he knocked, Addison came running out, dressed in her game uniform with an excited smile.

"First day of senior year Baby!" she exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms and kissing him.

Zed laughed and lifted her off the ground for a moment. He put her down and she handed him the car keys, then skipped over to the passenger side. "Let's go! I spent all night making mixtapes for the cassette thingy, which was super hard because no one uses cassettes anymore except super old cars."

"Hurtful! I had dozens of cassettes in the truck."

"I know!"

Zed unlocked the car and went around back, dropping his backpack in the trunk. He closed it and went into the driver's seat, starting the engine as Addison put in a cassette tape that played modern music. Zed rolled down the windows and Addison put the volume up.

"Where's Eliza?" Zed asked.

"She spent all weekend with Eva," Addison said, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

"Ew! I don't even wanna hear about our private lives!"

Addison laughed and waved him off. "Just shut up and drive."

He drove them to school, breaking the speed limit everywhere except the school zones and pulled into the school parking lot like they owned the place, snagging one of the best spots in the senior section (reserved for school president).

They grab the attention of everyone once they parked. They both got out, leaving both the engine running and the music blaring.

In the spot next to them, Eva, Eliza, and Bree got out of the car. "You two are so fucking extra,"
Eliza complained. "I thought you didn't get these cars until you turned eighteen?"

Addison giggled. "You can do whatever you want when you've got money, if you weren't aware," she said.

"Oh I'm aware," Eliza said.

Addison laughed; she grabbed her backpack and closed the door, walking around and meeting Zed at the trunk. Eric Germane came up to them and whistled. "Damn Zed, I see you upgraded to a sexy ride," he said.

Zed grinned and said, "This is Addy's car," he said.

Eric raised an eyebrow and looked at Addison. "Now I wish that I was boning you," he said, "you sure you don't want a human Addison?"

Addison just laughed, going into Zed's side as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "I'm pretty happy with my Zombie," she said, "but you'll be the first person I call if I ever change my mind."

"Turn off your music!" Eva shouted. "You're being a public disturbance."

"You're just jealous that your girlfriend doesn't let you drive kickass cars," Eric said.

"At least I have a girlfriend."

A sophomore walked past them with her younger sister and said, "You athletes are so fucking obnoxious."

Addison just smiled and called, "Welcome back!"

"That poor freshman," Bree sympathized.

Addison hummed in agreement, then looked up at Zed and said, "Go turn off the car so we can go welcome everyone. We get to do morning announcements today!"

"We," Eliza corrected, but Addison just waved her off.

"Yeah whatever. Let's go!"

Chapter End Notes

Woo! Senior year! We're almost at the end of the story! If you didn't know, "Uncle Dez" aka Dezmond is a character created by miss CallMeLy (from fanfiction). He is not a BGZ, but an original character, and she was great to let me borrow him.

Senior year are the last ten chapters of this story! They're all based off of High School Musical 3 songs. Hope you all love it! There may be other stories in the works…ssh.
Homecoming is at the beginning of November, but several things happen before the game and the dance. Since February, coaches from colleges instate and around the country had been visiting the school and scouting out athletes. Zed had been called down once in April but his current Zombie status prevented him from even considering any colleges, as well as the fact that he was on crutches at the time. But once September hit and news got out that not only was he playing at his full capacity, but he could get a Z-Visa and attend college anywhere in the country, his inbox was flooded with emails from colleges and scouts from everywhere.

Anytime he tried to talk with Addison about college, she said the same thing: "I won't tell you my top three schools. I don't wanna influence your decisions." It was fair but annoying. He didn't even want to meet with scouts, he just wished somebody could take care of all of it for him.

Addison got busy quickly with President stuff. Zed only saw her before and after school and during the classes they had together, but those barely counted because they both had to pass at least their first semester classes.

Weekends were spent either practicing, at games, or doing homework. The year started off hectic and Zed was sick of it. He wanted to spend time with his girlfriend, he missed her, damnit.

His timing was impeccable too. On the Saturday before Homecoming week, he went over to her house at the one time he knew she'd be home: shower time. Addison always stuck to her schedule and reserved the two hours from five to seven for showers, even if she didn't plan on being home for dinner.

He didn't feel like dealing with her parents so he scaled the tree in her backyard and pulled open her unlocked window, sneaking into her bedroom. She was in the bathroom and the door was cracked open enough for Zed to see steam rolling out. When he closed her window again, the bathroom door opened wider and Addison popped her head out.

"Zed? What're you doing here?"

"I came to see you," he whispered. "Feels like it's been forever."

"Let me get dressed," Addison said, then closed the bathroom door. She came out of the bathroom a second later and put on a dress, then sat on her bed, patting the spot next to her for Zed to sit. He sat down and she turned so they were facing each other.

"I was gonna go to Target to go buy stuff for our costumes," she explained. "Wanna go with?"

"Not really," Zed said, "I just wanna spend time with you, not thinking about school. Just us. I miss you."

Addison sighed but before she could talk, Zed grabbed her hands and said, "Addy, hear me out."

She raised an eyebrow and he sighed. He knew his girlfriend, knew that she would get what he meant if he made a Disney reference.

"Can you imagine what would happen if we could have any dream? I'd wish this moment was ours to own it, and that it would never leave."

Addison smiled softly. She pulled her hands from his and put them around his neck as he kept
singing. "Then I would thank that star that made our wish come true. Cause he knows that where you are is where I should be too."

"Right here, right now. I'm looking at you and my heart loves the view. Cause you mean everything. Right here, I'll promise you somehow that tomorrow can wait for some other day to be. But right now there's you and me."

Addison kissed his nose and giggled. "Zed," she said, "it's gonna be you and me forever."

"What about right now though? You said you wanna go buy stuff for costumes but…that stuff isn't as important to me as spending time with you. Especially because I don't even know if we'll go to the same college."

Addison smiled and rolled her eyes. "I haven't even gotten offers yet," she said.

"No school, just us," Zed interrupted. "Tomorrow can wait."

"You sound like you wanna have sex," she joked.

Zed frowned, and her joking smile melted away. "Addy, seriously," he said, "I don't wanna sound like I'm being super needy but you don't really make time for us. I want things—life, school, everything—to just slow down."

"I'm spending time with you now!"

"Because I broke into your bedroom."

He got her there. She let her hands fall from his face and she looked away from him. "Well I'm sorry for being such a bad girlfriend," she said in the exact tone where she wanted him to feel guilty.

Zed sighed. He stood up and said, "Have fun making costumes Addy. And with your student council and cheer. I'll see you on Monday."

He went back out through her window, then back to his house. They hit a bump, that happened to all couples. Addison was busy trying to make her senior year memorable for everyone and Zed was busy trying to keep their relationship alive. But it clearly wasn't a priority to her, so he could stop trying and focus on his own things.

He got home and went up to his room, Puppy hot on his heels. He used his school-issued laptop to go through the emails all the colleges have sent him. Puppy jumped up into his lap and Zed stroked the dog's fur while he reads, getting lost in the void of college.

He doesn't hear from Addison the rest of the weekend.

Monday was Generations Day. Zed went to Addison's house early because he had promised he'd do the costume with her and even if they were having problems, he wouldn't go back on his promise. Addison opened the door looking like a very adorable grandmother. She smiled, relieved, and pulled him inside.

"I didn't think you were still coming," she admitted. "We—we haven't talked since Saturday and I said stupid shit and—"

"I promised you I'd do this costume with you," Zed said, not sounding very excited at all. "I'm a
man of my word."

She smiled gratefully, then grabbed his wrist, dragging him to the stairs. He waved at her parents and followed her up to her room. Once they were inside, she pushed him to sit on her bed, leaving the door open.

"First things first," she said, "I have to apologize. I've been stupid, and you're right. I haven't been investing any time in us. But please understand that this week has to go perfectly. But Friday, right when the last bell rings, I'm all yours. I mean, besides the game. But from then until graduation, I'm all yours. Just give me this week."

"I—Okay," Zed agreed, as if he could tell her no. "You're not gonna join prom committee are you?"

"God no."

Zed chuckled. "Good. I wanna bug you all prom season."

Addison giggled, then gave him a quick kiss. "I'm sorry again," she said, "thank you for still coming and being so understanding and great. I love you."

Zed just smiled in response. "I'll get back to you with the answer when I get some Addy-time."

She rolled her eyes (fondly, of course). "You're so clingy."

"You love it."

She just smiled and went to her desk. She came back with brown and grey hairspray and asked, "So how does aging work for Zombies?"

"No idea," Zed shrugged. "If you weren't aware, it's not very likely that most of us make it past fifty."

"Wait, how old is your dad?"

"Forty-six."

"Really?"

"Well, maybe," Zed said. "You know how ages are in Zombietown. Zombies were rogue for like, thirty years. We don't age when we're rogue. Records were destroyed after the outbreak, so all these numbers are just guesses."

"Um, okay?" She looked at the bottles in her hands. "So my dad told me that...um...when Zombies start...for lack of better words, dying." She winced but continued, "that your hair starts turning back to normal colors. So like being Zombie is a first death and your final death is like, 'time to return to your human state.'"

"How unnerving."

Addison nodded in agreement. "So what I was thinking was to dye your roots grey and your ends brown. Assuming your human hair would be brown."

Zed nodded as she talked.

"You should change into your clothes first."
Zed nodded and shrugged off his jacket. Addison grabbed his shirt and pulled it over his head. She told him to stand up and he undid his jeans, twisting his hips to shake them down.

"Drogi Z! Close the door, damnit!" Eliza shouted from the hallway.

Addison turned and laughed, standing up. "We're not doing anything! I'm just getting him into his costume for today, E."

"Don't care!"

Addison looked at Zed, who was laughing, and couldn't help but smile and roll her eyes. She helped him get changed into his costume, then spray-dyed his hair. He got fake glasses and even a cane before Addison deemed him ready for school.

The Acura could technically only fit two people, but if they put their bags in the trunk, Eliza could squeeze in on the passenger side. It was totally not legal because Addison and Eliza weren't wearing a seatbelt but there weren't very many police officers in Seabrook (it was perfect, not much crime to stop). They got to school where they met up with their other friends. The campus is pretty deserted because of how early it is in the morning, which gives them enough time to set up the different backdrops in the courtyard. They got in their pictures, then went back to the parking lot to hang out in Eva's SUV while they waited for school to start.

The platform in the cafeteria that used to be where the cheer captains would sit got converted into a stage over the summer. They had a theater on the other side of campus, but used the cafeteria stage for lunch announcements and performances. The stage ended up being convenient for dance proposals, that Zed didn't think he had to do because he never asked Addison to go to Homecoming for two years. They were dating, for Pete's sake.

Addison saw things differently. Lunch, during the first day of Homecoming week was very special. Zed went to their lunch table, the same table they'd been sitting at since freshman year. To his surprise, only he and Bonzo were there. Lunch had started a good ten minutes ago and the girls were nowhere insight. That is, until music cut on over the cafeteria speakers and the stage lights came on. Zed knew that song, because it was the second song from one of Addison and Zoey's favorite movies, *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*. It was the same song Zed had used on Saturday, to prove his point to Addison, but this time in a different key than the actual movie.

The curtains opened and Addison is center stage, not even dressed like an old lady anymore. She's not wearing anything special though, just a Seabrook typical yellow dress and sandals. She smiled, lifted the microphone, and started singing at the second verse.

"If this was forever, what could be better? We already proved it works But in 3072 hours—" Zed smiled, noticing the number change. His girl, he loved her. "—a bend in the universe is gonna make everything in our whole world change. And you know that where we are will never be the same oh no. Right here, right now. I'm looking at you and my heart loves the view. Cause you mean everything."

Eva tapped his shoulder and he looked at her. She grabbed his elbow and pulled him up, then motioned for him to go to the stage. He grinned and walked across the cafeteria, standing at the side of the stage.

Addison smiled and turned to sing to him. "Right Here, I'll promise you somehow that tomorrow can wait for some other day to be. But right now it's you and me."
The music faded out and Addison climbed off the stage. "Zed Necrodopolus," she said, "we're going to college next year. But right here, right now, I just want to spend time with you. Will you be my date to the Homecoming dance Saturday?"

Zed held back his laughter. Addison raised her eyebrow and he nodded. She put the microphone in front of him and he said, "Yes, I will."

The cafeteria cheered and Addison's smile brightened. She kissed him and when she pulled back, she produced a bouquet of white roses. Where she got them from, he didn't know. But he did smile and accept them.

She leaned up to his ear and whispered, "Read the card," then turned to the cafeteria and said into the microphone, "Homecoming is this weekend! Don't forget to buy tickets to the game and the dance. Seniors, vote for Homecoming court. Polls close Friday at noon, and king and Queen are announced on Friday during the big game. Go Shrimp!"

Some people cheered and Addison turned off her microphone. Meanwhile, Zed pulled the card out of the flowers.

*Gar garziga, my amazing boyfriend. These white roses symbolize innocence and purity, and you're so sweet and pure. xoxo, Addison*

The note made him blush just a little, because she was teasing him about sex. When she saw his reaction, she giggled and grabbed his hand, pulling him toward their table. She started talking Homecoming details, saying that she had already bought her dress (yellow) and corsages (also yellow) so all he'd have to do was match or compliment.

Eliza and Bree join them, because Bree had to work the curtains and handle the props, and Eliza was doing the soundboard. They finished their lunch, and during the next passing period there are two more Homecoming proposals (on different sides of campus).

They win the Homecoming game (surprise surprise) and both Addison and Zed end up as Homecoming Queen and King. They dance the night away, in the school gym, and Addison keeps her promise of it being just them for the rest of the weekend.
The Common App closed early decision in November, which meant Addison had already gotten in all her applications before cheer competition season started (which was when she would start). By some unknown luck, competition overlapped with football season, meaning they were competing while the football team was still training and having games. Addison's offers started rolling in after their first competition, in mid-November. There was a cheer representative coming in from different schools every few days to talk to the senior cheerleaders.

There was also football reps coming in, wanting to see the senior and junior players. They all got scheduled meetings—the cheerleaders and football players—with each representative. Addison's first one ended up being at the same time as Zed's first one: during the last period on the Monday after the first competition.

At lunch that day, Zed was complaining about the meeting. It was just him and Addison that day; Bonzo had mid-day rehearsals, Bree and Eliza were working on a project, and Eva was out for lunch with a representative from some college in Utah.

"I don't wanna go, I don't wanna think about college," he whined. "Why can't we just do high school forever?"

"College will be fun," Addison assured him. "Bucky loves college. It's nothing like Seabrook!"

"And how many Zombies are in college?"

"You'll be the first!" Addison said. "Colleges are always trying to diversify. That's what I call scholarship money."

"That's what I call people hating me because I'm Jewish and a Zombie."

Addison sighed. "Zed, just focus on finding the perfect football team to play for," she said. "After college, you could go pro! You'd be the first Zombie in the NFL! Wouldn't that be awesome?"

"I dunno…"

"Zed," she stated, "imagine having everything you've ever dreamed. Don't you want it?"

"Maybe."

She rolled her eyes and asked, "Can't you see it?"

"Kinda."

Addison gave him an annoyed pout. "Imagine first thing after graduation, we both get drafted in the big leagues."

"Both of us?"

"Well of course."

This time, Zed rolled his eyes. "Yeah right."

"You gotta believe it!"
He picked up his fork and shoveled a mouthful of pasta in his mouth. "Keep talking, I so care."

Addison shot him a glare. He wouldn't listen to her, and he needed to. She was talking about his future, their future. Hopefully together. It was important, and he needed to see that.

Addison grabbed his tray and pulled it away from him. She moved so she was sitting up on the lunch table and he looked at her, annoyed. "You and I, all the fame—"

"I think you mean 'Addison and her Zombie boyfriend.'"

"But doesn't that sound exciting!"

"Inviting."

"Let's do it then!"

Zed tapped his ear and said, "Listening."

"Personal stylist, agents, publicists."

Zed sat thoughtfully for a moment, then asked, "So where do I fit into this? And us? And a family? What about poor unborn Alexander!"

"Don't you get it Zed," Addison said, "you're the key to this plan. With you we can win!"

"Win what?" Addison tilted her head at him, asking him to try just a little. Zed sighed and guessed, "Win the scholarship?"

"Think bigger."

Zed rolled his eyes and groaned. He did little jazz hands and said mockingly, "Become superstars."

Addison grinned and nodded. "That's better. Don't you see that bigger is better, and better is bigger. A little bit is never enough." She stood up and got on the floor, turning his chair with a surprising amount of strength and exclaiming in his face, "Don't you want it all!"

He jumped and she giggled, then kept talking. "The fame and the fortune and all."

"Wait…" he paused to think, then accused, "Have you been quoting High School Musical 3 this whole time?"

"It's inspirational!" Addison defended. "Come on, walk and talk with me."

"But lunch."

"Take it with you!"

Zed pouted and stood up, shouldering his bag and grabbing his food. "You're being very mean today, Addy," he pointed out.

Addison softened, pressing a quick kiss to his lips. "I'm sorry," she apologized, "it's just that college is really important. And you haven't been treating it like it's important. But you should."

Zed nodded in agreement. He didn't say anything until they left the cafeteria and were walking up the staircase.
"I just never thought I'd actually go to college," he said. "I never thought I'd be playing football and getting scholarships and all of this."

"I get that," Addison said, "but nothing is gonna happen if you ignore everything. Colleges will stop being interested in you really fast. And you want to go to a good school, with a good team."

"I also want to go to school with you," he added. They reached the top of the stairs and Zed moved in front of her. "Addy, I love you. I don't want to be apart from you. Ever."

He'd been saying the same thing for months, trying to get her to tell him the school's she was applying to and the ones she actually wanted to go to. But she wanted him to pick schools he wanted to go to not because of her, but for his own reasons.

Now though, college applications were basically done. He was getting offers and he would have to accept one soon. She could tell him now.

"I will tell you my top three," she said. "And you'll tell me yours."

His eyes went wide and he nodded enthusiastically. "Yes!" He looked at his hands, then down the hallway. "Let me get rid of my food first," he said, then ran down the corridor to the trash can at the end.

Addison bit her lip to keep from giggling. Zed came back a moment later, out of breath but smiling. "Okay, go," he said between breaths.

"Well, my number one is White Mountain State University—yes, the same school Bucky goes to. Um, East Haven College. Great cheer team, it's in Virginia. And Harvey Hutson University, in Massachusetts."

She looked up at him after listing, seeing him grinning like an idiot. He grabbed her jaw and planted a rough and sloppy kiss on her lips. When he pulled away, he was still grinning. "It's kinda insane that we have the same top two," he said as an explanation.

Addison laughed. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down for another kiss. She pulled back and said, "Here's hoping we get scholarships."

"Let's get that money baby!"

During study hall, Zed and Addison ran off. Bree knew it was to go makeout in the Zombie Safe Room, but didn't push when Addison denied it. Bree hung out with Eliza and Bonzo in the library. Bonzo had just finished music rehearsals, and had explained to them that Mr. Arnold—the music teacher—had sent in an application for Bonzo to several music schools. And he had gotten auditions for a good number of them.

"Bonzo that's amazing!" Eliza said, more enthusiastic than she usually was.

Bonzo gave a shy smile. "Zie gofrugal," he said.

Eliza gaped at him. "What do you mean you're not sure about it! This is an amazing opportunity, B!"

She was growing more aggressive, and Bree figured she had better step in to avoid any actual conflict. She placed a hand on Bonzo's upper arm, drawing his attention. "Bonzo, you could blow up and be the first Zombie musician," she explained as calmly as possible, even though she was
bouncing on the inside. "Picture it! Red carpet, rose bouquets, crowd waiting backstage."

"Of course us, with you," Eliza added. "Telling the security guards that I'm with you. They can't stop me. I'm not paparazzi."

"Invitations, standing ovations," Bree went on. "You could be a celebrity."

"Seabrook today. Tomorrow the world!"

They both looked at Bonzo, seeing his thoughtful look as he considered all those things. He looked between the two of them, grinned, and nodded. Both Bree and Eliza cheered and got immediately silenced by the librarian. Bonzo pulled his laptop out of his bag and unlocked it, going straight to his email while asking Eliza and Bree to help him schedule auditions.

Near the end of study hall, Zed and Addison showed up, looking slightly disheveled. Bree shook her head at them, disappointed at their unprofessionalism. There were college recruiters on campus all day, what if they had been caught? Not only would neither of them get in, but word would get around that the mayor's daughter was constantly screwing a Zombie, even during school. Sometimes, Bree thought she was the only one of her friends who saw all the consequences of actions. No amount of scolding would have gotten them to stop though, considering Bree had tried and failed.

After they finish their respective practices, they drive back to Addison's house. They hang out in her room until her parents show up with dinner. It took the young couple some time to get down for dinner because of the extra long shower they took after finishing practice. They got down and Addison's parents were already a quarter of the way through their first servings of Chinese food.

"Hey kids," Missy greeted. "How was school?"

"Great," Addison said.

"How'd your meetings go?" Dale asked. "Did you both go to one? What schools were they?"

"It was White Mountain," Addison said. "I think it went well. I mean, I've already met the rep—Ashley Carter. We talked cheer, she said she'd email me if there was a scholarship available for me."

Her parents nodded along. The table fell silent, and one by one, the Davis Family all looked over at Zed for an answer. "Um, mine was also from White Mountain," he said, "and it went well, I think."

"You both want to go to White Mountain?" Missy asked suspiciously.

Addison rolled her eyes, knowing what her mother was thinking. "Relax Mom," Addison said, "Zed didn't know that it was my top choice until today, and I didn't know he was even interested until today."

Missy pursed her lips. "I don't necessarily have anything wrong with your reasons for picking those schools, I just—"

"Want us to make our own decisions," Addison finished.

"It doesn't matter what schools we go to," Zed said. "There's no way Addison is getting rid of me." He smirked, then added, "Even if we're miles apart."
Addison rolled her eyes fondly. "We seriously need to stop watching High School Musical 3."
The state championship game was at the end of November, the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend. All the football players and cheerleaders got to spend the holiday with their families, and took the buses up to Claremont, which was where the game was being held that year. Since they switched districts that year, they were playing a school they'd never heard of until then: East Haverhill High School. The Panthers were like the Shrimp; undefeated in the season. They went to States every year for the past ten years. In all of New Hampshire, most of the pro athletes came out of their school.

Zed and Addison had agreed to focus on nothing but their respective sports until after the game. Zed needed to focus on being captain and leading his team to their fourth victory. Addison was okay with being his awesome cheerleader girlfriend.

By halftime, though, everyone was exhausted and pissed beyond belief. Not only were The Panthers good, but they played dirty. The kind of playing dirty where they couldn't get carded, but were close to it. Cameron the sophomore was already out with a knee injury, which the medic said could be his ACL. Eva had gone out during the second quarter after rolling her ankle, but came back in toward the end, looking for blood.

They were in a lounge, not too far from the locker rooms, because there were two girls on the team (Eva and a freshman named Lily) who couldn't go into the guys' locker room. Zed looked around the upset, distraught, angry, and hopeless faces of his team.

Before Coach came in to go over the first half and make plans for the second half, Zed moved to the front of the room to address his team. "Look alive guys," he said, trying his best to sound encouraging. "Only six of us have an excuse to look dead, myself included."

No one but Eva laughed, and even hers was dry. "You guys, we're getting our asses handed to us out there," Zed said. "It's bad. They may be good, but we're better. We're amazing, damnit! We should be on that board! Get it together!"

His team flinched when he shouted but he didn't feel any remorse.

"Zed," Lily said timidly, "they're playing dirty."

"Then play dirty," he said. "There are enough of us that we can afford a few cards here and there. We're going into the second half on defense, so get the ball back so offense can score. If you get pushed, push 'em back harder. Don't let anyone past the twenty yard line."

"And what if they pass the twenty yard line?" Simon asked.

"Get the ball back," Zed said. "Intercept, let the downs run out, just get the ball. We are not losing to a bunch of 'panthers.' For a lot of us, this is our last game. And we've won three championships in a row. We're making it four, so you'd better be ready for that."

They all still looked like they didn't believe him. He sighed and shook his head. He'd have to find another way to get through to them. "Tell me, why are you guys here?" he asked.

"What?"

"Why are you here!" Zed demanded. He scanned the team before pointing at poor freshman Lily. She flinched but Zed kept up his hard glare.
"Um, to play football?"

Zed nodded and looked at her expectantly. "What else Lily? Why did you want to join our team? Why do you wanna play?"

"'Cause…'Cause you guys are the best team. And I wanna be on a winning team. Who can teach me how to play."

Zed grinned. "Exactly," he said, "we have to keep the goal in mind. Remember what we do this for. You can all have a different reason for being here, but we all know that we have to win. We're not gonna let some Panthers ruin us. We're the best."

He looked around his team again, seeing that they looked more confident in themselves and each other, and grinned proudly. They were going to win, he knew it.

Twenty-one seconds, no timeouts, thirteen points to go. Addison and the cheerleaders were working overtime to keep the crowd fired up. The Shrimp had the ball and were only six yards from the touchdown. Zed and Eva and the team could score, they could get the extra points. The defense could turn it over. Addison had seen more impossible things from her team.

Addison saw their formation and knew the play instantly: Garrett would snap the ball to Darwin. Eva was lined up wide on the left and Zed wide on the right. Eva would run down the line; Zed faked a step up, turned back about three yards and ran toward Eva. Darwin threw the ball to Eva. When Zed would cross Eva, she'd hand it to him and fake the defense to the right while Zed ran the ball to the left.

It worked like a dream every time. It was a shame that they wasted such a perfect play on such little gain, but they got the touchdown and the Seabrook stands went wild. Coach called for a two-point conversion, which was insane. If they had just gone for one, someone could have easily kicked it in. But going for two would have been suicide. Not even professionals could manage it most times.

They got lined up at the two yard line. Eva was on the far left with Zed right next to her. On the other end was Frank the junior with Zed on his left. When Darwin called "set," Zed went into motion behind the quarterback. Darwin got the ball and passed it to Zed, who chucked it to Zephyr on the other end of the field.

The stands and the cheerleaders went wild; they needed one touchdown to win, no extra points or anything. Whoever had called for the two-point had to have thought it out. Addison knew the defense could pull through in these last sixteen seconds.

The referees’ whistles were all going off and everyone looked back to where the action had just taken place. The announcer dudes were talking, but their voices faded to nothing as soon as Addison recognized her boyfriend, laying on the ground where he had been standing. The stadium screens displayed the collision: two defensive men took him down while he was midair, sending him headfirst and hard into the ground. It played in slow motion—or maybe everything around her had slowed down—and showed his head hitting the ground twice before he landed completely. Now he was lying motionless in the turf.

She started running, throwing her pom poms down and charging across the field. No one stopped her, though she was sure they were trying. She ran right into a referee and ignored everything he said, side stepping him. She slid in the turf right next to Zed, definitely getting grass stains on her white leggings. Addison unstrapped his helmet and pulled it off his head.
Dark veins were spreading over all of his skin. His eyes were closed and his mouth was open slightly, but when she tried to check his breathing, nothing was coming out of his nose or mouth. Her heart stopped; he wasn't breathing and he was going Zombie, which only happened if he was close to death. It was like a fail-safe, because when he went Zombie he didn't need many vital processes like a heartbeat. Except even that wasn't working.

"Zed, Zed!" she cried desperately. She shook his shoulders, trying to get him to wake up or give her something.

She picked up his wrist and looked at his Z-Band, seeing the device broken and glitching. He needed a patrol officer—needed them to electrocute him and give him a temporary band and save him.

Just when she started thinking of the worst, Zed coughed. His started spluttering and coughing, gasping for air.

"Oh my god Zed!" Addison cried, her tone a mixture of relieved and worried.

"Addy," he croaked, his voice raw and desperate. She saw his hand shaking and she grabbed it, letting him know that she was there.

He wheezed out, "Can't…breathe."

He started coughing again and Addison turned frantically in search of help, nearly getting trampled by the emergency response team. She turned back and her eyes widened at the sight of Zed coughing up blood, both liquid and clumps.

She's no medical professional and she knew she needed to move to get out of their way but Zed kept up his death grip on her hand. Addison ended up rushing with him and the medical team to the therapy room.

Zed, miraculously, is fine. He'll have to visit the Zombie hospital back in Seabrook to treat his two broken ribs, but he was fine. His lungs were bruised and his side hurt, but he was alive, which was all that mattered.

Zevon and Zoey managed to get in to be near Zed after he got escorted off the field, but because he was stable, they ended up sitting in the medical bay while the rest of the game played on one of the televisions.

It's not until the rest of his team are celebrating their fourth victory and Zevon snuck off with Zoey to grab a quick bite that Zed whispered to Addison, "I love you."

Addison immediately said, "I love you more, but don't you ever scare me like that again."

Zed hummed and Addison couldn't help herself, leaning toward him and kissing his cheek. "I'm serious," she warned. "I plan on marrying you and that'll be very hard if you die."

"I'm already dead."

Addison lifted her head and playfully glared at him. "Do you wanna die a second time?" she threatened half-heartedly, making him smile.

"I could never leave you," he said sincerely. "You're my everything."
Addison's heart melted in her chest. Zed was such a smooth talker, she couldn't handle him sometimes. "I love you," she said softly. "Rest up, okay?"

Zed hummed in response, already one step ahead.
There were no big trips during winter break. Zed couldn't leave town until he was completely healed, which only took a week, but other than that, Zed was pretty sure that Addison's family was never having another big Christmas get together again. Not just because of the last disaster, because he's not self centered enough to think the world revolves around him. It was more because the patriarch of those family gatherings was now dead. Both Addison and Zed were going through a bout of mental instability. They were depressed, moody, stressed, and anxious because of school and all the memories surrounding the time of year.

Their friends all met over winter break for lunch at Zebra's Mac&Cheese Hut in Zombietown. Bree, the event organizer, had only said there were major things to discuss, but they all knew what it was about, especially when Bucky was there. The table stayed silent while they waited to order.

Once the server left, Bree took a deep breath and said, "I think we all know what this is about."

"Zeddison being total wrecks," Eliza grumbled.

"They're grieving," Eva corrected. "Just, not in the best way."

"Addison locks herself in her room for days," Eliza said. "She doesn't eat or do anything! And when she usually gets like this, Zed is always there to help her."

"But he's got his own shit going on," Bucky reminded them. "Which means that we gotta step up and help our friends."

Eliza frowned at him. "When did you start caring about other people?"

Bucky chuckled, shrugged, and said, "That's college for you, I guess."

"Sure, college."

"Guys," Bree said, recentering their attention. "I think we should divide and conquer. Half of us take Addison and the other half take Zed. They need us now more than ever."

Eliza nodded in agreement. It wasn't about working faster, it was about working together. If they all focused on one of their friends, they'd basically be leaving the other to rot in the dust. And who was to say that the first person wouldn't lapse while they were helping the second person?

"Divide and conquer," Eliza agreed. "We should split like we did freshman year."

Eva narrowed her eyes in confusion. "The girls had a sleepover and we talked and got to know each other better. And Bucky and Bonzo went with Zed and basically babysat him while he grieved in the most destructive way possible."

"Zogi fa, Zebala dogo zegi zear," Bonzo said.

"Except last year," Bucky pointed out. "He was a little preoccupied being at the worst Christmas ever."

"Especially since you were there," Eliza joked.

Bucky pinched her arm in retaliation. "So it's settled? Me and Bonzo will take Zed and you ladies will get Addison?"
Everyone nodded and voiced their agreement. The girls huddled together to go over their sleepover plans, leaving Bucky and Bonzo to eat and carry on with their light conversation.

The girls' sleepover was scheduled for the weekend after New Years, and even though that was a few weeks off from the anniversary of Zed's mother's death, Bucky and Bonzo figured they might as well get started then anyway.

It started as an ambush on Zed. Bonzo got Zed to meet them outside of the Power Plant on the morning of the girls' sleepover. Zed wasn't the least bit curious, but excited at the idea of a guys night. What was more surprising was that he was excited to see Bucky.

"Man, I haven't hung out with just you guys in so long!" he said. "Gang's all back together."

It was more worrying than anything. It didn't take a genius to know that Bucky and Zed were civil towards each other solely because of Addison. Zed had to be going through something serious to be thrilled to see Bucky.

Zed was practically vibrating with excitement. "Where are we going?"

"New York," Bucky proclaimed. Zed's jaw dropped open and Bucky stifled his laughter. It was a funny sight, seeing the giant Zombie in so much shock. "We drive down, get some food, do some club hopping. We'll drive back up in the morning, sleep a little, eat, hit some clubs up here. See where the night takes up." Bucky shrugged. "You ready?"

"How are we gonna get into a club?" Zed asked.

"You two can pass for twenty-one," Bucky said. "Just in case, I had a couple of fakes made."

Zed frowned and asked like a prissy teenager, "Isn't that, like, illegal?" He whispered the last part, obviously afraid of someone overhearing.

Bucky scoffed. High schoolers.

"Don't worry about the logistics, my fake has gotten me everywhere." He turned on his heels and headed to his car. "Let's go."

The only reason Bucky got to take them out all weekend was a deal he made with his uncle, that probably broke a lot of rules at Zombie Patrol. Bucky would get full control over their Z-bands and complete responsibility for everything they did through the weekend. And in return, he could take them wherever the hell he wanted, no questions asked.

So first they went club hopping. Bucky didn't drink anything because he would have to drive them back, but he kept his eyes on Bonzo and Zed. Zed lingered around the bar and drank. Bonzo liked making friends with the other people there, entertaining them and making them laugh.

After they hit a couple of clubs, Zed asked (drunkenly) if they could just hang out at a bar, which they did. Zed drank, Bonzo ate, and Bucky observed.

They left after Zed puked his guts out, thankfully outside of the bar. He passed out as soon as they got on the highway, leaving Bucky and Bonzo to listen to some quiet and calm music. Bonzo fell asleep after the first hour. Bucky wanted to switch from Bonzo's playlist to his own, but he had the life of a really sweet Zombie and his cousin's boyfriend in his hands. Plus, Bonzo's playlist was pretty good.
They got back to Zombietown after sunrise, and Bonzo and Bucky drag a half-asleep, still drunk Zed into the Power Plant, getting him adjusted on the makeshift bed.

"He's a mess," Bucky commented. "We shouldn't encourage his bad drinking problem."

"Za."

Bucky yawned and shook his head. He was ready to knock out, being up for twenty-four hours straight running on nothing but energy drinks and coffee (and some pizza that Zed made them buy). "That's a future problem," he muttered. "I need to sleep."

Bucky woke up eleven hours later, his body sore and his head still lightly pounding. He looked at his phone and saw that it was already after seven, and he was starving. Luckily, Zed and Bonzo had gone out and brought back dinner. It was Zombie food, but still edible.

"So what's the plan for today?" Zed asked.

Bucky pointed an accusing finger at him and said, "You are going to stay the hell away from alcohol."

Zed pouted. "I didn't drink that much."

Bucky and Bonzo both gave him an unbelieving look and Zed laughed nervously. "It's not like I drink often."

"But you could," Bucky pointed out. "I'm not letting my cousin date a blooming alcoholic."

"I'm not!"

Bonzo put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Zebala."

Zed sighed in defeat, his shoulders slumping. "I just—I don't want it to be a problem," he said sadly. "But it's better—or easier, I should say—to get wasted than…then think about everything."

"Zed," Bucky said. "I know it hurts. And it'll always hurt, so trying to forget will never help. And it's unhealthy. And I know you said you couldn't, like, afford therapy or anything, but you should look into healthy coping habits."

Zed sighed and nodded. "Yeah, you're right. I gotta fix myself."

"No more underaged drinking," Bucky said. "And no more self-destruction. And if you don't find anything, you can always call me."

"Zn ge."

Zed gave a small smile. "Thanks guys. I think."

Bucky chuckled in response.

They played card games all night and, the next morning, met up with the girls at a breakfast place in Seabrook. Zed and Addison—always the cliche romantic movie—ran into each other's arms once they made eye contact. Bucky looked at Eliza and they both rolled their eyes.

"Drogi Z," Zed muttered against her hair. "I didn't realize I haven't seen you in so long."
Addison said something, her voice muffled by her face in his chest. Zed smiled and kissed the side of her head.

"Okay, stop with all the lovey-dovey grossness," Eliza said. "I'm hungry, so I'll go get us a table."

"I'll come too," Bucky volunteered.

He grabbed the door for her and followed her inside, walking up to the hostess. There was a short line, maybe three or four people ahead of them.

"So how'd your weekend go?" Bucky asked.

"Nice. We cried a lot. I kissed Addison."

"You kissed my cousin?" Bucky asked, and Eliza nodded. "My cousin who has a boyfriend?"

"She's gonna tell Zed," Eliza said. "It's not like it's anything. Wasn't as great as kissing Eva."

Bucky hummed as they moved up in the queue. "Does this mean I get to kiss Zed?"

"Zed is not into men and you don't find him attractive."

"I might if it means I get to kiss him."

Eliza chuckled. "Don't you have a boyfriend? Does Zach Fairmourn not ring a bell?"

Bucky smiled painfully and they moved up in the queue again. "Rings a bell, just not the boyfriend bell," Bucky said. "It was, you know, mutual. I think, I guess. I dunno. I was in college and things weren't...Uh...working. Plus, I think he was already moving on."

Bucky shrugged. Eliza put her hand on his shoulder and said, "That sucks, you guys seemed really good together."

"It's not important. Kinda why I never brought it up." Bucky said.

Eliza hummed. "So how'd it go with you and Bonzo?" she asked.

"Good. Me and Bonzo got Zed to talk about some stuff. Sort out his issues. The works."

"That's good."

"Well I didn't kiss any tall, hot Zombies so it wasn't as eventful as your weekend," Bucky joked.

"Well I didn't kiss a tall hot Zombie either."

"Just my cousin."

"Get over it."

They walked up to the counter and the hostess smiled at them. "Just the two of you this morning?"

"No," Eliza said. "Seven."

The woman blinked in surprise, but her smile didn't falter. "Seven? That may take a while. Maybe ten minutes."

"That's fine."
She passed Bucky a buzzer pad and the two of them left the line, heading back to the exit. Eva, Bree, and Bonzo were sitting on the pavement, all facing different directions, which made Bucky assume they were playing a mobile card game, while Addison and Zed sat on the bench outside the restaurant, whispering to each other. Eliza went over to her girlfriend and Bucky followed.
Addison rushed down the steps, running across the living room to get to the door before her parents. She stopped in front of the door, taking a moment to catch her breath before yanking it open. Zed smiled down at her, holding out a bouquet of flowers. Addison smiled, mildly surprised at the gesture.

"Good morning Gorgeous," he greeted.

"Good morning," Addison responded. "What're the flowers for? Valentine's Day was two weeks ago."

"I can't get my amazing girlfriend flowers?"

Addison's cheeks dusted a light red. "Well no, but—"

Zed chuckled and stepped inside, pulling the door closed. He bent down and kissed the top of her head. "I'm just teasing you," he said. "I woke up and I had this bad feeling."

"A bad feeling?"

"Yeah. And usually when I get that bad feeling, you're sick or taking a mental health day."

Addison furrowed her brows. "I don't understand."

"It's like…when something's wrong with you—or like Zoey or my dad or like, someone I've got a super strong, uh, emotional connection with—I just know."

Addison nodded slowly. "So like a sixth sense. Or—oh my god—" Addison started laughing at the words that popped in her head. Zed gave her a funny look, and she calmed down enough to say, "like your Zombie sense?"

Zed rolled his eyes. "So you're good?"

She nodded, still giggling. "Maybe it's someone else," she suggested. "Come on, lets get breakfast."

"Is Eliza here?" Zed asked.

"She left early. Had to makeup a test." Addison took the flowers from him and grabbed his wrist. "Come on, I'm starving," she whined, pulling him to the kitchen.

They get to school with fifteen minutes until the bell and spend that time making out in the car.
When the second warning bell rang, they got out and headed to homeroom. They barely made it on time and Eliza and Eva both gave them knowing looks, eyeing their half done hair and flushed skin.

"Look who decided to show up," Eva teased. "I wonder what took you so long?"

"Just taking care of some…car business," Addison said.

Zed blushed and leaned forward, using his fingers to comb through Addison's hair. "It's not like we'll miss anything important," he said. "First off, this is homeroom. Second off, all we need to do is keep up grades—barely. We're already in college."

"That's the mindset that'll get your admissions revoked," Bree pointed out from the other side of him.

Zed stuck his tongue out at her and she laughed. Bonzo joined Zed in combing through Addison's hair, which turned to braiding it into pigtails.

"Addison," Eliza said. "How're you today?"

Addison frowned. Why was everyone asking her that? Was there something wrong with her that she wasn't aware of?

"I'm fine. Why does everyone just assume something's wrong with me?"

"Eliza's been paranoid all morning," Eva explained. "Says she had a bad gut feeling or whatever."

"Her Zombie sense?" Addison asked.

"Addy, that's not what it's called," Zed whined.

She ignored him and said, "I'm flattered you consider our friendship a strong emotional bond. And Zed has a bad Zombie sense too. But I swear, I'm fine."

"Well, I don't know who else it could be," Eliza said.

"Uh, how about me?" Zed suggested. "Best friend, very accident prone."

"You can have Zombie senses about yourself?" Addison asked.

Zed rolled his eyes. "I don't know the logistics of my Zombieism."

Addison shrugged and let the boys braid her hair, getting into a conversation with Bree about their cheer meeting that afternoon.

After school ended, Addison stayed for a cheer clinic and Zed went to tutoring, so Eliza planned to go home with Eva and spend the afternoon at her house. Eliza's email notification went off while they were in the car. Eliza glanced at her Z-Band, reading the preview of the email. It was from the MIT director of admissions.

Dear Eliza, On behalf of the Admissions Committee, it is my pleasure to offer you admission to the MIT Class of...

"Oh my god," Eliza breathed. Eliza hummed curiously. Without looking away from the email, she said, "I just got in."
"You what?"

"I got into MIT!"

Eva gasped, the excitement coursing through both of them. Eliza had been deferred in December, and was absolutely crushed. She had worked so hard to make a good impression, and the possibility of being rejected ruined her. But she had moved on, of course. A week after getting deferred, White Mountain State University had sent out their decisions. Eliza and Zed and Eva and Addison, and Bonzo and Bree all got in. Maybe Eliza had given up on MIT, if it meant being with all of her friends for four more years. She wouldn't tell them though, they didn't need to know.

But now, a little more than two months later, her dreams were coming true. She got into the best engineering technology school in the world (yes, she did her research).

"What am I gonna tell the guys?" Eliza wondered aloud. "We've been together since we were babies! I can't go to school in Massachusetts. That's too far."

"Wait, you don't wanna go there?"

"Of course I wanna go to MIT," Eliza stated. "It's the Massachusetts Institute Of Technology. But I can't leave Zed and Bonzo. We're gonna be lame college besties who've been friends forever."

"I'm sure they'd understand if you didn't go with us to White Mountain," Eva said. "You shouldn't pick your school based off your friends."

"It's not just about my friends, E," Eliza explained. "I've never been away from...here. For four years? Can I even handle that? I mean, White Mountain is a good distance away, but I could still get a ride here if I had, like, a Zombie emergency. What am I supposed to do in Massachusetts? What if I go offline? Or I need a doctor? The rest of the country isn't Zombie safe. I don't wanna hurt someone."

"So you're gonna go to White Mountain," Eva said.

"But my dream..."

Eliza sighed, slumping back against her chair. "I don't know what to do or where to go. I want my own thing! But, I can't pick between my life here and my dream life! Ugh!"

"Woah," Eva said. "Calm down. Let's talk more when we get to my house, okay?" Eliza nodded glumly.

She perked up, her stomach twisting in a horrible way, the way her Zombie tended to respond to coming danger. She looked back and forth quickly, her eyes widening at the sight of a speeding truck zooming through the intersection, directly into them. Eliza reached out for her girlfriend, her arm covered Eva's torso as the car lurched to the side, glass spraying out as the windows shattered. Her ears blew out and she squeezed her eyes shut, then everything turned black.

Addison had invited Zed over after school ended. It had been a while since they'd hung out, alone, and Addison's parents wouldn't be home for a few more hours. Which gave them plenty of time to make out on the couch. Addison was straddling her boyfriend, their lips making the familiar journey against each other's.

At least, until Zed stopped, leaned back and away from his girlfriend, and frowned as if something was bothering him. "What's wrong?" Addison asked.
"I don't know," he muttered. "I just—I've got a bad feeling."

"Maybe I can fix that."

Zed snorted and pushed her back. "No, like a bad gut feeling. Not uncomfortable or anything."

"Haven't you had that all day?"

He nodded, running a hand through his hair. "It's gotten worse just now, I think something is wrong."

"Oh it's like your Zombie-sense."

"Sure, let's call it that."

Addison giggled, leaned back so she slid out of his lap, and picked up the remote. "Where's your Zombie-sense leading you? The fridge? I'm starving."

"I'm hungry too. Get us snacks?"

"Why me!"

Zed laughed and leaned back, taking the remote from her. "It's your house, Baby. Now feed your hungry hungry Zombie."

Addison rolled her eyes and got up, heading to the kitchen. Zed watched her, then turned on the television. The guide showed that it was on some cartoon show—his girlfriend was seriously obsessed with cartoons—but the picture showed the news.

"—crossing an intersection when the other car ran a red light, slamming into the driver's side and destroying the front of the car before speeding off."

Zed's eyes went wide. He knew that car. "Addison!" he called. "Get in here!"

Addison came running in. "What…?" She looked at the screen and frowned. "Isn't that Eva's car?"

Zed nodded without looking away from the television.

"The victims have yet to be identified but witnesses say that a rogue-Zombie could be seen forcing its way out of the car, pulling out the body of the victim. This is a first on Channel 5 exclusive. The story will continue on the regular four o'clock news. I'm Trisha Yearwood, Channel 5 news."

Zed muted the television and stood up. Addison was already putting on her coat; Zed grabbed his own and they both rushed out of the house. Neither trusted themselves to drive, but it was okay because the intersection was less than a mile away.

Addison's hands were shaking but she managed to call her mom. It was a little after three thirty which meant her mom's lunch break would be ending. Her mom answered almost immediately.

"What's up? I'm about to head back into my office."

"There…Mom there was an accident on 51st and Bonaparte and I think Elisa was in it and I—me and Zed are going there now can you please meet us?"

"I'll be right there. I'll call Dale too."
Addison nodded and hung up, putting her phone in her pocket. Her heart was racing for fear of the worst. What if Eliza was dead? What if Eva was dead? What if they were both dead?

"Addy," Zed called. They had stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and she looked up at him with uncertain eyes. Zed's features softened and he took her hands in his. "I'm sure they're fine. We're probably worrying for nothing."

Addison nodded in agreement. They were in Seabrook. Nothing ever happened there, which meant emergency services could be on the scene in an instant. She was stressing herself out for nothing.

Zed squeezed her hand reassuringly. "But let's go make sure."

Addison nodded in agreement, following Zed down the sidewalk. She convinced herself she was overreacting. There was nothing to worry about.

The worst part about being a Zombie is being unable to die.

She might die of old age someday, when her Z-Band gave out, but no accident or trauma would ever be the cause of it. If anything were to happen, she'd go rogue and survive.

If only the same could be said about Eva.

Going rogue meant that Eliza remembered all of it. The hit, rolling once, twice, three times. Eva's screams, then white noise. Everytime she closed her eyes, she saw her, her skull cracked open and blood leaking out from the head wound. Dead.

The Zombie Patrol had been the first to arrive, sedating Eliza and getting a temporary Z-Band on to replace the smashed one. When she came too, there was police tape blocking off the intersection and a large crowd tethered behind it. Her brain was cloudy; she couldn't remember what had happened, why she was unconscious, or why she was now being babysat by a Zombie Patrol member. She was covered in blood and scratches and broken glass, her head was throbbing, and she felt like vomiting. Her ears buzzed and she could barely hear.

Not only was she blearily confused and in pain, but she felt empty. Like a major part of her was missing, and she'd never get it back.

She realized her Zombie sense was gone, for the first time all day.

Whatever bad thing that was going to happen to her loved one, had passed.

Through the ringing and the sludge, she heard Zed shout her name. She lifted her head to see him, Addison, and Mayor Missy ducking under the police tape and running to her. And behind them, an ambulance being loaded up with a covered body.

It hit her like a freight train—the hit, the screaming, the blood, everything.

Eva was dead.

_It takes and it takes and it takes_
Never Be the Same

It was the first time in Seabrook history someone had died in a car accident, let alone a teenager, let alone someone like Evangeline Winslor. She was the human who helped change Zombie politics in New Hampshire. She was the first girl to ever play on the Seabrook football team. She embodied the spirit of Seabrook. The whole town grieved. Not a single pastel outfit could be seen.

The funeral was the following Saturday. It was an open casket. Bree was the first of their friends to look at her. Bucky went up alone, stayed for a minute, then went back to his seat next to his cousin. Bonzo stayed at the back, with Eliza, just on the edge of the human section. Zed saw guys from the football team who had played with her, graduated, and gone off to college all around the country. It was full of people, humans and Zombies alike, everyone who Evangeline had touched.

Bonzo and Addison sobbed, supported by their significant others who were crying, more silently. They slowly cleared the cemetery; Bucky went home with Addison and her parents. Bree stayed with Eliza until it got dark and she needed to be home, leaving Zed and Eliza, sitting under a tree in the dark.

Neither had said a word all day, except Zed with the occasional words of comfort for his best friend and girlfriend. It was silent save the occasional sniffle from either of them.

Eliza turned her head to her best friend. Her eyes were red and her cheeks had tear tracks staining them. "Zed," Eliza said, her voice thick and raspy. "I don't—I—She's gone. She's really—She's actually gone."

Zed looked at her, unsure what to say. What do you say to someone who just lost their girlfriend, the person they physically bonded with, their soulmate? He couldn't even imagine what it would be like if Addison had been in that car—if it had been the two of them instead of Evangeline and Eliza.

"What am I supposed to do without her?" Eliza's voice was quiet and wavering, breaking before she could barely finish her sentence. Tears started spilling out of her eyes again, and all Zed could do was pull her into him.

Life wouldn't be the same without Evangeline.

Zed and Eliza left the cemetery long after dark. They walked back to Addison's house in silence, where Addison's parents were hosting Evangeline's family. Eliza used her key to let Zed and herself in. Everyone was in the living room; Dr. Swander and Mr. Winslor were on the couch with Addison's mom and Addison was sitting in the armchair, her legs drawn up to her chest.

"Where were you two?" Missy asked. Her voice was soft and gentle since the whole day had been spent in a somber mood.

Eliza greeted everyone and immediately went upstairs to her room, while Zed stopped behind his girlfriend. He glanced at Eliza, then at Missy and said, "We stayed at the cemetery. Collect our bearings."

Addison shifted in her chair, then stood up. Zed took it as his cue to take her seat, and she sat back down in his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck.
"Your father went with Bucky to get dinner for us all," Missy explained to Zed. He gave her a slow and short nod.

"My mom is giving them advice on what to do next," Addison whispered in his ear. "It's boring adult stuff."

Zed pursed his lips. He didn't think it was 'boring adult stuff,' especially considering he didn't know where to go from here. He remembered (vaguely) his mom's death, having to retell the story countless times to several different humans and Zombies, before being forced into therapy. He remembered his dad being completely broken and having to be a light of hope for him while he grieved (at least, that's how Eliza's mom had put it). He never complained or made life hard so his dad didn't have more things to worry about.

Then of course, last year, when Addison's grandfather died, he could remember doing something similar for Addison. He was always at her house, making sure she was eating and helped her to get back on her feet. He made sure she went and saw her therapist and that she was never too overwhelmed with school.

But this was different. Evangeline was one of his best friends. It was like a piece of his heart had been torn out, a gaping hole in his life that he'd never be able to fill.

He didn't know anything other than helping other people through the pain. What about helping himself?

"You're thinking too hard," Addison mumbled. "Do you wanna go upstairs?"

Zed nodded and stood up before she could get off of him, looping one arm under her knees and the other around her back. "We'll be back," Addison announced.

Missy raised an eyebrow at her daughter, but only said, "Okay, we'll call you when dinner is here."

Zed and Addison nodded and made their way up to Addison's room. Zed glanced at Eliza's closed door, wanting to go and check on her, but knowing she needed some time alone. Plus, she had told him she was exhausted. He'd check on her in a bit, see if she was sleeping well.

He went into Addison's room and let her down, then followed her into her bathroom. Addison looked at the counter, then Zed, then back at the counter. It didn't take long for him to understand that she wanted him to sit, and once he did she stepped between his legs, bringing her hands up to cradle his face.

"Hey," she said in a gentle voice. "Are you okay?"

"Am I okay?" Zed furrowed his brows, confused.

"Mhm," she said. "It's just—you haven't said much at all these past few weeks. And you've been so —there for me and for Eliza and for everyone. Who's checking on you?"

His mouth opened in an 'O' as he understood. "I…I don't know," he said. "I just—I think I'm still in shock. I don't know." He didn't know how he was supposed to feel. Out of all of them, he thought he would've been the first to die. As dark as it sounded, with all the accidents he'd had in the past few years, either him or Addison would be a likely candidate.

"How are you doing?" Zed asked.

"I'm really sad," she said despite her smile. "It hurts so bad."
"Like a piece of your heart was ripped out," Zed added.

"And nothing will ever replace it."

They stared each other in the eye for a long moment, unsure what to say next. There were still so many emotions left hanging in the air. Things would never be the same. How could anyone be expected to move on? How could life go on without Evangeline?

Finally, after a tense silence, Addison leaned forward and pressed a chaste kiss to his lips. "I'm gonna go to bed," she told him. "I'm not very hungry—and before you ask, I have been eating almost regularly."

Zed gave a slightly amused smile. Addison continued. "If you want, you should ask to stay the night. And if you can, just come in and get comfy, I won't mind, no matter how much I complain."

Zed nodded, then Addison pulled away from him and went into her bedroom. Zed left the bathroom, giving her a kiss before leaving her room. He looked at Eliza's closed door down the hall and went in, barely even knocking before walking in. Eliza cursed in surprise, and on any other day Zed would have laughed.

"I just wanted to check on you," he told her. "If I'm feeling this miserable, I-I can't even imagine what you're going through."

"I was gonna say something snarky about you being tough but a true softie," she said, "but you're honestly a really nice guy."

A lump formed in Zed's throat, his head buzzing and his eyes stinging. He was going to burst like a dam and Eliza kept talking to him, unaware of his descent into despair.

"And sweet and caring," she said. "I know I don't tell you enough, but I love you. You're my best friend, I don't know what I'd do without you, Zed."

Zed let out a strangled noise, his eyes going blurry as tears poured out. His chest burned as he fought to control his breathing. He pinched his eyes closed, covering his face with his hands when he felt Eliza's arms around him.

"I love you, E." He barely got his words out through his sobbing.

Eliza clutched his shirt and whispered, "To the end of the line."
Spring break ended in the middle of April, a little more than a full month after Eva had died. They got by. Seabrook healed.

With Zed as the mediator, Eliza and her family came to an understanding. Both Eliza and Azalea missed each other, and the whole Scythes family was past arguing. They'd never be able to get back those years apart, but were moving into a new chapter of their lives.

When they got back to school, the football team got together and signed Evangeline's jersey. None of the other guys knew yet, but it would be a gift to Evangeline's parents. They were giving it to them at the ceremony at the end of the summer, after the new field is finished and Evangeline's name is on every surface available (like the girls' locker room and the scoreboard and snack bar). It was all Principal Lee's idea, which only Zed, Addison, and Coach knew about.

Now it was Wednesday. Addison left a note in his locker telling him to blow off third period and meet her at the Safe Room. He wasn't exactly sure why or what was so urgent it couldn't wait until later, but he met her at the beginning of the period anyway. He was more worried about what was pressing his girlfriend then going to English.

The past few weeks had been hard on them. Excluding the part where they were both having a difficult type coping with Evangeline's passing, everything was piling up and crumbling around them. Colleges had been sending out decision letters for months and, even though they both already knew where they were going, it still hurt to see all those rejections. At least, Zed got rejected from the majority of schools. They were pretty generic letters, but he knew that his Zombieism always tied into it. No one wanted a dangerous monster on their campus. Especially with how many times he had Z-Band-related incidents.

The week after the funeral was Zed's scheduled Z-Band update. Addison insisted on going with him. He nearly broke through the "Zombie-proof glass" and killed three people, and during his medical exam he flatlined, twice. Addison didn't leave his side for a full week after that.

That's without mentioning the rollercoaster that was Addison's emotions. Some days were better than others, but those were few and far between. She stayed home a lot, and since she refused to let Zed leave her sight he stayed home a lot. Everything would set her off and she'd either cry or shut him out, sometimes for days. She was like glass, and Zed hated himself for thinking like that. He shouldn't be annoyed with her, she needed him! He should be the support she obviously needed. He knew from experience that, when she got like this, he was the only thing standing between her and complete, total self destruction.

So he went to the Safe Room. Addison was sitting on one of the gurneys, her hands folded in his lap, making him nervous. She chewed her lip thoughtfully and almost didn't notice him coming in.

When he stopped in front of her, she finally looked up at him. "Hi," she said in a small voice.

He went and sat next to her. "What's up?"

"I…You know how I've been, um, spiraling. And the depression is just getting worse and out of control. And, I've been talking with my parents, and I'm gonna take a gap year."

Zed lets out a breath, relieved that that was what she wanted to say. And then he thought about
what she said: they weren't going to go to college together in August. Every awful and horrible thought he'd had before flew out of his head because he doesn't think he'll be able to survive without her. He wouldn't be seeing her everyday like he does now. How often would he even be seeing her? He had gotten so used to seeing her all day, everyday, hanging out. He just assumed they would continue like that for the rest of their lives.

"I just, I need to work on myself for a while," Addison explained in a rush. "It would've taken me ages to admit that before so please understand. I'd be great if you supported my decision."

She looked at him with sad, pleading eyes, that broke his heart. He grabbed her hands in his and turned to face her. "Addy, no matter where we are or what happens, I'll always be with you. You are the love of my life," he assured her.

She relaxed, a soft smile gracing her face. Zed kissed her knuckles and added, "I'm just worried about living without seeing you everyday, but that's just because I'm clingy."

"You can't get rid of me, Zed," she assured him. "I love you more than anything. But I can't rely on you all the time. I have to do this for myself."

Zed nodded in understanding. "Then I will completely support you," he said. "But you will come to school after the year?"

Addison giggled and nodded. "Yeah, and I bet we could even live together and be clingy in the privacy of our broke college apartment."

Zed laughed then kissed her lips. After a sweet second, he pulled back, and said, "Now when are we gonna talk about prom?"

Addison laughed and raised an eyebrow. "Prom? Isn't that kind of a long ways away?"

"Two weeks," he told her. Addison frowned. "Do you want me to do a big fancy ask? Or are we just in an understanding that we're going together?"

"No," she said. "I don't need anything. Well, maybe flowers. But you don't need to worry."

"Okay." He nodded. "Wanna match colors? Like we did at Homecoming?"

"Well first I gotta get a dress," Addison grumbled. She sighed, then gasped as an idea hit her. "Do you wanna skip the rest of the day? Go look at some dress with me?"

"You're going dress shopping today?"

"No, just looking. I kinda need my mom there so she can pay for me." Addison explained. "But we've never, like, skipped or anything. Always show up and make grades and be awesome. Let's rebel for once!"

Zed laughed and slid off the gurney, pulling Addison off with him. "Okay, but if we get caught I'm so throwing you under the bus."

Zed and Addison had stopped driving after the accident and Missy graciously offered Bucky up as their designated driver. Which, he didn't mind, he loved helping out his cousin. Plus it was only on Tuesdays and Fridays when he didn't have classes, until after mid-April, when he was finished with school.
He did mind it when Addison and Zed were in detention, for being caught skipping school.

He had to wait an hour for them, and refused to waste his car battery so he moved to the school library, where Eliza was also waiting for them.

Bucky sat with her and smiled. He, Eliza and Eva had been in a group chat for years, since they did the movie project. Bucky didn't use the group chat anymore, it felt wrong. Even though Eva's phone number was disconnected, the messages would still technically send. That didn't mean that Bucky and Eliza didn't text. They talked every day, almost constantly, either texting or video calling or regular calling.

He sat down at her table. Eliza didn't even look at him before she said, "I'm kinda concerned that they're letting random adult men onto campus."

Bucky chuckled and shook his head. "I'm an alumni, and rich," he pointed out. Eliza snorted and looked up at him. "I can do anything around here, E."

"Which totally isn't fair," she said.

"No one should be this devilishly handsome and stinking rich, I know," he joked. "That's why, to balance out my ego, I'm a chauffeur."

"You're waiting for those dumbass lovebirds too?"

Bucky nodded. "They're such goody-two-shoes, can't even cut school right."

Eliza nodded in agreement. "And now they're making us wait for them! The nerve!"

Bucky and Eliza laughed, earning the stink eye and a harsh "Ssh!" from the library monitor, but every person in that room knows that the guy has zero power over them and they can make as much noise as they want.

Once they stopped laughing, it fell silent between them. Eliza went back to her homework and Bucky took that time to look around the library. Strangely, there's a pretty packed office on the other side, filled with mostly kids he recognized from Addison's class and the grade beneath them.

"Hey Eliza," he said, the girl in question looked up at him in response. "What's going on in there?"

"Prom planning."

"Prom? Already?"

Eliza nodded.

"When is it?"

Eliza shrugged. "I dunno, two weeks. Why?"

"Do you have a dress yet?"

Eliza made a face at him. "Why would I have a dress? I'm not going."

Bucky eyebrows furrowed in confusion. How could she casually push off prom! It was every senior's favorite event; it signified the end to an era.

"That was cute," he stated. "When are you free so we can go dress shopping?"
"I'm not going to prom, Bucky," she firmly stated, squaring her shoulders. She still looked and sounded the slightest bit uncomfortable, as if there was something she was leaving out.

Realization hit him—er, came to him with strong suddenness that was in no way related to being hit.

Eliza and Eva were supposed to go to prom together. And with Eva gone, Eliza didn't want to go at all.

He let his features soften up and Eliza tensed more. "Eliza," he whispered, "I don't think Eva would want you to be miserable and miss out on events because you're missing her. You and I both know that she'd want you to live your life and make everyday matter. But that also means for you to do things that make you happy, and I know you and Addison and Bree were all talking and getting hyped for prom. You shouldn't miss out on it."

Eliza blinked several times, her eyes shining. In a thick and shaky voice, Eliza said, "I-I got into MIT."

Okay, that was random.

"Eva was the only one who knew, I didn't know how to tell anyone. We were all supposed to go to White Mountain together!" Tears started rolling down her cheeks and Bucky leaned over, pulling her into his chest.

Frankly, he didn't know what to say to her. The wounds were still fresh, they felt like they would never heal. He figured that Eliza and Eva had been talking about the subject when the accident happened, and it had been bugging Eliza for a long while now. But Eliza wasn't the type to cry, so Bucky managed to coax her away from the table and into the 'Rejuvenation Station' (courtesy of the Addison and Bucky Davis trust fund).

After several tearful minutes, Eliza looked up at him and said, "Tell me what I should, Bucky. I need someone to tell me what to do."

"I can't make the decision for you, Eliza. This is too important. What do you want?"

"I don't wanna miss out on time with my friends!"

"Zed and Addison and Bree and Bonzo would want you to be happy, Eliza. You should go to the school where you're gonna be happy, where you're gonna succeed. They'll understand whatever decision you make. They'll be happy for you no matter what."

Eliza smiled at him, her eyes shining as she searched his face. "I-I don't know what I would do without you," she said sincerely.

Bucky gave her a smile. "That's what best friends are for."

Eliza nodded, though she looked like she wanted to say more on the topic. Instead, she went back to earlier and said, "If I'm going to prom, you're coming with me."

"I already went to prom." Oh and what a good time that was. Zach was a lot of fun. He was the only sophomore there too, which boosted his street cred. Idly, Bucky wondered how he was doing.

"Yeah but now you're going with a lesbian," she said. "Plus, I don't wanna third wheel. Or—fifth wheel."
Bucky pretended to think about it, although he was really wondering where he had put his suit from his prom.

"I guess it wouldn't hurt."
Chapter Notes

Second to last chapter! Basically the last, the next one is barely a thousand words. But hey, we made it all together!

Now, there are some themes in this chapter that we haven't talked about in a while. I'd say…chapter six-ish? Just a warning, you might not remember some things since it's been so long.

Might as well reread the whole story.

Even though Zed knew where the spare key was, he knew he had to knock on the door. It was part of the prom experience Addison always wanted. He was determined to give it to her, too. It didn't matter if he didn't care much for prom. Addison did, and she needed this more than anything.

He knocked on the door and less than a minute later, Missy opened it. She gave him a polite smile. "Hey Zed," she greeted. "Don't you look lovely."

"Thank you, Missy," he said. "Is Addison ready?"

Dale emerged from the house then, standing right next to his wife. "She is, are you?" Dale asked.

Zed gave them an amused but confused laugh. "I think so?"

"What are your plans for after prom?" Dale asked.

Zed smiled, ready to tell the half truth they had already come up with, not that Addison's parents would be too upset by the actual truth. "We're all gonna stay at the beach house tonight," Zed said. "We're gonna have a bonfire, just us and our friends, and stay there tonight. After parties are lame, filled with drugs and smoking and things that suck."

"Mhm," Dale said. "So what's the sleeping arrangement like?"

Zed chuckled and shook his head. He loved Dale, he was so protective of Addison. Even though they were all well aware that Addison and Zed had been intimate for a little more than a year now. "Well," Zed said, thinking back to their preset lie, "there's just so many rooms there, I think the girls are having their girl sleepover in one of the big rooms and me and Bonzo and Bucky are spreading out over the rest."

If Dale and Missy didn't believe him, their didn't have anytime to say anything, because at that moment, Addison made her presence behind them known. "Stop bothering my boyfriend and let us go to prom please," she said.

Her parents looked at her, then moved to the side to let her step out. Once Zed saw her, he forgot all about his despair and his dread for prom because fuck his girlfriend looked beautiful. Addison had been careful to not let him see her dress, only telling him that it was a deep red sort of color so he could get a matching bow tie. Her dress was strapless and long, hugging every one of her curves. There was a matching choker around her neck, and her hair was slicked back, with a piece
hanging out in front and the rest tied in a low bun.

She looked so beautiful, Zed couldn't even breathe. And then he's hit with sudden realization: if Addison looked this gorgeous in a prom dress, he couldn't even imagine how she'd look in a wedding dress. And suddenly, the ring box in his pocket weighed heavier, the box he'd been carrying with him for years.

Woah.

His chest hurt, actually, physically hurt, from how hard his heart was beating. Addison was going to be the death of him.

Addison smiled, small, shy, and completely adorable. "You look beautiful, Zed."

He opened and closed his mouth, unable to find the words to describe what was going through his head.

Addison giggled at his inability to speak. "Aw, you two are so cute," Missy gushed. "Come on, pictures out back!"

Zed kept up light conversations with his friends—complimenting Eliza and helping Bonzo with his tie—but was overall distracted by his insanely gorgeous girlfriend. She was taking pictures with Bucky first, then with Eliza and Bree, and she looked so beautiful. Once they were all finished, Missy turned to where Zed was standing with Bonzo and said, "Alright let's get some of Zed and Addison!"

And, well, he panicked. He barely managed to get out an excuse before he ducked into the house and ran to the bathroom. He needed to breathe, calm down, and not imagine marrying Addison, maybe on a nice day in the winter when the snow's falling, matching her white gown and white hair. No, it'd be winter, but not late enough for it to be snowing. Well it might snow, but it was unlikely. It'd definitely happen in a park, and they'd make it look kind of like the Zombie Light Garden. He would probably cry. No, he would definitely cry.

A knock on the door snapped Zed out of his daydream. For a split second, he panicked, fearing Addison had come to check on him. He steeled himself, taking several deep breaths then unlocking and pulling the door open. He jumped a little at the sight of Addison's dad standing on the other side. Dale gave him a sort of pained smile.

"Everything good in here?" Dale asked. "You kinda ran out." When Zed didn't answer, Dale joked, "If this is how you are on prom night, I'm kinda afraid of how you'll be on your wedding day."

Zed's eyes widen as his resolve broke, and Dale freaked out, afraid he had said something wrong. Zed grabbed his arm and pulled him into the bathroom, slamming the door shut.

"Woah if I said something wrong—"

"I'm losing my mind," Zed spat out. "I-I don't know what to do, I need your help."

And, well, Zed hadn't expected Dale would be the person he confided in. Especially since Dale only tolerated him, for the sake of Addison. But it wasn't like he could go to Addison about any of this, considering it was about her. She'd probably think he was crazy if she found out what was running through his mind.

"Zed, you know I was joking about the cold feet thing? Though if you're serious, I'm gonna have to
retract my blessing with the whole ring thing—"

"No I—Addison is just—I need you to take this—" He fished into his pocket, pulling out the ring box and thrust it toward Dale. "Take it from me. If I have it tonight I—I won't be able to keep my promise."

"Huh." Dale said. He took the ring box from Zed, examined it, then placed it in his pocket. "Feel better now?"

Zed shook his head. "I need—I—I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like, I dunno, Addison looks beautiful and I can't stop thinking about how beautiful she'll look for her wedding and—"

"Zed, calm down," Dale said. "Take a deep breath, you're panicking."

Dale led Zed with deep breathing, until Zed was less panicked and more calm. "Okay, Zed, just keep a level head," he said. "It's prom, and it's your last big celebration with your friends before you guys graduate, and you go your separate ways."

Zed let out a whimper as he thought about losing Addison in the middle of June, when he'd have to go to college early for football practice. That was a little more than a month away, he wasn't ready to say goodbye yet.

"I don't think I can do this," he admitted. "This I can't—I'm not ready to graduate or for prom I just—why does this have to end?"

Dale gave him a smile, putting his hands in his pockets and shrugging. "Listen, Zed, I can't tell you that life is gonna be great after you graduate, 'cause it's not. It'd hard and stressful and no one really helps you learn what you need to do. I still hire someone to do my taxes!"

Zed chuckled a little, his nerves lightening up.

"But Zed, you've got what a lot of people don't. You've got great friends who are gonna be there with you, you've got Addison who'll always have your back, and, well, you've got me and Missy, and we'll always be here to help if you need anything."

"Really? I thought you guys hated me."

"Eh," Dale said, making Zed laugh. "You're a good guy Zed, and you're good to Addison. Now go out there and give my daughter an amazing prom." He paused, then added, "But not too amazing. I'm watching you, Necrodopolus."

Zed laughed again. He and Dale exited the bathroom, heading back to the backyard. "We'll see," Zed told him, opening the sliding door and walking out before Dale could respond.

Missy was taking pictures of Bree and Bonzo while Addison talked with Eliza and Bucky. Except when she saw Zed, she left them and rushed over to him.

"Hey, is everything alright?" Addison asked.

Zed nodded. He felt lighter without the ring in his pocket weighing him down. "Yeah," he assured her. Addison raised an eyebrow, pressing him further. Zed pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "It's nothing to worry about, your dad really helped me."

"He didn't threaten you?" Addison asked, clearly surprised.
Zed shook his head. "Well, he told me to give you an amazing prom. Then said 'not that amazing' which isn't really a threat, but it's still there."

"Are you sure?"

Zed smiled and nodded. "Yeah. And, by the way, you look stunning. I just—I feel so lucky to be your boyfriend."

"Thank you, though I kinda figured I looked pretty good when you were literally speechless," Addison teased with a light smile, making Zed chuckle, nervously. She reached up and adjusted his bow tie, adding, "You look pretty snazzy yourself, Z."

"Thanks, my dad tied this for me."

Addison laughed, her eyes twinkling. A flash, then Zed and Addison both turned to see Missy pointing the camera at them. "I think that's the best one yet." She spoke softly, her eyes shining.

The dance was at a fancy hotel—which Zed said was the same one where they held the sports banquet, not that Eliza would know. The first thing they did was take pictures in the photo booth, with every prop and every person they could snag. Eliza posed and smiled for every picture, a truly, genuinely happy smile, like the one she had at Addison's backyard. She didn't think she'd be happy or excited about prom, without Eva there with her. And yet.

Zed and Addison were off dancing the night away, and Bree and Bonzo were goofing off by the food table. Bucky and Eliza had snagged a table and were telling stories about the different people they saw on the dance floor. Nothing unusual was going on. They were just having fun, doing what they usually do. And yet.

For the first time in months, the gaping hole inside of her wasn't as big. It felt…slightly, somewhat, full. She couldn't figure out why either. She was just…having fun with her friends.

Addison pulled Eliza onto the dance floor when Zed went to the bathroom. Thirty seconds into the song, Bree went and joined them. And Eliza danced, actually danced, doing stupid moves with Addison and Bree and laughing their butts off, until Zed and Bonzo joined them on the dance floor. After two more songs, Eliza went back to table and coaxed Bucky to get out there and bust his dance moves, which started a whole soul train line.

Food came out and they all sat down around their table, talking and laughing, and Eliza's heart was content.

The night drew on and they danced and talked and laughed. When the night was coming to a close, Principal Lee took the stage to announce the Prom King and Queen. Zed was king, like he had been for Homecoming, and Eliza was queen. It was the first time at Seabrook High two Zombies were voted king and queen.

"Our second to last song of the night will be our 'royal slow dance,' where your king and queen get to dance with their date or partner of their choosing," Principal Lee said with a smile.

Their class clapped and Zed and Eliza made their way off the stage. "You wanna dance with Addison?" Zed whispered. "Even though I'm a little afraid you might steal her from me."

Eliza chuckled and shook her head. "Dance with your date, I'll dance with mine."

They hugged once they were on the dance floor again, then went to where Bucky and Addison
were standing. Zed and Addison linked hands as the music started, moving several feet away from Bucky and Eliza. Eliza watched them and several others start dancing to the cover of "Can't Help Falling in Love," turned to her date and asked, "May I have this dance?"

Bucky chuckled and turned her so she was facing him, putting his hands on her waist. Eliza wrapped her hands around his neck, giving him a small smile.

"First Zombie Queen, huh?" Bucky said in a hushed voice.

"And I won't be the last either," Eliza assured him, matching his volume.

Bucky hummed, giving her a smile and pulling her closer. Eliza held back a squeak, her eyes wide in panic for a split second before she relaxed. "You never slow danced?" Bucky mumbled. "You can't stand so far away, E."

"Why do we even have to do this?" Eliza complained.

"Tradition?" Bucky shrugged, looking over her head. "I mean, it's usually a couples dance, 'cause it's so intimate."

Eliza nodded wisely, adding, "Like sex."

Bucky shook with the effort to keep from laughing. He looked back at her and said, "You're so weird. Slow dancing and sex are two different things. Two different levels of intimacy."

Eliza gave him a nod and they fell silent. Eliza studied his face, starting at the blackheads on his nose, following the lines of his cheek bones and down his jaw. Looking into his eyes was too intimate, like slow dancing, and she was already on edge from being so close to him. Dancing with Bucky made her feel... weird inside. Her heart was racing, her palms were sweaty and she was actually afraid of making a wrong move around him.

It was like... like she had a crush. On Bucky.

Wait, hold on. That couldn't be right. She didn't have a crush on Bucky, he was just her best friend—no, he was an asshole who had become her best friend, who was comforting her while she was hurting. Her stupid feelings were just interpreting his kindness for something else. She didn't like Bucky, or men in general. She couldn't.

And yet.
The night before graduation, Eliza snuck into Addison's room for some much needed girl time. Addison put on a movie that they both had seen already, since it was clear that they would be having what felt like their final girl chat. Even though Eliza wouldn't be leaving until the summer, the graduation energy had gotten to the both of them.

"Addison, I have a serious question for you."

"I'm all ears, E."

Addison watched her look down at her lap, where her hands were folded. "How did you know that you were pan? Like why didn't you just say you were gay?" She lifted her head, her eyebrows furrowed together in worry. "Did Zed make you realize you weren't only into girls?"

That was a weird question that she definitely wasn't expecting. But Addison had come to expect the unexpected in life.

"My mom used to ask me if Zed made me straight," Addison said. Eliza raised a confused eyebrow. "He didn't. And he didn't make me realize I was pan either, because I always knew I was into guys. It was the other people I wasn't so sure about."

"What do you mean?"

Addison shrugged, leaning back into her pillows. "Growing up, all I would ever see was a guy and a girl. That's how I was taught relationships were supposed to work. There was no in between or anything. Just a man and a woman. I already felt like an outsider, because of my hair, and my non-binary partner in second grade made me so confused."

"Your what?"

"My non-binary datefriend from second grade." Addison said, looking at her as if asking, 'You never had one?'. Eliza remained shocked.

Addison smirked, climbing off of her bed and going to her closet. She had to stand on her toes to bring down the box filled with old yearbooks, then dragged said box back to her bed.

"Okay so," she said, pulling out the first. "Second grade, first relationship." She flipped through the pages until she landed on her class, turned the book toward Eliza and pointed at one of the pictures. "Mack Andres, the first non-binary person I'd ever met. Kissed me when I fell off the slide, we 'dated' for four days. Then their dad got a job in San Antonio. I never saw them again."

"Okay?"

Addison trailed her finger down the page until she stopped on her picture. "That's seven years old me, by the way."

"Adorable, but I'm not surprised," Eliza commented.

"I've kept all my yearbooks, but I only really like the high school ones. Cuz of my crazy awesome zom-friends."

Eliza snorted, closing the yearbook. She reached up and pulled the hair tie out, letting her curls fall
around her shoulders. "You're pretty cool too, Addison," she said. "A lot cooler than I thought. I-I will miss you. Next year, when you're still here and I'm off at school."

Addison smiled, swallowing back to urge to say something cheeky. Instead she said, "I'll miss you too, but you're going to do great things. Probably design a super awesome roller coaster. Or airplane. And then I'll get you to make me a private jet, Miss Engineer."

Eliza chuckled, ruffling her hair. "I'm leaning toward computer engineering, but I'll learn how to do that just for you, Adds."

"Aw! I'll convince someone to name a building after you."

"Like who?"

Addison shrugged. "Probably Bucky. Or one of my cousins. I don't plan on doing big business things."

"What do you plan on doing?"

Addison shrugged again. She combed her fingers through her hair, looking down at her yearbook. "Right now, I'm fine where I am. Zombeans is everything to me. So I'll be doing that while I figure out my life."

"Well it sounds like you've got everything covered," Eliza grumbled. "Think about it. You've got a perfect relationship, your own business, and you're loaded. If you really think about it, you don't need college."

"You think so?"

"I mean, what's college gonna do for you? Give you a bunch of debt? You've already got a job, your own business. College is to give you the tools to get on with the rest of your life. To me, it sounds like you already have everything you need." It was silent for a moment, then Eliza shrugged and added, "But that's just my opinion. It's your life. You get to choose what you do."

Addison hummed, nodding. Sure, the thought had crossed her mind, but she never thought it was a real thing to do. Eliza was right; if things didn't work out with Zombeans (which they should) her inheritance would cover her for…a long time.

But she wouldn't just ditch the idea of college, not yet. She had a whole year to figure it out, anyway. In the meantime…

"Why'd you ask about my sexuality? Is something wrong?" Addison asked.

"I…There's this guy," Eliza started. "I dunno. We've been friends for a while—not Zed, or Bonzo, just FYI. I just don't know how I feel about him."

"I didn't think it was either of them." In fact, she wasn't even trying to figure out who it was. It didn't matter unless Eliza felt comfortable telling her.

"Well this guy, he's not like he usually is. He's been really nice and caring and he's—he's just been there for me lately, and he's helped me through so much." Eliza sighed, looking from her lap to Addison. "This whole 'not telling you who it is' is too much work. I'm talking about Bucky."

You know in movies when a bombshell is dropped and the camera zooms in on the main character? That was what happened.
"Bucky? As in my cousin?"

Eliza nodded. "Prom was just...and Bucky was just...and now I'm so...I'm so fucking confused."
She furrowed her brows, pouting like Addison and never seen before and said, "Help me."

Addison sighed out a laugh, shaking her head. "I didn't think I'd have to have this type of
conversation until I had my own kids," she commented. "But Eliza, feelings and romance aren't as
simple as we're taught. It's not just guys and girls and sex. It's a whole crap load of different things.
I don't know if you're ready for all that yet."

"Addison, I definitely need this," she said.

Addison smiled. "Tomorrow. I'm in graduation mode right now."

"Uh okay?"

"Wanna go through my old yearbooks and laugh at people in our grade?"

"Sure."

Graduation was held at the Seabrook Performing Arts Center. They were all due there at least half
an hour before the ceremony would start, so a final headcount could be made by the thirty minute
mark. Which meant that, as class president, Addison would be doing an unofficial head count an
hour before so she could figure out who might be running late. Most people would show up earlier
than half an hour anyway.

As time ran out, she noticed the one prominent person missing was her own boyfriend. Even
Bonzo was there!

"Where's Zed?" Addison asked her friends.

Eliza shrugged helplessly. "I haven't seen him all day," she explained.

"Graduation's in forty-five. He can't be missing now!" Bree exclaimed.

Addison put a calming hand on her best friend's shoulder. "Don't freak out Bree. We've got some
time, I'm sure he'll turn up." She looked at Eliza and asked, "He's not home?"

Eliza shook her head. "Zoey said he left for your house about an hour ago."

"Okay," Addison said. Now she was starting to worry. She hadn't even known he was planning on
meeting her at her house. "You guys, can you check his usual hangouts in Zombietown. Maybe my
house or Bucky's."

"And what will you be doing?" Eliza questioned.

"I'm gonna check at school," Addison said. "Keep your phones on, if you find him, let us know."

They all nodded and agreed, grabbing their stuff and splitting up.

Zed was at school, in the Zombie Safe Room. Once Addison saw his familiar green hair and the
pastel pink graduation gown, she shot off a text to Bree before approaching him. He was sitting on
the gurney, hands in his lap and eyes on the ground.
"Hey," she said softly.

Zed looked up at her with a sad expression, prompting her next question. "What's wrong? We're graduating, Zed."

"That's exactly what's wrong," he grumbled. Addison sat down beside him, watching as he let out a slow breath.

"I'm nineteen," he said wistfully. "I never thought I'd be here."

Addison bit her lip, and asked, "You weren't expecting to be trapped in a Zombie Safe Room?" trying to lighten his mood.

Zed let out a halfhearted chuckle. "Addy, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't even have a life plan."

"Yeah you do," Addison stated. "You're going to college, at your dream school. And it's barely three hours away from here. I can visit you whenever. Me and Zoey and Zevon will be at all your games. Your roommate will be so sick of me after a month. You'll get to hang out with Bonzo all the time." She nudged his side with a smile. "And then I'll be there with you next year."

"Yeah but what about after that?" Zed looked up at her hopelessly. "The only thing I have going for me is football. I don't know what I'm gonna study, what I'm gonna do. I-I don't know anything. And…and I don't want this to be over because I don't want anything to change."

Addison put a hand on his shoulder and gave it a small squeeze. "Zed, you don't need to have your life planned out now."

"You do," he argued. "You've got a job and income already that makes you happy."

"But you and I aren't the same person," Addison pointed out. "Just like how me and Bree aren't the same. You don't need to know everything you're gonna do with your life now. We can take things slow. You can take some general classes until you figure out what you want to do. It's not something to worry about."

Zed sighed defeatedly. "These four years have been the best years of my life," he said quietly. He shook his head. "I'm sorry for dumping my bullshit on you."

"Please, I'm your girlfriend. I am emotionally involved in your bullshit, even though it isn't actually bullshit and is a legit concern."

Zed smiled, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. "Um, about that. I-I don't want you to be my girlfriend anymore."

Her heart stilted in her chest. "What?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I don't want to graduate high school with the same girlfriend I started with," he explained. "I-I don't want to graduate…without asking you to marry me."

Addison was at a complete loss for words, her mouth hanging open, taken completely off guard.

"I've got a ring too," he added nervously. "I bought it, like, three years ago."

"Freshman year," she said unbelievingly.

Zed offered the ring toward her. It was…simple, yet beautiful. It was everything she loved and he
loved, combined in one ring. There were two stones, a white gold diamond and an emerald, that
intertwined with a simple gold band. It was beautiful and so…them.

"Addison," Zed said in a soft voice. He took her hands in his and looked her in her watering eyes.
"Will you marry me?"

The pressure in her nose built, a lump forming in her throat as she tried to hold back her tears, to no
avail. "Oh my god," she managed to get out. "Oh my god!"

She looked up at him, tears slipping out when she saw his soft smile. Addison launched herself
forward, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him hard. It lasted a second before Zed
pulled back and looked at her hopefully.

"Is that a yes?" he asked.

Addison nodded. She knew if she tried to say anything she'd start sobbing. Instead she held out her
hand, letting him slide the ring onto her finger. She beamed up at him again, pressing a passionate
kiss to his lips again.

Zed pulled back and smiled at her. "I love you," he said softly. "But do me a favor and don't tell
your parents. I was technically supposed to wait until after graduation."

That snapped Addison out of her euphoria. "Shit! Graduation!" She got to her feet and pulled Zed
up with her. "We're gonna be so late!"

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