Lagging Behind

by Bookwyrm743, Wanheda89

Summary

When the world is falling apart in every direction, it’s nice to know that you have someone. This is the story of how some ones become each other’s someones with a lot of cussing and strange situations in between. Welcome to the apocalypse.

Notes

Ladies, Gentlemen, everything in between, I welcome you with open merisms and a variety of varied polyptotons to my newest work in collaboration with my second favorite redhead (I'll tell you when I find my favorite) Wanheda89. We write together, in tandem, and even on the same page sometimes. Editing is spotty if present at all, and I do hope you mind the spottiness of our punctuation because it's so much better when people get mad at it.

This monstrosity of a story has not only taken over our lives and our brains, but also our
drive as writers to make something worthwhile, so I hope it is worth your while to read something that may be almost as endless as the walking dead universe itself. So far our plan is to post two chapters a week, and we have enough to continue this pattern for at least a month so until then, enjoy regular updates on our two favorite friend groups.

There will be snark, cussing and tears for all. Nothing explicit will occur between romantic partners onscreen because that's really weird to write with someone else adding in commentary. There will be graphic fight scenes, blood, gore and all the turkish delights of apocali (Apocalypsis). We will also be writing the chapters as alternating between the two groups of E.R. (Elyza and Raven) and A.A. (Any and Alicia) hence the inclusion of two chapters a week because we are not so cruel as to make you wait two weeks to hear about the next installment of whichever group you are rooting for.

Please know that while none of these characters technically belong to us, their portrayal of our prejudice and pride are as much a part of our lives as they are parcel to your entertainment. Without further ado, adon'ts and ashouldn'ts, we present to you 'Lagging Behind'.

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Hey girl long time no see!” Raven grabbed Elyza and pulled her into a tight hug. “Oh my god I missed you so much!”

“You act like you’ve been gone for years.” Elyza teased, but she hugged back just as tightly. The familiar smell of oil and solder reminded her of hours spent helping Raven with robotics labs, and shop assignments. Raven smelled like home. “Man, you couldn’t have picked a college a little closer to home?”

Raven stepped back to grab Elyza’s suitcase, “You know I love it here. Besides an hour isn’t that far away, just a hop skip and a boat ride right?”

Elyza slugged her shoulder, following her into the tiny apartment. “Weirdo.”

“You know it.” Raven grinned over her shoulder, “You get the couch.” She set the suitcase in the corner by the TV and snagged the clean laundry off the back of her green couch. “I’ve got a few blankets in the ottoman.” Raven jerked her chin at the pair of black footrests next to Elyza.

She lifted the lid off the top and found a plethora of old controllers and consoles tangled into a mess that would have made any nerd cry. “This is just sad.” Elyza looked up to Raven and opened up the other footrest to pull out the heavy denim blankets. “These however, are amazing.”

“Courtesy of grandma Reyes.” Raven grinned, “She’s a god damn miracle worker with some old jeans and flannel.” Her smile faded just a touch and she watched Elyza focus too hard on unfolding the blanket, “Speaking of miracle workers, how’s your mom?”

Elyza sighed, throwing the blanket over the couch. “Stressed, as always. I think it’s really bad Rae.” She glanced over at her best friend, “I’ve never seen her so freaked out… I don’t think she’s sleeping anymore and, and her face.” Elyza grimaced, trying to figure out how to explain what she saw in her mother’s eyes, “When she told me that we were coming down here… I don’t know Rae, she looked, she looked the way she did after dad.”

Raven put a hand on Elyza’s knee and squeezed, “That shitty huh?”

“Yeah…”

Raven sat down next to Elyza and hooked an arm over the younger girl’s shoulder, “It’s gonna be okay Elyza, your mom is a genius among geniuses, and they have dozens more where she came from. They’ll fix this.”

Abby said almost the exact same thing when they parted at the airport. ‘This will all blow over in a few days.’ Elyza couldn’t help but feel like it was worse, calling so many doctors to work with the military, quarantines and evacuations. Even the college was catching on. The whole reason that Raven had any time to spend with her was a nationwide holiday. Too many people getting sick. She played enough chess to know that you didn’t move that many pieces around for a minor issue that would blow over in a few days.

“Yeah…” Elyza pressed her face into Raven’s shoulder, “I’m sure it’ll be fine.”
Raven only allowed them half an hour to sulk about the shitstorm brewing outside before she double tapped Elyza’s shoulder. “Alright, enough mopey shit. I only get you for a weekend and I’ll be damned if I’m not going to enjoy it.” Elyza sat up enough for Raven to stand and accepted the hand offered to her.

“What are we doing?”

“Well I am going to make dinner, and you are going to update me on life outside of the smoggy valley.” Elyza raised an eyebrow at the dinner comment until she saw where Raven was headed. Phone in hand, Raven dug through her drawer of takeout menus with a huge grin.

“I know what you want and not a chance.” Elyza replied, grabbing the first pizza menu she could find. “This one.”

“Come on,” Raven pouted, “No boys? Or girls I’m not picky. I need something in my life besides robotics projects and a bunch of eggheads too focused on their homework to notice the bitch sitting next to them.”

“Nah, none of them.” Elyza shrugged, “I’m not really looking for any of that stuff right now.”

“Girl you need to get over that Finn business, guy was a fucking dick, jerking everyone around.”

Elyza spun a pen on the countertop, avoiding Raven’s knowing looks. “I’m over it.”

“Mmmmn,” Raven dialed the pizza place. “You’re so over ‘it’ you became a national fucking monument to being over it.” She rolled her eyes every few minutes while ordering their food, all while Elyza made it a point to ignore those looks. “So what movie is it gonna be tonight? I’ve got anything that the internet has to offer.” Raven kicked Elyza’s chair, “Come on dude, I’m sorry about the Finn comment okay?”

Elyza shook her head, “I-It’s not Finn, you’re right, he’s a tool. It’s whatever. I’m worried about what’s out there.” She jerked her chin, “Something bad is going to happen.”

“Oookay, I think it’s time to watch some Disney. You need lighthearted, carefree songs.” Raven dragged Elyza to the couch and sat her down. “You are gonna stay here until you can smile and mean it, I will also accept singing along with the songs, but it has to be loud and awful. Got it?”

Elyza made a noise somewhere between a laugh and a scoff and nodded her agreement, “Yeah mom.”

Raven vaulted over the couch and turned on the TV, “Jokes are a very good start, but they won’t get you out of a minimum four movie marathon.” She warned.

“I guess I’ll have to be surly for the first four movies.”

“Shut up.” Raven flopped down next to her and turned on Cinderella. They made it through the first half of the movie before pizza showed up. After that it was laughter and eating and rude commentary all the way to the end of the night and then some.

Disney movies were still playing when the sun rose. Raven was curled up on a pillow, her legs thrown across Elyza’s lap and sleeping soundly. Elyza watched her sleep, wishing she could do the same. She appreciated all the effort Raven had gone through to make her feel welcome and try to take her mind off of things, but how could she just have fun? Her mother was off dealing with a potential epidemic while she marathoned fucking Disney.
“Fake it til you make it right?” Elyza murmured, laying her head down on her arm, “I hope you’re right mom.”

“Did you get any sleep?” Raven mumbled, nudging Elyza with her foot.

“Eh, I’ll sleep when I’m dead” Elyza shrugged moving out from under Raven’s legs. “I’m gonna take a shower then I’ll make breakfast?” she asked

“If by make breakfast you mean pour some cereal in a bowl or toast a poptart, sure” Raven snarked “Shit, you know I’m your girl if you want something blown up or set on fire, that goes for food too.”

Elyza laughed and shook her head as she collected her things and headed into the bathroom. Letting the water warm up as she brushed her teeth, Elyza couldn’t help worrying. There was an epidemic out there, one bad enough that they had declared a national holiday. How long would Raven’s stash of junk food last? And what would happen if they couldn’t get delivery?

Mom had made it clear that they should stay inside and wait out the worst of the problem, but that had been all of the advice she had offered. She had been so focused on getting back to work that she really hadn’t given much information, not that she probably could. Stepping into the steamy water Elyza decided that a trip to the grocery store was the first order of business. They could get some real food and then they could really hole up until this all blew over.

“I know you said you have cereal and stuff, but let’s head to the grocery store and get all the fixings and I can make pancakes and bacon and we can eat real food for breakfast.” Elyza said as she walked out of the bathroom, drying her hair with a towel.

“Uh, aren’t we supposed to stay inside til your mom calls and gives the all-clear?” Raven asked, looking a little worried

“Yeah, but she probably forgot your eating habits and staying inside doesn’t do us much good if we keep getting visits from random delivery people who could be sick,” Elyza said with a grin.

“Yeah ok, you may have a point on that one. Give me some time to shower and change and I’ll be ready to go. We can hit Kroger down the street.” Raven agreed, heading to her bedroom to get ready for the day.

“Fuck me!” Raven moaned staring at the crazy grocery store parking lot, “Why are there so many people in this state?”

“Because the weather is nice, and it wouldn’t be a problem if you ever bought actual food, if you did then we could be chowing down and watching something but NOT Disney. I still can’t get that Frozen song out of my head.” Elyza whined.

“Shut up, let’s get this done with all ready, I’m starving,” Raven smacked Elyza’s arm as they headed into the store. “What all do we need?”
“Well if I thought you’d use the stuff, I’d make pancakes from scratch,” Elyza paused and looked at Raven who just rolled her eyes at the ridiculousness of that idea, “So we need pancake mix, eggs, milk, bacon, lunch meat, bread, cheese, some chicken and then snacks. Maybe we should get some stuff we don’t need to heat in case there’s issues with power?”

“First of all why would there be issues with power? It’s a long weekend, not an apocalypse. And second why do we need so much food?” Raven asked

“Uh, have you seen you eat? My mom’s paying for it anyway so we may as well eat well. We have no idea what’s going to happen, so we should be prepared.” Elyza answered as she grabbed a cart and started down the first aisle.

To say it was a mess would be a grievous understatement. Boxes tossed to the floor, a once-full container of frosted flakes was exploded across the linoleum like so many bags of sugar frosted confetti. A couple of dented cans, and most importantly, almost no undamaged packages of food on the shelves. It looked like a war-zone met a candy store riot.

“Shit, there’s not much left. What’s with people going crazy? And if you’re being miss prepared, maybe we should get some bottled water and batteries for flashlights? Sometimes the water stops if the power is out for too long.” Raven suggested as she dodged around carts and people blocking the shelves, throwing what she could into the cart.

“Yeah we can do that. This is insane, it feels like the whole city is here.” Elyza complained, barely avoid ramming yet another clueless idiot with her cart.

“Ok, so they are out of milk, and there’s only frozen chicken left. Let’s get the water and get the hell out of here already.” Raven grunted as she dumped another armful of food into the cart.

“I thought you were unhappy getting groceries, I think you’ve added a ton more stuff to the cart than I have.” Elyza pointed out “I’ll head up to the lines, they are ridiculously long, while you get the water.”

“Sure, send the cripple to get the heavy water,” Raven joked “Meet you up there,” she took off, not giving Elyza time to say anything else

The lines were ridiculous, all of the checkers had at least 7 people waiting in the que to be checked out. Elyza wasn’t even close enough to belt to read any of the trashy magazine articles. Figuring she could at least get in a few levels of Candy Crush while she waited, Elyza pulled out her phone and started matching.

“Boo!” Raven yelled, laughing as Elyza jumped and almost dropped her phone. “They are out of water, there’s literally none left so I got some iodine solution.”

“Ok, how does that help us if there’s no water coming into the house in the first place?” Elyza asked, leaning back onto the cart. She was now the 4th person in line.

“I figure if you are worried about it, we can fill up the bathtub.” Raven shrugged

“Better be after a serious washing. I’m not drinking ass water” Elyza laughed.

Raven smirked and shook the iodine bottle, “Hence this shit, it’ll keep the ass out of the water.”

Chapter End Notes
I would apologize for all the things I mangled in that intro if it weren't so much fun. Kudos to you if you read the entire intro -BW743
Please comment, subscribe etc. and let us know how you feel in the most brutal detail. We live on the emotions you feed us, and as such have a tendency to be starving artists.
“Mom, what are we doing?” Alicia set down the monopoly box, “I haven’t been to school in days, we’re planning a surprise trip to see Anya and we all know how she feels about surprises. You stole meds for Nick so he can detox in the desert? And you won’t let me help Matt or Mrs. Cruz… Why won’t you tell me anything?”

“Licia..” Nick put his hand on her shoulder.

“No!” She shrugged it off, “I have been here through everything. I make nice with Travis and Chris, I go to school, I show up when bad things happen, and I don’t leave.” She shot a dirty look at Nick, “So why does Nick know more about what’s going on than I do?”

Madison pinched her nose, “It’s-people are getting sick honey. That’s all we know, people are getting sick and they’re hurting each other, it’s not safe to be around other people right now okay?”

“Is that what he was going on about when they picked him up?” She pointed at Nick, “Why do you believe him? Why do you always believe him?”

“Keep your voice down.” Madison snapped, looking to the window nervously. “Look, it’s not just Nick, I’ve seen it too. Whatever it is, the police are going to handle it and we are going to wait it out.”

“Where? With what? Everyone’s been packing up and leaving, where are we gonna get food and water? How is Nick going to detox? You know he can’t wean himself off.”

“Can we not talk about me like I’m not here?” Nick asked softly.

“You’re never here.” Alicia snapped, “Mom you can’t just drag us into the middle of nowhere without a plan and expect us to be okay!”

“I don’t, I’m not.” Madison shook her head, “Honey I know you’re scared but we have a plan. Travis will come back and then we can get out of here for a week or two, we have enough for that and by then everything will have blown over.”

“If everything is so bad then why are we waiting for Travis? He knows where Anya is, he can find her just fine on his own.”

“Stop that right now, we aren’t going to leave them behind. We are going to wait right here for Travis and Chris and his mother, and we are going to stay with Anya for a week. Two tops, and then we will be right back home again.” Madison sighed, “I don’t have all the answers hon, but I’ll try not to keep you in the dark. For now the best we can do is sit tight, and keep quiet.”

Alicia looked away, more ashamed of herself than she would admit. Mom was just trying to keep everything together, and Nick… She had learned long ago that nothing she did or said would bring
back the old Nick, she shouldn’t have let him get to her the way he always did. “Okay.” She retreated to the hall cupboard where they kept the board games.

“The Trans have a shotgun, I tried to lift it once. Come on, this way!” Alicia followed Nick and her mom over the garbage can, trying not to think about what Nick would have done with the Tran’s gun. While her mom was digging for ammunition and Nick bowled through the house like it was his own, Alicia picked her way through the living room carefully, looking at the pictures of a happy family. The Trans had always been really nice, and Susan used to babysit Alicia when she was home sick from school. Were they still going to be friendly after the chaos settled and they came back home?

It would be weird. Everyone looking with suspicion and wondering what you did because you thought you had to, wondering what you were willing to do. Alicia wondered what her mom would be willing to do with her stolen shotgun. “Mom we shouldn't be in here.”

“Shh, look!” Nick pointed, “Someone just walked into our house.”

They were probably doing the same thing as Nick and Mom, Alicia was ready to scream in frustration. No one was listening to her. With everyone going crazy, maybe he was just trying to find a place to hide! But Mom and Nick didn't care. They just shoved a pair of shells into the gun and raced back through the maze of trellises that made up the majority of the yard with Nick up front muttering the path through.

Alicia lagged behind, none of this felt real, all the panic and the ‘sick people’ it felt like a mob mentality, mass panic orchestrated by some news hub looking to get some new headlines. “Shit! Shit! Where are the rest of the shells?”

“I left them on the table. Alicia go back and get the rest of the shells!”

She turned back around and jogged back through the maze, grateful she didn't have to take part in the shared insanity of Nick and Mom. Alicia found the box of shells on its side, the pieces scattered under the table right as the power came back on. She should have felt better, the return to normality, just cleaning up a mess in Susan’s kitchen but it felt wrong. Alicia flicked the light off and shoved the shells into the box, feeling a weird panic rise in her chest that only grew when she heard dry rasping breathing from behind her.

Alicia looked over her shoulder and saw Susan, but it wasn't Susan. Mrs. Tran stood in the hallway with her hands outstretched to Alicia and a slack expression that combined with the nerves of breaking into someone's house just sent a jolt of terror through Alicia's veins.

She took what she had gathered and bolted out the back door, running through the trellis maze. She tried desperately to remember the pattern Nick had mumbled through the cacophony of crashing footsteps from her own feet and those of Mrs. Tran close on her heels.

Alicia felt a gnarled hand brush her back and shrieked, scrambling up the fence. A hand appeared in front of her and she grabbed it without thinking, hauling herself up the last few feet of the fence. Alicia felt fingers slide over her ankle before she crashed into Nick’s chest.

All of her was shaking as she followed Nick into the house. Travis was fighting with one of the neighbors, talking loudly to him, trying to talk him down while keeping himself between Madison and the man, trying to protect him from the shotgun. Travis was yelling at Mom and telling her to put down the gun and he turned to look at her and the man lunged at Travis, knocking him to the
An old man grabbed the gun from Madison and shot their neighbor. Travis pushed the man off of him and stood up, “Wh-why did you do that?”

“You knew this man?”

“Yeah I did he’s-”

They turned around when the man stood up again, his face half gone. Eyes a milky white. Alicia gasped in horror when the old man lifted up the gun again and put it in their neighbor’s mouth.

Everything was silent after the gun went off. The old man handed the gun back to Mom and returned to the two women cowering in the corner next to Chris and his mom. There was blood everywhere, and chunks of things that Alicia couldn’t bring herself to think about. She hid her face in Nick’s shoulder, trying to breathe through her mouth but she could taste the blood on the air and it was all so horrible.

“Pack the car.” Madison interrupted Travis’ angry rambling about the man being sick, harmless.

“No, Mrs. Salazar is hurt, she can’t-”

“They can stay in the house as long as they want Travis. Pack the car.” Madison looked him in the eye, daring him to argue one more time, daring him to see how long they would stay here in this massacre of a living room.

“Come on, you don’t need to see this.” Nick dragged Alicia out before she could start hyperventilating for real. He held her tight, rocking her slowly while Madison, Travis and Eliza argued in the living room about what to do.

Anya saw the truck approaching with three kids and Travis’s useless ex in the bed, packed tight with canned food and camping supplies. “Well Shit.”

Chapter End Notes

For some reason the end notes might be broken on my end, but I'm not sure.
The best offense is a good defense

Chapter Summary

Elyza and Raven are struggling with some of the natural results of 'the end' and as such throw themselves in the opposite direction of reality, straight through a glass window of good intentions, catch themselves on the mattress of excellent planning, and drive directly into a car wreck of poor choices.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Elyza flinched at the sound of more screams and crashes down the hall. “They’re getting closer.”

“Then stop fucking-” Raven grunted, trying to move the couch against the door, “-Listening and help me with this bitch.” Elyza stopped wringing her hands and pushed the other end of the couch, together they braced it under the doorknob. Usually Raven’s need to act when things got bad was annoying at best, but at this moment Elyza could have kissed her.

The screams had started early in the morning, getting closer and closer as the hours passed. Elyza had poked her head out early on and seen a trio of frat boys forcing their way into one of the apartments with a couple of crowbars and well placed kicks.

Raven had immediately gotten to work on barricading the door. “Now what? We can’t stay in here for long.” Elyza dug through the cupboards for the remaining food and grimaced at the meager stack. “We could hang out for two or three days, but I don’t think the door will hold.”

“Uh, fuck that.” Raven snagged her backpack. It had heavy padding on the straps and could easily hold a week’s worth of groceries without breaking a sweat. It was built for physics textbooks and heavy duty laptops. “I promised your mom that you would be safe. Safe doesn’t mean trapping you in an apartment where the best case scenario is starving to death. Put the non-perishables in here.”

“Right, you’re right. So where do we go? The city has to be in shambles if the cops haven’t shown up yet. Emergency shelters… That would be hospitals, police stations, churches and schools.” Elyza mumbled, shoving pancake mix and bottled water into the pack. “Hospitals are going to have high concentrations of disease, police stations are down. Without a response to rioting they have to be in bad shape. Churches are going to be full of crazies screaming about the end times and homeless people, almost as bad as the hospitals.”

“What are you muttering about?” Raven asked, shoving the jean quilt from Grandma Reyes into Elyza’s smaller suitcase.

“Shelters. You know of any schools in the area? High schools specifically, higher income if you can, the rest might get looted or burned down. God knows I would have liked to burn Skyline to the foundation.” She snorted.

Raven bit her lip, “I think there’s one past the zoo? It had some stupid magnet mascot or something that caught my eye. It’s like thirty minutes on the freeway.”
“Backroads,” Elyza said, “We can’t trust the freeway to be moving.”

“Okay so like double that. Worst comes to worst we can hit the stadium or the hospital, they’re both nearby.” Raven offered, digging through the mess that was their living room for anything else they needed. Elyza had food, water and a first aid kit, so Raven was grabbing a few changes of clothes and some blankets to sleep in.

“Perfect, now let’s get the hell out of here.”

“About that…” Raven looked out her window to the ground that was a solid fifteen feet away, “How the fuck are we getting out of here?”

“You’re the engineer.” Elyza snarked.

Raven rolled her eyes, “First of all, I’m in training, second of all fuck you, third of all… No, no the second hit it pretty well. Unless we’re gonna jailbreak it and tie the sheets into a rope then I’m out of ideas, and if we really want that to work we would have to braid it and that’s going to take longer than the door has but-”

“Just jump.”

Raven rolled her eyes, “Hold this.” She shoved the suitcase at Elyza and retreated to her room. “Motherfucking frat boy bitches-” Raven reappeared curled up trying to drag her thick mattress from the bedroom, “-Breaking into my goddamn apartment. I HOPE YOU SHIT GLASS!” She yelled at the door.

The edge of the mattress caught on the blankets and dirty clothes on the floor, dragging them and then catching on old take-out boxes. Soon enough it looked like Raven was trying to pull the whole room out the window.

The doorknob rattled. Elyza and Raven looked at each other in a panic.

“I think they heard you.”

“No shit sherlock! Help me get this bitch out the window!”

Together they managed to launch the mattress out, and before Elyza could ask questions, Raven hoisted the backpack and threw it out the window. It landed with a wince-worthy smack and bounce, but as far as they could tell, nothing exploded.

“Looks like minimal injuries to me.” Raven shoved the suitcase out next and without hesitation threw herself after it.

“FUCK!” She rolled off the mattress with a groan, checking her brace, “Whatever whore invented spring mattresses is a bitch.”

“Are you okay?” Elyza shouted.

“Better then you’ll be if you’re still up there when the door breaks!” Raven snarked, still laying in the grass.

Elyza launched out of the window, trying to land as flat as she could. She did a pretty good job of it, but she forgot about the backpack full of canned food and water bottles right where she planned to put her skull. It didn’t work so well.
“Ohhhh I heard that crack from over here.” Raven pushed herself to her feet with a groan, “If you split your head open I’m going to fucking kill you.”

Elyza squeezed her eyes shut against the awful spinning, “It’s fine Rae, it’s probably fine.” She thought about sitting up and decided against it. Vomiting would lose precious resources. Who knew how long it would be before Dominoes started delivering again.

“Liar.” Raven took her hand and pulled Elyza to her feet. “You good to walk? I don’t think the chuckleheads upstairs appreciated my hopes and dreams about their future bowel movements.”

“Good enough to get to the car.” Elyza muttered, “Come on.” She grabbed the heavy backpack and swayed with it.

“I may be crippled but at least I can stand up. Gimme.” Rae snagged the bag out of Elyza’s hands and slung it over her back in one easy motion.

Elyza silently agreed with the sentiment and grabbed the rolling suitcase.

They made a break for the car, weaving through a thin crowd of students scrambling for their vehicles. So far no one was being stopped from leaving, but it was only so long before the looters would turn to vehicles.

It felt like everyone had a phone in hand, desperately trying to call their loved ones, warn them about the chaos in the city. “Don’t they know the lines are down?” Elyza mumbled, “Emergency lines only.”

“They don’t know what else to do babe. Come on, get in the car,” Raven opened the door of her jeep and helped Elyza inside. Despite the pronounced pain in her left hip, Rae packed their bags in the back of the car and pulled herself into the driver’s seat. “We’ll hole up in the school until we can get a better idea of what’s going on okay?”

Elyza nodded, eyes glazed over as she watched the panicked movements of the crowd. Raven gunned it, worried about the way Elyza was acting. Elyza frowned, trying to focus on a weird change, the concerned voices became screams as one of the frat boys launched themselves at someone.

The two became the center of an odd open space in the crowd and a couple of people turned around and just ran as fast as they could, shoving people aside. The two stood and they attacked others.

All too soon the orderly panic turned into frantic chaos in their rear view mirror. “Weird…”

“What is?”

“I think that frat boy bit someone?” Elyza sounded so out of it that Raven stepped on the gas a little harder. Hallucination or reality, it was motivation to move a little faster.

Raven snapped her fingers in front of Elyza’s face, “Hey, focus, before you go fruity in the loops I need to know how to treat a head injury.”

Elyza nodded, feeling less out of it than before, but still very groggy. “Rest, and stop any bleeding. I don’t think my brain is swelling, but if I start going real nuts check for a pupil response to lights, awareness of external stimuli, and…. I think that’s it? Based on the size of the lump in my head I
don’t think I have a concussion, but to be safe I should not be allowed to sleep for the next twelve hours-ish?”

“I’m hearing a lot more question marks than I would like to.” Raven snapped, aggressively passing an overloaded minivan. “You wanna try again?”

“No I don’t! My head feels like I filled it with strawberry cheesecake pudding and I’m dizzy and sick and you’re driving like a crazy person while I’m just trying to figure out which way is up. So unless you want me to hurl on you, deal with it.” Elyza slumped back against the seat, grabbing hold of it. It felt like her head was going to explode.

“Okay well I wouldn’t be driving like a crazy person if they would just-Shit!” Raven jerked the wheel hard to try and swerve out of the way of a car that tried to t-bone them and they both felt the wheels on Elyza’s side of the car lift up from the pavement.

The Jeep rocked back onto all four wheels and sped down the road. “Fuck you too asshole!”

“What was that about?”

“I don’t know, the light was green,” Raven ducked her head to look through the rear view at the traffic light behind them, “Damn it! The traffic lights are on the fritz, the one behind us keeps cycling.”

“Uh, what? Shit, I think I’m bleeding” Elyza swiped her hand over the back of her neck, finding it smeared.

“Fuck, should we just head to the hospital?” Raven asked as she sliced through an intersection filled with clueless drivers.

“No, I should be ok. We really need to avoid hospitals if we can. I can clean it up as soon as we get to the school.” Elyza pressed some napkins into the back of her head, hissing at the pressure. “How much further?”

“You are not starting that shit, unless you are going to throw up.” Raven scowled “You aren’t going to throw up are, because I will cut you if you throw up in my car.”

“No, I don’t think I’m going to throw up, but these roads are chaos. We are going to get killed if we don’t get off them soon.” Elyza said.

“Fine!” Raven stomped on the brake and pulled a sharp right turn that lifted their wheels up for a brief moment before crashing them back to the asphalt. The jeep bounced with a pair of sickening cracks.

“What was that?”

“You don’t want to know.” This street had almost no cars on it, but there were just enough pedestrians that Raven was afraid to check her mirrors.

“Seriously, how much longer til we get there. This is not ok”

“It’s five minutes away I swear. See? There’s the old zoo right there.” Raven pointed out the decrepit sign to their left.

“FUCK ME!” Elyza yelled as the world began to swirl and tilt with an odd screaming noise that pierced through the fog she had been in since jumping out of the window.
“Buy me dinner first…” Raven groaned, trying to get her bearings. Everything seemed to be sideways. Cracks in the windshield and a lamp post that grew to the right instead of up were the only thing she could see.

“What the hell just happened Rae?”

“I think…” Raven looked up to Elyza, “That we are sideways?” She undid her seatbelt and wiggled out of her seat to climb out the back of the jeep to assess the damage. “Shit on a stick. Those assholes t-boned us.” She leveled a dirty look at the fancy ass mercedes that was spun-out in the intersection behind them with a crumpled nose and shattered windshield.

“Come on, let’s get to the school”

“Without my baby? How about we smack your grandma while we’re at it.”

“Well unless you can put this back on all four tires, I don’t really see how we can take him with us.”

Raven walked around the massacred vehicle looking ready to cry, “Look at what that bitch did to you…” She leaned against the hood and did her best to hug her baby. “I’m not leaving.”

“That’s a problem, cause you aren’t staying here either and I will drag your ass with me if I have to” Elyza reached in and pulled out their bags coming around to where Raven was mourning the car.

“I’ll come back for you Winona.” She promised, kissing the hood.

“God, come on” Elyza grabbed onto Raven’s arm, hauling her away as best she could while dragging their bags along too.

“It’s this way.” Raven sniffled, taking the suitcase from Elyza and picking up the pace. The sidewalks felt far less hectic than the roads had, but both felt exposed.

“What is wrong with the lady in the other car? Why is she growling?” Elyza asked, more than a little weirded out.

“I dunno man, but she looks fine to me.” Raven looked over her shoulder and swallowed hard. There was blood smeared across the woman’s face and dripping from her mouth.

“I take it back, she doesn’t look fine.”

“We should help.” Elyza turned back towards the car.

Raven grabbed her arm, “Are you kidding? That’s the piece of trash that just totalled Winona!”

“Winona?” Elyza shook her head, “Not the point. We have to help her, we can’t just leave her there and it might take too long for help to get here.”

“Yes! Winona. It's an amazing name. And she better be fucking grateful” Raven huffed as she stomped to the damaged Mercedes.

Elyza walked up and opened the car door, “Ma’am my name is Elyza Lex, are you ok?”

The woman in the car just stared at her groaning and growling. Weird, but maybe she’s in a lot of pain.
“Ma’am can you tell me your name and where you are hurt?” Elyza asked as the woman reached towards her, grabbing onto her arm. There was still no real response.

“Ma’am ambulances and the police are really busy and probably won’t be able to get here anytime soon, so I need you to tell me if you are injured. If you don’t and we move you, we could make any spinal injuries even worse. Are you hurt?” Elyza asked again, looking at Raven who just shrugged and stood there.

“Ok, can you unbuckle your seatbelt?” Nothing but more groans and guttural growls.

“I’m going to reach across you and unbuckle the seatbelt so we can help get you out of the car.” Elyza turned from the woman “Rae, I’ll swing her legs around to the ground and then you take her left side, I’ll take her right and we can pull her out of the car.”

“Why are we trying to help her? She’s acting fucking weird and we could fuck her up without meaning to. We should just head to the school, see if they have an emergency communication system and radio for help from there” Raven urged, tugging on Elyza’s arm.

“Rae. It won’t take long.” Elyza waited for Raven’s nod before turning back to the woman in the car. The woman had started groaning louder and was gripping Elyza’s arm with enough force it was starting to bruise. Elyza shifted and stretched across the woman reaching for the seat belt release at her sight. As she got close enough to reach the woman lunged towards her and sank her teeth in, knocking Elyza into the steering wheel. “Shit!” Elyza yelled, struggling to disengage from the woman’s mouth.

“Elyza! Get the fuck off of her, you bitch!!” Raven yelled and started hitting at the woman’s side and head. A few good hits in her face and she lost the hold she had on Elyza’s shoulder, but the woman still had hold of Elyza’s arm.

“She won’t let go of my arm Rae!” Elyza struggled trying to get away, she had managed to get her body out of the car and had been able to put some space between them, but no matter how she fought and hit the woman just would not let go of her arm.

“Move towards the back, E!” Raven yanked Elyza back and grabbed hold of the door, “Let go bitch or I will take off your arm!”

After a moment’s hesitation while the woman continued trying to haul Elyza back to her, Raven slammed the door into her arm. The woman’s arm made a nasty cracking noise and they both saw a bone shard splitting through the skin, but it didn’t even phase the woman.

Raven did it a second and third time, slamming the door into the woman’s upper arm as hard as she could. Finally when there was blood oozing down the woman’s arm and her bones was visible through her flesh she finally lost her grip on Elyza.

Elyza fell back to the pavement and scrambled away from the car.

“Are you ok? She fucking bit you!” Raven demanded as she began to check Elyza over.

“No, I’m ok. I mean she tried to bite me, I think. But she just got a mouthful of the backpack strap. My arm is killing me, but I don’t think it’s broken or dislocated” Elyza rubbed her arm and stared at the woman who was still struggling against the seatbelt trying to reach them.

“Fucking crazy bitch!” Raven kicked the door shut one last time and they both watched in horror as the woman’s arm fell to the ground, completely severed. “Oh god…”
The woman in the car scratched at the window, growling at them and snapping her teeth. “I think I might puke.” Elyza mumbled, looking pale as a sheet.

Raven looked around and realized they were in the middle of the road and hauled Elyza up by her backpack straps. “Puke later, we need to get out of here.”

Together they sprinted the last mile to the school, stumbling in through the metal double doors.

The banner across the front said, “Temecula High, home of the Mighty Magnets”

Chapter End Notes

My favorite line in this chapter is "I hope you shit glass" and I am very proud of that line. It just makes me uncomfortable even thinking about it.
“You want to run that one by me again Travis?” Anya set her hands on her hips and stood between him and the door to her home. Okay, the door to her shack, but it was her shack.

“We just need to hang out for a few days.” Travis tried to explain again, “People are getting sick and hurting each other, and we needed to get out of the city.”

“Where do I put this?” Alicia held up a pair of sleeping bags.

“Throw those in my room.” Anya waved her through. When Travis tried to get by she put her hand on his chest, “No. I get grabbing any paddle you can get your hands on in a shitcreek. I’m talking about the part where you have the gall to assume you get to step foot in my house without so much as a courtesy ‘hey sis I’m invading the only peaceful place left in the world and I’m dragging my problems along with me’.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not gonna make a bunch of kids die in the desert with your sorry ass, but that doesn’t mean I have to lift a finger for you.”

“Anya,” Travis sighed, “I know we’ve had our differences, but would you please consider letting us stay? I’ll stay in the truck if that’s what you want, just…” He rubbed his neck, trying to think of a way to fix all the bad blood between them, or to make amends somehow.

Anya pursed her lips, deciding he was too pathetic to leave on the porch all night, it would be worse than putting the fucking fish out of its misery. “My house, my rules. Got it?”

“I already do auntie!” He joked, ducking into the house before she could throw something at him.

“I am not your Fucking Auntie!!!” Anya yelled, rolling her eyes.

“But I thought you said you didn’t mind when I called you that!” Alicia poked her head out of the kitchen window, pouting at her ‘aunt’.

“The boys are assholes about it, and I actually like you. Sometimes” Anya smirked at Alicia who
gave her a small grin.

“You hear that?” Alicia ducked back into the house, “Anya likes me more than all of you!”

“Yeah yeah, keep talking!” Nick shouted.

Chris glowered at the ground as he shouldered past his parents, “She’s not even related to them.”

“I don’t think she likes anyone she’s actually related to” Travis muttered as he hauled food from the truck to the cellar.

Madison bumped his shoulder, carrying her own load of dried food, “It doesn’t matter if she likes us, just as long as she lets us stay until we can go home again.”

“And when might that be?” Anya asked

“Just a week or two.” Madison promised, sounding like she was begging fate as much as she was begging Anya to believe her.

“A week or two out here with me? Over some sort of flu? What’s going?”

“We don’t know.” Travis interrupted, “People are just getting sick, and acting strangely. We wanted to get away before it could spread.” Anya knew that tone, that pleading for a little more time. The last time she’d heard him like that he was promising their parents that the dog was fine. Their rabid dog.

“What do you mean acting strangely?”

“They’re eating people.” Nick said quietly, “I saw it. My uh, my friend she-she had a knife-” He gestured to his left side, “-in her… And she, she was eating someone.”

“I don’t want to hear about your fucked up high, Nick. That’s not actually a problem the rest of us have to deal with” Anya rolled her eyes.

“You leave him alone.” Madison got in Anya’s face, “Nick has his problems but he’s not a liar.”

“No, she’s right Madi.” Travis stopped her, “That church was a mess, and something really bad happened, but there weren’t any canni-cannibals there, you know that.” He stumbled over the word that caused him so much discomfort.

“And what about Calvin? He was shot AND run over by a damn truck and he was still moving around. Half of his face was ripped off and he was still moving!” Madison insisted “You can’t tell me that was normal!”

“Mom,” Nick tugged at his hair, curling in on himself a bit, “It’s fine, it’s-” He shook his head, “I’m used to it. She’ll see soon enough. You all will.” He went back inside the house, chewing on one of his nails.

“Wow,” Anya raised her eyebrows, “He got weirder. I didn’t think that was possible.” She looked to Madison, “You’ve got yourself one seriously fucked up kid there.”

“He is fine,” Madison growled “You don’t understand what’s going on.”

“Then show me.”

“Hey now,” Travis got between them, “I don’t think that’s a good idea, it’s dangerous out there.”
“Hey Anya! Where am I sleeping? And where’d you put Mr. Pickles? I haven’t seen him in forever!” Alicia asked, breaking the tension between the adults. It was obvious they were getting nowhere.

“You can crash on the floor in my room. Just put your sleeping bag at the foot of the bed. And that fucking fish is on the windowsill in the bathroom. I keep hoping it falls into the toilet and dies. The boys can crash in the living room and you two can sleep on the office floor.” Anya directed. “But don’t think we are done with this conversation. I will be getting more information from you and people who know what dangerous is.”

“I’ll stay in the living room with the boys if you don’t mind.” Lyza mumbled.

Anya jerked and moved back into the house “Fucking forgot she was here.”

Alicia snickered and helped Lyza with the small duffels they’d packed with clothes. “Come on.”

“Fucking phone lines..” Anya muttered, slamming her house phone onto the receiver. She dug through a footlocker for her sat-phone and started dialing up her contacts. No one picked up. Over a dozen high ranking military officials, and not one of those pricks could bother to pick up the damn phone.

Anya kicked the locker and tossed the phone back inside. Time to dig out the monstrous radio setup in the cellar. It wouldn’t get anyone in charge, but at least she could talk to others around the country and find why out her home was being invaded by Travis and his growing harem of angry wives.

It took a few minutes to find all of the random parts and get them put together. This was not her preferred method of communication. Too many amateurs playing around. But until someone answered their damn sat-phone it was the only way to get information. Turning the dial, sorting through static and garbled communications Anya listened, trying to get something understandable out of it.

Finally she found a military channel.

“This is Sergeant Forrester of the SASR, I’d like to know what the fuck is going on.” She barked after a few minutes of confused listening, chatter wasn’t giving her what she needed. Everyone was going on about code Cobalts, and walkers, and deados and none of it made a lick of sense.

The line went quiet for just a moment before a familiar voice broke through the static, “This is Colonel Pines at the Pendleton naval base in San Diego, state your location Sergeant Forrester.”

“Indra thank fuck. I got a bunch of shave tails on my ass telling all kinds of bull about cannibals and drug lords that need multiple instances of mental recalibration to take down, please advise.”

“Then you have the short of it. I’m running an offensive on the infected here in Diego, I could use your help on this-” The static got stronger, and other voices were starting to push through the supposedly secure line, “Meet us in the-”

“Indra? Colonel Pines!” Anya tried to adjust the radio, fine-tuning the exact frequency.

“Isn’t long before HQ calls in the-” More static, “napalming the major hubs-” The com line was overwhelmed with interfering voices all calling for backup or trying to talk to their families. It was a mess of civilian and military traffic all blending together into one panicked cry for help. Setting
the radio back onto the table Anya stood and began pacing.

This was insane and if it weren’t for the fact that Indra would probably keel over dead if she ever made a joke, let alone on an official channel, Anya still wouldn’t believe. It still wasn’t really clear. Something about the infected. People obviously. And walkers. Which sounded a hell of a lot like something out of a halloween movie, not real life. But whatever it was, there was nothing confusing about napalming major hubs. That was very clear and rather desperate.

“Told you.” Nick said from the top of the stairs, arms crossed over his chest. “Maybe I’m a little screwy sometimes, but I know the difference… I know what dreams feel like. What’s out there? It’s no dream.”

“When did you become the voice of reason?” Anya snarked, taking her confusion and frustration out on the easy target.

“Dunno.” He shrugged, “Maybe when your world started to look more like mine.”

Anya shot him a glare, “Sure kid, cus you’ve lived in such an awful cannibal filled world all your life.” She put the radio back where it belonged and shooed him out the of cellar, “Move it, we’ve got to unpack all your shit right?”

They rejoined the others just in time for Anya to begin regretting her relation to Travis all over again. Her cozy shack was packed to the rafters with so many extra bodies, there were asses on every flat surface in the living room and one in the kitchen that she was quick to rectify. She grabbed Chris’ leg and jerked him off the counter with a scowl, “Keep your ass out of my food. Got it squirt?”

He straightened up, trying to get in her face with his gangly little body, “There's nothing even on the counter!”

“Not anymore. Keep it that way.” She turned around to all the forlorn faces and bouncing knees. If ever a group of civvies could look like a powder keg ready to blow, this was it. Anya clapped a hand on Chris’ shoulder, “Grab Nick and Alicia, we're going on a quick trip around the property.”

He stumbled and hated being treated like a little kid, but Anya never disappointed on her field trips. It was the only reason he tolerated her treatment of him. Madison looked into the kitchen when she saw Chris looking oddly excited, “What's up?”

Rule number one of Aunt Anya’s trips, never tell the adults. “She's making us check the fence around the property.” Chris grouched, trying to look appropriately annoyed.

Anya nodded her confirmation. “Kids need to run, and the fence needs checking. I'll keep them safe, just like always.”

Madison didn't necessarily approve, but she had seen how down Nick and Alicia were. It would do them good to get out and move in a familiar place, to feel like kids again. “Keep us updated. If anything happens we can come get you in the truck.”

Anya stopped herself from rolling her eyes and nodded, “Course Madison, I wouldn't think of doing anything else.”

Chapter End Notes
Feed our Muse Monster with Kudos, Comments, and Subscriptions. This is FINALLY getting started.
Have you ever wanted to spend your apocalypse at school? Dreaming of trapping yourself in the teacher’s lounge while you observe the horrors of the undead from your lofty post? Considering teaming up with black commandos wielding shotguns like total badasses? Then this was almost the chapter for you. - BW743

“You know high school is bad enough when it's full of people and noise, but this is really creepy.” Elyza said as they moved through the hallways of the deserted high school.

“I’ll take this over that woman any day. Come on, let’s see if we can find a room with a sofa or something.”

“Where is everyone?” Elyza looked through the windows into the different rooms expecting to see someone. “It’s like a ghost town.”

“I don’t know, but right now I’ll take it. Where do you think the teachers lounge will be?” Raven asked, “I don’t want to spend all fucking night looking through this place.”

“Uh near the cafeteria?” Elyza suggested, shrugging.

“That might be helpful if I knew where the fucking cafeteria is.” Raven responded.

Elyza grimaced, “Yeah because I’m going to know where the damn teacher’s lounge is.” She jogged down a hallway, “Okay, I think this is just a mirror of the other halls, these are all just classrooms. Are there any stairs?”

Raven started looking down the halls for stairs, “Over here! I’ve got a staircase and an elevator.” She sniffed the air, “Do these pampered assholes have a pool? You smell that?”

“Who cares?” Elyza rolled her eyes, “Come on, let’s see if there’s anything worth finding up there.” They climbed the stairs continuing to look around. “Hey look, its an emergency escape map,” Elyza said, inspecting it further. “So this must be the cafeteria and since these rooms to our left don’t have a room number, I’m betting those are the admin rooms.”

“Huh, who knew those stupid maps would actually be useful one day.” Raven started off in the direction of the cafeteria. “You seeing this shit? They have a pool, their own football stadium, shop classes, home ec, and a full chemistry lab! Lucky little assholes.”

“Damn, if you had gone to school here you’d have blown the place up ten times over just in the chemistry lab.” Elyza laughed

Raven did her best to look offended, “Only ten times? I will have you know that I am a public menace.”

“Eh, someone hot would have come by and distracted you” Elyza grinned and nudged Raven’s side.
“Whatever. Look they labeled the teacher’s lounge for us. How nice.” Raven tried the door handle. “And they even left it unlocked. What kind of trusting idiots teach here?” Elyza opened the door and a piece of cardboard fell out of the jamb, “Looks to me like someone forgot their key.” She tested the handle, “It locks automatically, so don’t close it without the cardboard.” Elyza held it open for Raven, “Seems like a safe enough place for a night or two. Maybe we can raid the vending machines.” Raven nodded her agreement and started examining the snack machine. “Oookay, I got this.” She unzipped the suitcase and pulled out a tiny screwdriver kit. She started messing with the hinges on the machine and after a few minutes and a solid kick, Raven knocked the door right off. “Voila! I give you snackfood.”

Elyza curled up against Raven, both of them tucked under grandma Reyes’ blanket and full of stale chips and vaguely fresh candy bars. “Do you think that whatever was wrong with that old lady is the disease my mom is working on?”

“If there’s more than one nasty ass thing going around, I don’t want to know about it.” Raven said quietly looking a bit freaked out, “That wasn’t normal Elyza. I don’t know what this is supposed to be. I thought it was like, a really bad flu that’s going around or something. But this is way more fucked up than that. That lady didn’t even flinch when her arm…”

“Hey, don’t freak about that,” Elyza hugged Raven into her side using her uninjured arm, “Whatever is going on, we’ve got each other, no matter what.”

“You can bet on that.” Raven took a deep breath, “Try to get some sleep. No one’s getting through that door tonight.”

Elyza perched on the counter in the teacher’s lounge, peering out the window while she snacked on another bag of chips. The streets were practically empty. Every once in a while a person would shuffle between cars, or maybe a pair of people holding hands to keep close. Eventually she got bored and started flipping through the magazines scattered around the room. Most of them were educational things, talking about new teaching techniques and how to organize your classroom, because when everything goes to shit you need something to litter the streets and start the fires. She tossed the magazine aside and went back to staring out the window.

“You gonna do that all day long?” Raven raised an eyebrow.

Elyza shook her head, “It’s too creepy to wander the school, up here it just feels… Like we’re on a cloud and nothing can touch us.” She rested her face against the cool glass, folding and refolding her snack wrappers.

Raven threw herself back onto the couch, “This is actually the worst.” She sighed, tapping nonsense patterns on the armrest, “I may die of boredom.”

“Oh my god,” Elyza turned her head to follow the trio of people walking towards the wreckage of Winona in the middle of the intersection.

“What is it?” Raven hopped off the couch and looked over Elyza’s shoulder, “Oh shit…”
The trio consisted of two men arguing on their way to the car and a woman leading the way to the crumpled mercedes. To the freaky old lady they had left behind. “I can’t look,” Elyza ducked her face down into her hands, “Tell me they just kept walking, please?”

Raven’s grip on Elyza’s shoulder tightened as she watched. The woman peered into the glass and waved to the men, calling them over to the driver side door. Together they opened the car and the taller man reached over and unbuckled the old lady’s seat belt before falling with a scream of pain, one hand clutched to his shoulder.

Elyza winced as the grip on her shoulder became painful and continued to watch as the man on the ground started cussing. The lady in the car was moving slowly, but she managed to fall out of the car and began to pick herself up. It was ungainly and halting, hindered by the lack of an arm on her left side, but she managed. How is she still moving, her arm was cut off, she should have bled out. The unhurt members of the trio had knelt beside their injured friend and were helping him up, they didn’t notice the old woman, didn’t pay any mind to her.

Not until she took a chunk out of the lady that had insisted on helping the old woman out of her car. Raven couldn’t take her eyes away, but she wished she had done the same as Elyza. She looked just like any old grandma at the store with her flower dress and her fluffy perm, just like every grandma except for the blood dripping down her chin and the stringy chunks of muscle she was ripping out of the poor woman’s back.

Elyza began to shift and Raven put her hands over Elyza’s, “Don’t look.”

“We should help them-” Elyza pushed Raven’s hands off her eyes in time to see the man stand over the grandma and begin bashing her face against the asphalt, over and over until he was splattered with blood and gore and knelt over his friends.

He started going through all of their pockets, taking everything he could before he took off running down the street without a backwards glance. “He’s just leaving them on the street?” Elyza was horrified by all of it, the gore and the brutality was just so inhumane, but he could have at least stayed with his friends who were writhing on the ground in pain, bleeding out.

The grandma must have gotten a major artery with her first bite… The man on the ground had already stopped moving. “That’s so awful… What the hell is wrong with people?” Elyza pushed herself off the counter and out of Raven’s arms, “What the hell is wrong with us? We just stood there and watched! We could have helped!”

“Elyza…” Raven ran a hand through her hair, “Even if we could have gotten there, what could we have done? That lady was crazy, she was-she was eating people! You don’t get that batshit insane and just go down.” She saw movement and Raven’s eyes went wide as saucers, “Oh my god.”

“What happened?” Elyza moved back to the window, unable to keep away from the grisly reminder of their new reality. “That’s not possible.”

The man was on his hands and knees, crawling towards the old woman’s body. There was no way he had survived that much blood loss, but he was up and moving.. And crouching.. And eating. Elyza put her hand over her mouth and ran for the nearest sink.

“That’s fucked up.” Raven mumbled.

“Did you hear that?”
“Rae I don’t think I can handle seeing anything else right now.” Elyza was trying everything she could to wash the taste of bile out of her mouth, but short of wasting water on a rinse and spit, she hadn’t come up with anything.

“It’s not outside.” Raven pressed her ear to the door, “I think there’s someone in the school.”

“Well let’s go then!” She grabbed the doorknob.

“Wait!” Raven slapped a hand onto the door, “What if they aren’t friendly? What if whoever’s out there took ‘flesh-eating disease’ to a whole new level? It’s not safe out there.”

“It’s not safe in here either.” Elyza snapped, “We’re surviving on a half empty vending machine and a few bottles of water, bottles that are going to run out pretty soon. Dying out there or in here, it’s all the same, the only question is how long it takes.”

Elyza grabbed her backpack and stormed out of the room, not waiting for Raven. “Fucking hell.” Raven shoved a few important things into a duffel and ran after Elyza as fast as her gimpy leg would let her.

Raven burst into the hallway and Elyza was nowhere to be seen. She could hear boots echoing on the linoleum but she couldn’t tell which way. “Elyza?” Raven hissed, her friend couldn’t have gotten far in the minute she was out of sight. “Elyza?” Raven raised her voice and winced as her echoes mixed with the bootsteps. “This place is fucking creepy!” She shouted, breaking into a slow jog down the hallway they had found the stairs on.

Raven clattered down the steps and rounded the corner just to run headlong into Elyza. Both girls let out a shriek and Raven bounced off her friend, landing on her ass. “What the fuck was that?” She snapped, pushing herself to her feet with a wince, “Don’t you ever do that to me again!” She yanked Elyza into her arms.

“I’m sorry,” Elyza wheezed, “You’re crushing me.”

“You deserve it! You scared the fuck out of me.” Raven smacked Elyza’s arm and put her head on Elyza’s shoulder to catch her breath, “Fuck man…”

“I noticed.” Elyza couldn’t help but chuckle, as soon as she’d left the safety of the lounge she realized how terrifying the abandoned hallways were without Raven cracking wise. Then she thought about the presence of a stranger, either infected or not and Elyza decided to wait for Raven to catch up. Just in time for her friend’s terrified yelling to bounce around the walls of the place in a dizzying cacophony. “You did your fair share of terrifying me too.” She bumped Raven’s shoulder, “I vote we find someplace that doesn’t sound like a haunted mansion.”

“I second that.” Raven grouched, “Now let’s find whoever is running around this empty hellhole so we can leave.”

Elyza nodded and turned around, “On the bright side, they know exactly where we are?”

Raven winced, “We might need to work on that stealth bit. Come on, they’re probably close to the door right?”

“Probably.” Elyza sounded about as sure as Raven did. Together they walked back to the main doors of the school, listening for something other than the sound of their own footsteps in the cavernous building.

“Have I mentioned that this place is really creepy?” Elyza whispered.
The sound of a gun cocking shattered the silence and caused both girls to spin around with wide eyes. A black woman with a shotgun was glaring at the girls, “Hands where I can see them.”

The girls put their hands up as soon as they processed the words. “I would offer to shake your hand but yours look full.” Raven quipped weakly, “Mind pointing the business end of that thing elsewhere? I like the current shape of my face.”

The woman snorted, “Either of you bitten?”

They shook their heads, “The old broad down the street tried on my friend, turns out backpacks are more than just a fashion choice.”

“You’re lucky.” She lifted the barrel of her gun, “You two have any weapons? Something to protect yourselves?”

“Uhh,” Elyza looked to Raven and she shrugged, “It wasn’t exactly a priority when we were jumping out the window of our appointment.”

“You’ll need this.” The woman pulled a wicked looking knife out of her boot and flipped it so the handle was towards Raven. Both girls looked confused and worried by the offer, “Take it.”

Elyza did as she was told, holding the weapon gingerly. The only knife she had ever held was a chef’s knife, this one did not feel like it was made for slicing cucumbers. “If you come across one of those things, you have to aim for the head.” The woman instructed, “Go for the-”

“Temple, base of skull, ear or eye socket. My mom’s a doctor, I know where the weakest parts of the skull are, but why would we kill people? They’re just sick.” Elyza wasn’t pleased at the implication that either she or Raven would have to hurt someone, let alone an invalid.

“That old broad that tried to bite you was dead. They’re all dead kid.” The woman shook her head, looking around the building, “If they get the chance, they’ll eat your fucking face off and then you’ll do the same. You die, you start eating people. Try to remember that next time somebody’s grandma tries to get you.”

Elyza looked dubious so Raven took the knife. “Noted. Thanks.”

The woman nodded, “You find any food in here? Or water? I’m trying to stock up.”

“Teacher’s lounge.” Elyza gestured, “Go down that hallway, take a right and the third left. It takes you to the stairs. The lounge is just around the corner, door locks and the machines are already open. There’s sodas and snacks.”

“Thanks kid.” The woman cracked a smile, “Be careful out there.”

“You too.” Elyza waved at the woman’s retreating back.
Field Trips the most Educational Experience

Chapter Summary

The mom squad is annoying, Anya is a Badass, and we meet somebody new.

Chapter Notes

We didn't forget...or I didn't forget Bookwyrm743 totally forgot lol. But here is the next chapter for your enjoyment, (Also it makes my soul happy to be posting an Anya/Alicia chapter because I feel like I haven't seen them in forever.)

By the time Anya had tossed together some snacks and a couple of handguns from her collection in the root cellar, Chris had gathered the rest of the children for her little outing. Madison was standing on the porch, watching them pack up so Anya made a good show of it. “Alright, get in the jeep. The fence isn’t going to check itself and you need to get yourselves back here and in bed, before you all turn to fucking pumpkins so move your asses.”

“Yes, sir!” Nick saluted and Anya’s hand twitched with the urge to smack that grin off his face. She lifted her hand to him and he grinned from ear to ear, ducking into the back of the car. Alicia hip checked Chris away from the passenger seat.

“Hey!” He looked to Anya for some kind of defense.

Anya snorted, “Kid you want it, you gotta fight for it. I don’t give two shits where you sit.”

“But she always gets shotgun!” He protested.

“And you always let her.” Anya replied, “So grow a pair, or sit your ass in the damn car.”

Chris glanced up to the porch where Madison was watching with a disapproving glare at Anya and pouted his way to the back seat. “Bunch of bullshit.” He muttered.

As soon as his door was shut Anya stepped on the gas, tearing across the property with a giant cloud of dust behind them. “You just have to accept the way of the world man,” Nick advised, “Girls sit up front, but guys get the snacks.” He smirked, lifting up Anya’s pack.

“Dude!” Chris high-fived Nick and pulled a protein bar out of the bag and started chowing down.

“Whoa…” Nick pulled a gun out of the backpack, “What are we doing out here?” He looked up at Anya.

“Checking the legitimacy of the mom squads claims, and working on your aim. If we have a bunch of crazy cannibals out here, then you’re going to need to know how to shoot a gun.”

“We’ve gone shooting before.” Chris rolled his eyes, “You know we can hit a target.”
Anya’s grip tightened on the wheel, “But can you hit a person?” She glanced over her shoulder at him, “It’s a hell of a lot different than shooting a rabbit or a coyote kid, even more so when they want to kill you too.”

Her words were met with silence as the kids remembered that they weren’t just on a visit to their aunt’s house. That this was not Auntie Anya the crankpot who kept Mr. Pickles The Fish alive just because she knew it was important to the kiddos.

This was Anya Forrester the Australian commando who kept three separate gun lockers in her root cellar and bought them all knives and self-defense classes for their birthdays.

They were quiet for the next thirty minutes, listening to the rumble of the engine and the crunch of dust and gravel beneath the wheels as they bounced over the badlands.

When Anya saw the fence she stepped on the brakes and turned them slowly so they stopped thirty feet before the barbed wire. “What the fuck is that?” Anya jumped out of the car and drew her gun in one smooth motion.

She looked back to the flabbergasted kids, “What the fuck is this?”

“Well Auntie Anya, those are people and those things are cars and those other things are tents,” Alicia gestured in front of her “and that is what most people call a tent city.”

Anya glared at Alicia and tightened her grip on her gun. “No shit Sherlock. What the fuck are they doing here?”

“Everyone is trying to get out of the city, it was Mom and Travis’ plan from the beginning. Guess everyone else thought it was a good idea too.” Nick shrugged and scuffed his foot. “Can we go back? It’s about time for my meds.”

“You just had a dose, Nick. You are supposed to be weaning off.” Alicia said, rolling her eyes at her brother.

“It’s not my fault that I’m still sensitive.” He grumbled, “It’s too early for once a day doses.”

“You had two doses today already and we need to make sure the meds last or you will have to go cold turkey on the last bit,” Alicia replied

Anya raised her eyebrows, “You done whining kid? This is a serious issue we’re talking about. You can handle a few hours sweating it out, what I can’t handle-” She turned around to the tent city and bellowed, “IS THIS BULLSHIT RIGHT HERE! YOU FUCKING SHIPRATS!”

Chris leaned towards Alicia, “What’s a shiprat? How is it different from a normal rat?”

“Does it really matter?” Alicia asked

“I dunno, she’s screaming it at strangers, so maybe?”

Alicia rolled her eyes, “No, it doesn’t freaking matter.”

“Freaking?” Nick asked

“All right, fuck this shit.” Anya threw herself back into the jeep and put it into gear, ripping down the rough track alongside the fence. “Come on, there has to be an end to this somewhere!” Anya hit the steering wheel, “Did all of California move out here last night?” She was starting to get antsy,
starting to feel trapped by the ocean of people that stopped right at the edge of her fence. How long until they needed more space and decided to move their invading asses onto her property? And how the fuck were they going to have enough water. That was going to be a problem first.

“Anya?” Alicia put a hand on her aunt’s arm, “Are you okay?”

“This is a problem, a fucking shitstorm” Anya shook her head “All these morons came to the desert to get away, but there are limited resources here. There’s only so much food, but before that becomes a problem, water will get everyone killed. Them for lack and us for having it.”

“Oh, shit.” Nick’s eyes were wide, he’d seen the same kind of thing all the time on the streets. Desperate junkies waiting around corners for the chance to jump someone after a meet with a dealer, people getting hurt even just for being in the area that people thought their fix would be. “This is bad.”

“You’re damn right it is, and there’s no way we can hide it out in the city either.” Anya chewed on her cheek, “There’ll still be too many fuckers there too. Let’s get back to the house, we’ve got to keep people off the land and away from us.

Anya stopped and pulled around, they still hadn’t gotten to the end of the tent city but it didn’t matter at this point. There were just too many people. It was time to keep themselves safe, at least long enough to figure out what the hell was happening.

“STOP!!” Chris yelled, startling everyone else in the Jeep.

“What the fuck?!” Anya yelled slamming on the brakes, but it was too late. Chris had vaulted himself out of the car as soon as it slowed down. He stumbled and tripped, his body confused as he started running towards a girl laying on the ground half in the overgrown runoff ditch. “What is happening?”

“She’s hurt!” Chris yelled over his shoulder as he came up on her.

“Oh god,” Alicia launched herself out of the vehicle after him, at best he would need help and at worst he would need a lot of help.

“We don’t help people!” Nick shouted

“What he said! We don’t help people when we have no fucking clue what is going on!” Anya agreed as she ran to where Chris and Alicia were bent over the injured, and apparently crying girl.

Nick snagged the bag full of handguns and ran after them, arms and legs flailing in a display that would have caused Anya physical pain if she had been paying enough attention to notice.

“Hey, hey stop crying, it’s okay.” Alicia rubbed the girl’s back, “Where are your parents?”

“I don’t know,” she cried.

“What happened?” Anya asked

“I don’t know! I was walking and then my ankle hurt and now it’s all swollen!” She blubbered, clinging to the woman’s leg.

“Is anything else injured?” Anya asked, once she received a head shake she bent down and picked the girl up “Get away from that ditch right now. There are snakes around here and we don’t need any more injuries. What’s your name?”
“Tris,” she sniffed

“It’s nice to meet you, Tris.” Alicia smiled at her, “We’re gonna take good care of you. I promise.”

Nick came running up, “What did I miss?”

Tris saw the bag of guns in his hand and recoiled, hiding her face in Anya’s shoulder, “Put those away, you idiot! And don’t run with guns, even if they are unloaded.” She snapped.

“They aren’t loaded?” Chris looked heartbroken.

“Of course they aren’t loaded. One of you would shoot someone in the ass. My ass looks great as it is, it would not be improved by a bullet.” Anya snarked.

Chris grimaced at the mental image and shook his head. Alicia brushed past him to open the door for Anya. “She can have my seat.”

“Yeah, of course you’ll give up shotgun for her.” Chris grouched

“Dude.” Nick smacked his arm, “She’s hurt. You go get bit by a snake and then you can have shotgun. Snake bites always supersede gender roles.”

“Oh my god, you’re both idiots.” Alicia was starting to get a twitch from all the eye rolling, it felt like any time someone opened their mouth she had to roll her eyes at the nonsense pouring out of them. Some things never changed.

They rolled up to the shack with Madison right where they left her except for the cup of tea steaming by her hand. Anya looked twice as pissed and didn’t bother explaining when she carried in a sniffling child that clung to her in a way that Travis couldn’t wrap his head around. Anya was not a maternal woman, or even a family woman as far as he could tell, but he recognized the look on her face as one that Madison had worn on many occasions. Usually when Nick was involved.

“Alicia what happened?” Madison turned to her daughter for information while Travis tried to interrogate Anya.

“Who is this? What happened to her? Is she sick? Anya, what’s going on? Why didn’t you call us for help.” Travis hovered over his half-sister with all the intensity of a mother hen and Anya was getting sick of his clucking.

“She’s a kid, don’t know, don’t care, figure it out and because you don’t know when to fucking shut up Travis.” Anya snarled, “So get the fuck out of my face.”

He put his hands up and backed up a little bit, his face scrunched up in concern. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Go see if emergency services are working yet. Nick, go downstairs and get the big first aid kit, it looks like a big toolbox.” Anya directed while placing Tris on the sofa

“I’ll get some water and blankets.” Madison turned to the little girl, “Are you hungry, have you eaten yet?”

Tris nodded to Madison’s question and Alicia crouched by Tris’ head, stroking her hair out of her face, “See? You’re gonna be just fine. My aunt Anya is the best right?”
“She’s not even really your aunt, Alicia,” Chris commented.

“Shut the fuck up Chris.” Alicia slapped her leg. “I’m so fucking done with your bullshit!”


“Don’t talk to Chris like that,” Travis said in the same moment.

“How about you all shut up?” Anya suggested, pissed off that the sudden tension in the room was freaking Tris out. If the girl’s heart rate kicked up at all, it would only help the venom kill her faster.

Liza and Nick walked in toting the heavy first aid kit and dropped it next to Anya with a thud. “Hey there honey,” Liza smiled, “We’re gonna get you fixed right up okay? I’m Liza.”

Tris offered her a weak smile and Liza looked up at Travis, “Would you mind clearing the room? We want her to be comfortable, being on display like this can’t be helping her stay calm.”

“Uhm, sure. Let’s move out to the deck. And Anya, emergency services are still down. Not even a message on when they’ll be back up again.” Travis said as he herded people to the door.

Anya grunted, focused on the dark bruising around Tris’ ankle. She wanted it covered up before the girl could see the swelling and blackened skin. “We need a marker and a compression bandage.” She muttered, turning to dig through the first aid kit, but Liza already had the supplies in hand. “Thanks.” Together the women marked the circumference of the swelling and wrapped Tris’ leg up to her mid-thigh while Alicia held the girl’s hand.

“Get her some water,” Anya ordered Alicia and took her place by Tris’ head. “Tell me about yourself kid.”

“Um, I’m 10 and I go to Washington Elementary school. And I have a dog named Nero and I play soccer.” Tris said, wincing as her leg was wrapped

Anya nodded, trying to find a connection to the kid. “Huh, well we don’t have a dog, but we have a fucking fish in the bathroom, you like fish kid?”

“Anya, why are you so foul-mouthed? She’s just a kid and you shouldn’t use language like that around her. Or around Chris either.” Liza scolded

“I dunno, why are you such a fucking sneaky bitch? I swear you just show up and then disappear. You sure you aren’t a ghost or some shit?” Anya narrowed her eyes at Liza.

Alicia and Tris looked at each and snickered into their shoulders.

“I am not a ghost or something.” Liza rolled her eyes, checking the tightness of the wrap, “I just don’t feel the need to be in everyone’s face about being here.” She shot a look at the front door, “I’m grateful to have a place to stay, so I keep out of your way.”

“Well.” Anya blinked, “That’s almost thoughtful.”
Car batteries, who knew?

Chapter Summary

Memes are had, crackers are shared, and Grandma Reyes is disappointed. Also wand jokes!

Chapter Notes

Good heavens, I must say that is is odd, confuzzling and downright weird to go back to these early chapters for posting, because me and Wanheda are like a hundred odd pages ahead of this moment and things have changed so much and yet not at all. It's like being on a treadmill but a montage of your life is flashing by, and you stop on the treadmill and realize that you are in fact the end of the montage.

Raven stopped dead in her tracks, “Oh my god, it's the Wong Fook Hing book store, Elyza we have to go in.”

“Shh!” Elyza smacked Raven’s arm and looked over her shoulder at the trio of people grumbling to themselves across the street. She wasn’t sold on the woman’s story that all people were dangerous, but she wasn’t going to take her chances helping them either.

Raven ducked into the cozy room with a massive grin, “Dude, this is it! This is our new home.”

“Are you serious?” Elyza shook her head, “Any reason besides the name?” She gave the security bars across the windows a shake. They were practically worthless. Elyza had a baby gate that was sturdier than this useless piece of decorative scrap.

“I don’t need one, but those bookcases would make a mighty fine barricade don’t you think?” Raven waggled her eyebrows, pointing to the rows of shelves sitting on the back half of the store. The front half was a little java cafe with tables and wire wrought chairs. The nice kind that made your back sore after a few hours instead of minutes.

“Maybe, but are you going to accept anything other than a yes no matter what I say?” Elyza asked, moving towards the door

“I have no idea how to answer that but we are staying.” Raven put her hands on her hips and looked around with pride in their new home, “I don’t even need to come up with a name for this baby.”

“Well help me get into the store and we can see what you’ve decided we are going to deal with. Maybe we will get lucky and there will be some food, or water. Probably too much to ask for a shower.” Elyza tugged on the door handle.

“Babe please.” Raven booty-bumped Elyza out of the way and pulled out her trusty screwdriver, “Time to work some magic.” She had the door open with minimal damage in thirty seconds.
“Yeah well if you were really magic you’d get me a cheeseburger and a milkshake. Now put your wand away and let’s check this place out already. Those people are creepy.” Elyza pushed at Raven’s arm trying to get her to move into the store.

“You’re just jealous that my wand is bigger.” Raven tucked it into her pants with a smirk and sauntered into the store.

“I’d suggest that size doesn’t matter, only how you use it, but I don’t think that’d work too well for me.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“Sorry cutie, you’re not my type.” Raven ducked under the counter, “You’re like a sister to me and incest just isn’t my thing.”

“Well thank fuck for that.” Elyza started walking towards the back of the store, checking out the bookcases. “Hey there’s another door back here, but it doesn’t seem to open. So much for a fire escape.”

“Maybe it goes to an upstairs apartment or something?” Raven’s voice was muffled behind the counter, she was crouched low and digging around for anything interesting.

“I don’t know, but we aren’t getting through that, it doesn’t even budge.” Elyza came out from the stacks, “I’m going to check out the loft and see what’s up there.”

“Scream if someone tries to eat you.” Raven snickered.

“I usually do.” Elyza smirked

“That’s my girl.” Raven’s head popped up, “Wait what??”

Elyza walked up the stairs laughing at Raven’s face.

“Shut the fuck up!” Raven yelled, “Or I won’t give you any of the goodies I find.”

“Not my fault you’re clueless. Also there are some sofa’s up here. They’ll be a lot more comfortable than the floor of the teacher’s lounge was. And I will cut you if you don’t share food.” Elyza called over the edge of the railing.

“Oh my god, who is your most favoritest bitch in the world?” Raven called up, her grin obvious in her tone.

“Me.” Elyza responded, “But you’re a close second, what’d you find?”

“Well fuck you too. I’m keeping it.” Raven snarked, “No grilled cheese for you!”

“No the fuck way! If you don’t share I will shave your head while you sleep!” Elyza came running down the stairs.

“Who says I’m sleeping in the same place as you? This is my kingdom now bitch and I am queen of the cheese.”

“Weren’t we talking just a few days ago about how you burn everything? Hope you enjoy those carbon bricks.” Elyza taunted. “And don’t forget to make it to the toilet when you’ve poisoned yourself.”

Raven had no retort to that, she’d spent one too many nights puking up the messes she’d tried to disguise under ketchup and any other condiment she could scrounge up. “I take it back, you are the
biggest bitch.”

“Damn right, now show me the goods and we’ll be eating like queens.” Elyza ducked under the counter and joined Raven. “Once we’ve eaten we should probably do something to make this place a little safer. It took no time to get in here and those bars are useless.”

“I’ll just put you in front, your tongue should be sharp enough to deal with anyone that tries to walk in.” Raven snarked, “Besides we need to scavenge one of the car batteries out there before we start the lockdown. I can’t get this press working without a little juice.” She put the panini press she found onto the counter.

“Ooook. I’ll let you get right on that and assume it’s possible.” Elyza raised her eyebrow skeptically. “And I’d probably just need to be quiet and they’ll follow the sound of your voice and then you can deal with them.”

“It’s a good thing I like you Lex.” Raven muttered, “There’s cheese and bread in that mini fridge,” She pointed, “It’s the good shit too.”

“Rae, you think anything that isn’t velveeta is the good shit.” Elyza ducked down to look into the fridge.

Raven narrowed her eyes, “That’s because Velveeta is scraped out of Lucifer’s armpit and served on a nice ass flavored platter.”

‘Wow, ok, them’s some strong feelings on velveeta you have there.” Elyza pulled out the cheese and mayo packets. “And this is not the good shit, this is the tolerable shit.”

“It’s not wonderbread and plastic so I’m going to call it the good shit and move on.” Raven rolled her eyes and walked out of the java shop with a dark look, “Thanks Raven for finding dinner, it might be the last time we ever have cheese again and I’m really grateful, no honestly, you’re the best.” She muttered to herself, popping the hood on the nearest car to start the process of removing the battery.

Raven came back in toting the battery, still muttering to herself as she dug her emergency kit out of her bag and went ham on the thing. By the time she was done it was a mess of wires and looked ready to catch on fire at any moment, but Raven seemed impressed with herself. “Done.”

“We’ve only got cold water, but I got the coffee pot cleaned out so if you get that set-up too, we can have coffee in the morning.” Elyza started placing sandwiches on the warming press. “And maybe you should go find the fire extinguisher, just in case that thing explodes.”

Raven wasn’t there to whine at Elyza’s lack of faith in her. As soon as there was mention of coffee, any kind of coffee, Raven was out the door in search of another battery. She would have her cake and damn well drink it too. Metaphorically speaking.

“I’ve got grilled cheese sandwiches, pickles and I found a package of cookies. They probably aren’t great, but it’s still chocolate.” Elyza help up the package.

“Perfect, I’ve got the coffee machine ready to go for the morning, and I think if we break down some of those chairs we can make some decent spear things.” Raven nodded to herself, looking like she was already working on ways to turn the shop into a death trap.

“I was just thinking we don’t want someone to come in and surprise us. What the fuck do we need spears for?” Elyza asked looking confused.
“Dude we have grilled cheese sandwiches. I would stab a bitch for that. Let alone the privilege of walking into the Wong Fook Hing book store to pick a fight. Life doesn’t get better than that babe, we have to protect our considerable assets.”

“Rae, Love. You don’t have considerable assets.”

“You have enough for both of us.” Raven teased, snagging a sandwich for herself.

“Hell I know. I was hoping the lack of food would help with that.” Elyza turned to check out her ass, “Sadly it’s still there.”

“Some of us are just cursed with more boobs than brains I’m afraid.” Raven lamented, trying to restrain her grin.

“And some of us are fantastic enough to have both, thank you ever so fucking much.” Elyza smacked Raven’s arm. “But seriously, spears?”

Raven chewed thoughtfully, “I dunno, it just feels right. Like…” She tried to quantify the feelings that had been rising ever since that old lady had tried to take a chunk out of Eliza, “It doesn’t feel like everything is just going to go back to normal. I want,” She scuffed her foot on the floor, “I want to sleep and not be afraid to wake up?”

“Do you think that lady was right? That people are dangerous?” Elyza asked, her expression just a bit sad and a lot serious. “Mom said this is serious, but that lady made it sound almost like the world is ending.”

“I mean… We just broke into someone’s store and started mutilating their appliances. I stole car batteries? Shit is definitely weird. You would never have let me do something like that without at least three fire extinguishers within arm’s reach and now you’re asking me to do it to the coffee maker too?” Raven pointed out, trying to skirt around the violence with which that man had smashed grandma’s head into the asphalt.

There was a reason she covered Elyza’s eyes. She could barely think about it herself, but it was always in the back of her head, and if she was being honest, it was the biggest reason she wanted spears. She didn’t want to become that person herself, not if she could avoid it.

“I…” Elyza started, “I think things are going to get worse before they get better.” Elyza paused again, blinking watery eyes “If they ever get better. I don’t think things are ever going to be the same again Raven. I’m a little bit scared about what we are going to have to do.”

Raven hooked her arm around Elyza, “Hey, none of that worry shit. If anyone even looks at you wrong I’ll strap a grenade to their dick, remember? That’s how it’s always been and that’s how it stays. Spears means people are too scared to try and take our shit. Fear is for the uninitiated.”

Raven grinned from ear to ear, shoving her own worries deep down.

Elyza nodded her head. She had known Raven too long to fail to see her worry in her eyes, but she could definitely follow her example. “Ok, then let’s barricade ourselves in here with the bookcases, load them up so we are protected and then you can show me how to make a spear out of a chair.”

“It’s like you read my mind.” Raven shoved the rest of her sandwich into her mouth and grinned around it, “Kom wif ee.”

“God you are disgusting.” Elyza grimaced, “I happen to know that Grandma Reyes would smack the back of your head if she saw you do that. Ew.”
“Gamma ez izn ear.” Raven said around her food, strolling into the back of the shop with one hand out, casually knocking all the books on the shelves to the floor.

After thoroughly reprimanding Raven for her incessant need to destroy everything, Elyza helped Raven move the bookcases from the downstairs cubby, layering them three deep in front of the windows and loading them up with books again. It had taken the rest of the day so Raven had suggested scooting the last case over a few feet to cover the door as well and call it a night.
The hand that bites the snake that feeds you OR It's my goddamn boat.

Chapter Summary

We find our little band returning from their field trip with a new member of the party, and a brand new complication that might finally illuminate the situation for those who are still in the dark.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hey kid, how you feeling?” Anya asked softly as she checked on Tris. It was still early, the sun wasn’t even up yet, but Anya was used to early hours and didn’t see the point in laying in bed just because she had visitors.

“My leg hurts and I’m cold” Tris whispered, shifting down under the blankets a bit more.

Anya walked over to the chest that served as a coffee table and pulled out another blanket, laying over the ones already covering the little girl. “This should help you get warmed up. I’m going to unwrap your leg where the bite was ok?” Tris nodded and Anya turned on a dim lamp in the corner before unwrapping her leg a bit. “Well it doesn’t look great, but it doesn’t look any worse, so that’s something. Do you need anything?”

“No, I just want to go back to sleep.” Tris mumbled, almost back to sleep already.

Anya rose and grabbed clothes out of the dryer before heading into the bathroom to change. It was just a few minutes later that she put a cup of water on the coffee table for Tris before nudging Liza awake.

“I’m going out for a run, I checked on Tris already and she seems to be hanging in there, but keep an eye on her. I’ll be back in an hour.” Anya didn’t bother waiting for acknowledgment before she headed through the front door and began her normal route.

The sky was getting brighter quickly, illuminating the path in front of her as Anya began to hit her stride. This run was usually the most peaceful part of her day, no people and no bullshit, but today there was an added heaviness to it. Despite the fact that she knew this path well enough to run it in the dark, today there was an unknown element. That tent city had sprung up within 24 hours and there was no telling what had become of it, or what damage had been done to her property. Yes there were fences and the like, but most people assumed the desert was empty and that the land belonged to no one. It wouldn’t be a stretch to find people squatting on her land. Or even worse, to find people hunting for water on her land. As far as she knew, Anya had the only well within 20 miles, and while it was enough to sustain her it wouldn’t even sustain all of her guests for too long. The damn drought affected more than just commercial growers and green yards, everyone always seemed to forget that.

She could hear the distant sounds of people carried on the wind and a wariness she rarely felt at home seeped into Anya’s bones. Her eyes scanned the horizon and then swept the region in front of her at a mile, half a mile and a hundred yards, over and over she followed the pattern trained into her by a thousand watches over her fellow soldiers. The missing weight of her sidearm felt like a
slap to the face for being so careless.

Anya picked up the pace, trying to find her zen. There was too much going on and she was starting to miss things. Leaving the house without her fucking sidearm was the height of stupidity with all this shit going on. Whatever the fuck was actually going on. Indra was not prone to exaggeration, hell Anya had seen maybe one obvious emotion in the last 5 years of working with the Colonel. Since it was Colonel Pines she was to be believed without hesitation and that meant that Anya should be on high alert. Instead she was distracted by a house full of her useless family, a girl with a rattlesnake bite, and a tent city.

Anya began strategizing as she continued her run. It was a great time to make plans without distractions. First thing was to arm herself, and probably the kids too. Travis would be worthless with a gun, he could shoot but he’d just whine about it. Madison and Liza might know how to shoot, but the kids had been shooting with Anya for a few years. It had started when Travis had first introduced Madison, Alicia and Nick. Nick had been a hot mess fresh out of a rehab, Alicia had barely said two words the first day and Chris had not stopped whining about something or other the whole fucking weekend. Fed up, Anya had dragged them to a fair without Travis and Madison, which had resulted in the fucking fish taking up residence with her and lessons on how to handle guns. The couple had both been pissed about it, but Anya couldn’t care less. This was America and everyone should know how to handle a firearm since they were so easy to access.

Once everyone was armed, securing the well should be the next step. She had exterior access for testing and cleaning the well and shit so she should make...

“What the fuck?” Anya’s line of thought was interrupted as she spotted someone on the road up ahead. Anya slowed and came to a halt, squatting down as she watched what looked like a guy stumbling on the road up ahead. That wasn’t the issue, the issue was that his neck was not at a normal angle. His ear was resting easily on his shoulder and the bones in his neck were oddly bunched and he didn’t seem bothered by it at all. She was pretty sure that he should be dead, yet here he was up and moving. His gait was weird and she continued to observe how he moved, slow and stumbling but not phased by tripping or something in his path. He just kept moving, seemingly without aim. He was also making guttural noises without stopping. It was disturbing to hear the constant nonsensical noises, reminiscent of someone dying in extreme pain. As she continued to watch, Anya became aware of another noise, faint due to the distance and the noise of the ambling man.

It took a moment to figure out what it was and she identified it as a rattlesnake just moments before she saw the snake spring and bit the man she had been watching. Anya began to rise in concern but quickly sank back down into a crouch as the man failed to react at all to the strike.

Her concern quickly turned to disbelief as the man began to reach for the snake that had just bit him.

The snake sprang at him again and he tried to catch the damn thing! She continued to watch as the man caught the snake clumsily on its third strike, her eyes widening as he opened his mouth and bit down on the snake that was still attempting to strike at him.

No fucking way. It was time to get the fuck out of here.

Anya slowly backed away from where she had ducked in the scrub before turning around and began back to the house, taking the shorted path and increasing her speed to get back faster. She made it back to the house in record time with a stitch in her side. Anya climbed back up the porch
fighting to get air into her lungs.

Anya had met a lot of badasses in her day, but not one of them would have taken a rattlesnake bite to the eye without flinching. Let alone have the balls to bite back. “Anya are you okay?” Travis offered her a hand, “Did something happen?”

Anya brushed his hand away, “I’m good. Has breakfast been made yet?”

“Madison and Alicia are working on it now, I think the eggs are done, if you want something?”

“I’ll be back in a few, I need a shower. Has Tris drunk that water yet?” Anya moved into the house.

“I uh, I don’t know, I’ll check with Liza.” He looked over his shoulder for Liza, then back to Anya, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Just need a shower.” Anya walked towards the bathroom, “I’ll be back in 20, make sure Tris drinks that water, and I’ll check on her leg again when I’m out, the bandage needs to be changed.”

Travis stepped out of the way for Anya, deciding he was lucky she hadn’t bitten him yet and went to help the girls in the kitchen. Anya ducked into the bathroom and with a click the door was locked.

She slid to the floor, elbows on her knees and hands on her head. That guy had a broken neck, she’d seen it once before when one of her SO’s got into a wreck, nearly ripped his head off. He didn’t get up from that, but this guy, this snake-eating tourist with the broken neck was just waltzing around on her property and holy shit. Indra was not lying? “What the fuck is going on?” She mumbled.

Anya’s mind was doing a full-on death spiral, but she began going through the motions of a shower. Hot water, shampoo, soap all the normal things. All things that could not distract her from the fact that things were very much not normal and for the first time in years, Anya did not know how the fuck to deal.

When her twenty was up, and she turned off the water, her body on auto-pilot, Anya decided that dealing was overrated. Dealing could wait until they had a game plan. Until then, she would sit up, shut down and get shit done.

“After breakfast I want to run everyone through the guns. I don’t want any stupid accidents. We won’t do target practice, there’s too many people out there, but everyone needs to know their way around the guns and everyone needs to be armed, even if it’s just a seal pup.”

Chris raised his hand, “What is a seal pup and why are we using them as weapons?”

“Its a knife and we use them because they are sharp and pointy.” Anya snarked at Chris as she sat at the table and began filling her plate with food. “After we run through the weapons, I want the boys to help me secure the well and the house.”

“Jeez, somebody got up on the wrong side of the bed.” Chris muttered

“That’s enough Christopher, your aunt is trying to help.” Liza chided before looking up at Anya with raised eyebrows, “And you, we already have a little girl with an injured leg, do you really want to put someone else on that list? Guns?”

“Let me rephrase that for Liza,” Madison snapped, “Guns?!! They’re kids! I don’t know what’s wrong with you, but there is no way you are giving my children guns.”
The kids all looked at each and shrugged “Anya’s been teaching us how to use guns since the first time we met her. I don’t think I’ve ever been here more than a day or two and not done target practice.” Alicia said “I’m a better shot than Chris and Nick, not that that’s a surprise.”

“Hey! I’d be an amazing shot if I wasn’t always shaky” Nick retorted

“You’re always shaky because of the drugs you moron.” Chris shoveled food in his mouth, barely taking the time to chew.

“I don’t care what you’ve been doing behind our backs.” Madison snapped, “You aren’t getting guns. None of you are old enough to understand what it means to use one, and I’m not going to let you hurt yourselves.”

“First of all, not only are they old enough to understand what it means to use one for self-defense, they are also old enough to die if someone decides that we have something that they want, like water.” Anya glared at the adults around the table. “Second of all, my house, my fucking rules. You want to be here, then you will not only learn how to use the weapons I have available you will also be armed and able to protect yourself.”

“Then we’ll leave.” Madison stood up from the table.

“Madi-” Travis grabbed her elbow, “Think about what you’re saying.”

“I am Travis. Kids pack your things, we’re leaving.”

Nick huffed, “And where are we going to go huh? Back to LA?”

“Anywhere but here.” Madison snapped.

“No.” Alicia glared at her mother, “We came here for a reason. To be safe, that’s what you said. Did you think we were going to hide in the basement or something? Mrs. Tran tried to attack me, and Mr. Dawson attacked the Cruz’s and killed their dog! Mom if we want to be safe we have to be willing to fight for ourselves. That starts here. With the weapons that Anya is giving us.”

“I’m more than willing to do what it takes to protect us, Alicia, but you are children. You are not responsible for our safety. We are your parents and we will take care of you.” Madison responded.

“Oh you’re going to protect us now?” Alicia laughed, “Like you took care of us when dad died?” As soon as the words passed her lips, she regretted it, but she stood by it. “You haven’t taken care of me in years, you’ve been too busy pretending that everything is okay. And Nick has been on his own even longer!” She pointed at her brother, “You need to wake up mom. This is the first time you’ve been there for us in a long time.”

“Alright, enough!” Anya stood from the table. “If anyone doesn’t like the idea of weapons, they are welcome to leave, but no one is forcing anyone else to leave. If the kids are willing to protect themselves then I won’t let you force them to leave.”

Madison looked between her two kids. Alicia was defiant, if a little guilty for the things she’d said, and Nick had his arms folded and his head down. It was a pose she knew well from her visits to his rehab. If she wanted to be there for her kids, she would have to let this one go. “I guess I have no choice.” She mumbled, sitting back down.

Travis and Liza looked away from a muted conversation they had also been having and both nodded their agreement. They would stay as well. “Guess that’s settled then. Finish eating and clean up, I’ll take care of Tris then we get to work.”
Anya walked to the sofa where Tris was still asleep with a bit of concern. They hadn’t exactly been quiet during their breakfast discussion and it really should have woken the girl. She also hadn’t drunk the water that Anya had left beside her, fucking Travis. “Tris, wake up sweetie.” Anya shook Tris’ shoulder trying to get her to wake up.

The girl’s small face pinched in pain and she twisted on the couch, trying to get comfortable again, eyes clamped shut.

“Come on Tris, I really need you to wake up. You need to drink some water and I’ve got food for you.” Anya shook her shoulder again

“I’m not hungry.” Tris popped one eye open and grimaced at the light, “I’m sleepy and my leg hurts.”

“You can sleep again after you’ve eaten, but you won’t get better if you don’t have any energy.” Anya scolded softly, still trying to be gentle

Tris opened the other eye and stuck her lip out into a pout, “Do I have to eat? My tummy aches.”

Anya’s face and voice hardened “Yes, you do have to eat.”

She looked down at the floor and nodded, “Can you bring it to me?”

“It’s right here for you.” Anya held up the plate and waited for Tris to reposition herself on the sofa. The girl did as she was told, scooting up just enough to put the plate on her lap and eat slowly. “Do you need to use the bathroom?”

Tris shook her head as she continued to eat slowly. “You let me or Liza know if you do okay?” Anya lifted Tris’ chin just long enough to ensure the girl heard and would say something. “Good, I’ll be back in a few hours, rest up kid.” Anya mussed Tris’ hair with a small smile. Tris returned it shyly and ate with a little more enthusiasm.

Anya went out the front door and around to the basement, it was time to start pulling resources up to the main house. It was the only downside of her home, no internal access to the basement. Anya started unloading the contents of the basement, everyone else could move it from the top of the stairs into the house.

“Start stacking stuff in the dining room, we can eat on the floor as long as we need to.” Anya told Travis as he came down the stairs. “I wasn’t planning on having so many people around in case of emergency so we will need to be careful and make do with what we’ve got.”

He nodded, “Got it, I’ll get the boys to help too.” He offered her a hesitant smile, “Thank you again for taking us in.”

Anya rolled her eyes “Grandmother would roll over in her grave if I didn’t.”

“I-” He balked a little at the realization that that was the only reason, “W-well thanks. I don’t think I could have kept them safe on my own.”

Anya didn’t say anything but she agreed. Travis was not good at doing hard things. If he could find a way to avoid doing something he didn’t want to do, he would let the earth burn to avoid it. It was not a good habit at any point in time, but especially not after what she had seen this morning.
With help from the boys, Anya managed to unpack all the essentials from the cellar, leaving behind a few of the larger add-ons for the Jeep and the gas cans for her backup generator. It only took them a few hours, but that was enough.

“Anya get up here!” Liza called from the house.

Chapter End Notes

Woot! We are going to double post because with the 9-15 page chapters in your future, it feels cruel and unusual to make you wait for 3000 word posts. That being said, it's our goddamn boat and we may make you wait for a 3000 word post in the future. Because we can.
Chapter Summary

Elyza and Raven butt heads at the junction between good intentions and common sense, leaving themselves just a little bit confused, and a lottabit naive. They also go shopping.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Okay, so once you file down the ends here, you have yourself a nice spike, see?” Raven held up her wrought iron fork for Elyza to examine. Honestly it just looked like she broke the back off one of the chairs and filed down the pieces that had been socketed in the wood. Not difficult, but very time consuming.

“Remind me why we can’t just leave the bookcase in front of the door again?”

Raven rolled her eyes, “It’s an escape route, we need to have it secure just in case the alley behind the shop isn’t safe.”

“Safe from what? Sick people?” Elyza tossed her file aside, frustrated by the rampant paranoia surrounding those who had been infected. Maybe they were more aggressive, but she wouldn’t just walk around killing people just because they caught the bug.

“Safe from cannibals.” Raven raised a finger, “And safe from people like us who like to make spikes out of chairs.” She raised her second finger, “And finally, people are just generally bad to keep around, they eat all your food and make you share the couch which I for one am not going to do. So safe is just a general term for no one else is going to touch our stuff.”

“Well speaking of stuff, we need food. The cheese and bread is almost gone.” Elyza continued moving the broken remains of chairs out of the way. “On the upside though, we have enough coffee to last us a year.”

“Thank fuck. I can live on coffee alone as long as necessary.” Raven set the homemade spear down. “And there was a grocery store on the corner, we can check in there and see what they have.”

“Ok. I’ll go empty out the backpack, we can just load that up and then I’ll be ready to go.” Elyza started up the stairs to the loft.

Raven stood up and started getting her brace adjusted. She had loosened it shortly after they got started filing the chair spears down, needing it to be a bit more comfortable, but it didn’t do any good when it was loose and she really couldn’t walk much without it. She picked up the spears and handed one of them to Elyza, who had come down with them empty backpack slung across her shoulder.

“Why are we taking the spears?” Elyza asked

“Because it’ll really fucking suck if we need them and don’t have them. If we don’t need them and
have them, then no harm done.” Raven answered as she looked out the front window to see if anyone was watching. Finding no one she pulled open the door and waited for Elyza to exit before using the key she had found in the office/cleaning closet to lock the door. She gave the door a little shove and turned around, satisfied that it was properly locked.

The girls moved down the street away from their bookstore looking around. The street was dead quiet, which was odd. There were no cars driving down the street, no people walking down the sidewalk (other than them), there wasn’t even any ambient noise from too loud TV’s and radios. All of the store fronts that they walked past looked deserted, although they weren’t obviously closed. There were no bars pulled over doors, no ‘Sorry, We’re Closed’ signs showing, some of the stores still had their outside display out. But despite those signs of normal business, every store they passed gave off the same eerie feeling as a ghost town.

“Ok this is too fucking creepy” Raven said, her voice seeming even louder than usual in the odd silence. “This is California, nothing is ever this quiet. Ever.”

“I think I’ve been in cemeteries that were noisier than this street is” Elyza agreed.

“Especially if we were there!” Raven laughed. “But seriously, lets move a little faster. I want to get back to the store.”

“You sure your leg can handle faster?” Elyza asked getting a glare from Raven in return. “Alright, alright. You’ll tell me if we need to slow down and you’ll do it before the pain gets too bad.” Elyza gave Raven a commanding look. “We don’t have access to an ER or pain meds if you overdo it and your back or legs spasm.”

“I’ll let you know, Mom.” Raven rolled her eyes

“Hey,” Elyza bumped Raven’s shoulder, “You’re important, I couldn’t do this without you.”

“You bet your ass you can’t.” Raven smirked.

“Then take care of yourself.” Elyza flicked Raven’s head, “So I don’t have to.”

“Abuse!” Raven called out, laughing as Elyza tried to take another swipe at her. To their right someone took a deep breath that seemed to rattle in their lungs and exhaled a low growl. “Oh fuck..” Raven stumbled back a step.

Elyza caught her, taking a step back herself. “I-It’s fine. Look, he’s trapped.” She pointed to the thick rope tied around his waist, holding him back from them. “He can’t get to us Raven.” Elyza promised, her grip a little too tight on Raven’s arms, but neither girl was confident enough to comment on it.

“Right.” Raven nodded, pointing her spear at the man, “You heard the lady, fuck off and find somebody else to munch on.” He snapped his jaws at her, straining against the rope and Raven stuck her tongue out at him.

Elyza tugged her arm, “Okay, enough playing with the other kids. Let’s get what we came for and go Rae.”

“Yeah.” Raven shrugged, “You’re lucky Elyza’s scared you little shit. I’ll kick your ass if I see you again.”

“Yeah I’m totally the one shaking in my boots.” Elyza rolled her eyes. “Is this the place you were talking about?”
“Yeah this is the one.” Raven kicked a rock at the guy who was tied up and turned back around to the store and dragged the door open with a cringe inducing screech of metal on concrete.

“Rae, no one is in here.” Elyze said looking at the vacant checkout counter.

“After that noise can you blame them? I kinda want to rip my own ears off.” She gestured for Elyza to go in first. “Move it. I’m not waiting for someone to come back just so I can eat lunch.”

“Rae, I can’t swipe my damn card! How are we going to pay for lunch?” Elyza moved into the store slowly.

Raven rolled her eyes, “I have some cash from my last rent check, I figured hell the world is ending, not like anyone’s going to bother evicting me over a late letter.” She shrugged it off before Elyza could even start getting mad about such irresponsibility, “We can just leave it on the till.”

“Ugh, fine. I’m still not sure that’s ok, but whatever.” Elyza grabbed a basket and started through the aisles.

“We can write a firmly worded letter about their consistency during societal collapse later honey.” Raven patted her shoulder.

Elyza laughed, shaking her head. “Ok, I can see your point. But there’s no need to be a snarky bitch about it.”

“Girl, when have I ever been anything else?” Raven raised her eyebrow and tossed two packs of oreos into the cart. “Come on, it’s grocery time and I am starving.”

“Should we maybe get real food and not junk shit with our limited resources?” Elyza scolded Raven.

“You mean my limited resources? Yeah we’re getting junk shit. You can keep your nasty ass vegetables.”

“Well the next time I make grilled cheese sandwiches you can sit in the corner with your junk food and watch me eat it.” Elyza replied adding cans of soup to the basket.

“Maybe I was going to be nice and leave a pack for the guy outside and share with you.” Raven stuck her tongue out, “You’ll never know now will you.”

“You?! Share oreos?! When did hell freeze over?” Elyza laughed

“About the same time you became a total bitch.” Raven groused, tossing a bagged salad that only looked a little iffy into the cart with a dirty look.

“Oh honey, I’ve been a bitch since the day I learned to talk so that isn’t really a thing.” Elyza gave her a look “And if you think salad is the only vegetable we are getting you’ll need to get your head checked.”

“And who’s gonna check it hmmn? I don’t think all the car batteries in the world are going to help a dead MRI figure out my genius brain.” Raven dug through some of the lower shelves and emerged victorious with a heavily battered box of ramen. “VICTORY!”

“And here I thought you were a genius.” Elyza snarked, “Hospitals have backup generators you dofus. The MRI’s aren’t dead.”
“Ahh, but they also have all the good drugs.” Raven tapped her nose, “I bet all the junkies in LA, and that’s a hell of a lot, went right for the hospitals and are waging wars over who gets the first taste of those yummy narcotics.”

“Have you ever tried to break into those medicine lockers?” Elyza asked, “On second thought don’t answer that, but they are almost impossible to get into if you don’t know what you are doing and no way in hell can you get into them if you are high or dropping.”

“Like I said, all the junkies are fighting over who gets the first taste. I bet that’s where all those nutters are.” Raven spread her arms and looked around, “Cus I’m not seeing anyone here, and even in the burbs we are a crowded ass city Elyza. They have to be somewhere.”

“Maybe they are all off at burning man?” Elyza suggested, “I’d be good with that.”

“All of fucking LA?” Raven rolled her eyes, “Oh my god at least with Finn you knew something was going on. Wake up and taste the napalm honey, Mr. Rope over there is the only fucking person we’ve seen since the goddamn african commando gave us a knife and sent us on our merry way, and we are here squabbling over how we are going to pay for the fucking groceries!” She kicked a box of crackers and sent it flying down the aisle, spraying crumbs everywhere.

“It’s not like I don’t know that something is going on Raven, but I also don’t know that I can believe that this is reality and not some post-junk food gorge and halloween movie induced nightmare. Because I’ve got a thought or two about this and it shouldn’t be happening outside of a badly written fic.” Elyza had gotten serious.

“Yeah well shitty character motivation or not, something is going on and if it’s a dream we’re sharing a little too much even for family.” Raven muttered, “Let’s get your damn vegetables and get the hell out of here.”

“Already got them. I know if I don’t sneak them in you will find a way to avoid getting them at all.” Elyza started putting their items in shopping bags.

Raven watched Elyza pack the plastic bags and thought about how hellish it was going to be lugging them across two blocks of vaguely mangled roads and decided not to mention their empty backpacks. For Elyza’s mental health, she would just go with it. Raven slapped down an approximation of how much their trip should cost and scooped up half the bags. “Ready to go shopping barbie?”

“You’re just jealous of my fantastic looks.” Elyza grabbed the rest of the bags and started towards the door.

Raven grinned and did her best impersonation of Barbie’s voice, “But Elyza, how could I be jealous of someone so magical and fantastical as you?” She had endured endless hours of those damn movies for Elyza’s sake, and she made sure to bring it up every chance she got. “You’re my best friend!”

“And I endured fucking endless hours of fucking transformers and fucking Tron. There’s literally nothing interesting about them. Never has been, never will be. I thought my eyes would start to bleed last time you turned one of them on!” Elyza groaned

“I don’t know, fucking transformers sounds like one hell of a feat of organic machinery.” She snorted, “At least they kicked ass instead of riding retarded dragons.”

Elyza was cracking up “You are such a ho. And they were horses. I only ever liked the damn
“barbie movies with the horses.”

“Except for that one time where we had to watching motherfucking barbie rapunzel and her god damn magic paintbrush with her stupid god damn talking retarded dragon.” Raven reminded her, “I watched that five times in a row for you because you were so sad about Murphy breaking your Ken doll. Then I snapped the tape in half, because I couldn’t handle that kind of mental torture. You were an awful child.”

“That was a library movie. It took my allowance for a month to pay for that you bitch.”

“And it took my therapist years to work me through my issues with paintbrushes!”

“The only therapists you ever saw were for your leg so I don’t really want to know how they were helping you with paintbrush issues. And how much further to the bookstore? These bags are cutting off my hands.” Elyza complained

“I don’t know Elyza, maybe if you stopped huffing and puffing you’d realize we walked all this way for the Wong Fuk Hing bookstore.” Raven giggled to herself and dropped her bags to unlock the door.

“Ok, well I’m hungry so let’s get in there and make food. And then we need to figure out the shower situation because your ass stinks.” Elyza pushed at Raven impatiently.

“You’re no basket of flowers either babe, maybe instead of worrying about how many veggies you could cram down your face you should have thought about soap.” Raven lifted a bar from her bag and waved it in Elyza’s face. She smirked and bumped her ass against the door, popping it open for both of them. “After you princess.”

“Soap doesn’t do a damn thing without water to go with it, and preferably enough water to cover said ass. That little washcloth thing is ridiculous.” Elyza dumped her bags on the serving counter and ducked behind it to start organizing their items.

“And showers without running water is even worse, but at least I can poison a pond and smell better doing it. You’re staring down the end of a very long pipe dream girl.”

“I don’t even know what you just said. Let me make you some lunch and then when your blood sugar is stable, you can start making sense again.” Elyza started grabbing stuff for lunch

Raven laid her head down on the counter, “Fooooooooood.”

“You are pathetic.” Elyza laughed.

“Don’t forget hungry.” Raven waved her hand in the air, “And a total bitch if you keep this up. You haven’t seen the levels of bitchy bitchiness that could happen when this bitch gets to bitch about you being a bitch for not feeding this bitch.” She made sure to point at which bitch she was referring to so that neither of them got lost in the sentence.

“Rae. Stop talking.” Elyza pointed at Raven. “I don’t even think you know what you are saying at this point. Go wash, and then food will be ready.”

Raven whined and grabbed her pack of oreos before dragging her ass to the kitchen, eating three of them in the time it took her to get to the swinging door.

“Don’t you dare eat all of those oreos Raven or I will fucking end you!!!” Elyza yelled.
“Fight me bitch!” She threw a small stack of them on the corner before the door shut all the way. “You’d better love me for this!”

“Raven! Share!” Elyza grabber her oreos and hit the door open “I will not cook for you if you don’t share the oreos Raven. I will literally sit there and eat whatever I make in front of you and not leave any for you!”

“There’s a whole fucking pack for you! Why do you have to ruin my only joy in life??”

“Because it’s fun.” Elyza shrugged, “And I know you’ll wake up at 3am and eat them all.”

Raven didn’t reply to that, but a half-empty container of oreos appeared on the counter a few minutes later and the water started running. Half an hour later she came back with wet hair and damp clothes. “We need to hit a mall pretty soon. That or start doing laundry in one of the sinks back there.”

“Ick. Laundry.” Elyza shuddered, almost dropping the crackers stacked on a plate beside a bowl of soup, “Anything but laundry.”

“I know.” Raven sat on the counter, “I think I’d rather get put in jail forever for shoplifting during a national crisis than try and do laundry by hand.” She snagged a cracker from the stack and munched on it.

“I wouldn’t even care if I had a washing machine. I hate doing laundry.” Elyza slurped at her bowl of soup.

“Girl you don’t have to tell me twice. I remember all the times Mama Lex thought about getting a maid just to clean up after your ocean of laundry.” Raven crushed all of her crackers into the bowl and chugged the semi-gelatinous mess.

“That is disgusting” Elyza made a face and gagged a little. “Are you incapable of eating like a normal person?”

She glanced down at the soggy crumbs at the bottom of her bowl and up at Elyza, “Dude, that is the only way to eat soup. You’re missing out on god’s greatest gift to mankind.”

“I enjoy not puking, so I’ll do without, thanks.” Elyza drank the last of her soup of the bowl. “And since I made food, you get to clean up while I bathe.”

“You’re a fucking tyrant sometimes, you know that?” Raven grumbled, scooping all of the dishes together into a pile she could carry to the small sink up front. She didn’t need dinner and a show, and since all they had to work with were the industrial sinks in the back for dishes and bathing, Raven would happily take a tiny sink over the need to bleach her own eyeballs.

Chapter End Notes

Alright guys, this is the end of naivety as we know it. The next few chapters are really going to drive it home that not only are our people very much in the end of times, but that not every person is still a person anymore. That being said, it's still icky to stab a person shape in the face, so some hesitance will be expected.

If you notice any symptoms of wanting to experience the apocalypse yourself, yelling at characters to stop being stupid, or a strong desire to hold and protect our cute babies,
please contact your authors at once.
“I don’t believe you Travis.” Madison snapped as soon as the office door was shut, “How can you be okay with that woman putting weapons into the hands of children?”

“Hey, calm down Madi.” He put his hands on her arms, “Anya was just trying to look out for the kids. Liza and I don’t approve any more than you do, but she’s just being practical, and we have to as well. If something happens, they should be able to protect themselves.”

“You and Liza?” Madison scoffed, “Of course, I forgot you and your wife were taking care of your son. Who cares that your bitch of a half-sister is not only undermining my authority but endangering the lives of my children. But it’s fine because you and Liza agree right?”

“Madison,” Travis sighed, “I didn’t mean it like that okay? I get that you’re angry, I am too-”

“Oh you are?” Madison shoved his hands off her, “Because it really looks like you’re fine with all of this.” She gestured towards the rest of the house. “You said it would be safe here!”

“It is!” Travis insisted, “But to be safe we have to be willing to protect ourselves, and sometimes that means weapons.”

“What happened to you? I thought we were on the same page about this. Hurting people only makes all of this worse.”

Travis sighed, running a hand over his face, “I don’t know what to say, Anya has more experience in situations like this than any of us. I think that if she trusts the kids to be careful, then maybe we should too.”

“That’s just perfect Travis, let’s give guns to babies then.” She threw her hands up in the air, “Why don’t we let Nick detox on his own too, see how that works out? Since we’re going to trust them to be adults and take care of themselves we might as well right? I should have known that you would let your crazy sister run right over you, you always do this!”

“And what am I supposed to do about it huh?” He snapped, “Let her kick us out so we can pick between the riots and the city full of who knows how many thousands of sick people? Are you really going to risk Nick and Alicia’s lives on the principle that holding a gun is going to make them into murderers? She’s not telling them to shoot anyone, she trying to give them a way to protect themselves! I thought you would understand that!”

Madison looked away from him, still fuming but unable to come up with anything that made sense. Travis crouched down to look her in the eye, taking her hands, “Hey, I’m not saying we let them run wild. Just, when they’re outside, we give them a way to protect themselves, to signal for help. Okay?”

“Fine.” She refused to meet his gaze.
“Madi?”

“No, do what you like. I can’t stop you any more than I can stop her.” Madison folded her arms and tried to contain her frustration.

“Madi….”

“I need to get Nick his dose.” She dug into her bag and pulled a single pill from the bottle. They were down to four a day, hopefully that would be enough.

“Do they realize we can hear them?” Nick asked, looking towards the door his mom and Travis were arguing behind.

“They don’t really care, Nick.” Alicia shrugged, “I think Liza and Anya are the only reasons they didn’t just stay here to have the argument.”

“Ouch.” Nick muttered, “You ever think about just wandering into the room, just to be there, see if they notice? I think about that sometimes.”

“I wouldn’t have to wander into the room. They’ve had fights like this over the table while I’m right there. I just put in my earphones.” Alicia looked away from her brother, not wanting to see his face.

“I think that’s just how parents are.” Chris butted in, trying to comfort Alicia with a hand on her arm, “Mom and dad are always like that. At least now it’s mostly over the phone.”

“Well I guess it moved from your house to mine.” Alicia stood up and walked into the kitchen.

“You good kid?” Anya looked up from the dishwasher.

“I just get tired of it all. It’ll be fine.” Alicia moved to help with the dishes.

“Just do what I did.” Anya grinned, “Build a shack in the middle of nowhere with more guns than neighbors and all that shit has a tendency of staying far away.”

“Berkley was my shack and no one is as bad as they are.” Alicia sighed a little, “Now I don’t think it’ll work out for either one of us.”

“Gee thanks kid.” Anya drawled, “Just rub it in.” She started scrubbing the pans that couldn’t go in the dishwasher with more force than was really necessary, “The mom squad is helpless.”

Alicia laughed, “Just don’t ever let me join the mom squad, I’d rather be eaten alive.”

Anya pointed a fry pan at her, intent on telling her not to tempt fate and then she paused, “Deal. I’ll feed you to the zoo if it’s ever a risk.”

“Thank God.” Alicia grabbed a towel and started to dry the cleaned dishes. “So what do you think is going on? Mom, Nick and Travis don’t make any sense with the little they do tell me.”

“Well Travis is delusional on the best of days, and the other two aren’t much better.” Anya snorted, “I figure we won’t get the big picture until we ditch the paddles. For now I’m going to assume the country of FUBAR has taken command and prepare accordingly.”

“Oh so what does that mean? We know how to shoot, but that can’t be all we should be doing.”
Alicia asked

“You shouldn’t be doing anything.” Madison interjected, “You Nick and Chris need to stay here where it’s safe and let the adults take care of things.”

Anya looked to Alicia for her response. “And how did letting the adults take care of things work out for Nick?” Alicia glared at her mother.

“That’s a different situation and you need to let it go. He’s with us again, and we’re weaning him off the drugs.”

“Really, Mom? Either this is a situation we have never been in before so you are as clueless and helpless as the rest of us. Or Nick will be gone in a few weeks, back on the damn drugs and you’ll be gone trying to find him.” Alicia threw the towel on the counter.

Madison’s hands were clenched so tightly that her arms shook from the effort and she took a step forward with a foreign look in her eyes. “You don’t know the first thing-!”

“Okay.” Anya stepped between the two women, “Let’s take a big step back. Madison, I get that things are stressful right now but you need to take a walk.” She met the older woman’s eyes and didn’t look away until Madison stormed out of the kitchen. “Alicia,” She raised her eyebrows, “I don’t know what you’re looking for, but that is not the way to go for it.”

Alicia nodded her head, “I’m going out to the deck for some air.”

“Stick to the back of the house.” Anya patted her on the back, “Wouldn’t want to have to break up a catfight on the second day. It’d be worse than our family reunions.”

“Hey Anya, would you come look at Tris? She doesn’t seem to be getting any better...” Liza paused, seeming like she wanted to say more.

“Yeah.” Anya sighed and walked into the living room while she dried her hands. There was so much going on around them, it felt like she never had a second to breathe. “Did she ever drink that water?”

“She did. I actually got her two more cups, she said she’s really thirsty.” Liza turned back into the living room and moved to Tris’ side.

“Well that’s good.” Anya checked Tris’ head, “She’s clammy and,” Anya frowned, “Her pulse is elevated too.”

“I haven’t spoken to her in almost 2 hours. That was when she drank the last of the water.” Liza pushed Tris’ hair back from her eyes, “Should we wake her?”

“No, I spoke to her at breakfast.” Anya shook her head, “Just keep an eye on her? Wake her up in an hour and see how she’s doing. Where is she, what’s her name, basic stuff.”

Liza’s face pinched in concern, “What are you worried about?”

Anya sighed, “Snake bites are never good and we don’t have access to proper medical care and antivenin.” Anya shook her head again. “This has always been about doing what we can and hoping for the best, but at this point any symptoms are a concern.”
“Got it.” Liza nodded, grabbing Tris’ cup to refill it. “I’ll keep you posted?”

“Yeah.” Anya pushed up and away from the sofa. “I’ll be in my room for the next little while, get me if you need me.”

“Sure thing Anya.”

Anya walked into her bedroom pulling the door mostly closed behind her and took just a minute to take a deep breath. This morning had been good at keeping her busy, but she wouldn’t be able to ignore what she had seen during her run forever. It would have to be dealt with.

For now though, it was time to see if the radio would give her any more details. Maybe even contact with Indra again. Anya sat on the edge of her bed and pulled the radio setup closer to her on the nightstand. She turned everything on and began on the channel she had last contacted Indra.

“This is Sergeant Forester of the SASR hailing Colonel Pines at the Pendleton base, does anyone read me? Over.”

“This is Master Chief Woods speaking, Sergeant Forester I need you to move to our private channel.”

“Yes, Sir. Switching now.” Anya began turning the dials, tuning to their preferred frequency for covert missions, it was something Indra had established years ago in case of emergency.

“Anya where the hell are you? Indra said something about you being with civvies and then the connection cut out before she could get anything else.” Gustus wasted no time on pleasantries.

“I’m at home with my family.” Anya allowed no inflection into her tone. “I’ve received no verified information on what’s happening, Sir, but some weird shit is happening.” Anya wouldn’t normally cuss while speaking to a superior officer, but there was just no other way to phrase it.

“I’ll second that.” He scoffed, “I’ve got more guns than I can count pointing in every direction and I’m starting to think hedgehogs feel a lot more anxious than they let on. Have you been briefed about the infection yet?”

“No Sir, only rumor from civilians with more adrenaline than sense.” Anya responded.

“Adrenaline is about all we have going for us right now Anya. As far as we can tell the infection is spread through contact with bodily fluids, specifically blood and saliva. They bite. Hard. So don’t let them get their hands on you. Current prescription for any infected is a bullet to the brain.” He sounded normal at the beginning of his little speech, but by the end Gustus was dead tired. There were only so many civilians and fellow soldiers you could shoot before it started getting to you, and as far as he was concerned, one was more than enough.

“What does the infection do, Sir?” Anya was wary and a little confused. A bullet to any kill zone was enough to put down any diseased individual she had ever heard of, and headshots could be iffy, especially on the move.

“The short version?” He paused, reluctant to even voice what was going on. “They’re dead. As doornails. The infection kills you, and some period of time after your heart stops, you get back up and start attacking anything living.”

Anya choked on air a bit, not sure she understood, or really didn’t want to understand. “Sir, are you saying that this infection reanimates the dead?”
“That is exactly what I’m saying Anya.”

Anya just couldn’t come up with an appropriate response to that.

“Yes.” Gustus gave a chuckle, “It’s a lot, right? It makes more sense when you see it, just be sure not to miss when it happens, got it? You’re a good soldier and I’d hate to lose you to something as stupid as panic.”

“No Sir. What are my orders?” Anya asked, unsure for the first time in her life about what was coming.

“Get your ass to San Diego.”

“And the civilians with me?”

“We’re taking in anyone who isn’t bitten. They would get first class seats on the first bird or boat out of here. The plan is to evac the civilians, drop napalm on the major nests of infected and clean house.”

Anya took a deep breath and slowly release it. Napalm was a last resort and there would be no returning once it had dropped. This was end of world shit. “I’ve got injured with me, what’s the medical situation look like?”

He paused a lot longer than Anya would have liked before he responded. “We have limited resources Sergeant, you know we can’t take on any additional risks.”

Anya swore, violently and loudly.

“Anya? Is everything okay in there?” Liza called.

“Yeah it’s fine!” Anya called back to Liza. “Sir, the injured with me won’t make it more than 24 hours without medical attention.” Anya spoke quietly into the radio, not wanting anyone else to overhear.

Gustus sighed and Anya could practically see him rubbing the ever-growing bald spot on his head. “The order comes from brass, we aren’t to take on any medical risks. All supplies are being stockpiled until the country can get back on its feet. We’ve established martial law until the crisis is over.”

“Sir,” Anya paused and then began again. “Sir, I’ve got a twelve-year-old with a rattlesnake bite and it’s going to kill her. I can’t just leave her here to die alone.”

“No exceptions Sergeant.” Gustus knew what she was asking for, “I expect you to report to the Pendleton base in three days. Get your affairs in order, and get your ass out here.”

“Yes, Sir. Sergeant Forester out.” Anya reset the handset with slightly shaky hands. What. The. Fuck. Get my fucking affairs in order? My affairs have always been in fucking order, so it isn’t so simple as writing a damn will. Did he mean to get family down to Pendleton too? Except that Gustus would’ve just said that, it’s not like we had to be worried about civilian ears hearing classified information. Three days would be more than enough time to bury Tris, pack up and haul ass to San Diego.

What the hell would take three days to get done? Anya got up and started pacing, needing some kind of outlet for the nervous energy that Gustus’ words had evoked. She mulled over his words half a dozen times before she stopped in her tracks. He’s giving me time to run.
Master Chief Gustus Woods, the man she had dragged out of more tight spots than she could count, the man who was even more dedicated to his career than she was, that man was offering her a chance to desert before the going got tough. “What does that dumb bastard think he’s doing?” She made two more laps of her room before she realized. *I can’t think about this right now.*

Anya grabbed her jacket and keys and strode to the back porch with a clear mission in mind. Something to get her out of this stupid cycle of doubt. “Get your shit, we’re checking the well.” Anya informed Alicia.

“Uh, what?” Alicia leaned on the railing to try and talk to Anya’s back as she circled the house.

“Knife or gun.” Anya stopped in front of Madison, determined to make someone else deal with their shit instead of dealing with her own.

“Excuse me?”

“Do you want a knife or a gun.” Anya stated more than she asked.

“I don’t want either.” Madison replied looking confused.

“I’m taking Alicia to check out the well. I figured that as her mother you would like to get involved.” Anya bit back the snarky remark about Madison always wanting to be involved when she wasn’t needed. “So would you like a knife or a gun?” She did her best to sound polite, but it mostly sounded like she was bleeding internally.

“A gun.”

“Perfect. I’ll meet you at the jeep in five.” Anya turned around and dug through the safe for the appropriate weapons and holsters. She checked each one for wear and tear and grabbed ammunition for all of them before returning to the Jeep. “Madison, Travis mentioned you used to go hunting with your dad.” She passed the woman a shotgun, “12 gauge.”

Anya watched as Madison took the weapon, keeping the barrel pointed at the ground as she popped the clasp and checked if it was loaded. “Shells?”

With an approving nod, Anya passed the small box to Madison. “No loaded weapons in Baby.” Madison rolled her eyes and got into the passenger seat. “Kid.” Anya turned around, “Glock and a knife.” She held out both to Alicia, careful to keep her hand on the barrel of the handgun as she passed it.

Alicia smiled, “I’ve still got the butterfly you gave me for Christmas last year.” She took the Glock and hit the chamber release, catching the clip as it slid out. Alicia slid it back in with a nod and drew back the slide with her thumb to the trigger to ensure it wasn’t loaded. It dropped back into place with a click and Alicia engaged the safety before sliding it into the holster that Anya was holding out for her. “Do I pass inspection?” She asked with a shy grin.

“Don’t get cocky.” Anya clipped the spare knife to her belt and climbed into the driver’s seat. Alicia’s smile only grew as she joined them in the jeep. Not even Madison’s murderous glare could quell her pleased grin. Anya approved.

“A butterfly knife, Anya?” Madison hissed

“Oh please,” Anya rolled her eyes, “It’s a gentleman’s weapon.” The jeep roared to life beneath them and Anya stepped on the gas.
“What does that even mean?” Madison muttered under the roar of Anya’s overpowered engine.

“Keep an eye out for trespassers. No one you don’t recognize should be on this land.” Anya spoke while driving away from the house. Despite the other two keeping a lookout, she made a point to watch the landscape for anything moving that was bigger than a tumbleweed.

“Why do we need to check the well?” Madison asked.

“Because it’s the only reliable water source within twenty miles, and I’d like to make sure it’s ours.” Anya snarked, “That tent city out there is going to run dry faster than a water balloon fight at burning man. My well is going to be their first target.”

“How are we going to keep the well safe?” Madison asked with sudden fear tinging her voice.

“We start with making sure that it’s in good shape.” Anya jerked to a stop next to a stand of rocks and looked around before flipping one of the rocks over to reveal the wellhead. “After that we’re going to secure this bitch to the rocks and call it a day. The fewer times we come out here, the less likely it is for some asshole to trip over it.”

“You hide your well under a rock?” Madison was confused. Again.

“It’s fake.” Anya tossed the fake cover at Madison like it was a frisbee. “Plastic.” She opened a panel in the side of the stand of rocks and checked the display on the pump itself. “Alicia can you bring me the gas can from the trunk?”

Alicia came jogging over, eyes peeled for movement on the horizon. “Here.”

“Thanks.” Anya filled the pump’s generator and closed the panel. “Get that facade back over the wellhead and we can get out of here.”

“Yes auntie.” Alicia smirked.

“That’s all?” Madison had expected something much more dangerous with the way Anya had treated them, and the weapon inspection she seemingly expected from Alicia. It all felt so over the top.

“That’s another month of water.” Anya shrugged, “It seemed easier than mounting an offensive against the nearest populated area.”

Madison blinked. Was that a joke?

“Let’s get back to the house, we don’t want anyone to see us out here.” Anya climbed back into the jeep and started it back up.

As they pulled up to the shack, Liza ran out to meet them “Anya! Tris needs you!”

Anya stomped on the brakes, jerking the vehicle to a stop and leapt out as soon as the jeep was in park. “What’s going on?” She demanded, jogging to the house.

“She’s cold, but drenched in sweat, she says her head and stomach hurt and she keeps getting confused.” Liza pulled open the door so that Anya didn’t have to slow down.

Anya brushed past the boys gathered in the living room and knelt by Tris, her hands frantic as she checked the girl’s forehead for a temperature. Cold. She moved down to her dressings. Still secure
and clean. What the hell went so wrong? Anya moved all the way up the dressing and lifted the
girl’s shirt to check the upper end, and that’s when she saw it. A massive bruise spreading across
Tris’ abdomen, her stomach distended from internal bleeding.

“A bleed? How?” Liza couldn’t remember Tris even moving that far, let alone taking an impact of
that magnitude to her stomach.

“She must have hit something when she was outside.” Anya softly probed Tris’ stomach, the skin
pulled taut with little give and sighed. “Try to call medical services again, but if you get through to
them tell them no rush.”

“You know she’s not gonna make it.” Nick pointed out.

“I’m aware of what is happening, Nick.” Anya glared at him, “Medical services will be who her
parents contact to find her.”

Tris stared between them both, “I’m gonna die?” Tears were beginning to well up in her eyes, not
just from the pain but from fear now.

The room was uncomfortably silent. “Of course not.” Travis reassured her, “Liza is going to get
through to the hospital, and they’re gonna send someone to come get you. You’re going to be just
fine.”

“Travis.” Anya reproached. She turned to more fully face the little girl on her sofa. “Tris, I’m
really sorry, but yes. You are going to die. There is nothing I can do and we are too far away for
help to get here in time.”

“Anya! Stop saying that, she’s just a little girl!” Madison snapped.

“No, she’s a person, and she deserves to know the truth.” Anya wasn’t dealing with any of their
idealistic bullshit. “Tris, I know you’re scared, I would be too, but do you have anything you would
like to say to your family? I can write it down for you and give it to them when we find your
parents.”

Tris was quietly sobbing now, but she nodded her head. “I just want to tell them I love them, and
that I’m sorry I wandered off.” The words were barely understandable through the crying, but clear
enough to break the hearts of those listening.

Anya nodded and stroked Tris’ hair, “That’s perfect. Do you know their names, so we can find
them?”

“It’s Howard and Emma Haywood.”

Anya jotted the names down above Tris’ words and did her best to smile. “Perfect, now they’ll
know just how much you love them. You did a good job kid.” She showed Tris the short letter so
that she could make any changes she wanted to it.

“I still can’t get through to medical services.” Liza said, phone still in hand as she came back into
the room.

“That’s fine.” Anya took a deep breath, “We’ll cross that bridge when we get there. Now Tris,”
She did a little better at smiling this time, “Why don’t you tell me about your favorite place in the
world.”

“My favorite place?” Tris asked, her crying had slowed to just streams of tears rolling down her
cheeks. “My favorite place is the park near the soccer fields. My dad would take me there with Henry, my dog, when my mom had to work. We would stop before we got there and get these huge ice cream cones. And then we would walk through the park into the back trails. There was this one path we would always take that would lead us to a lake. Henry would splash in the water while we would sit on the rocks and eat our ice cream.” Tris drifted off.

“What flavor would you get?” Alicia asked.

“What?” Tris asked.

“What flavor of ice cream?”

“What kind of ice cream do you have?”

Alicia frowned and Anya interrupted her before she could try to clarify again, “That sounds like a wonderful place kid. Why don’t you go back to sleep for a little bit while we get lunch ready.”

“I eat lunch after math class. Is this math class?” Tris tried to sit up.

“No kid, it’s nap time.” Anya put a gentle hand on the girl’s shoulder, not needing much force to keep her down, “So close your eyes and take deep breaths.”

Tris settled back onto the sofa and followed Anya’s instructions. Soon she relaxed in sleep and the room took a breath themselves. Anya sat back on her heels, “Go find something to do. The kid isn’t gonna sleep long with all of you staring at her.”

As the others began to leave the room Alicia walked over to the bookcase in the corner of the room and began reading through the titles. Finding one, she pulled it from its place on the shelf and settled into an armchair. She didn’t really intend to get much out of the book, but she had seen how hard it could be to be the only one in a room when someone passed while she worked in the hospital. Anya shouldn’t be alone.

Nick didn’t stray far either, hanging out in the dining room, right on the edge of straying into the living room, arms crossed over his chest as he waited for the inevitable. No one believed him yet, so it was his job to make sure nothing else happened.

Tris’ light breathing was the sound that dominated the house, no one else felt comfortable enough to speak or even whisper. They were all waiting. So when Tris stopped breathing, they all knew it.

Anya clenched her fists and pulled the sheet over the girl’s head. Alicia watched from her chair. Nick waited. The others gathered into the room. “Should I try medical services again?” Liza asked, her voice feeling unnaturally loud.

“No. We have her parents information. I’ll write her time of death down for documentation and that’ll be enough.” Anya made a note on the back of the letter. “I’ll take her out and bury her under the tree in the back.”

“Here, let me get her cleaned up first.” Liza offered, grabbing a washcloth from the kitchen and some water. Anya stood back and watched. Alicia squeezed Anya’s hand gently, “Get some air, we’ll take care of her.”

Anya nodded and walked out and grabbed the shovel leaning against the back of the house. Metal hit dirt with a dull crunch and the hiss of the sand making a small pile to her left. Crunch and hiss.

Crunch and hiss. The noise was rhythmic, almost soothing.
All too soon, she was finished.

Anya walked back into the house covered in dust and sweat. On her couch was a bundle wrapped in one of her old sheets, if she didn’t think about it, it could have been an oddly shaped pile of bedding, or the kids being stupid with the pillows. She wasn’t good at pretending. Anya scooped up the limp girl with a small grunt and began walking outside.

Her steps stuttered when they all heard the rattling gasp of air from the body.

“Fuck. She’s back.” Nick began to scramble for a weapon.

“Back? What do you mean back?” Alicia asked, her face twisted in confusion.

A low rumbling growl began to fill the air as the form wrapped in sheets began moving. The body twisting and the head snapping forward towards Anya. Anya lowered the body down onto the floor, keeping her grip firm. She grasped the head and began to unwrap the sheet before pausing. “Alicia, pull your weapon.” She instructed, waiting before continuing.

Alicia planted her feet and drew her weapon in a smooth motion. Cock the slide, safety off, both hands braced on the grip and base, sight lined up on Tris’ chest. Uncertainly, she questioned her aunt. “Anya?”

“I...I don’t know what’s going to happen. Just be ready.” Nothing about this felt right, but things hadn’t felt right since her idiot brother and his families showed up and with Indra and Gustus’ warnings ringing in her ears, Anya needed to be sure.

After giving Alicia’s stance a quick once over, Anya turned back to unwrapping the makeshift shroud. As she shifted the fabric, the body underneath her began thrashing with more force, making Anya shift her grip to Tris’ now exposed hair. It wasn’t ideal to have to manhandle the little girl, but it was better to be safe.

Anya bit back a gasp when she saw Tris’ milky eyes wide open and staring at her. The girl looked pale but otherwise fine as she flailed, trying to break free of Anya’s grasp. She arched forward, straining at Anya’s grip on her hair as she snapped at the air between them, desperate for something.

Alicia maintained her stance, weapon moving to aim on what little of Tris’ body she thought she could hit without harming Anya while the others broke into chaos. Nick began yelling almost incoherently about bites and killing it. Liza and Chris both falling over furniture in their attempts to escape the room, while Madison and Travis moved forward not even paying attention when they came between Alicia and her target.

Alicia moved, shifting into a better position. Now standing over Tris’ body, a clear shot available if needed. “What do we do now, Anya?” Alicia asked, her voice shaking, but her hands still surprisingly steady.

Anya drew her own weapon, remembering Gustus’ words. The only cure was a bullet to the brain. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Madison yelled.

“Anya just stop and think about what you’re doing! This is a little girl.” Travis pled, afraid to touch Anya and have her accidentally shoot someone.

Anya ignored all of them, holding Tris’ head down to the wood floor and carefully placed the barrel of her gun against the child’s head. The child she spent the last day trying to nurse back to health and comfort in her last moments. The child straining against her grip to try and eat Anya and
her family alive. She pulled the trigger.

Everything stilled in the aftermath of the shot, but as soon as their ears stopped ringing Travis and Madison fell on her, pulling her away from the child. “Are you crazy? You just killed her!”

“What’s wrong with you, she was fine, she was alive.”

“Mom she wasn’t fine, she was crazy!”

“She wasn’t going to do anything to us, she was just scared.”

“Shut up.” Anya yanked herself out of Madison’s grip, “She’s dead.” Anya scooped the girl up into her arms again and resumed her march outside.

Alicia took that as a signal to relax and dropped the barrel of her gun to the floor, turning the safety back on and releasing the trigger in a slow practiced motion. She stared wide-eyed at Anya as the intensity of the moment hit her and she slumped back against the wall.

Anya’s hands shook as she laid the small body into the shallow trench, carefully she recovered Tris’ shroud and began to cover her with a cairn of dirt and rocks.
Get in the car b!tch, we're going shopping

Chapter Summary

A visit to the mall, to Mr. Rope, and to reality.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, thank you so much for your comments and your support, keep it coming. It makes my day and Wanheda89's to see your comments pop up in our feed, and we do our best to make sure that we reply to all of your comments. In the way of announcements, we are going to put out some extra posts during the holidays. Whether this includes Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and all of the other 'holidays' only celebrated by those with a death wish and sobbing wallets or not, is entirely dependent upon whether or not my illustrious co-writer can resist the puppy-dog eyes.

“OK bitch, we need clean clothes and I’m not fucking washing your shit in the sink,” Raven tossed an empty backpack at Elyza’s head, watching as it dropped to the floor behind her.

“Can we at least finish cleaning up after breakfast first?” Elyza flicked wet soapy fingers at Raven’s head.

“No, we can not. You can eat while you walk.” Raven snagged her spear and her sandwich, an odd hitch in her get-along. “I feel like I’m wearing sandpaper slacks. I blame that shitty soap you grabbed.”

“Fuck you, you grabbed the soap you dumbass.” Elyza glared at Raven

“ I wanted to just take new clothes!” Raven waved her hands in the air, “But no! You had to go and be all moral about leaving behind fucking money.”

“I’m so sorry that I don’t want to go to jail for a new pair of underwear. I’m way too pretty to have to tolerate jail-shower advances.” Elyza grabbed the backpack off the floor and grabbed the sandwich she had left on the countertop for herself.

“I dunno, jail is sounding pretty nice right now.” Raven muttered, “At least they can do laundry properly.”

“At this point I’m all about the real shower. Hot fucking water sounds so good.” Elyza practically moaned.

“How about a bath that doesn’t involve mopping the floor when you’re done or cramming your crippled ass into a fucking sink.” Raven looked to the heavens for patience.

“At this point a prison bed might feel like heaven. Those damn sofas are lumpier than great grandma’s gravy.” Elyza shoved half the sandwich into her mouth and started pulling the backpack
Raven shuddered, “Thank god I never had to go to thanksgiving with you guys. Your mom’s descriptions of that shit still haunts my nightmares.”

“Where are we going for new clothes?” Elyza asked as she moved towards the front door.

“There’s a place just past Mr. Rope, I figured we’d leave him a little something on our way there.” Raven brandished a sleeve of stale saltines. She’d eaten the first three before she decided that death was better than putting another one in her face.

“You are so fucking magnanimous.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“You don’t even know how to spell that shit so shut the fuck up.”

“Shut up!” Elyza hit Raven’s arm.

“So much for brains and boobs right?” Raven grinned, taking the hit and knowing she deserved it.

“At least I don’t burn water you idiot. Like that shouldn’t even be possible.” They pulled the new and improved door closed behind them and Raven locked it.

“That was one time.” Raven rolled her eyes, “And chemically it is possible, you just have to separate the molecules and ignite them.”

“That should be something you have to do on purpose, not on the stove.” Elyza laughed.

“Bitch.” Raven chuckled, shoving Elyza’s shoulder, “Come on, Mr. Rope is probably dying for a bite of these.” She waved the crackers.

“I don’t know why you keep giving him food. He didn’t drink the water you left or the bread.” Elyza said.

“Even people without an appetite have to eat eventually.” Raven shrugged, “You leave money on the counter, I leave food for when Mr. Rope comes to his senses.”

“Yeah well, we are out of money, so I’m obviously giving up on that.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

Raven rubbed the back of her neck, “If it gets to be a problem I’ll stop too.”

“Yeah, ok.” They kept walking and Elyza tripped over a crack in the sidewalk, catching herself before she landed.

“Hey! Careful there shorty,” Raven helped haul Elyza to her feet, “There’s only room in this town for one cripple and the spot’s taken.”

“I said brains and boobs, not grace.” Elyza shoulder bumped Raven.

Raven snorted, “I caught that.” She mussed Elyza’s hair. Rattling growls to their right drew Raven’s attention. “Hey Mr. Rope.” She tossed him the pack of saltines and watched it land next to the other crackers and a pack of snowballs that she’d left over the past few days. “I get waiting for a better meal dude, but you should eat something.” She advised.

He snarled and swiped at them, his arms an easy five feet away from either of them. “Sorry, not into the grabby ones.” Raven gave him a two finger salute and kept walking. “Man, for a sick and starving guy, he just keeps going.”
“He has to be getting food and water from somewhere. There’s no way he could go this long without.” Elyza stood as far away from him as she could.

Raven pouted, “That fucker is letting someone else feed him? You bitch!” Raven shook her fist at him.

“It’s ok Rae, I’m sure you provide his favorite stale crackers.” Elyza patted her arm.

She rolled her eyes, “Fuck you too.”

“You wish sweetie.” Elyza grinned.

“Gross, you’re like my baby sister.”

“So where’s this store with clothes. Mama needs a new pair of underwear.” Elyza turned to scan the store fronts, trying to figure out the right one.

“This way mama.” Raven rolled her eyes, leading Elyza into a shoe store. At the far end was a big open arch that led to the rest of the mall, “Your wish is my command, panties galore and all the shoes you can shove on your feet.” She dragged Elyza through the main floor to a giant department store in a general state of chaos. “Clean up on aisle… all of them.”

“You knew this mall was here the whole time?” Elyza shot Raven a glare.

“Duh, girl had to get her boots somewhere,” Raven pointed to her shoes, “But the mall isn’t cheap and it’s not like you were up for shoplifting earlier. What was I going to do? Whine about how my bitch of a kid sister would rather have a clean conscience than designer panties?”

“You’re unbelievable.” Elyza shook her head, digging through the racks of clothes for some new shirts and pants that would fit her rear.

“Unbelievably awesome, that’s what you mean, right?” Raven began sorting through the shelf for pants. “Hey look, almost all they have left is my size. I’ll take em!”

Elyza shot her a dirty look and kept digging for even one pair that might close over her hips.

“How’s it going for you over there?” Raven asked, a smirk on her face.

“Fucking skinny ass bitches dominating the goddamn market on fucking pants.” Elyza muttered, walking over with a handful of jeans.

“Aw, do we need to go find you a big girl store?” Raven juggled the armful of pants.

“No but I need to find a pet store.” She snarked.

“How’s it going for you over there?” Raven asked, a smirk on her face.

“I’m gonna find you a nice looking muzzle to go with that big mouth of yours.”

“You try and muzzle me and I’ll bite your face off.” Raven pointed her finger at Elyza, “Let’s go find some shirts, maybe you’ll have better luck there, bitch.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “You’re just making my case stronger.” She kicked her way through the mess over to the displays full of shirts, easily finding a selection she liked.

“I also want to find a hoodie and another backpack. It’ll be easier than dragging that stupid suitcase
around when we need to carry more shit.” Raven started adding shirts to the pile in her arms.

“Sounds good to me.” Elyza stuffed her new wardrobe into her backpack, “I’ll go check out some of the other stores and meet you back here?”

“Yeah, cool. But stop and grab some boots or something. Those vans are cute, but they ain’t gonna hold up worth shit.” Raven started off to find what she wanted.

Elyza gave a huff and nodded, “Holler if you find something interesting.” She picked another direction and started walking.

“As long as it isn’t food I will. If I find food, I’m keeping it.” Raven called back over her shoulder.

“Bitch!”

“You know you love me!”

Elyza chuckled to herself and meandered past broken storefronts and scattered product. It reminded her of a couple haunted houses Raven dragged her through right before she graduated, a right of passage or some bullshit like that. Either way Elyza had humored Raven and allowed the senior to drag her sophomore ass through every scary house in their home town. Yeah, it definitely had that creepy, someone’s waiting to catch you with your pants down, vibe.

Elyza started walking up the escalator stairs, most of the floor was littered with trash and merchandise, but the escalators were almost clear. At the top of the stairs Elyza walked over the directory. The shoe store was on this level and there was a victoria’s secrets downstairs, if the world was going to hell she may as well be rocking sexy underwear. She was just about to leave for the shoe store when she spotted her final destination. The food court. Elyza grinned, there’s no way Raven’s going to check out a map, that food court is as good as Elyza’s.

With a grin, Elyza headed to the shoe store. It had been torn apart just like every other place in the mall. Most of the shelves had been emptied, the boxes of shoes dumped on the floor and thrown wherever. She headed down what should have been the right aisle, looking for shoes that Raven might approve of. Reaching down she found a single hiking boot in a box labeled for her size. Getting down on her hands and knees, she found the twin shoved under the shoe rack. She pulled off her dirty and torn sneakers and pulled on the hiking boots, not a bad fit but better socks would be nice.

As she walked towards the front of the door, Elyza stopped by the front display and grabbed an extra backpack. It had a kid cartoon character on it, but it’d give her more space. After she had filled that backpack with socks from the display she grabbed 2 more bags, maybe she could find enough to fill them in the food court.

Next stop, lingerie. Elyza grinned, it would be fun to go wild with no price limit. Elyza jogged down the stairs and noted the crunching glass beneath her shoes, maybe Raven isn’t being as paranoid as she thought. Pausing just before she should see the store she turned and headed into the bath store. Some candles and some nice smelling soap wouldn’t go amiss. Opening one of the bags she started stuffing it with a few of her favorite scents, grabbing a few of Raven’s favorites too, before heading back out into the mall.

Elyza started to grin upon entering VIctoria’s Secret. Let the candy store rampage begin. She thought to herself, running her hands over some of the lacier garments. She took more time in here than she did in the payless and the bath and body works combined, browsing the shelves for anything that struck her fancy and fitting it into the remaining space around the candles and clothes.
in her bags.

When she found everything she wanted, Elyza shouldered the heavy packs and started for the food court. Best shopping trip ever.

The food court wasn’t too messy, lots of tables and chairs had been thrown into piles but no clothes on the floor and most of the garbage didn’t smell too bad. Elyza put her bags down on the floor, just beyond the tables and out of the way. They were too heavy to carry through all of the restaurant fronts. Elyza started on the front closest to her, they had nothing that she could take with her, that was the problem with wanting all fresh organic food. It was gross in just a few days. The next few store fronts didn’t net much, just some packages of pasta, a few bruised apples and some tins of meat.

Elyza paused her searching, she thought she had heard something. After a few seconds she hadn’t heard anything so she kept rummaging. As she closed the water bottle display Elyza dropped a few of the bottles she had been juggling. She set the ones in her arm on the counter and grabbed the other ones. One, two...where had the third bottle of water gone? She set the two she had on the counter with the others and got onto her hands and knees to see if she could find it. It took a minute and she almost had to lay on the floor to get to the bottle that had rolled underneath a rolling stand.

A low gurgle sounded above her and Elyza popped her head up above the counter, feeling that creepy vibe set in once more. A woman stood on the other side of the counter, staring at her with milky white eyes that seemed to look straight through her. “Uh, Hi.” Elyza scooted back a little bit from the woman’s intense gaze.

The woman gave a wet snarl and lunged at Elyza, shoving past the water bottles towards the girl. Elyza shrieked and shoved herself back from the woman who was caught on the counter, reaching as far as she could and snatching at Elyza’s hair.

With a solid foot of space between her and the woman’s fingertips, Elyza pushed herself to her feet and grabbed her bags, staring wide-eyed at the faze of the viciously snarling woman.

Elyza frantically searched for a way around her and bolted left, careening through the scattered cookware of the connected storefronts, the candles, and tins clanking loudly in her pack. Elyza caught onto a counter and used her grip on it to swing out to the main floor of the food court.

A door slammed open behind her and a man with equally sightless eyes came stumbling out, his arms extended towards Elyza.

“Go away!” She shouted, backing away from the two people following her, staring at her like a piece of meat. Elyza heard the death rattle just moments before she felt it. A broad something, warm and damp with a disturbing dip in the center. Elyza jerked away from the touch and turned to see what it was.

She almost lost it right there.

A medical cadaver has more organs that this… Thing standing in front of her. Elyza reached back to touch the damp spot on her shoulder and it came away a dark burgundy. Blood from the gaping hole in his chest where she knew his organs should be, where something should be.

His whole chest cavity was empty and he was still standing, still walking towards her. Oh god, he’s walking towards her. Move Lex! Elyza turned her back on the cadaver and sprinted for the department store. “Raven! Raven where the FUCK are you?” She screamed, her legs burning already.
There were more of them gathering, their gurgling breaths and grasping hands chasing her down the halls, their steps slow and measured but persistent as they continued. Elyza kept moving as fast as she could, but her body wasn’t cooperating very well. It seemed like her limbs were too heavy and even though she tried to avoid all the crap on the floors it seemed like she managed to trip on everything anyway. “RAVEN!!”

It felt like a horrible dream, her feet skidding on glass and debris and even the floor itself, hands brushing over her arms as the people behind her got closer, and all she could hear was the thunder of her heart.

“ELYZA! WHERE ARE YOU??” Raven yelled, panic in her voice.

“I’M HERE! THEY’RE RIGHT ON MY TAIL!” Elyza skidded into one of the major junctions and caught a glimpse of Raven right as she lost traction and crashed into one of the kiosks.

“WHO?” Raven yelled back, her brace giving a telltale creak as she ran towards Elyza.

Elyza scrambled out of the wreck of splintered wood and cheap jewelry, barely aware of the cuts and scrapes across her face. “Get back!” She waved her arm only to have it smack into someone’s body.

During her struggle to get out, the people following her had time to catch up. Raven could only watch as Elyza kicked and threw her backpack around, knocking her way through the clumsy bodies, dodging teeth and hands with an expertise that could only be explained by sheer bloody panic and a heavy ass backpack.

Raven’s moment of shock ended and she came barreling down the hall, smashing her own pack into the face of a chick with her mouth wide open for the chance to chomp on her chump sister. “What the fuck did you say to them??”

“I-” Elyza kicked out a guy’s knee, “Said-” She yanked her pack free of one’s grip and began dragging Raven back towards the door, “Hi! Now let’s get out of here!”

Raven didn’t have air for more questions, and Elyza didn’t have the energy to answer them anyway. They booked it for home until they ran out of steam by the shop and save, hands on their knees, gasping for oxygen.

Elyza shook from head to toe, her body on the edge of collapse. “W-we have to keep going.” She fist her hand in Raven’s sleeve and started pulling her towards the bookstore. “Just a little bit more.”

A rattling gasp to their left had them both upright and looking for the source when they saw him. “Mr. Rope?” Raven’s eyes were wide, “The fuck did you do?”

Mr. Rope crawled toward them, clawing at the asphalt with his fingertips to move closer. His legs were in a heap by the pole, still tied on and bleeding sluggishly. Mr. Rope’s top half was dragging a multitude of organs like ropes of old sausage, and the smell of rotting meat hit their noses like so many trucks of sewage.

Elyza gave a shudder and hunched over as her stomach violently relocated its contents across the double yellow line.

“Oh god,” Raven covered her nose with the back of her hand, not even sure what she was trying to protect herself from. The yellowish liquid on her boots, or the…. Stuff coming out of Mr. Rope. “Get it out…” She patted Elyza’s back, staring at the man she had vaguely bonded with, shred his
organs on the asphalt.

“We need to get back.” Raven pulled Elyza up and started pulling her towards the bookstore.

Elyza nodded, following Raven but her eyes stayed on the snarling man trying to follow them. She couldn’t figure it out. Her mind was blank and she knew that there was a reason that all of this was happening and she needed to think about it, but she couldn’t get past that spot. That spot of knowing that she was supposed to be focusing on something.

Then she was being dragged into the bookstore and Elyza knew she couldn’t see Mr. Rope anymore, it would be impossible to see him, but the image was burned on her eyelids and she couldn’t get away from it. From all of them. Mr. Rope, and the cadaver and all the others who had nasty bite marks or broken arms or red marks dripping down their chests, but it’s all dried and old and Elyza was starting to realize that maybe that grandma in the Mercedes wasn’t just a grandma anymore.

“Elyza?” Raven crouched in front of her friend, but the blonde was totally spaced out, “Okay, even I feel like a bitch for this.” Raven brought her hand up and slapped Elyza across the face, “Elyza!”

Elyza blinked, the pain from the slap slowly seeping into her consciousness. “What?” Her words were still slow and vaguely slurred, making her sound almost drunk.

“What is wrong with you? Did something happen? Are you fucking okay?” Raven started checking Elyza for injuries in particular, her head.

“Uh...I, um. Am I in shock?” Elyza asked, her confusion overwhelming.

“I don’t know, but you’ve got some fucking nasty scratches here.” Raven showed Elyza some scratches on her arms, four of them, “Looks like some bitch tried to fight you for the last toaster on black friday.”

“Oh. Ow. Those hurt.” Elyza stared at them like she hadn’t known they were there before.

“Yeah I bet they do.” Raven rolled up Elyza’s sleeve and grimaced, “Do you remember if that first aid kit in the kitchen had anything?”

“Oh, I don’t know, but I grabbed the one Mom left in your apartment.” Elyza replied.

Raven nodded, “Yeeaaaaahh, I probably should have thought of that.”

“Raven, can you help me get my shirt off? It’s…” Elyza shuddered and started shivering.

Raven raised an eyebrow, “I don’t think that’s a good idea hon, you’re shivering.” Raven shrugged off her jacket and moved around Elyza to set it on her shoulders and forced herself not to heave.

“Nevermind, we need to get that shit off of you.”

Elyza started pulling at her shirt. The feel of the wet fabric had been bothering her, but it somehow got worse after Raven’s comment. She kept pulling on the hem but couldn’t seem to get the shirt pulled up. Raven helped the girl out of her situation, doing her best to keep the... Chunks from getting in Elyza’s hair or touching her at all. “Oh,” Raven heaved, “I’ll be back.” She ran into the back and Elyza heard the telltale splatter of Raven losing the contents of her stomach.

Sitting on the floor in only her bra and pants Elyza’s shivering intensified so it looked like she was being electrocuted. Raven came back in without the shirt and looking pale. One glance at Elyza and she limped her way up to the loft where they kept the blankets. “Where did you put the kit?”
She called over the rail.

“Uh, the suitcase, maybe, I think.” Elyza chattered.

Raven rifled through the suitcase, leaving a mess behind and came back down the stairs with a grimace, Grandma Reyes’ blanket, and the first aid kit. “Why the fuck did we pick a place with stairs?” She groused, draping the blanket over Elyza.

She didn’t wait for a response, Raven just plopped herself on the floor next to Elyza and started cleaning her arm. “You know it’s a good thing I know how to use this shit, otherwise we’d be fucked if you hit your head again.”

“I need to clean up, it’s still on my skin, Rae.” Elyza shuffled a bit.

“Yeah well we need to get you bandaged up, so do you want to freeze to death in the kitchen first, or get your arm fixed.”

“It’ll be easier to fix my arm if the rest of me is clean.” Elyza moved onto her hands and knees and looked at the kitchen door, contemplating just crawling into the kitchen. Standing was going to be too much work.

“Okay, this is just sad.” Raven pushed Elyza to sit down, “Let me heat up some water in the kettle and you can get your sponge bath on, because you are not crawling, and I’m sure as hell not carrying you.”

Elyza looked at the kitchen door again before nodding, and sitting back on her heels again.

“Just,” Raven got to her feet with a momentary pinch in her expression. She hooked her hands under Elyza’s armpits and lifted her just enough to put Elyza into one of the chairs. “Sit.” She moved towards the counter and looked back with a hand out, “Stay.”

Raven busied herself warming up water for Elyza, fighting the urge to let herself sit down. She wasn’t sure she would stand up again when she did. The kettle gave a ding and Raven returned to Elyza with a folded up t-shirt to use as a towel and the hot water for her. “How sponge bath do you want this sponge bath?”

“Just help me with my back and I can do the rest.” Elyza paused and looked at the bags, “Can you grab the vanilla spice body wash out of my bag? I might need the whole bottle to get rid of this smell.”

“Where the fuck did you get this shit?” Raven pulled the body wash out, “And fucking candles too? You bitch.” She grinned, “Just a second.” She tossed the body wash into Elyza’s lap and pulled out a couple of candles. A bit of aluminum foil and those car batteries was all Raven needed to light them up. “Now we are living the dream, sponge baths by candlelight.”

Elyza had a faint grin on her face, “Rae, don’t make this weird.” She focused on washing her arms and front down.

“Right.” She giggled, waiting until Elyza was done before taking the cloth and washing down her blood smeared back.

Raven was behind her washing her back when Elyza spoke in a hushed whisper, “He was dead, Raven.”

“Who?” Raven frowned, trying not to spread the blood any further.
“The guy, who…” Elyza swallowed the thick lump in her throat. “The guy whose blood is all over me.” She paused again, this was so hard. “He came up behind me and hugged me. Sort of. I think he was trying to bite me, but he was missing his stomach.” Elyza stopped again, her gorge rising. “There was just nothing there, it was empty.”

Raven’s hand paused, “Honey, either he was dead or he hugged you.” Her voice was quiet, for once she was trying *not* to provoke Elyza. Honestly she was worried her friend was having a mental breakdown, not that she blamed her.

“Just like Mr Rope, who should be dead once he’s split in fucking half?!” Elyza’s voice became louder and more shrill as she spoke.

Raven wiped away the last of the mess on Elyza’s back and put the cloth aside, hugging Elyza tightly, “Shh, okay we don’t need to worry about that right now.” She closed her eyes, “Just take deep breaths honey.”

Elyza shook her head and reached for Raven’s hand, “Raven. This isn’t the flu.” She tugged on Raven’s hand, forcing her to turn fully to face her. “Those people in the mall, were dead. This is not a normal epidemic.”

Raven stared back wide-eyed, “Okay, so, like they’re dead?” Raven raised her eyebrows, “Like all the way dead? Dead people are walking around trying to eat us.” Raven clarified, trying to make sense of those words.

“Like we somehow landed in the Night of the Living Dead realm.” Elyza said.

“Personally I prefer Army of the Damned, but yeah I feel you.” Raven glanced down at Elyza’s arm, “If you want we can always find a chainsaw for that arm.” She offered with a half smile.

“Ha. Ha” Elyza snarked, “That actually could be kind of cool, but more importantly we have a new set of rules now. We aren’t trying to avoid sweaty, pale germy soccer moms, we are trying to avoid people who want to eat us, and not in the fun way.”

Raven nodded, “Spears don’t seem like such a bad idea now.”

“Okay, seriously, shit is real.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Raven raised her hands, “I know. Just trying to look on the bright side here. So commando black chick was right about people being scary as fuck, and we need to stay far the fuck away from them.”

“And when we can’t?” Elyza was worried, “That mall looked dead, no pun intended, and then all of a sudden it was crawling with the dead.”

Raven chewed her lip, “I guess we gotta become badasses now?”

“Any idea how we can do that?” Elyza asked.

“Not really.”
Chapter Summary

As realization sinks in for Anya and the others, desperation sinks in for Nick, and teeth sink into a... well a rather expected plot twist.

TLDR; shit gets real

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One solid strike to the nail and it was done. A copy of the letter Tris had dictated for Anya was tagged to the tree over her grave. Anya intended to find her parents and give them the letter personally, but things had gone so fucking sideways there were no guarantees and this might just have to do.

Anya collected her tools and left the fresh grave to return to the house.

“Anya?” Alicia asked softly. She wasn’t exactly sure how Anya was feeling or if she wanted to be alone, but Anya is the person she usually goes to for direction.

“We’ve got work to do kid.” Anya sighed, this was a fucking disaster and there was no time for feelings. “Get everyone back into the living room. We gotta talk.”

Alicia nodded and walked through the house collecting everyone. No one spoke very loudly, it still seemed odd and disrespectful to raise their voices. Though judging by the looks on Travis and Madison’s faces when Alicia opened the door they certainly had no issues arguing in the hours after the little girls death. Or whatever it was that had happened.

Anya stood in the center of the living room, everyone else had taken positions on the furniture or the floor, she looked alone and isolated. Not usually a look that could be attributed to Anya, but there were lots of things going on that were unusual. They waited in silence, no one wanting to start first but the weight of the unspoken was growing.

“What were you thinking?” Madison broke the silence, it was obvious that she had been bursting with the question for a while. “That little girl wasn’t actually dead, and then you fucking shot her!”

Anya took a step towards Madison with her hand outstretched and stopped, taking a deep breath and clenching that hand into a fist before tucking it behind her back. Her eys went from burning with rage to cold and calculating, “Madison, everyone. That child was neither healthy, nor alive. I have received reports that the infection is spreading and it causes you to die, at which point your corpse becomes animated and hostile.”

She leveled them all with a look to make sure they were listening before she continued, “As such, we are to avoid all other people infected or not. We will assign partners, and move in groups. No one will leave the house unless armed, and no one is going to question it. Do you understand? Perfect.”

“You said the infection causes you to die, but Tris died from the snakebite, how did she…” Liza
trailed off, obviously confused but also unwilling to say the words animated dead.

“No idea. Until we know, we are to assume that everyone who dies gets back up.”

“Calvin hadn’t been bitten either. He was shot.” Nick spoke quietly looking at his Mom and Travis, “He came back.”

“Calvin’s dead?” Alicia looked over, “Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“That’s not really important, Licia” Madison dismissed her daughter’s hurt.

Alicia snorted, “I’ll be in Aunt Anya’s group.” There’s no way she’s going to sit in the dark waiting on her mom to tell her what’s going on, at least with Anya things are scary but she feels like she can handle them.

“That’s fine.” Anya cut in before they could get off track on their normal slew of arguments. “Who here has a watch? We need each group to have a watch in case we get separated.”

Travis frowned, “I have one, but how is that going to help?”

“Everyone needs to know when to check in, how long they’ve been gone and if needed you can use it to help you navigate.” Anya paused and frowned, “Well, I can use it to navigate and so can the kids, so a kid in every group.”

“I’ve got a watch too,” Liza added.

“Anyone else?” Anya asked, when no one else responded, she nodded. “Ok, Alicia and I in one group. Nick, Madison and Travis in another group and Chris and Liza in the final group. Next order of business is going to be rendezvous points and bug-out bags.”

“Hey! There’s no way I’m going to separated from my kids!” Madison interrupted.

Anya looked at her, “You’ve already got too many people in your group, and I really don’t give a fuck what you want Madison. Right now I’m more interested in keeping people safe over happy.” She walked into the kitchen to look for her maps of the area. Behind her she could hear chaos erupt as the adults disagreed with being split up.

“Okay, so this is the map of the local area.” Anya laid out the map.

“Hold on just a minute.” Travis put his hand out, “We need to talk about these groups. No one here wants to be split up like this, and we sure as hell aren’t going to let our kids disappear.”

Anya looked up at him like he was an absolute idiot. So she just looked at him. “That is the whole point of what I’m doing. No one goes off alone, everyone knows where and when to meet up, our final destination, names, addresses, navigational skills. The entire fucking point of this plan is to keep you and your kids from ending up like that.” She pointed out the back window to the tree where Tris is buried.

“Why can’t we just stay together, we should just go everywhere as a group, right?” Liza asked holding onto Chris’s arm like he was going to be snatched away.

Anya sighed and ground her teeth. Could they be any more stupid? “Yes because we all want to go shit with a group of people not two feet away.” Anya glared at the adults, so far the kids had just been nodding in agreement with Anya. At least there was some sense in the group. Too bad it wasn’t the supposed adults. “We need to be able to move without being seen, that’s hard in a large
group. We need to be able to move and defend ourselves, that’s harder in a large group. We will need to obtain supplies, that’ll take too long with a large group.” Anya’s tone made it clear just how stupid these complaints were. “We also don’t want anyone to get left behind because we got too distracted for a head count.”

“Mom, we aren’t splitting up.” Alicia threw in her two cents, “We’re preparing in case something bad happens.”

Madison folded her arms and muttered something about nothing bad happening to Travis, but otherwise stopped fighting.

“Great.” Anya went back to the map, “We are right here. The tent city is due east of us, so rule of thumb, don’t go east. That place is going to be pure chaos once people start dying, and people will start dying. If anything goes wrong, we should rendezvous here, it’s a small town just thirty miles out. Close enough to walk it in a few days, or drive in an hour. If we split we will hang out by the motel 8 for four days.”

“Four days to walk thirty miles?” Travis raised his eyebrows, “That’s insane.”

“I know, I can do it in one.” Anya glared, “Four days should be plenty of time even if you have injured.”

“What if we miss that one?” Nick asked, “Where do we go from there?”

Anya checked her watch for the date, eight-ish days before the city gets napalmed, give it two more just for everything to burn out and for red tape to get in the way. They needed a plan that would take ten days minimum. “From there you should be able to find and hotwire a vehicle, so we are going to assume that everyone will be driving. Let’s hit the Sierra Madre’s, the north side of the range has a station here.” She moved her finger along the map, “We should be able to resupply on food and water there, maybe a decent shelter too. We’ll stay there for a week, if you haven’t made it to the station by then, you’re fucked.”

“Well that’s optimistic.” Madison muttered, “There’s a lot of room in here for things to go wrong.”

“That’s why we are going to have walkies, every day from noon to one we will turn on the walkies on channel seventeen.” Anya snapped, “This is not a situation for optimism Madison, the dead are getting off their asses and trying to attack ours, optimism jumped ship about a week ago.”

“I have no idea how to hotwire a car, Anya.” Alicia looked at her Aunt with raised eyebrows, a little surprised to find there was something they currently needed that Anya had not previously taught her.

“Well thank god she stopped at teaching you how to steal cars!” Madison snapped, “At least she has some standards. You’re not teaching my kids how to hotwire a car.”

“You’re right.” Anya grinned, “I’m teaching all of you how to hotwire a car.” To Alicia she shrugged, “I was waiting until your eighteenth birthday.”

“Oh my god.” Madison put her head in her hands. At this point she didn’t think that Anya was going to listen to a thing she said.

Alicia nodded, “Cool. But what are you going to teach us on, there’s no way you’d let any of us mess with Baby.”

“Who’s baby?” Liza asked
“My pride and joy.” Anya puffed out her chest a little bit, “And we are not practicing on Baby, we are going to use the truck.”

“My truck?” Travis sputtered.

“Yes, your truck.”

“Don’t you think you should ask before messing with my truck?” Travis sounded indignant.

“Oh, you mean the way you should ask before dumping BOTH of your families on my doorstep?”

Travis looked down, looking like a scolded puppy before muttering his acceptance that his truck would be the teaching instrument.

“Before we get to car jacking lessons though, everyone needs to put together their go bag. I want enough food and water for 3 days, one change of clothes, one radio per group, a knife, an unloaded handgun with 2 extra magazines, matches, a small first aid kit, flashlight, a roll of tp, and soap.”

Anya paused and looked at the adults who were, once again, rolling their eyes and protesting. “Everyone will collect their items, put them on a backpack and you will not pack the bags until I’ve inspected your choices. And Liza, please tell me you have better shoes than those?”

“Uh, these are all I brought with me.” Liza held out her foot showing her slip on sneakers, “We kind of left in a hurry.”

“One of your first priorities once we get into town is to find better shoes. Those will get you killed. While you are gathering your shit, I’m going to get the gun mounted on Baby.” Anya looked at everyone, practically glaring the adults into submission.

“Hold on, the gun?” Chris exclaimed, “Like a legit gun like those military guys use on their cars?”

“I don’t know if you noticed,” Nick put a hand on Chris’ shoulder and gave him a solemn look, “Your aunt is kind of a military guy.”

“Yeah, but that’s awesome.” Chris fanboyed.

“Yeah. It’s awesome. You know what else is awesome?” Nick asked turning to look at his Mom, “More meds. I feel like I’m in hell. It’s time for my next dose.”

“At least he didn’t say his next fix.” Alicia muttered to the ceiling, “You might want to find yourself a new dealer Nick, I don’t think Mom’s a fan of the lifestyle.”

“Alicia, don’t give your brother a hard time.” Madison scolded, “You know how hard withdrawal is.” She turned to look at Nick, “You’ve got at least another hour before your next dose. This is part of the process.”

“Oh yeah, trust the process, I know that one.” He snapped, going from sage to satan in a blink. He turned around and stormed into the kitchen to put together his go bag. “I’ll be in the kitchen, TRUSTING THE PROCESS.” He shouted.

“Nick,” Madison sighed, before following him through the house.

“He’s doing pretty well, Alicia. This is hard on him and on your Mom.” Travis reminded her.

“Oh yeah, because it doesn’t matter if it’s hard on me seeing my big brother wash his life down the toilet, just if it hurts mom that she chased him away. Way to go Travis, boyfriend of the year.”
“Stop your bitching and go get your shit together,” Anya glared at Alicia this time.

Alicia gave her a stiff salute and shot a dirty look at Travis for getting her in trouble before she joined Nick in the dining room. Travis sighed, rubbing his head, “How did everything get like this?”

“People.” Anya shot the sarcastic, sort of, response over her shoulder as she went out the door and around to the basement. She hadn’t pulled the add-ons to the jeep up from the cellar before since they weren’t easily stolen items, but now it was time to make sure that Baby was locked and loaded for bear...or the dead.

Hauling the last few items up from the cellar took a few minutes, that shit was heavy and awkward, but once it was out it only took a few minutes to get the semi-automatic gun mounted in the back of the jeep, the top wrap stowed and the grill cage installed. Taking the time to check the winch and cable setup, make sure nothing had been damaged the last time she went off roading, Anya then started loading up the extra guns and ammo she had brought up. All of the handguns would be carried, but she had a few hunting rifles and a shotgun that were a little much to carry.

With the jeep ready to drive, Anya grabbed her ladder and got it settled. The others were probably done getting their shit together, but they could wait. Anya climbed up and began messing with the switch on her lights. She usually hated having them on motion activated, what the fuck was the point of living in the middle of nowhere if you were always surrounded by light, but now it’d provide a warning if anyone tried to get too close. With all of the false alarms triggered by coyotes and the like sleep would be hard to come by, but better sleep-deprived than dead.

With everything outside the house settled, Anya walked into the kitchen to check out the go bags. She picked through the piles carefully, having to turn down almost every clothing choice, fucking shorts and a tank top do not count as clothes. Not in a desert full of cactus and venomous snakes. The knives weren’t bad, but she assumed Alicia made sure no one grabbed anything from the kitchen.

The rest of the items in the bags weren’t exactly easy to screw up until she got to Travis’ bag.

“Alicia, tell me what’s wrong with this.” She pointed at the stack of bullshit on the table.

Alicia looked it over and glanced up at Anya. She realized that ‘I don’t know’ was not an acceptable answer and looked again. Alicia stifled a giggle when she saw it, “Those clips are for a .22 handgun.”

“Yeah.” Anya picked up the desert eagle, “Travis. Does this tiny ass clip fit into this gun?”

He looked confused, “No?”

“No.” Anya rolled her eyes, “Eagles use .44 magnums, god can you even fucking shoot this thing?” She walked over to her crate of ammunition and snagged a clip for the pistol, “Come on. Alicia, make sure everyone else has the right ammo for their god damn guns.”

“Yes ma’am.” Alicia grinned, going through the packs for her aunt.

Anya spent the next forty-five teaching Travis how to wield the bigass pistol he picked, and how to aim with the massive kick that it packed.

Once everything had been approved and packed up Anya got her own go bag out from her bedroom closet. It was always packed and ready to go and far better equipped than the makeshift ones everyone else had, but she hadn’t planned for the world to end with 6 other people tagging along.
“I need you all to go find something to mark your bag with. It can be duct tape, a bandana, an old t-shirt of yours,” Anya looked around to emphasize that they couldn’t use hers, “Whatever the fuck you can find, but if you can’t tell which bag is yours in less than 2 seconds you are wrong.”

With the previously uniform bags now tagged like airport luggage, Anya began again, “These bags go everywhere with you. You sleep, it should be beside your head. You eat, it should be at your feet. You take a shit and that bag should carry the stench.”

Chris wrinkled his nose. “Gross.”

“Wait till you have to drink your own piss because you had to run without it.” Anya shrugged. “If we have to go and you leave your bag behind, no one is going to provide what you need. You will find it or do without.”

“Jeez.” He muttered, “You were a lot more fun before that kid tried to take a chunk out of you.”

Anya ignored him, and the rage rising inside of her at his comment. “Madison and Liza, I need you to sort through all of the food and water we have piled in the dining room, split it into two even piles and then we can get those loaded up in the vehicles before we start hotwiring lessons.”

Madison nodded and started sorting. Liza took a moment to smack her son upside the head and hiss something in his ear before stomping by him to help Madison. She raised her boy so much better than that.

Anya grabbed the fuel tanks and moved them over to the vehicles, splitting them up as evenly as possible. She hated siphoning resources away from Baby, but she didn’t trust Travis to be intelligent enough to keep track of his fuel consumption, nor does Baby really have enough space to fit everyone. Not legally anyway. Even less so with the bed full of food and ammunition.

Her next issue would be to figure out which group goes in which vehicle. Optimally, she would keep Travis with his truck, but the question is whether or not that would happen in an emergency. Probably better to give out that assignment while they were by the vehicles than to wait for chance. Otherwise they’d end up with whoever jumped in a vehicle and then someone would get left behind.

They managed to dish out assignments, keep their go bags on hand, and generally keep their heads for three more days. The only serious problem was Nick. His shakes got worse, and he had two more seizures, almost dying the first time when Chris didn’t know what to do and forgot to call for help.

Nick got more aggressive about getting his drugs, and as of today he is clean. Technically. Madison let him know over breakfast that they were officially out of Oxy and his response was to get up and leave. The sound of the door slamming shut behind him had been a little startling, but everyone quickly returned to their own meal.

“Don’t forget you need to stick together.” Anya reminded Madison in a mild tone. She wouldn’t mind a few hours of Madison and Travis out of the house, especially if they took Nick’s tempramental ass with them.

“I think he just needs a few minutes.” Madison shook her head and stayed seated.

Anya shrugged and took another bite of her eggs. “I get that.” She continued eating, but everyone could hear the unspoken words. The knowledge that nobody had gotten a few minutes since Tris died, and that Nick doesn’t get a free pass for being the idiot who got himself hooked on heroin.
No one argued with Madison’s statement, but they were also waiting to see how much time Nick got to cool down before it was time for him to grow up again. A full hour passed before Madison got worried, “Nick should be back by now.”

“No shit.” Anya looked up from her book. “If only you knew where he was.”

Madison shot her a glare and grabbed her go bag and a hat to protect her from the sun. “I’m going to look for him.”

“Don’t forget your exit buddy.” Anya reminded her, keeping her ass firmly in her armchair. Madison needed to learn that her contingency plan only works if everyone follows it, all the damn time.

“Travis!” Madison snapped, “Let’s go find Nick.”

“Why do I need to go?” Travis looked over from his seat.

“Because Anya is going to be a bitch about it.” Madison snapped, “Let’s go.” Anya raised her eyebrow and watched them leave.

About three minutes after they left Anya looked over to Liza, “If you needed to find narcotics within about ten miles, where would you go?”

Liza frowned, “Tent city.”

“Same. Let’s move.” Anya got up with a sigh. This wouldn’t be a problem if Madison fucking went after her damn kid when she was supposed to.

Liza nodded, “I was thinking about that, I’m glad I’m not the only one who was worried about him looking for a new supply.”

“I’m more surprised he didn’t leave sooner. I would have ditched when she dropped him to twice a day.” Anya shrugged, “Different strokes.” She snagged her go bag and fished the keys to Baby out of her pocket. “Grab anything you’ll miss, I expect that this is going to go poorly.”

Liza grabbed her medical kit and Chris ran for his video camera. Alicia put on her pack and said, “I’ll be in the car.”

Anya smirked, proud of her girl.

Anya walked out to Baby and slung her pack into the back. Climbing into the driver’s seat she sat drumming her thumbs on the steering wheel while waiting for Chris and Liza to come out. They should have had everything in their packs already, but whatever. As they climbed in Anya interrupted Liza who was pulling on her seatbelt, “No seatbelts. If we need to get out in a hurry the harness belts will take too long.” Anya reached over and pulled the closest harness strap out of the way so it wasn’t tucked behind Liza, “Just pay attention, if I tell you to put them on you’ll need to do it on the move.”

“She’s not wrong.” Alicia grumbled, “Last time she told me to put on my harness she was testing the roll cage.”

“We are not testing the roll cage!” Liza protested, “And you better not have tested the roll cage with Chris in the car.”

“He was fine.” Anya stepped on the gas and drove east, past the empty spot for Travis’ truck,
hopefully they weren’t getting themselves in trouble. She checked her watch, “By my estimation, Nick will be getting into the city sometime in the next ten minutes, meaning that he will have fifteen to get himself neck deep in trouble.”

“That’s more than enough time.” Alicia rolled her eyes, “Trust me.”

“I think we are all aware of how much trouble Nick can into in 2 minutes if he’s left alone.” Anya accelerated just a bit more. “Alicia stay with Baby. Chris stay in the car too. Liza you’ll come with me if someone needs medical help. We are not there to help anyone, give information or dawdle. We get in, get the others and get the hell out. If anyone starts to follow us in a vehicle we won’t go back to the house, we’ll just drive out to the rendezvous point.

“What? No fair! Lisha and I are totally capable.” Chris folded his arms over his chest, “This is bullshit.”

“Watch your mouth young man.” Liza warned him, “You are not going to throw yourself into the middle of a bad situation and make this worse.”

He glared at his mother, “I wouldn’t make it worse. I’m really good with a gun, right Aunt Anya?”

“I’m not getting into this with you.” Anya glanced at him in the rear mirror, “You’re guarding Baby, and you’re going to thank your lucky stars I trust you that much.”

Alicia had been quiet, rolling her eyes at Chris’ whining, “Where should we meet if you can’t get back to Baby?”

“Stick around for forty-five, or until you feel threatened. Then we meet at the rendezvous just like we planned.” Anya grinned, “We should be back in fifteen or less though.”

The tent city came into view slowly, almost looking like a mirage at first. As they came closer people slowly came into view, although there was something odd about it. At first there were only a few people wandering in between the tents and vehicles that were clumped together. But as they traveled further into the pop-up town there were larger groups of people. Some surrounding vehicles, others clustered around tents.

The oddest one though was a group of people surrounding a table with a radio blasting music, they just kept walking, bumping into each other and whatever else was in their way. No one was dancing, or singing. No one was drinking beer or shouting. They were just quietly walking into whatever was in their way. It was eerie and disturbing.

Anya kept driving past them, her eyes scanning for the remainder of their group. More than one head turned their way, empty eyes following them and soon shambling steps did the same. They gained a trail of people shuffling through the camp. No one was protecting their tents, or yelling when someone tripped over their water bottles.

“This place is freaking me out.” Alicia mumbled. She’d been to a party or two courtesy of Matt, and none of them looked like this. Not even the homeless camps they drove past sometimes were this sedate.

Anya shifted in her seat, her grip on the steering wheel tightening. “Those people aren’t alive anymore,” she muttered. “Look sharp, avoid unneeded contact, and if someone refuses to back off shoot them, preferably in the fucking head.”

Finally, well into the tent city, Anya spotted the truck and pulled over parking with enough space so they could get in and out without hitting each other, but still close enough to be able to make a
quick transfer if needed. She jumped out, leaving the keys in the ignition, “Alicia if needed, you drive. Leave the gun alone. You’ll hit someone living.”

Once she got a nod from Alicia, Anya checked her weapons, “Liza, you have your knife?”

“Uh, yeah.” Liza looked wary and unsure.

“Keep it ready, leave your pack here in the car. If they can’t make it back to the car, they aren’t going to make it back.” Anya looked around and debated calling out. She didn’t want to bring more attention to them, but there had been too much activity to follow tracks.

Deciding that it would take way too much time to follow them, Anya sighed. “Clark. Manawa.” She spoke quietly. She listened and couldn’t hear anything over the music blasting down the road.

She glanced around, a few of the...walkers were getting closer, focused on the vehicle and them. Moving away down the road Anya called out louder, better to have those things coming after her and not surrounding Baby. They were slow enough she and Liza could outrun them.

Finally she could hear the sound of a fight. There was nothing to indicate it could be the others, but it was a direction to go in. Moving down the road she started to cut through the tents and could finally see the fight taking place. Nick was on the ground, it looked like he had been thoroughly beaten and we wasn’t moving much. Travis was pushing some guy around, badly, while Madison hovered over Nick, it looked like she was trying to protect him with her body. Stupid woman probably left her weapon in the truck. Or forgot she it.

“Hey!” Anya yelled as she came up within reaching distance. Everyone turned to focus on her and stopped. Whether it was her don’t fuck with me attitude, or just that she bothered to interrupt, they all rotated to orient around her.

“What do you want?” One of them, the biggest, asked.

“I want those three, then I want to leave.” Anya responded, not intimidated in the slightest.

“This one,” The speaker jabbed a finger at Nick, “had been raiding people’s tents taking shit.”

Anya sighed and leveled a look at Nick, “Anything he took, you can keep. We just want to walk away.” Anya shifted her stance, the others had relaxed. “No harm, no foul. We’re just gone.”

Nick started to protest, fighting Madison over him. Travis moved away from the group and reached down grabbing hold of Nick, hauling him up as Madison moved away from him. “No! It’s Mine!” Nick protested, fighting the hold.

Anya rolled her eyes and walked over to him. She began searching him and started pulling out prescription bottles and a bag of powder. Anya tossed them onto the ground behind her. “Here, you keep that and we walk away. We good?” Anya asked.

There was a pause as there was a silent conversation between the other group. Finally, the big guy nodded, “Get out of here, we see him around here again and I’ll kill him.”

Anya motioned to the others to walk past her while she stayed focused on the others, waiting until they had some distance on her before she turned around and started to follow. Anya urged them to move quickly back to the truck where the others were waiting to avoid the walkers coming towards them.

They made it back to the road when Nick finally managed to rip himself away and began running.
In the fucking opposite direction of the vehicles of course.

“Nick!” Madison yelled, trying to grab at him again.

Nick just kept going, not paying attention, but he was clumsy and kept tripping into tents and cars. He was making a racket and drawing even more attention. Anya took off after him, the others on her heels. Nick stumbled into a tent and partially collapsed it, getting caught and tangled in the canvas. Anya reached over and hauled him out to the growing rumble of growls and snarls.

“Oh shit, what is wrong with them?” Travis asked, eyes focused on two people whose eyes were riveted on them.

Anya looked up, “Dead.” It was the only reply she needed to give. She looked at Nick and shook him, he was so light she was able to use enough force to make his teeth clack together. “You run again and I leave you for them.”

Anya pulled him around and started pushing Nick forward, keeping her grip tight on her collar. She didn’t trust him not to try and take off again.

Rounding the corner between one tent and the next Anya paused “Fuck.” There was a group of fifteen dead right in front of them, only two behind them. “Go back, just avoid those two. Move” Anya barked at the others. Feeling hands just barely brushing her shoulders as she pushed Nick ahead of her.

By the truck Madison and Travis watched in horror as Anya and Nick were trapped between multiple groups of infected, groaning and getting close enough to touch Anya’s arms and back. “Oh my god,” Liza turned to the truck and grabbed Madison’s shotgun from the bed. She ran at the group and once she was ten feet away, Liza stopped and braced herself and the gun, took aim, and shot.

The deershot spread out far enough to catch two with the first shot who fell and crashed into some of the others. Anya ducked instinctively, yanking Nick down with her and turned to see Liza lining up her next shot. “Badass.” She grinned, pulling the knife from her thigh holster and put it through the brain of the dead guy standing over them.

Liza shot three more with her next shell and backed up towards the truck as the crowd started following her. She popped the weapon open after a moment and let the shells fall among the rest of the debris on the ground.

Anya took that moment of distraction for what it was and dropped two more in close range. With the group so scattered Anya started pulling Nick around the side, keeping a firm hold of his collar until she was sure he was tied into the damn truck.

Liza scrambled to move backwards and keep an eye on the group and reload her shotgun when lightning shot up her leg. Liza fell back onto a heap of wood scraps and scattered glass. She looked down to see a large shard of glass in the bottom of her foot, then she realized. She looked up and saw four of them standing over her, bending down to grab her.

Travis yelled and ran at them, shoving two aside and trying to get between Liza and the infected trying to get to her. “You stay away from her and nobody gets hurt!” Anya took a quick detour to help Liza, Nick still stumbling after her.

Anya came up behind the group and stabbed one in the head before slinging Nick at Madison by the truck. “Get that disaster in the truck!” Anya ducked under a swing from one of the dead, “They
aren’t going to stay away Travis, man up or back off.”

One of them fell on top of Liza in the chaos and she screamed, beating at him with the shotgun. Travis kicked the guy with a roar and tackled him, beating his face to a bloody pulp, not even stopping when the guy stopped moving. Anya handled the last two and pulled Liza to her feet. “Travis come on!”

“Travis stop it!” Madison shouted, “Travis, we need to go!”

He sat back breathing hard, looking around in confusion. Slowly their voices filtered into his mind and Travis stood up, backing towards the truck. Everything was hazy, but he needed to get back to the truck. He climbed into the passenger seat and watched Anya moving around and yelling at people, at him.

Anya put Liza in the bed of the truck, “You go to the rendezvous, I will meet you there!” She looked over her shoulder at the growing horde of dead congregating towards them, following the noise of their yelling and the gunshots.

“Go!” She shouted, not waiting past the moment that Madison turned on the truck before racing back to Baby. She wasn’t sure what she was going to find, and every minute in this damn tent city feels more and more like a minefield.

Alicia was already moving into the backseat when Anya got to Baby and ripped the door open with a bit of a wince. She’d have to check the hinges later. Putting the car into gear she ignored Chris yelling questions about his mom and just focused on driving.

Anya didn’t start breathing again until the tent city was gone from the rear view mirror. She looked to Alicia and Chris, “Okay, report. We got Nick back, he’s in the truck with the mom squad. Everyone’s okay I think. We’re meeting up at the rendezvous and we’ll know more then. Anything happen here while we were gone?”

“No, it was quiet. A few...people or whatever walked by, but they ignored us once the yelling started.” Alicia responded, finally settling back into her seat.

Anya nodded her head, she had hoped they would be left alone. And it was good to know the walkers had moved elsewhere when noise started. That could be useful. For now though, they had thirty miles between them and their meet-up.

Anya pulled into the parking lot of the Motel 8, the only vehicle there was Travis’ truck, and it was empty. Anya pulled into the spot right next to the truck, and jumped out. She reached into the back and grabbed her go bag gesturing for Chris and Alicia to do the same. She walked up to the door directly in front of the truck and peered into the window.

Madison was sitting on the bed next to Liza who was laying down. Travis came back in with a frown on his face and a bowl of water with a washcloth on the edge of it. Anya closed her eyes and let out a deep breath, Travis looked constipated and that could only mean that something is very wrong.

“What’s wrong?” The question almost a statement. Anya dropped her bag by the door and moved out of the doorway so the kids could get inside.

“There’s nobody at the front desk. We forced the door.” Travis paused at a grunt from Nick, “Fine, Nick forced the door. Can you get another room open?”
Anya narrowed her eyes, it was obvious that Travis was avoiding the question. “Nick, get another room open. You obviously know how to do it.”

Nick nodded and left grabbing his bag before pushing between Alicia and Chris to get out of the room. After a nod from Anya the two kids hauled around and followed him out of the room. “We’ll be in 108,” Nick called over his shoulder.

Anya reached behind her and hit the door closed. “What is it, Travis?”

“I got bit,” Liza whispered, refusing to look up.

Anya froze for a second. “Fuck.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s not a big deal, a few antibiotics and this’ll be taken care of, right?” Travis asked, his voice strained with hope.

Anya and Liza just looked at him.

“Are you really sure about this stuff Anya?” Madison asked, her voice calm.

“Yeah, I’d trust the guy who gave me the info to hold a gun to my head, I trust him with this.”

“So I guess the only question left is who’s gonna do it then.” Liza looked around at all their faces.

“What?” Travis asked his voice rising.

The three women looked at each other, Travis was the only one fighting it. “If she turns into one of them she will attack us. We can’t let that happen.” Anya sighed.

“I’d rather you do it before I have a chance to hurt Chris.” Liza reached up and grabbed Travis’ arm. “You don’t have to be the one to do it.” Liza turned to Anya her eyes pleading. A single nod from Anya had her relaxing but Travis immediately tensed up.

“No! You are not killing my her!” Travis protested, “She hasn’t done anything!”

“I haven’t done anything yet, Travis,” Liza tugged on his arm again, “I am going to die, and when I do I won’t care about anything, even hurting Chris. I can’t be allowed to do that.”

“Travis just, just let me talk to her.” Anya reassured him, “Give us a minute?”

“No,” Travis refused firmly, “You’ll do it as soon as I walk out of the room. You aren’t killing her.”

“No I’m not.” Anya took a deep breath and slammed his head into the door frame. “I’m obeying her last wish you idiot.” She muttered as he dropped. “You married a lightweight Liza.”

Liza bursted into laughter before the seriousness of the situation set in, “Thanks. Just..”

“I won’t let the kids see.” Anya promised, offering Liza her hand, “Come on, you deserve something a little less depressing than this room for saving our asses.”

Liza took her hand and the two of them took a walk. It was slow but neither of them mentioned it, mentioned Liza’s limp. They went around the back of the motel to a little hill that overlooked the mountains, all foggy in the distance. “It’s no sunset, but it’s better than paisley.” Anya shrugged.
Liza smiled a little and nodded, “Thank you, for doing this. For taking care of Travis and the others. I know it’s—it’s not what you wanted but—”

“Hey,” Anya stopped her, “I may be a selfish bitch spending more on my car than my own family, but taking care of people is what I do. It’s in the blood. I’ll take care of them.”

“Just don’t forget to let them take care of you, yeah?” Liza cupped Anya’s cheek, “Don’t forget you’re important too.”

“I won’t.” Anya looked down. Liza looked away to the mountains and Anya took measured breaths, knife in hand. It was quick, and Anya caught her body before it hit the ground. “Sorry Liza, you were one of the good ones.” She set Liza down carefully and looked around, trying to think of the best way to take care of her, to keep her promise.

The gasoline lit up rather quickly, burning hot and hopefully killing off anything and everything inside the body. It felt wrong, against her fundamental instincts to not put Liza in the ground, but quarantine protocol… And this way none of the kids would have to see.

Anya waited for the fire to burn out before returning with a grim look on her face and Liza’s cross and watch in her hand.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for not posting on tuesday, to make up for it, we are doing a double post tonight with a third one tomorrow to cover all our holidays and corporate greed days.
Dude, where's my car?

Chapter Summary

Dude! What's mine say?
Sweet! What's mine say?
Dude! It says that bitch just stole my coffee machine and now I'm fighting the homeowner's association over whether or not a moat fits inside the 'reasonable landscaping' clause of our contract.
....Sweet.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I need fooooooood!” Raven whined from her spot on the sofa cushions.

“Rae! If you don’t fucking stop whining I’m going to ram this can of soup up your ass!” Elyza slammed the can down on the countertop. She opened the soup with aggressive twists on the can opener. “I love you, but I’m seriously ready to drag your ass outside and leave it for the fucking dead!”

“I can’t move!” Raven yelled back, “I have been stuck on these stupid cushions for the last 4 fucking days. I can’t even use the damn bathroom without help!” Raven flopped back on the cushions, they had laid them out on the floor after their run from the mall had made her back seize up.

Elyza sighed, being stuck was hard on Raven and this had been miserable. At least she had books to read to sort of occupy her. “I’m working on food, and you should be working on those exercises that the PT taught you.”

“I never did those exercises, they were stupid.” Raven mumbled.

“I don’t care if they are stupid. Do them, and then when you can walk on you own, you can stop bitching at me everytime you want something.” Elyza began pulling out bowls, spoons and crackers for their lunch.

“If I do them will you rub my back afterward?” Raven begged, giving Elyza the biggest puppy-dog eyes she could manage.

Elyza almost refused, it had been a long few days stuck in the store with Raven, but she had been in a lot of pain and the back rub would help. “Fine, but food will be done soon.” She checked the soup, it needed a few more minutes.

Elyza ducked under the counter and walked over to Raven, crouching down beside her. Elyza pulled Grandma Reyes’ quilt over and rolled it up before helping Raven move into a seated position. Raven had avoided mentioning the pain she was in for a few hours after they got back from the mall, but by the time Elyza’s freakout was completely over, Raven couldn’t bend her leg.

They had worked together that night trying to stretch out her back, and rub the soreness from her
muscles. She had been able to do her own sponge bath before they went to sleep, but by the time she woke up the next morning, Raven couldn’t even sit up without help. It had taken time and a few bruises to get her downstairs, using the blanket to help pull her forward across each stair so her butt could drop down onto the next stair. Once she was down they had decided not to try to get her back up and Elyza had gone up and thrown down all of the sofa cushions, so they could sleep on something vaguely comfortable.

After a lunch of soup (again) and both the exercises and a back rub, Raven was once again able to move around the store, but only while leaning on Elyza for assistance. “It’s a good thing you’re skinny Rae, otherwise this would be really fucking difficult.” Elyza commented as they hobbled around the store.

“I’d collapse if I had to haul your assets around.” Raven agreed with a sage nod.

“You can haul around car engines, but you think I’d be too heavy for you,” Elyza hip checked Raven, making the other girl’s leg buckle. “Oh shit, I forgot,” Elyza pulled to keep Raven from completely tipping over.

“Well thank god someone forgot.” Raven grouched, “It would suck if both of us have to remember I’m useless.”

“You aren’t useless Rae.”

Behind them, they heard the familiar cocking of a shotgun. “I dunno, I would say she’s pretty useless. I heard you yelling from half a block away.” The girls raised their hands and turned around to face a big guy. Not like fullback, but definitely gym rat meets gangbanger kind of guy.

The least badass thing about this guy’s sawed off shotgun and leather clad exterior was the mop of blonde hair that looked like his mom cut it in the dark with a butter knife. “Well fuck, I would tap that in another apocalypse. You know, the one where you didn’t use a blender to complement your salon experience.” Raven joked.

Elyza bit her lip, trying not to laugh. “Probably not the best time Rae.”

This guy was neither amused, nor insulted. He knew what happened to his hair, it wasn’t good. But on to more important things, “I’m taking your shit.” He informed them, “I’m not a total monster, so you can take whatever the fuck is in your packs, but the food, water and everything else is mine.”

“Just our luck, a philanthropist.” Elyza glared, “Can we have a few minutes to put our clothes in our bags?”

He pursed his lips, “Five minutes.” He stretched out his arm to reveal his watch, “Starting now.”

“Wha-you fucker!” Raven snapped. He looked down at his watch pointedly and Elyza started moving.

“Stay, I’ll get our stuff and toss it over the balcony.” Elyza jogged upstairs to shove all of their things into bags as best she could while Raven glared daggers at the invader.

“You’re a real fucking hero you know that? Stealing shit from a cripple. A female cripple. I hope you electrocute yourself on the coffee machine.”

“There’s a working coffee machine?” His eyebrows disappeared into his roughly chopped bangs,
“Shit, I wouldn’t mind going out like that if there’s a cup of hot coffee in it for me.” He glanced down at his watch, “Two minutes princess.”

“WHY DOES EVERYONE USE THAT STUPID FUCKING NICKNAME?!”

“It’s easy honey,” Raven called up, “You just have that rapunzel screwed sleeping beauty look.”

“I don’t even know what that means, and I hope I never do.” Elyza called.

The guy shrugged, “Sounds like a good time.”

“Finally someone understands!” Raven gestured at the guy.

“Yeah, if only that someone weren’t taking our bookstore and all the food we just fucking found. What a miracle we found him.” Elyza snarked, throwing three packs over the balcony. She had the fourth slung over her back, it was the one full of their candles, bodywash and other items that wouldn’t do well getting chucked fifteen feet to a hardwood ending. “I hope you hate it here.” Elyza glared at the guy, packing on two more backpacks. Normally she would make Raven carry half of them, but with how screwed up she was, it was going to be hard for Rae to move at all, let alone loaded down with shit.

“Thanks ladies.” He stepped away from the door, “I wish you the best of luck out there.” He gestured to the door with his gun, patiently escorting them out. As soon as their feet were over the threshold, he slammed the reinforced door on their asses, almost knocking Elyza over.

“Fuck you! I made that goddamn door!” Raven shouted, “Come on.” She muttered to Elyza, resting a hand on Elyza’s shoulder, “Let’s find a car that still works.”

“Did you leave the battery in any of them?” Elyza looked at the cars with their hoods still propped open.

“Come on,” Raven rolled her eyes, “I only took like six.”

“Well you’re the car genius, you lead the way.” Elyza gestured towards more parked cars, one of the packs started sliding and she had to catch it before they all started.

“That one should be fine.” Raven gestured at a sedan, looking rather bummed. She limped her way over, trying not to rest her weight too heavily on Elyza. She yanked the hood up and checked for any damage to the interior. “Oh baby you are rough.” Raven winced and put the hood back down.

“She looks like the front yard of a frat party.” Raven shook her head and tried the doors. Luckily the door behind the driver’s was unlocked and Raven was able to wiggle squirm her way into the front seat with a plethora of cussing and gasping that per her usual very much crossed the line into awkwardness.

“Raven you know I could have done that right?” Elyza asked through the window on the driver’s door.

Raven glared at her through tempered glass and unlocked the door, “Shut up.” She was caught upside-down and half-way through a barrel roll with her head under the wheel. “It’s easier this way anyway. Just stay out of my light while I work.”

“I’m going to throw this crap in the back.” Elyza started slinging packs onto the floor of the backseat.
“Just don’t bury my legs, I have no fucking clue how I’m getting out of here without a concussion.”

Elyza didn’t comment on that, deciding that Raven needed a few minutes to be independent. She had been chafing at her dependance on Elyza pretty much from the moment she realized she couldn’t get off the couch. Raven needed a chance to do something by herself, even if it did cause her a few more aches and pains in the morning.

Elyza crawled into the backseat angling herself underneath Raven’s legs. What idiot leaves the backseat door unlocked, but locks the front doors? She finally wiggled herself across and was able to reach the lock and flip it. Elyza pulled herself closer to the door managing to knock herself into Raven’s leg earning a few cusses and an almost kick. Opening the door she moved up and finally sat down in the passenger seat, still slumped to the side to avoid Raven’s body.

“There you are!” Raven exclaimed as the engine kicked to life. “Now to get out of this shithole.”

“Anything you want me to do?” Elyza asked, worried about Raven, but trying to give her space.

“Nah, I got this shit.” Raven reached up by her head and pulled the handle to pop the door open, she slid a bit with a grunt once she no longer had it to support her. The oh-shit handle gave her the leverage she needed to haul her body out of the barrel roll with only a few kicks to Elyza’s head and shoulder.

Like a greased elephant baby, Raven slid out onto the pavement with the metallic clack of her leg brace on the road. She pushed herself up into a sitting position, “That went better than expected.”

Elyza nodded and looked over Raven’s shoulder. “Raven!”

Raven turned around in time to see Mr. Rope latch onto her right arm with both hands and drag himself towards her. “Oh shit!” Raven tried to yank her arm out of his grasp only to end up flat on her back with the top-half of their neighbor growling at her.

She braced a hand on his forehead, scrambling backwards into the car, trying to pry herself out of his iron grip without getting bitten. Elyza yanked at the handle for her door, struggling to get the janky latch to open with her eyes turned towards Raven’s struggle. In hindsight she probably could have opened the door if she simply spent more time looking at the task at hand.

“Get the fuck off of me!” Raven shouted, getting a firm grip on his hair and ripping her hand out of his grip, taking a rotting finger with her. As soon as her arm was free, so was Mr. Rope free to grab her shoulders and start pulling her in. “I fed you fucking crackers!” She punched him in the eye, feeling her knuckles split and his head begin to cave under her hand.

Elyza finally got her door open and started running around the car to help.

“I am not gonna die to roadkill!” Raven grabbed for the knife the Black Commando gave her right as Mr. Rope’s hair ripped free of his head. Elyza made it to them just in time to see Mr. Rope land on Raven’s shoulder. Raven let out a yell and slammed her knife into his skull at nearly the same moment.

“Are you ok? Raven?” Elyza cried in a panic, her heart racing.

Raven shoved their rather ungrateful neighbor’s corpse off of herself and looked down, “I don’t think so?” She tugged at her shirt and gasped, “Motherfucker!”

“What? Did you get bit?”
“No, that asshole ripped my shirt!”

Elyza chuckled a little, “Don’t worry Rae, we’ll go raid a new store and get you a new one. I’ll get the most expensive shirt in the whole store.

Rae nodded, “Thanks…” She looked down at the mess of herself and Mr. Rope. “I uh, That was…”

“Do I need to hold your hair while you throw up?” Elyza smirked a bit, trying to distract Raven from the ick factor.

“Fuck off.” Raven braced herself on the frame of the car and pushed herself up into the driver’s seat to give herself a bit of distance from it all. “We should, we should go.” She looked pale.

“Let me get into the back and get you a clean shirt.” Elyza pulled open the backseat door and began rummaging around. Pulling out a t-shirt she handed it to Raven. “We really need to find some baby wipes or something if this keeps happening.”

“Yeah, sounds good.” Raven changed in a bit of a daze, discarding her torn shirt on the road next to Mr. Rope. The handle of the knife caught her eye, “Hey, Lyza can you get me that back?” She gestured to his head, “It’s our only weapon right now.”

Elyza bent down and got the knife, wiping it down on the shirt Raven had just thrown. Once it was mostly clean, certainly chunk-free, she handed it over to Raven who was fully dressed once again. “Do you want me to drive?”

“No, I’m good.” Raven put the knife back into its sheath on her hip and sat back in her chair, “Get in.”

Elyza went back to the passenger side of the car and got herself situated. “So where to now?”

“I have no fucking clue. What do you think?” Raven sighed.

“Well, still want to avoid people. And apparently we need a lot of space so assholes don’t hear us and kick us out.” Elyza leaned back against the seat.

“Or a better fucking door.” Raven muttered, “I vote no glass doors.”

“And maybe something better than a sofa to sleep on, that’d be nice.” Elyza suggested.

“Okay, this is starting to sound like a house, yeah? Like a normal house. I’m hearing suburbia call my name.”

“I don’t really care where we go, I just want a real bed and a shower.” Elyza shrugged her shoulders, “Also food. Food would be good since that asshole kept all of ours. It took forever to haul all of that from the store too.”

“Well maybe someone left some shit in their house. God knows we left a couple of packs of ramen in the apartment.”

“I’d eat Ramen right now.” Elyza practically salivated, it hadn’t even been that long since lunch.

“See? Now you get it.” Raven grinned, “You never know when your last meal is gonna be.” She nodded sagely at her own advice.

“I wish I had known that steak was going to be my last, I would’ve eaten it until I burst.” Elyza
almost groaned. “So do you have any ideas where to go? Or should we just drive til we find something?”

“I was going more for that second option if we’re being real here.” Raven stuck her hand out the window to enjoy the breeze.

“Hey, can you pull over here.” Elyza pointed to a cluster of buildings.

“Uh, yeah sure.” Raven stopped in the middle of the road, “You need a tanning salon or something?” She teased.

Elyza rolled her eyes, “No, come with me and bring one of the empty bags.” Elyza got out of the car and started towards one of the doors.

“Sure thing.” Raven turned one of their bags upside down and shook it out into the backseat. “Perfect.” She climbed out with a huge grin, “I’ve always wanted to park in the middle of the road.”

“So glad we could fulfill a wish, Rae.” Elyza gestured to the door in front of her. “Can you get this door open?”

“Have you met me?” Raven drew her knife and used it to jimmy the door open, “Voila.”

“I could have done that,” Elyza squinted her eyes, and then pulled the door open. She walked into a waiting room filled with stiff looking chairs and end tables littered with ancient magazines. “Let’s see if we can find anything useful here, but especially the medicine cupboard.”

“Bro, this is some family doctor, all we’re going to find is a bunch of mags for a fire.” Raven gestured at the pile of tabloids and colored in kids magazines, “Like, why are we even here?”

Alcohol swabs, clean needles, bandaids, gauze,” Elyza ticked each item off on her fingers, “and if we’re really lucky they’ll have some useful medicine samples.”

Raven put her hands up, “Okay, my bad. I’ll go raid the bandaids and shit.” She pushed past the front desk and started digging through the cabinets in the patient rooms.

Elyza wandered behind the receptionists desks, opening every cupboard she could. Most of them were filled with office supplies or personal items, which provided a few cups o’ noodles and some candy bars. Halfway through she found a cabinet that was locked and used a thick letter opener to jimmy it open the way Raven had done the front door.

This cabinet contained rubbing alcohol, silver nitrate sticks and a variety of creams. Elyza grabbed as many as she could carry and hauled them towards the back offices, surely someone had left a bag or a grocery sack.

Elyza walked to the very back of the building and found the kitchen and grinned. With her armload of stuff dumped onto the table she rummaged through all of the cabinets and set everything useful on the table with her stash of supplies. Canned food, snacks and tons of condiment packages, along with a few grocery sacks to haul it all in.

“Hey, do we need popsicle sticks? There’s enough to build a taj mahal in here. Like full scale.”

“Not really, I’m not inspecting your tonsils.” Elyza made a grossed out face. “Did you finish up the patient rooms?”
“Yeah.” Raven came in with a few bags of cotton balls, gauze and some stitch kits. “I left the band-aids behind, I figure if it’s that small we can just suck it up.”

“Yeah that’s fine. We need to raid the Dr’s offices and the nurses stations next.” Elyza looked up from where she was loading bags. “Which do you want?”

“I’ll take the office, breaking and entering is my middle name after all.” Raven grinned, starting to shake some of the funk from before. “You have fun with the nurses.” She winked.

Elyza dropped the bags off by the door to the front and went back to the nurses desks. Once again most of the cabinets didn’t have much that was useful. Elyza finally found what she had been looking for since they walked in the front door, a tall cabinet locked with a combination lock. She disassembled a lamp and used that bar to wedge into the body of the lock, one quick twist and it popped open.

Elyza grinned, the locker was full of medicine samples. She started sorting through the boxes, they didn’t need cholesterol meds or stuff for blood sugar. But there were a few boxes of antibiotics, not that she’d ever heard of ZEMDRI before. Grabbing the last few boxes, pains meds, muscle relaxers and sleep aids, Elyza went to find Raven.

Raven was sitting in the front waiting room rubbing at her leg when Elyza walked up and handed her a box. “Take these, follow the directions on the box.”

Raven took the box and narrowed her eyes at Elyza, “We didn’t make this stop for band-aids did we?”

“I hoped,” Elyza shrugged and grinned.

“You’re lucky you’re family.” Raven grouched, checking the dosage before taking her pills. “Otherwise I’d have to punch you.”

“I could take them back.” Elyza raised her eyebrows.

“Fight me.” Raven stuck her tongue out.

“If I took them back it wouldn’t be much of a fight, just give it a few hours and when you need help walking to the bathroom I could just push you over and win.” Elyza grabbed as many bags as she could manage, ready to head back to the car.

“Bitch!” Raven called, hobbling after Elyza with the rest of the bags. “You’re not wrong, but you’re still a bitch.”

“Just get in the car and drive and be happy when those muscle relaxers kick in.” Elyza slammed the door shut.

“Amen.” Raven chuckled her stuff in the back and climbed in. “Let’s find somewhere to hole up before the back seat gets any worse. It’s starting to look like Mama Lex’s house back there.”

Elyza glanced in the back, “True.” Her house was always a disaster.

Raven headed for the western edge of town, and once the front lawns were larger than a postage stamp she slowed down a bit, “House hunting time. You have an opinion on color? I’m thinking we start with green doors and move from there.” She smirked.

Elyza chuckled a bit, “How about that one with the tall brick and metal fence?” Elyza pointed it
out.

“Fucking pragmatist, that place is uglier than a half shaved dog.”

“But still better than the assholes haircut.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“How about that one?” She pointed to a cute little cottage with giant bay windows.

“Weren’t glass doors out on your list? How are those windows any better?” Elyza asked.

“It’s better than that eyesore.” Raven turned the car up the hill where the yards got bigger along with the houses.

“You aren’t going to be looking at it, you’ll be sleeping in it.” Elyza slumped back into her seat.

“I’ll take brick, I’ll take metal, but we are not living in a place that looks like a mini prison.”

“Whatever bitch.” Elyza inspected the houses they were driving past.

“How about this one?” Raven stopped in front of a smaller house with stone facing on the front and a sturdy iron fence. “It isn’t chain link, but it should be good enough. Small windows too.”

“Yeah it’s fine.” Elyza leaned forward in her seat, “Congrats on becoming a real estate agent.”

“Uhh, yeah I’m pretty sure this place was awful for the market.” Raven snorted, “Too small a house and way too much yard, not to mention you can see through the fence. Any mess in the backyard is gonna have the HOA all up in our grill.”

“Yeah, that’s totally my worry, good thing I’m not dropping a couple hundred thousand on this place.” Elyza stared at Raven a little weirded out.

Raven ducked her head. “Okay, maybe I watched house hunters a few too many times during finals last semester. I needed something to binge watch.”

“And you couldn’t come up with something better than house hunters?” Elyza asked, incredulous.

“...” Raven opened her door, “Let’s check it out.”

“If there’s anyone in there, we leave.” Elyza checked,

“Yeah totally.” Raven nodded, “Let’s leave out packs in the car until we know it’s clear.”

As they reached the front door Elyza reached up and rang the doorbell. A couple of loud knocks also got no answer, so Elyza moved to the side so that Raven could get the front door open.

“You’re going to have to teach me how to do this someday.”

“It’s really not that hard.” Raven pulled out her knife, “You just slide the tip behind the latch and pull it toward you, that disengages it, and the door pops open.” She pulled the door open, “It’s a lot better with a sturdy knife or a screwdriver. The thinner your tool, the less damage you do.” She pointed to the scuff marks on the lock.

“What do you do if there’s a deadbolt?” Elyza asked.

“Break a window.” Raven snorted. “They’re a bitch to open without just breaking down the damn door. It’s easier to board up a window than to fix the door.”
“Yeah, ok.” Elyza walked inside, “HELLO!! ANYBODY HOME?!”

Raven laughed, “Dude I think between the doorbell and the knocking, we would have known if there was someone here.” She walked into the kitchen and started rifling through the cupboards, “I found hot cocoa mix? That’s like food right?”

“It’ll count when one of us hits our period.” Elyza nodded.

“Oh shit.” Raven looked like Christmas was cancelled, and while technically Christmas is cancelled forever now, it really hit Raven. “We have to find shit for that. Like, we HAVE to find shit for that.”

“You really didn’t even think about it? I’ve been dreading it for five days, I’m supposed to hit next week.” Elyza complained.

“Uh,” Raven rubbed the back of her neck, “I just don’t really pay attention to it until I suddenly realize it’s been a while, and within a few days I usually start. Except that one time, I was paranoid for two weeks, and or two weeks late.” Raven narrowed her eyes in thought, “I was probably just paranoid.”

“Oh fuck. I’m not going to be able to keep track on my phone anymore.” Elyza looked horrified. “This is going to be hell.” Elyza shook her head and took off to look through the rest of the house.

“No running water, but there’s three bedrooms back there and they all have real beds.”

“Dibs on the master.” Elyza grinned, running to the back to claim her room before Raven could stop her.

“Racing a cripple?” Raven shouted, “I thought your mother taught you better than that!”

“Not when it comes to getting the best bed in the house!” Elyza grinned.

“Yeah the one with the most strangers screwing around in it!” Raven called back, “And there’s no laundry machine to make you feel better.” She opened one of the other doors and found a pretty standard room, double bed and a computer desk. It wasn’t great, but it would do her just fine.

“Raven that’s gross!” Elyza shuddered, “I’m going to grab our stuff from the car. I wouldn’t want someone to take it while we’re in here.”

“Good idea, I’ll be out to help in a minute.”

Chapter End Notes

.... I will always be proud of that summary.  
Happy thanksgiving!

It's my goddamn moat.

Chapter Summary

Guests, problems, problems with guests... But mostly just arguing over the damn moat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So how do we prevent another asshole situation?” Elyza asked over their meal.

“What?” Raven looked up confused.

“That guy, this morning at the bookstore, he just walked in and took over and there wasn’t a fucking thing we could do.” Elyza looked around at the kitchen they were sitting in, “How do we prevent that shit from happening again.”

“Okay, well it starts with locking the goddamn door.” Raven shoveled more noodles in her mouth.

“Yeah cause that totally made things difficult for you.” Elyza snarked.

She spread her arms, “Not everyone is going to be awesome! You didn’t even let me finish.” Raven gestured wildly with her fork, “I think we need to board up all of this glass shit, and then we put spikes on everything. Maybe a moat. I think we really need a moat. I vote we turn this bitch into a fucking castle.”

Elyza’s eyes has gotten big at the mention of boarding everything up, but at the moat they practically popped out of her head. “A Moat?” She spluttered.

“Hell yes a moat. A capital ‘M’ Moat, nobody is going to come walking in here if we have something stopping them from getting to the front door, and it’s not like we have the materials to hide the fucking thing. Most people tend to have their doors on the front of the house right where the porch is… So yeah, not hideable.”

“Wow. So Insightful,” Elyza deadpanned. “I’m more concerned with how we,” Elyza paused and looked at Raven’s bum leg “are going to dig a damn moat.”

“I have it all figured out.” Raven grinned, leaning back in her chair. “We passed a Home Depot on our way here right?” She raised her eyebrows, looking almost as terrifying as she did the day… Elyza didn’t want to think about that day. Let’s just say that Raven is not allowed to touch blenders anymore.. Or vacuums.

“Yeeaaahhh?” Elyza drew it out, afraid of agreeing to something that she would regret in the near future.

“Well the Depot rents out backhoes.” Raven’s eyes gleamed with intent, “If I can build a rocket, I can figure out how to drive a backhoe.”

“Shit, do you know how much I fucking hate Home Depot?” Elyza’s shoulders had slumped a bit,
she wasn’t going to fight Raven’s insanity.

“I mean, I can go alone and you can scavenge for fences to board up the windows with,” Raven was having far too much fun with this, “Or! We can spend half an hour at the Depot with a truck, grab some plywood and a bobcat and tear this bitch up in an afternoon!” After a moment of Elyza saying nothing, Raven stuck her lip out in a pout and clasped her hands together. “..Please?”

“Fine, get your ass in the car.” Elyza sighed in defeat.

The drive to Home Depot was short and uneventful, mostly filled with Elyza whining about the destination and the lack of music.

“First things first, help me get these doors open, I’ll push left, you push right.” Raven braced herself and wedged her fingers in between the doors that were just slightly ajar. “Put your back into it bitch.”

The doors slowly slid open and Raven cackled with glee “Hello beautiful, Mama is here!”

“Can you stop flirting with the store long enough for us to get our stuff and go?” Elyza snapped.

“Oh sweet babies, don’t listen to a word she says.” Raven reassured the store, grabbing a giant cart on her way past the door. “Let’s grab that plywood for you cranky pants, then I’ll break into the office for the keys.”

Elyza took a deep, dusty breath of musty air, “Why do I even have to be here?”

“So you can drive the car back.” Raven sniffed. Enjoying the smell of wood pervading the air, “Duh.”

“And what are you driving?”

“I am going to drive the most fundamentally american vehicle known to this earth, a truck.” Raven smirked, “I’ll hook it up to the trailer for the excavator and we’ll be cruising out of here. Help me with this.”

She gestured to the large panels of plywood and the two girls loaded up three panels, some hammers, a whole bucket of nails and a handsaw. “Okay, you want to take the little stuff to the car while I break into the rental office?”

Elyza nodded, “Yeah sure, anything to get me out of this godforsaken place.”

Raven shook her head, “I love that the Depot is a godforsaken hellmouth, but a mall full of undead cannibals is an exciting afternoon.”

Elyza stuck her tongue out, “Oh whatever. It’s not like I knew it was full of dead people. You don’t exactly expect to find those outside of a freaking cemetery.”

“Well apparently the Depot is one of the safest places we’ve ever been to, because there’s nobody here,” Raven grinned, “I bet we could turn those diesels on in the back and no one would notice.”

“You are probably the only person who would ever want to live out the end of the world in a Home Depot.” Elyza called over her shoulder as she veered away out the door to load up the car.

“That’s because I’m a genius.” Raven mumbled to herself, shoving one of the screwdrivers she picked up into the seam between the door and the frame. She wasn’t exactly keen on snapping their
only knife just to prevent some damage to a random door.

“Who else would think to dig a moat, and fortify a coffee shop?” Raven nodded in agreement with herself as she started rummaging through the drawers in the desk, “Or using a backhoe to do all the hard work. But am I awesome? No, I’m crazy for liking access to all my favorite toys.”

She shook her head and snagged a ring of keys from the bottom of a pile of old receipts, “God damn, these guys need a desk spike or something for these things.” She tossed the receipts on the floor, just to make sure there wasn’t anything else in there.

“Jackpot!” Raven snagged the Twix with a massive grin, “One point for Reyes, and Lex is at nil.” She ripped it open and took a bite out of it while she meandered to the giant wooden case that obviously held the rental keys. “Now which of you bitches is gonna be my new baby?”

She traced a finger over the different labels for the keys and snagged one labeled ‘truck’ and another labeled ‘Kubota 2.5-3t’. “That is my baby.” Raven moved to leave and another label caught her eye.

Someone was walking behind her. Elyza probably. “Yo Lyza! These bitches have generators!” Raven shoved every set of keys for all the generators in her backpack and spun around to leave the office.

Elyza was standing right behind her. Raven bumped into her, her candybar falling to the ground. “Aw come on!” She crouched and grabbed it, blowing on the exposed chocolate.

“You found chocolate and you didn’t tell me?” Elyza exclaimed, “Gimme that.” She snatched the remaining half from Raven.

“Hey! That’s mine!” Raven swiped at the chocolate.

“Not anymore it isn’t.” Elyza took a big bite out of the bar, “Now what were you saying about generators?” She said through a mouthful of chocolate.

Raven pouted, “They have them too, a couple are real decent low power alternatives to the car battery thing.”

“If it means you won’t blow something up so we can make coffee, I’m all for it.” Elyza grinned.

“I haven’t blown anything up yet.” Raven huffed, “They keep the trucks in the back.”

“We should grab all the snack stuff from by the registers before we leave. It may not be cold, but I wouldn’t mind a soda.” Elyza took the last bite of chocolate.

“Oh shit, I didn’t even think of that!” Raven gasped, “Dude, if no one’s raided this place we could have a year’s supply of chocolate, or like, two weeks knowing you.”

“Fair point.” Elyza shrugged, “I wonder if there’s a break room with a vending machine. You could break into one of those, right?”

“Oh hell yeah, they’re the same as the ones in the school.”

“We should check before we leave,” Elyza followed Raven, “We would be terrible survivors if we left chocolate behind.”

“We really would,” Raven reached the trucks and tried the keys she had, they fit the second truck
and she fired it up. “We need to get this hooked up to a trailer, I’ll need you to guide me.”

“Uhh, I’ve never done that before.”

“Tab A goes to Slot B, you’ve done that more than once before, yeah?” Raven smirked.

Elyza blushed, “Okay, sex is a lot easier than getting two multi-ton machines hooked together so they don’t fall apart in the middle of the freeway. I don’t know about you, but my escapades in this department tend to stay within a ten foot radius of the starting point.”

“Boring.” Raven scoffed. “You’ve obviously been doing it wrong, so here’s some practice.”

“Oh my god.” Elyza shook her head, “Whatever, I’m sure I’ll figure it out. Just get in the damn truck.” Elyza jogged over to the trailer where she could see what was happening.

Raven got herself lined up as best as she could on her own and looked back to where Elyza was standing and began to slowly back up. “Which way do I need to go?” She called back.

“You need to go that way like 3 inches,” Elyza gestered left.

Raven made a small adjustment, hoping it was close and kept backing up. “Which way now?”

“Just keep coming, you look really close.” Elyza hollered back. “Where do you want the ball thingy?”

“Ball thingy?” Raven laughed “I want it lined up right under the scoop thing.” Raven rolled her eyes.

“Ok you’ve got like 6 more inches and then it’s all in.” Elyza replied.

“That’s what he said.” Raven joked.

Elyza snorted, busting into laughter while Raven finished lining up the truck. “Okay! Stop, stop! You’re right there!” She giggled harder, “You’re good.” She shot Raven a thumbs-up, trying to keep herself upright.

Raven put the truck in park and walked back to join Elyza, giggling by the fender while she cranked the trailer hitch down over the ball. “Okay, so you fix it here with this latch, and then we attach the chains, and we don’t give a fuck about extended signals.” She grinned, “You load up the plywood into the trunk while I find our excavator.”

“For my sister, you sure want me to spend a lot of time with your wood.” Elyza snickered.

Raven laughed, “For real, I’m pretty sure its your wood at this point.”

The girls split up a final time, loading the last of their supplies, and all the junk food they’d bagged from the front end. “Okay, you’re good.” Elyza gave the side of the truck a double tap, “I’ll follow you back in the car.”

“Awesome, I’ll take her down to the lot exit while I wait.”

Their drive home was uneventful, though there were quite a few dead in the streets they had to swing around. It felt like there were way more of them than when everything originally went down, and the noise from the truck drew them out so much more than the little janky car. Overall, they made it back without any followers and only an hour taken from their day.
Raven parked in front of the house and Elyza took the driveway. “Okay, you handle the groceries and windows while I take the moat?”

Elyza shook her head and grabbed a few bags, “I still can’t believe you’re digging a fucking moat.”

“I think what you mean is that you can’t believe you didn’t think of it first.” Raven teased, hopping out of her truck, “Besides, this makes you a real princess.”

Elyza glared, “I fucking hate that nickname.”

“And yet everyone uses it.” Raven grinned, “Maybe you should try cutting off the princess hair and becoming less of a bitch.”

“You’d be bored if I was less of a bitch,” Elyza taunted, “And I’ll cut off my hair the same time you do.”

Raven stuck her tongue out and climbed up into the excavator, “Move your ass princess, I’m digging that moat now.”

“I’m going, I’ll be back in a bit.” Elyza headed towards that door with her haul, “What windows do you want done?”

“The whole first floor?” Raven shrugged, “Maybe leave some slots for light or something? Or just the bottom half?”

Elyza nodded and continued into the house.

Raven got to work rather quickly, getting the hang of the controls and over the course of the afternoon she dug a four foot deep moat all around the house, leaving only the driveway untouched. The dirt from the moat was deposited in a rather large mound in front of the driveway, sloping the whole thing so they could use it like a ramp for the truck in a pinch. It also meant that anyone trying to drive in from the street would need to get out of their car, or skinny through the tight space Raven left for the truck to go through normally.

“RAVEN! How the hell am I supposed to get out of here?” Elyza yelled from her side of the moat.

Raven stopped the excavator and turned it off, “What??” She yelled back, her ears still ringing from the noise of the machinery.

“HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO GET TO THE OTHER FUCKING SIDE?”

“Jump!” She joked. Upon seeing the look Elyza shot her, Raven lost the grin. “I left the driveway untouched, you can come out through the garage. I figure that way we’ll hear it if another asshole tries to take our shit.”

Elyza turned around and went into the garage coming out through the open door. “So I had a thought…” Elyza paused “How are we supposed to fill this moat? There’s no running water.”

“Okay moat is a strong word, I didn’t mean to fill the damn thing with crocodiles and shit, I just don’t want some dick walking in our front door again. Now no one can get in without us knowing. We can board up the other doors too and bottleneck it.” Raven rolled her eyes at Elyza’s ridiculousness. Who the hell fills their moats these days?

“And what’s to prevent someone from jumping in with a ladder or some shit and climbing up the other side.” Elyza asked, irritated.
“That’s why we board up the doors!” Raven snapped, “Are you listening?”

“I still don’t see how that helps. I can literally jump down there, climb out the other side and then walk in the damn front door. How is that helpful? I’m not even athletic!” Elyza argued.

“Clearly you can’t because you had to yell at me for help!” Raven glared at Elyza for trying to tear holes in her perfectly good plan.

“I didn’t want to get dirty you bitch.” Elyza glared right back.

Raven snorted, “And you wonder why people call you a princess, it means we have a warning. The only reason that asshole beat us was because he got the jump on us. If we had known he was coming we could have speared him.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, you only talk bitch-” Raven’s eyes went wide and she spun around, throwing herself into the excavator and turned it on in the time it took to, well… To jump into an excavator and turn it on. “Who the fuck are you?” She snapped, turning the machine towards the pair of invaders.

Uh, Hello?

“Congrats, you have officially checked it out, now check your asses out of my yard.” Raven snapped, waving the arm of the bucket loader at them in a shooing motion.

The girl stepped forward from behind the man’s back and looked at the two women in front of her. “Do you have any food, or water you could share? We haven’t been able to stop to eat since yesterday.” She asked, “I’m Madi, by the way.”

“Madi.” The man put his hand on her shoulder, “Come on, we can find somewhere else to go, it’s fine.”

Raven’s glare softened a little bit and she glanced to Elyza. They had a massive pile of snacky shit in the house that they didn’t necessarily need all of it. Elyza nodded, “If you wait here, we can get something for you.”

Raven turned off the excavator and hopped out of the cab with a wince. She’d spent too many hours sitting down for her hip to not flare up. “I see either of you trying to get into the house, I’ll personally kick your asses.” She threatened, pointing a finger at the guy and then Madi with raised eyebrows.

The guy nodded, “Of course, we aren’t going to pull anything, I promise. I’m just trying to look out for the kid.”

Elyza came back out of the house a bag in hand with a few water bottles and some food. “Here, this should get you going.” Elyza slowly approached and handed the bag to Madi, keeping an eye on the guy behind her.

“Thank you.” He said, “I’m Quint, I uh, I’m sorry for catching you by surprise.” Quint seemed rather genuine, and the girl Madi nodded her agreement, already breaking into one of the chip
“It happens. Thanks for not being an asshole.” Raven snarked, her tone still a little sharp. She is not a fan of being caught off guard, not after this morning.

“What are you guys doing?” Madi asked looking around Raven at the moat she had dug.

“I’m making us a moat. I figure if you can’t get to the door, you can’t break in.” She replied, puffing out her chest in pride at her amazingly awesome idea.

“How are you going to fill it in? You can totally jump in and climb out right now and get to the door.” Madi looked confused.

“That’s what I said!” Elyza exclaimed.

Raven huffed in exasperation, “Oh my god, it’s a moat. Not every moat gets filled with water, and it’s not any fucking harder to climb out than it is to swim.”

“Then why are you doing it?” Quint raised an eyebrow, trying not to further antagonize Raven.

“Fuck you all!” Raven threw her arms up in the air, “It’s fucking cool okay? We can put spikes in the bottom, or battery acid or anything we fucking want!”

“You just wanted to play with an excavator.” Elyza accused Raven.

“And you just wanted to play with my wood all day.” She pointed at Elyza. Quint and Madi got wide eyed. Quint in particular would have never, suspected. I mean, Raven isn’t exactly feminine, but he’d never considered that the diminutive.. Uh, person, wasn’t exactly the… He stopped that line of thought, realizing he was just digging a deeper hole than this Raven with her.. Their moat.

“I got to manhandle that damn plywood all by myself, trying to hold it up and nail it to the fucking wall. You got to sit out here in your little toy and play by yourself.” Elyza jabbed her finger at Raven

Madi turned purple, she wasn’t a hundred percent sure what she was hearing, but she was positive her parents would not have approved it. “I thought we were talking about a moat?”

“So did I.” Quint mumbled, looking rather alarmed. “You, uh, enjoy your… Whatever you’re doing.”

“What?” Elyza looked over at the duo she had forgotten were there, “We are talking about the moat.”

“Duh,” Raven agreed, “What did you think we were talking about?”

“Oh, your...uh,” Quint gestures at Ravens...groin, “area.”

Raven blinked, “My what now?”

Elyza bust out laughing, cackling hysterically until she fell on the ground. “He thinks!” She couldn’t stop laughing.

“She thinks I-!” Raven looked down at herself and then up at Quint and joined Elyza, bending in half and clutching at her sides, “You!” She giggled, “You thought I had a dick!”

Madi looked away from the hysterical girls, distinctly uncomfortable looking. “It kinda sounded
like it to me too,” she defended Quint.

“No,” Raven protested, “No I get it!” She waved her hand at the girl, giggling so hard it hurt, “I just-” She started laughing again, falling to a knee, “That’s great!”

Quint looked at Madi and then to the two women on the ground, wondering if they were suffering from a mental break of some kind. Clearly they couldn’t even hold a normal conversation without starting a fight, and potentially incapacitating themselves in one form or another. “Do-do you two need help?”

Elyza slowly picked herself up off the ground, wiping the tears that had streamed down her face as she laughed. “We need all sorts of help, but there’s never been someone who could help the two of us.”

Quint shook his initial reaction out of his head and blamed that particular mental slip on their rather perverted form of conversing. “I was thinking more with this house. It seems like you have a good thing here, and I would like to find a place where we don’t have to be on the move all the time.” He immediately threw up a hand to defend the idea, “We’ll pull our own weight, Madi is really good at finding food and things, and I’m no weakling in a fight.”

Elyza and Raven looked at each other, “We are trying to set ourselves up so we don’t have to move around,” Elyza confirmed.

Raven tilted her head, “I mean, we have the rooms to spare?” She offered. In part because there is a certain bond formed when someone makes you laugh so hard that it’s difficult not to pee yourself. This is the kind of bond she shares now with both Madi and Quint.

“You don’t have to keep us around long term, this is your place and I respect that.” Quint said, “If after a day you want us gone, then so be it.”

A short, silent conversation between Raven and Elyza lead them to turn and agree, a day-long trial. It was starting to get dark already anyway. They escorted Madi and Quint into the house showing them where the bedrooms were, offering a separate one to each of them. Raven and Elyza had shared a bedroom before, it was irritating but doable.

Quint was nothing but thankful for their hospitality, and Madi explored the house with pure curiosity. She was too young to really think about herself as a danger to Raven and Elyza, so for the most part, she saw it all like being invited to a friend’s house for a sleepover.

A quick meal of canned beans and vegetables and everyone was ready for an early night. None of them had been able to sleep in a real bed for a week and it felt like a luxury.

No one bothered getting up before noon, and it felt amazing. Slowly everyone made their way to the kitchen, following the smell of coffee. Raven hooked up the machine to the small generator she grabbed just long enough to get their water hot and brewed black.

“Welcome to the end of the world.” Raven mumbled, passing a mug to each of their newest people. Their awestruck faces were enough to convince her that the sacrifice of coffee was worth it.

Madi took a sip and wrinkled her nose a little bit, “Do we have any milk?” She asked without thinking.

“Fresh out, but I think we still have a thing of creamer,” Raven dug through the backpack of miscellaneous food items she’d just thrown into a cabinet yesterday. “Aha!” She pulled out a small container of the stuff, “Don’t say I never did anything for you.” Raven took her chance to put a
solid tablespoon of the stuff into her mug before handing it to Madi.

“You know you’re going to have to get used to coffee without the creamer one day?” Elyza asked, sipping on her mug of black coffee.

“Nope, I’m going cold turkey as soon as we’re out.” Raven replied, humming into her cup, “Coffee without creamer is like cows without udders. Just plain unnatural.”

“You mean it’s the only way to drink coffee. Why dilute perfection?” Elyza raised her eyebrows.

“I dunno, like udders are freaky but so are cows without them.” Raven shrugged, “It’s a personal thing.”

“See, and I think they’d look more normal without the udders. Like most other animals don’t have their nipples hanging out all the time.” Elyza considered.

Raven blinked slowly at Elyza, “I mean it depends how cold you are.”

“We’re in California, it’s never that cold unless you are in the mall.” Elyza shivered

“And yet,” Raven gestured to Elyza and smirked into her coffee.

Quint choked on his coffee and though no one caught him looking, his blush and pointed stare at the counter said otherwise. That or he’s actually a thirteen year old boy in a thirty year old man’s body.

Elyza gave her a look, “I already warned you how close I am to that time of the month, I get horny.”

Madi’s eyes got really wide, “I’m still a kid you know,” she scolded.

Raven looked at the kid and raised an eyebrow, “I dunno, you got balls.”

“No I don’t!” Madi protested.

Quint covered his face with his hands, “She means you’re brave, why don’t you get ready for the day.”

“That’s a good idea.” Elyza nodded, “We should go out and check the nearby stores for food and water before it gets too hot outside.”

Quint frowned and waved his hand, “We have plenty for now. You two did a lot of work yesterday, if you’re too worried about it, I can check out the houses in the neighborhood this afternoon.”

Elyza and Raven exchanged a glance, “Nah, we’ll all go.” Raven refused his offer. “Meet back here in better clothes.”

He nodded, finishing his coffee and went upstairs to change, his steps a little heavier than they were this morning.

“That was...odd,” Elyza commented as she listened to Quint walk upstairs.

“Mmmm,” Raven nodded in agreement. “Let’s get ready to go.” She glanced up the stairs again.

A change of clothes and a few packs full of empty bags and they were ready to head out. “Priorities are water, food, meds, first aid stuff, and any weapons.” Raven looked around at everyone, “Does
“Anyone need anything specific?”

“Tampons.” Elyza piped in.

Madi blushed, but nodded her agreement.

“Uh,” Quint shifted in discomfort, “I don’t know about Madi, but I could use some different clothes. And shoes, these ones are starting to fall apart.”

“You can get those right Lyza?” Raven elbowed her, “You’re an expert at gathering clothes right?” She smirked.

“I’m leaving your ass behind, if I get attacked by a group again.” Elyza elbowed her back.

Raven snorted, “Fair enough.”

“A group?” Madi asked, looking between the two older girls.

“Raven has a big mouth, and sometimes it draws in more of the,” She paused, not quite sure how much Madi knew, “The infected. A group of them caught me with my shorts down last week.”

“She knows they’re dead.” Quint added. “I don’t really know what to call them though.”

“Welp, dead seems like a good start.” Raven threw in her two cents, “But honestly I like Ropelings too.”

“What’s a...Ropeling?” Madi looked confused.

“Long story short, they’re sneaky bastards.” Raven patted Madi on the head, “And I stab sneaky bastards now.”

“Shouldn’t we be focused on getting what we need?” Quint asked.

“What are you talking about?” Raven parked the car in the lot of what was a walmart, “This is focused, otherwise I’d be at Denny’s. But not this one, this one is janky as fuck, we go to the one on Wallard street.”

“You never go to the Denny’s in the shitty part of town.” Elyza told Madi as though sharing a vital nugget of information.

“Okay.” Madi nodded with wide eyes. Elyza and Raven seemed like just the kind of crazy that could thrive in this environment, and while Madi doesn’t understand everything they say and do, she gets the feeling they are good people.

“If we see other people in there, you know, living ones, we walk away and avoid them.” Elyza instructed, “If someone comes after us we get out of there. Unless they’re dead and then we can kill them. Also the rest of us really need weapons. Raven’s knife isn’t going to do much good.”

Quint nodded, “I’m not exactly a fan of beating the dead up with my bare hands.” He admitted.

“I don’t know if I could kill one of them, even if they are already dead.” Madi admitted looking down at her feet.

“You aren’t going to.” Quint put his hand on her shoulder, “We’ll take care of you.”

The front doors of the Walmart were wide open, junk and garbage littered the ground, “Yo! Any of
you dead assholes in here?” Raven called, “Or living assholes? I’m just not a fan of assholes.”

Raven’s call was met with silence and the group started picking their way through the junk looking for their supplies. Clothing racks were mostly empty and had been tossed every which way. Shelves had been overturned, their contents tossed, damaged and outright destroyed.

“There’s nothing here that we can use.” Elyza kicked at an empty shelf. “Should we go check out the hunting section for weapons?”

“Why bother, all that’s gonna be left are BB guns if we’re lucky.” Raven grouched, picking her way through the mess carefully, one wrong step and her ass would be stuck on the couch for another weak.

“Maybe there’s some stuff in the pharmacy?” Madi offered, pointing to the clearly labeled section. “Most people would go for the behind the counter stuff right?”

“There might be a few things, we can check but the Pharmacy would’ve been the second thing people raided, right after the cash registers.” Quint groused.

“They don’t put everything out right? Maybe there’s a back with stuff in it?” Madi asked.

“Not with drugs.” Raven pursed her lips, “But I’ll bet a hundred bucks they have stuff from all the other sections of the store.” She grinned.

“So we need to find the back and break in, yeah?” Elyza asked glancing around.

“Photo center back by the electronics.” Quint pointed, “There’s always a bunch of employees going in and out of there.”

“Lead the way.” Elyza gestured, a little surprised by him having something helpful to say. So far his commentary had left her with a lackluster impression of his abilities.

Quint nodded, straightened his back and led the way. He took them through the photo center and to beige double doors. Instead of bothering to let Raven unlock them, he just planted a kick below the handles, denting the door and knocking them open.

The girls followed him into the back a large open space that was almost as messy as the front clothing. “Well, there’s clothes here, but good luck finding your size and shit.”

“Grab what you need, I’m going to look over this way for other stuff.” Elyza gestured.

The group separated, Quint and Madi sorting through the clothes piled haphazardly, Raven explored beyond the messy rectangle of clothing to the left. “Elyza,” She said in a hushed tone, looking through a pair of double doors.

“Yeah?” Elyza asked, a little concerned.

“Get the truck.” Raven grinned, opening the doors further so that Elyza could see the massive shelves of food, “We’re gonna be eating cereal for a month.”

“And beans and rice for the next decade after that.” Elyza griped, before turning around and heading back out to the parking lot.

Raven turned back to the otherside of the walk, and found all sorts of merchandise. “I mean, did you want a treadmill?” Raven gestured, “Or a fucking trampoline? I’m pretty sure there’s
everything short of the kitchen sink in here.” Raven kept sorting, finally finding a bunch of hunting and camping supplies. Using her knife, she tore through shrink wrap and cardboard to find everything they could want, short of a normal fucking world. “Hey Quint! Madi! I need help in here!”

Quint and Madi came running, panic and fear on their faces. “Where is it? Is there more than one?” Quint yelled searching the space around Raven.

“You bet your ass there is! There must be a million of these things.” She showed him the small kerosene tanks for camp stoves, “Somebody grab a pallet, we need to take this shit before someone else gets wise.”

Someone knocked on the giant doors in the back by the truck depot, “Open up!” Elyza’s muffled voice came from the other side, “I’ve got the truck!”

Quint jogged over and grabbed the handle, yanking the door up to show Elyza standing there.

“We are going to need something bigger than the truck, we shouldn’t leave this stuff behind. Nobodies making new stuff for awhile.” Raven called back.

Elyza glanced back over her shoulder, “Well you have to avoid a walking corpse, but if you can hotwire a semi, we’ve got three options.”

“I can probably figure something out,” Raven called. “I’ll go work on that, why don’t you start loading up a few pallets. All the camping supplies you can find, even if it seems stupid. Tools too. And then start in on the food and water. We’ll fill the truck and the back of a semi up and we should be set for a while.”

“I’ll get to work loading up pallets.” Quint grabbed a small jack with an empty pallet already on it and jogged over to the camping supplies, “Madi come help me with this, heavy stuff on bottom.”

The girl did as she was told, happy to have something to do. Raven flashed Elyza a grin before leaving through the truck gates to find herself a semi-trailer. If this worked, they would be set.

Raven returned with her semi-trailer and red on her hands. It took a solid twenty minutes for her to back it up to the door properly, and she abandoned the attempt after she got it mostly lined up.

An hour later and both the semi and the truck were loaded up and ready to go. The previously loaded warehouse was now much clearer and didn’t hold as many useful items for future raiders. It was a bit unfortunate, but they would be well fed for awhile.

Raven did take a few minutes to leave a couple of packs with an assortment of supplies in them, hopefully this time it would go better than Mr. Rope’s crackers.

Raven parked the semi across the front driveway and hopped down. Her leg almost buckled when she hit the ground, but she recovered before anyone saw her. It might be a good idea to take a pain pill tonight before bed. Her leg had mostly recovered from the run at the mall, but it was still giving her more issues. This fucking leg was going to be a big problem.

“Hey Rae, are we unloading anything in there? Or just leaving it until we need it?” Elyza called from where she stood by the truck.

“I packed a padlock bigger than Quint so we would only have to unload whatever we needed.”

Quint and Madi began hauling their new clothes and shoes into the house, both eager to change
into new clothes. “I think we are probably good with what’s in the truck for a little while, so why
don’t you lock that up and we can go in and make dinner.” Elyza paused and cocked her head,
“After you bring in a camp stove, those battery things freak me the fuck out.”

Raven rolled her eyes, “You know they’re perfectly safe.” She made her way to the back of the
truck with just a hint of a limp. She climbed into the back and came back with some canned soup
and a camp stove. Raven took a moment longer than usual to decide how to get out of the truck,
and that was really all Elyza needed to see.

“You’re doing your exercises tonight.” Elyza declared.

Raven just glared a bit before nodding. She handed Elyza a few of the cans and they made their
way up the drive and into the house.

It had been another slow start morning, slow for everyone but Quint anyway. “What’s all of this?”
Elyza asked, looking at the massive pile of old pill bottles and prescriptions stacked on the dining
room table.

“I did a little bit of scavenging.” Quint shrugged, “We didn’t find the medical supplies we wanted,
so I went looking for them.”

Raven came in the room behind Elyza, “What do you mean you went looking for them?”

Quint looked up from the stash, “We didn’t get the medicine and first aid supplies we wanted
yesterday at Walmart, so I went through a few of the houses on the street. This was what I
managed to find.”

“You fucking left without saying anything?” Raven demanded.

“Why would I need to say anything?” Quint rolled his eyes.

“Not to quote the obvious, but you could have died! You could have been seen!”

“What are you talking about?” Quint turned away from the protesting girls, “I’m perfectly capable
of taking care of myself.”

“Maybe in a fucking bar fight, but this is people trying to eat you.” Raven glared daggers at Quint,
“Not to mention that you left us alone, and we don’t bar fight. God, you’re so fucking stupid, what
if instead of fighting you, someone decided to follow you back here and kick in the door while
you’re off wandering the neighborhood!”

“It’s fine, no one followed me and everyone was fine.” Quint dismissed them. “You’re worrying
about nothing.”

“Nothing is waking up and everyone is still tucked in their beds.” Raven snapped, marching into
the kitchen, shaking her head and muttering under her breath.

Elyza sighed, putting her head in her hand, “Just, don’t do it again without telling someone.”

Quint grumbled under his breath and continued sorting. “What’s for breakfast?” He asked.

Elyza looked up, “Whatever the hell you get up and make for yourself.”

Raven waited for Elyza to look at her and raised her eyebrows in a silent but somehow screaming, ‘
Elyza shook her head, hearing Madi come tromping down the stairs. “Good Morning,” Elyza paused, “Or afternoon.”

Madi nodded her head and beelined for the coffee pot. She mumbled something unintelligent and poured herself a cup. Raven handed over the container of creamer without even a word.

After Madi was halfway through her cup she finally spoke, “What are we doing today?”

“Resting.” Raven groused, shooting Elyza a dirty look, “It’s not good to ‘overexert yourself’.” She did finger quotes.

“Quit bitching Rae and deal with it.” Elyza glared.

“Excuse you, this is me dealing.”

“Well deal with less bitching.” Elyza poured her own cup of coffee. “We are just chilling around here today, Madi. We’ve got food, water, clothes.” She paused and glanced over at Quint, “And apparently we aren’t in urgent need of medical supplies.”

“Do whatever you want to today, just don’t leave,” Raven glared at Quint at that last.

“Can I explore the backyard?” Madi asked.

“Sure, just don’t leave it.” Raven agreed.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea, you should stay with me,” Quint protested.

“Oh and wander the neighborhood?” Elyza snarked, “She’s fine, I’ll keep an eye out for her.”

Quint grunted, “I guess I’ll be out there too.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “Let me grab a jacket and we can check it out.” She patted Madi’s shoulder and went upstairs. “When I come back, you’d better be doing your exercises Raven!”

“Yes mom!”

Elyza sat curled up on the sofa with a cup of tea in her hand. She had found a few bags tucked into the cupboard and it was a bit too late in the evening for coffee. It had been a pretty good day, especially for after the world had gone to hell. She and Madi had explored the back yard and found a small veggie patch. Most of the vegetables looked like they’d been picked or eaten by rabbits, but a garden would be nice. They had also found an avocado tree and an orange tree. Dinner had been fresh fruit and it had tasted amazing.

Elyza took a sip of her tea and looked over to Madi who was curled up and trying to read a book by candlelight. Madi is good people, she is helpful, funny and pleasant to be around. Quint is a pain in the ass. He had spent the day giving orders while he sat on his ass. He had also made more than a few comments about Raven’s leg and how ‘capable’ she is. Elyza had needed to redirect Raven when she heard one of them or the man would have been shown just how capable Raven was of kicking his ass.

“So we have a problem.” Raven muttered, sitting beside Elyza and glancing over at Quint who is sorting out his meds by his own confused method. He’d stopped through the whole afternoon to
watch Elyza and Madi chat in the backyard, and thus made almost no progress until they came in for dinner.

“Yeah?” Elyza asked quietly.

“Quint.” Was all Raven said.

Elyza nodded looking up at the other two people in the room. “We can’t do anything about him without it affecting Madi.”

Raven nodded her head, “He’s an asshole though and I don’t like him.” Raven sat quietly for a few minutes thinking. “We should keep an eye on him, I don’t want to kick Madi out, but I wouldn’t mind getting rid of him.”

“Okay, he snuck out once and he’s a little foggy on the teamwork, but that doesn’t mean we toss him out the door Rae.” Elyza scolded, trying not to let her personal feelings about his attitude get in the way. “I know you don’t like him, but not liking people isn’t grounds for getting rid of them.”

Raven grunted, “Fine, but if he keeps up with his commentary I’m going to kick his ass.”

“Fair enough.” Elyza raised her hands, “Just,” She couldn’t shake that weird feeling around him, “Keep an eye on him yeah?”

They both nodded their agreement, “I’m going to go to bed,” Elyza stood up and took her empty cup to the kitchen sink.

“I’m staying up for a bit more,” Raven said

“Don’t stay up too late,” Elyza asked, “You snore like a fucking lumberjack when you stay up too late.”

“I won’t.” Raven rolled her eyes and settled into the couch with her book, she planned to keep an eye on Quint.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, I am pleased to inform you that crap is about to get real, and we are only a few chapters away from getting the band back together.
If I wanted your opinion, I would have given it to you

Chapter Summary

There's attitude, zombies and a few more of the best people...

The next day passed relatively quietly, and by that, we mean that Quint was a generic dick that only seemed to get bolder as he settled into the group, but Madi also grew bolder, smiling more and talking louder. It was pretty much a wash of two steps forward and two steps back. However, on the third day with Madi and Quint, things get interesting. “Okay, so the tank on the semi is half full.” Raven informed Elyza, “Judging by my limited knowledge of gas efficiency, we are going to want to find diesel, at least enough to fill the tank, preferably enough to refill it once. It gives us a decent operating range without having to sacrifice the food storage.”

“I don’t see why we should be worried about this,” Quint shrugged, “The house is pretty secure, I think we should hunker down for a few days, give you time to let your hip recover.”

Raven looked at him with a degree of rage that had Elyza opening her mouth. Raven raised her hand at Elyza, her glare fixed on Quint, “Okay, first of all, you are never going to talk about my hip, leg or any other part of me as a reason to do or not do something. Second of all, if I wanted your goddamn opinion I would have given it to you.”

“I was just trying to think about making you more comfortable.” He snapped, “I don’t understand why you are so offended by the idea that someone might try to take care of you.”

“Okay,” Elyza put her hands up, “Before this escalates anymore, let’s just take a step back. We probably should just hunker down, but part of that means that we need to have everything we could need for a few weeks. That means that diesel is the last thing we need to stockpile before we can really sit back for a bit okay? I’ll keep an eye on Raven and make sure she doesn’t overdo it, how is that?”

Raven rolled her eyes which is practically a yes, and Quint nodded his agreement while giving Elyza a look that made her uncomfortable. It wasn’t like some creepy leer or anything, it just looked like he was considering her for something.

“There are some gas cans out in the backyard with the lawn mower,” Madi said, clearly on Elyza’s side when it came to keeping the peace.

“If it’s lawnmower gas we can empty the cans into the car or the truck, get them filled up too.”

Raven nodded her head, “If it’s for other lawn equipment we can’t use, check to see if it’s labeled. If it isn’t we probably don’t want to take the risk. The gas and oil combo would fuck up the engines.”

Madi headed into the backyard and grabbed two gas cans. One was unlabeled but the other had an 80/20 marked on the side. She grabbed them both and hauled them back to Raven. “This is what we’ve got.”

“Sweet, the 80/20’ll need to be chucked. We can pour it into some kitty litter or some shit.” Raven opened the top on the unlabeled can and took a quick whiff, coughing at the intense smell. “That’s straight gas, pour that into the truck, we’re on half a tank.”

“How many gas cans do you think we’ll want?” Elyza asked, hauling a small but heavy backpack with her.

Raven looked at the semi and considered. “We’ll use the portable cans for regular gas, we’ll fill the saddle tanks with as much diesel as we can pull up. It’ll mean driving the semi out once we find diesel but once it’s gone, it’s gone. Better to fill up both saddle tanks, which are fairly empty at the moment.”
“Okay, so now the big question, where the hell are we going to find diesel?”
Quint sat up, “What about the fire station? They have their own gas stations just for the engines right?”
“We can check there, or we can head to a truck stop, somebody has to be mostly full.” Raven refused to look at Quint.
“Yeah, but won’t there be a ton of people siphoning off truck stops and gas stations?” Elyza asked, hating the idea that Quint might have had a good thought, but those private stations would almost definitely be untouched.
“The school has a fueling station for buses too.” Madi piped up, “Do those run on diesel?”
“Shit,” Raven looked up, “You think the commando stuck around the school? I don’t want to horn in on her house, but the kid’s right.”
Elyza shrugged her shoulders, “Maybe but I didn’t see any fuel pumps.”
“My school has it away from the school buildings, like out behind the football fields,” Madi added. Raven pointed to Madi, “We never checked back there. We just stuck to the front side.”
Elyza was nodding her head. “Commando seemed pretty chill, and it’s not like she’s going to be using the whole damn school just for her.” She shrugged, “It’d be worth it to see if there’s fuel.”
“I don’t want to drive the truck over until we’re sure we know that there’s diesel there,” Raven considered, “Let’s go siphon regular gas for the vehicles and then we can check out the school. Nice idea squirt.” Raven nudged Madi’s shoulder.
“Yeah,” Elyza smiled, mussing Madi’s hair, “I never would have thought about the school.”
“Thanks.” She blushed.
“If someone’s there, I think we should avoid it.” Quinn had been shaking his head while the girls talked. “Especially a commando, they could hurt you.”
“First off, the black commando totally saved our asses.” Raven corrected
Elyza threw in her two cents, “Second of all, don’t you mean they could hurt us?”
“Thirdly, won’t the school be quieter than a truck stop?” Madi added in, grinning a little to be ganging up on Quint with the other two girls.
He glowered at them all, his thick arms folded over his chest, “I don’t like it.”
“Poor baby,” Raven pouted, “You don’t have to like it, you just have to deal with it.”
Elyza put her hand on Raven’s shoulder, “Let’s just go get the regular gas today and if there’s time we can drive by the school.” Elyza looked over at Quint, “If it looks occupied or has a lot of dead around it we’ll move on to plan B.”
Quint grunted, obviously still unhappy. “Fine. I’m just trying to protect you.” He looked directly at Elyza which had her shifting uncomfortably.
Raven inserted herself between Elyza and Quint, “Let’s get in the car and go. We got shit to get done.”
“Agreed.” Elyza shook off the weird feeling and tossed the keys to Raven.
“I call shotgun!” Madi grinned.
Elyza’s shoulders slumped and she started grumbling under her breath, “I call shotgun on the way back.”
Quint rolled his eyes at their childishness and climbed into the bed of the truck, “Come on Elyza.” He held his hand out to her.
Elyza clambered onto the truck bed without taking Quint’s hand, shoving her pack further up in the bed. “Everyone has a weapon, right?”
Once Raven had seen a nod from Quint and Madi she threw the truck into gear and backed around until she could pull out of the narrow space in the driveway. She drove down the road looking for an auto supply store.
15 minutes down the road she pulled into the parking lot, it looked pretty normal which hopefully meant it’d be stocked and lacking dead people.
Elyza jumped out of the bed as soon as she could. Raven liked to take her turns a little sharply, and Quint didn’t seem to be very good at keeping himself in his own corner of the truck bed.
“Fuel transfer kits and all the gas cans you can find.” Raven called over her shoulder, “I’m going to
“Okay, Madi, you’re with me.” Elyza waved the girl along towards the back corner of the store, at least having the consideration to shoot Raven an apologetic look.

Rae rolled her eyes, “Okay meathead, we need a spare tire for the truck and a decent jack, one that won’t take a week to get moving. I’m sure you realize that money is not an object.” She joked.

“Obviously.” Quint huffed, “It’s not as if we are going to leave behind money for the things we are taking. That would be ridiculous.”

Raven blinked and tried to decide if he could be any more unattractive.

A few minutes and they had a small pile of items loaded into the truck bed, Elyza had arranged a bunch of things so there was a dividing line between her and Quint. The mall down the street still had a bunch of cars parked in the lot. A quick lesson and they were filling gas canisters with siphoned gas. Elyza pulled a sharpie out of her pack and began marking an X on each of the cars they had siphoned.

“It’ll save time later.” She shrugged when Madi gave her a funny look.

“You shouldn’t do it though, someone will see the marks and know we were here.” Quint scolded.

“Why does it matter if they know someone was here at some point?” Elyza questioned.

“It doesn’t matter.” Raven shook her head. “And saving time in the future will totally be worth any so-called ‘risk’.

“I don’t see how making ourselves known to any potential others in the area will be helpful.” Quint argued, “They’ll start to build a map of where we are based on the places we’re comfortable going.”

“Because we marked a mall?” Elyza asked in disbelief.

“We aren’t leaving marks behind everywhere and everyone is raiding any usable supplies while they can.” Madi inserted. “If we need to leave quickly, knowing where the gas will be more important.” She shrugged.

He shook his head and started helping. “This is going to stab us in the back later.”

Raven turned to snark at Quint some more and stopped, hand going to the knife hooked to her belt, “Who are you?” she asked.

The girl in front with the long curly hair raised her hands, “I’m Octavia,” She jerked her chin at the curly haired… Boy is the wrong word, but he definitely is too cute to be a man. We’ll go with model. The curly haired model beside her. “That’s my brother Bellamy, and that,” She jerked her thumb at a bald Tarzan in work boots, “Is Lincoln. We heard you talking.”

Quint glared at the others, he’d complained about the noise the girls constantly made but they refused to stop talking. “Well just keep on walking.”

“Quint,” Madi scolded, “Hi, I’m Madi, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too.” Octavia smiled.

Bellamy elbowed her, “Hey, I’m with him, we should just keep walking.”

“We need help, Bell.” Octavia turned when she spoke to her brother.

“Help with what?” Elyza asked, “We might be able to get you what you need.”

“We are trying to get out of the city, we heard some rumors…” Octavia’s voice trailed off, “We are trying to find food and fuel.”

“Rumors?” Raven raised her eyebrow and leaned against one of the cars, “What kind of rumors?”

“Who cares about rumors, we aren’t going to spare anything,” Quint growled.

“Excuse me, bitch!” Raven glared at him, “Did I ask for your opinion? I believe I told you what happens when I want it. I also believe I heard rumors about throwing you down a well sometime this week, so maybe you want to shut the fuck up, and let the nice people talk.” She stared at Quint until he looked away. Raven sighed and turned back to Octavia, “You were saying?”

Elyza mouthed an apology at the trio of strangers, and glared at Quint, “Raven’s right, you need to shut the hell up.

Octavia looked a little concerned by their infighting, but also a lot amused. Her companions were just concerned. Octavia finally felt comfortable enough to put her hands down, “We heard they were planning to burn out the infected trapped downtown, figured that you guys might have heard
the same thing, and we're looking to get out.”
Madi frowned, “They?”
“Government conspiracies always start with a nice ‘they’.” Raven assured the girl, “Probably the military in this case.”
Elyza was nodding her head in agreement, “Military is definitely running this.”
Lincoln smiled, “Probably, either way, things are looking like it’s a bad idea to stick around even if they don’t burn things out. We were camping out in the fire station down by Korea town and got overrun by the mobs of infected roving around.”
“You know, Tarzan has a point.” Raven shook her finger at him, then she came to a realization, “Damnit! I just dug that moat!”
“You dug a moat?” Bellamy asked, incredulous.
“She totally dug a moat,” Elyza rolled her eyes, “Not that I can figure out what the fuck the moat is supposed to do, it’s not exactly hard to cross it.”
“It’s really cool though,” Madi defended Raven.
“She spent all day digging that damn moat and left me to board up the house by myself.” Elyza griped, “Do you know how fucking hard it is to screw huge boards in, while holding them, by your damn self?”
“I mean I wouldn’t,” Raven grinned, “But I’m sure Tarzan knows a few things about nailing things against the wall.”
Lincoln coughed and looked down. Octavia, on the other hand, blushed, “Anyway, you think you could give us a hand getting out of town? You look like you’ve got a pretty good thing going on here.”
“Yeah, we can spare a few things.” Elyza agreed after a short, silent conversation with Raven.
Raven held out a hand towards them and raised her eyebrows at Elyza. It is a gesture she’d seen more than once right before Raven invited her to do something stupid and crazy that usually ended up being fun... Or that one time. That ended up being a visit to the police station.
Elyza cocked her eyebrow, considering. She turned to look at Madi, “What do you think Madi? They good people?”
Madi narrowed her eyes at the three standing in front of them, twisting her lips to the side as she considered them as both individuals and as a group. “Yes.” She bobbed her head.
Lincoln, Bellamy, and Octavia felt an odd sense of relief as if this child nodding was somehow deciding all of it.
Elyza grinned, “You’re coming with us then. We’ve got food, water, medicine, clothes, vehicles, the whole nine yards.”
“I think we could probably throw in a kitchen sink if you wanted.” Raven joked.
“Are you serious?” Quint turned around to face the girls, “Why are you telling them this? We could have just gone on our merry way, this is crazy. We can’t just trust every stranger we meet.”
Raven shrugged, “On one hand, your right, we trusted you and look how that’s turning out. On the other hand there’s strength in numbers.” She turned to glare at Quint, “Plus it’s because of us that we have all that shit anyway, so fuck off.”
Octavia and Bellamy had been having a quiet argument, while Lincoln stood and silently observed. After giving her brother a small shove, Octavia agreed “We’ll come with you, no promises on how long, but we could use a little safety.”
Elyza pursed her lips, “And we definitely need to find a new place because three bedrooms are not nearly enough to hold seven people.”
“They’re working on it.” Raven mumbled, “You guys have wheels?”
Bellamy reached up and grabbed his neck, “I kind of ran our jeep off the road.”
“Smooth.” Elyza snorted.
“No worries, we can all load up in the truck and head back to the Semi.” Raven grabbed a full gas can, “Grab a can and help us get loaded. That all the shit you have?” She gestured to the bags the trio was carrying.
“Yeah, the firehouse was pretty empty when we left it.” Lincoln walked over to grab some cans. Octavia had also moved over, but she almost sprawled on the ground, tripping on thin air. Quint reached out and grabbed her waist, hauling her back up before she actually landed.

“Thanks, I’m such a klutz.” Octavia gave him a small grin.

Quint nodded, doing his best to return it. “I was a bit of a jerk earlier, maybe since we are going to be grouping up we can start again?” He left his hands around her waist until she was stable, “I’m Quint.”

“Nice to meet you, Quint,” Octavia moved away, “I’ll try not to make you catch me again, but no promises.”

He chuckled, “I don’t mind.” He held out his hand to help her into the bed of the truck and was pleasantly surprised when she accepted it.

They drove back to their little house, it was starting to get late and everyone was hungry. “What do you guys want for dinner?” Elyza asked, “We’ve got pasta, cereal but no milk, all the canned soups you could ever need and more.”

Raven gasped, “Can you make pancakes?? We still have that mix from my apartment.”

Elyza grinned, “Yeah and like 20 more boxes we got when we raided Walmart.”

Vigorous nodding followed, “Raven I need you to power the griddle.”

Raven was already halfway to the kitchen to get the generator running and the griddle started.

“Way ahead of you Barbie!”

“I’m going to spit in your pancakes if you don’t watch it, bitch.” Elyza shoulder checked Raven before reaching into the cupboard for the mix.

“I can show you where the bathroom and bedrooms are if you want.” Quint offered Octavia.

“Madi can crash with us, then the rest of you can figure out sleeping arrangements in the other two bedrooms,” Raven called over her shoulder.

“Fair enough,” Bellamy spoke.

Elyza couldn’t suppress her giggles, “Oh my god, I didn’t realize it before, but you sound like Batman.”

“He does not,” Raven disagreed, “He sounds like our history teacher, Mr. Kane.”

“You know he kind of does.” Elyza grinned, “Mr. Kane was hot in a Jesus-wannabe kind of way.” Bellamy looked between the two girls who were now bickering about the hotness of various high school teachers. “I’m just going to go check out the upstairs.”

“I think I’ll join you.” Lincoln nodded, “Octavia, call if you need anything.”

She smiled, “Sure thing Linc.”

After a short time, Elyza had a large stack of pancakes ready and she called out for the others in the house to come eat. There were exclamations of joy and excitement at the bottle of maple syrup, cans of fruit and the plate of bacon.

“Where the fuck did you get bacon?!” Raven practically yelled in her excitement as she shoved a piece in her mouth.

“All that pre-cooked bacon is shelf stable.” Elyza pointed to a bag, “We’ve got like 20lbs, I figured we could go crazy tonight.”

“You can go crazy anytime you want as long as I get fucking bacon.” Raven did a little happy wiggle, her leg extended out from the table.

Octavia snorted, “Are you two always this… Energetic?”

Madi laughed, “They’re tired and chill tonight.”

“Oh god,” Octavia shook her head, “I can’t imagine what you would be like on caffeine.”

“Eh,” Elyza shrugged, “Caffeine puts me to sleep.” Raven was nodding her head.

“As for me, you won’t have to imagine.” Raven grinned from ear to ear, “We’ll probably run out in a few weeks, but until then, it’s coffee every morning.”

Bellamy’s eyes got big, “You have coffee?”

“We have hella coffee man-boy.” Raven smirked, “I even have it rigged to start on a timer.”

“But the timer doesn’t go off until, like, noon.” Madi piped up.
“Yeah, we don’t exactly hurry to get up in the morning.” Elyza agreed.

Octavia flapped her hand, “No worries here. I’d rather sleep in most days.”

After everyone had eaten their fill they slowly separated, finding their way to beds or books to occupy their time until they were ready to sleep.

The usual morning grumbles were voiced as they congregated around the coffee pot the next morning. It took almost 15 minutes before conversation started to flow, as people finally woke up. Bellamy, Lincoln, and Octavia were the last to join in the chatter as they savored their first cups of coffee in coming up on two weeks.

So what’s this plan of yours Raven, I know your plotting face.” Elyza swung her mug in Raven’s direction.

“The school.” Raven swirled the coffee, watching it move, “I think it’s the best option we have, commando or not.”

“Will it be safe if they burn out the infected?” Elyza asked

“Depending on the location, yeah. A school should be pretty safe, concrete and rebar don’t burn well.” Lincoln said in between sips.

Raven raised her eyebrows, “Tarzan has layers.” She grinned, “School sounds even better now. I’m thinking we take the vehicles around, park them by the back and unload them. As soon as we have the semi unloaded, we dump it. School is already risky enough, we don’t want people looking twice.”

“We shouldn’t dump the semi, we’ll need it to move somewhere else.” Quint protested.

“There’s no house big enough for all of us.” Raven shook her head, refusing to look at Quint, “The school will give us space to live, protect ourselves and we could maybe turn it into something better.”

“We certainly wouldn’t be worried about space.” Elyza scoffed, “But you’re right that we should keep attention away from the school, no moats or barricades, just a nice empty school.”

“It won’t matter when we move on.” Quint insisted.

“I don’t want to always keep moving.” Madi looked sad.

“Then we won’t sweetheart.” Elyza hooked her arm around the girl’s shoulders and hugged her.

“It might be easier to survive if we keep moving,” Bellamy offered.

“Life is about more than just surviving.” Elyza snapped, “So feel free to keep moving, I want to make something.”

“Amen.” Raven gave her a high-five.

“Let’s get everything loaded up in the vehicles. Take everything useful, including mattresses. We should go through the rest of the neighborhood and take all of those supplies as well.” Raven shared her plan.

“What I wouldn’t give for a moving van.” Octavia muttered, “I know the semi kinda counts, but you said it was full?”

“We can fit a few mattresses in there.” Raven shrugged, “We’ll tie the rest down in the bed of the truck, not like a cop’s going to pull us over. We’ll pack in the corners of the cab and the car with everything else we have or can find and we’ll be good to go.”

“Sounds like you’ve been planning this for a while.” Bellamy commented, “You been thinking about the apocalypse a long time?”

Raven grinned, “I like to make things go boom, can’t help but think about how to survive a big one.”

“I wish she was kidding,” Elyza muttered.

Raven rolled her eyes, “Don’t be so dramatic about it.”

“You blew up the lab and destroyed my hair,” Elyza complained.

“It grew back,” Raven defended herself.

“It was a week before homecoming!” Elyza cried, “I ended up with a bob!”

“And yet somehow the real tragedy was the Finn you ended up with.”

“Sadly, we can’t avoid all the tragedies in life.” Elyza mourned.
Raven laughed, “A month ago you were still mourning that tragedy! Who knew that all you needed
was a little apocalypse to get over shovel face and his glorious curls.”
“Oh my god,” Elyza snorted, “Did you seriously just call him that? I was under the impression that
you were crushing on him long before I was.”
Raven shrugged, “A turd in the hand is worth two in the bush, and I’m pretty sure everyone here
would agree that I won out.” Bellamy and Octavia just looked at each other, momentarily lost in
that metaphor, trying to figure out which would be worse. Being the bush or the hand. “Seriously?”
Raven huffed.
“I think you lost them.” Lincoln patted her shoulder. “Let’s get these loaded up.” He gestured to
the pile of mattresses at the base of the stairs and Raven blinked.
“Did anyone else see him move those?” Everyone’s hand went up except Ravens and she nodded
to herself, “Note to self, Tarzan is a selective ninja.”
“I’m going to go check out the other houses, I want the best mattress I can find.” Bellamy rocked
forward onto the balls of his feet. “Anyone want to go with me? We need, what?” He paused and
counted, “4 more mattresses?”
Madi and Octavia both volunteered immediately, Quint also agreed after the girls confirmed they
were going. “Cool, We’ll haul them out onto the yard and grab anything else useful while we’re
there.”
Lincoln and Elyza were trying to Tetris the mattresses into the semi while Raven observed and
gave them unhelpful directions. She gave Bellamy a thumbs up to acknowledge his plans, “We’ll
empty the house and drive over, it’ll take 30 minutes tops, unless these two bozos can’t figure out
how directions,” she began yelling again, “I said to the LEFT!”
“YOUR LEFT, or OURS??” Elyza snapped, her face red with the strain.
“We’re all facing the same damn direction!” Raven yelled back.
“There’s no space there!”
Lincoln gave a grunt and hefted the mattress up onto his shoulder, “We’ll stack them on top of the
pallets.”
“Why couldn’t we have just done that in the first place,” Elyza complained.
“I don’t know, you’re the one holding the mattress.” Raven shrugged.
Lincoln shook his head at both of them and heaved the mattress to the very back of the semi, “We
can put any extra things in between the pallets.”
“Since you can He-Man the mattresses to the back, I’m going to go in and get all the useful stuff
pulled together.” Elyza walked away from the truck and towards the house.
“I’m just gonna,” Raven pointed to Lincoln’s bulging muscles as he lifted up another mattress on
his shoulders, “Uh, supervise.”
Dramatic and appropriate and shit

Chapter Summary

Let's go swimming!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“This house looks like it’ll have decent mattresses.” Bellamy walked up a driveway.

“How can you tell?” Madi asked, looking sideways at him.

“It’s a fancy house, if they spent a ton of money on a house then they’ll spend a ton on something they sleep on every night, right?” Bellamy explained his logic.

“I guess that makes sense.” Madi filed that tidbit of information away, “So how do we get in?”

Quint walked up to the window overlooking the front porch, he grabbed one of the metal decorations, some rusted out farm tool thing, and swung it into the window. It took a second swing to get the rest of the glass out, but once he did he turned and offered a little bow, “An entrance.”

Madi giggled, “Thank you.” She reached in and opened the door, walking into the spacious kitchen curiously. “Who do you think lives here?”

“Someone with no taste,” Octavia made a face as she followed Madi in. The walls were a mix of split pea soup green and Pepto Bismol pink. The orange and gold furniture and accents didn’t help.

Upstairs they could hear footsteps, slow and plodding. Madi’s smile went away, “What is that?”

“Just stay down here, Madi,” Quint was already heading up the stairs, “I’ll take care of you girls.”

“Not that I need it, but thanks, I guess,” Octavia muttered. Bellamy was glaring at Quint’s retreating figure.

“That guy has a hell of an ego.” Bellamy muttered, “I can take care of you just as well as he can.”

“And I can kick your ass while blindfolded and with my hands tied behind my back.” Octavia glared at her brother, “I don’t need anyone to take care of me.”

“I know,” Bellamy raised his hands, “But if anyone’s going to act like it’s their job to take care of you, it’s gonna be me.”

A few loud grunts followed a thump upstairs and the group tensed. A door opened and shut, “All clear, just stay out of the closed room, there’s nothing in there anyway.” Quint called down.

“Don’t go too hard on him, he’s just trying to look out for us.” Madi defended him quietly, “Even if he is a butt about it sometimes.”

“Whatever, let’s go look around.” Octavia walked away.
They did have fairly good mattresses, something that Bellamy was pleased to remind everyone. They also grabbed a few blankets and some more canned food from the pantry. The boys hauled everything out to the front yard before continuing on to the next house.

The next few houses didn’t have much that was usable. More canned food, a few first aid supplies, and two more dead people. They started on the other side of the street working their way back to the house they had been staying in.

By the time they hit the last house they had a few more mattresses out in yards than they actually needed and another couple of weeks worth of food piled up. They had also managed to find a few more medical supplies and medicine. They weren’t sure if any of it would be useful, but they tossed it into bags to go with them anyway.

“Shit, what is that smell?” Octavia asked, gagging behind her hand.

They turned around to see a slow-moving group of dead, stumbling towards them, gathered by the sound of people moving and yelling and the smell of living things. Quint snagged Octavia’s arm and pulled her behind him, “Go join the girls in the house, I’ll take care of this.”

“Over my dead body.” Octavia snapped, yanking her arm out of his hold, “I fix my own problems. I don’t need you or anyone trying to fix things for me.” She hefted her baseball bat and stalked towards the group, shoulders fixed in anger.

“Here we go again,” Bellamy muttered, following his little sister to make sure she didn’t do anything stupid. “Nice going idiot.” He shouldered past Quint who had yet to pick his jaw up off the floor.

“Hey get back here!” Quint called, breaking into a run so that he could stand by Octavia’s side while she took on the horde.

“Get,” She swung her bat with a grunt, just barely missing Quint’s head as she knocked one of the infected to the ground. “Away,” She kicked another to the ground, “From me.” She glared at Quint while she smashed her bat through an infected’s face. She straightened up, her hair blowing fiercely in the wind, eyes lit up with fiery retribution, and bat raised to beat any remaining necessary sense into Quint. In standing she leaned back too far, tripped over her own feet, and promptly introduced her ass to the grass.

Quint surged forward and reached down to haul her up, as Lincoln, Raven, and Elyza joined them in the fight, while Madi had backed herself up next to the semi keeping out of the way. Quint held onto Octavia to make sure she had her balance, “Are you okay?” He felt a splatter of wet across his head and back, heavy and thick.

“Look out lover boy!” Raven shoved him out of the way of the collapsing corpse while Lincoln yanked a fireman’s ax out of the thing’s spine.

Quint stumbled forward and Octavia almost fell down. Instead, her training kicked in. She twisted out of the way, yanking her wrist from his grasp and planted a kick to his lower back, firmly landing him facedown in the yard. She hesitated, giving him a quick once-over before she turned and rejoined the fight, using her bat to bash skulls in.

A few intense minutes later and all the corpses were on the ground where they belonged. “I feel gross,” Elyza grumbled, shaking a few chunks of torn flesh off her wrist.

“There’s a fairly clean pool in the backyard of that house,” Bellamy pointed to show them which
“Not for long,” Raven replied, stripping her blood-soaked shirt off and dropping it on the pavement with a wet smack. She would much rather be exposed in front of strangers than have that… Moisture on her body any longer.

“Please, let’s go get clean,” Elyza practically begged. “I’ll get the shampoo.”

Elyza ran to the car to grab the soap and shampoo while Bellamy led the bloodstained entourage to the pool. Unlike Raven, everyone else waited until they were at the pool’s edge before they stripped down to their skivvies and jumped into the water.

After Octavia climbed out of the pool to dry off, Quint put a hand on her shoulder, “Can we talk?” She nodded and Lincoln watched the two go around the corner of the house.

“Look, I’m sorry I kicked you, I was pissed and I let that affect my judgment. It won’t happen again.” Octavia looked uncomfortable and avoided looking directly at him.

He nodded slowly, “Thank you, and I forgive you.”

Octavia blinked slowly and stared straight ahead. “I only wanted to discuss your behavior before the fight.” Quint began, taking Octavia’s hand, “I can’t have you undermining my authority in front of the others, and I can’t have you endangering yourself. I understand that you are strong and capable, but that doesn’t mean that you need to constantly be under threat of harm. Do you understand? So when I tell you to go with the girls, I mean it.”

Quint straightened up to his full height and nodded, satisfied that he had gotten through to her. Clearly, Octavia was a much better choice, she listens and doesn’t interrupt him when he’s explaining things to her. She’s also far more attractive than the other two with her demure attitude and kindness to both him and Madi. Accepting Octavia into their group is the only decent choice Raven and Elyza have made in the time he’s been with them.

Octavia had stilled, willing herself to calm the fuck down. Sahyun would be ashamed of her if she lost her temper. It had certainly taken long enough to make control a habit, this little prick wasn’t going to be why she lost it. She tugged her hand back, willing to just walk away in her rage. Not only did he not release her hand, he tugged back on it, pulling her closer into his body.

Fuck.
That.
Shit.
She hooked her hand behind his head and jerking him past her, sliding her right leg between his and kicked him in the back of the knee. She finished with an elbow to the back of his skull and walked away.

Ears ringing with rage everything sounded distant and hollow. Slowly she registered Bellamy speaking to her, “What the fuck happened?” He kept asking, but his hands were carefully out to his sides, not touching and not reaching out to her.

Elyza ran past the pair to look around the corner and saw Quint on the ground with his eyes closed and his left calf bent two inches below his knee joint.

“He wouldn’t let me go,” Octavia said, her voice very calm and even. “I made him.”
“We can see that.” Raven hovered her hands a few inches away from Octavia’s arms, it was like a hug, but without all that touching shit. “And he definitely deserves it, but you don’t look so hot Xena, you sure you’re good?”

Octavia nodded her head, “I just need some space.” She walked over to one of the lounge chairs situated by the pool and lay back, eyes closed and focused on her breathing.

“She’ll be fine in a bit.” Bellamy’s eyes were trained on his sister, “She doesn’t lose her temper often anymore, but it can be hard for her to control it when she does.”

“I feel that Batman. Everyone has a rage monkey somewhere under the surface.” Raven leaned around the corner to peek at Quint, “Hers just breaks bones.” She saw the confused and vaguely annoyed look on Bellamy’s face and continued, “Mine commits minor acts of terrorism so it’s fine, no judgment here dude.”

“I eat chocolate until I throw up,” Madi admitted from her spot beside Bellamy.

“And I binge-watch the Disney channel until about the fifth rerun of the house of mouse.” Elyza pursed her lips, “I’m going to need a new coping mechanism.” She gestured to where Quint lay beside her, “His leg’s broken, obviously, and he’s probably going to have a concussion. He’ll need more help than I can give.”

“He’s going to need a lot more if he ever lays a hand on Octavia again,” Bellamy replied, hands clenched into a fist. He gave Elyza his full attention now that Lincoln was sitting next to Octavia. Bellamy didn’t exactly approve of his sister having a love life, but Lincoln is a good guy and is at least intelligent enough to know that Octavia would break him if he tried talking to her or touching her at this particular moment. Either way, Bellamy felt safe turning away from the couple to the task at hand. “I know he’s been here longer than us, and I don’t have a right to say jack shit about it, but we are not sticking around if he stays with you.”

“Oh no, he’s fucking gone.” Raven asserted, making it clear she wasn’t going to budge. She did look at Madi though, wanting to know what her take would be.

“Madi, he can’t stay. He isn’t willing to work with us or listen to anyone else.” Elyza spoke quietly, “You can go with him, or you can stay. I’d really like it if you stayed.”

Madi hugged herself, “Can I come with you then?”

Raven stood up and hugged the younger girl, “Duh!” She grinned over at Elyza, “Now I have the irritating sister and the pretty one.”

“Which one am I?” Madi looked up, thoroughly expecting to be the irritating little sister that no one wants.

“She’s trying to piss me off, Madi.” Elyza mock glared at Raven, “She’s trying to tell me that I’m irritating. She just forgets that she’s the irritating one.”

Raven rolled her eyes, “Elyza is delusional, but she’s also right. You are totally the pretty one. Welcome to the Reyes family tree.” In a conspiratorial tone, she added, “We have a lot more grafts than the original tree at this point so you’ll fit right in.”

“I’d offer to adopt you into the Lex family, but the Reyes family is much cooler. We just study a lot.” Elyza twisted her lips thinking, “And get tattoos.”

Madi’s eyes went wide, “You have a tattoo?”
Elyza cocked her eyebrow, slightly offended at Madi’s tone. “Yes. I have tattoos.”

“Wow..” Madi was in awe, then the light in her eyes dimmed, “I guess I won’t ever be able to do that huh?”

“If you don’t mind that I never completed my apprenticeship, it could be arranged.” Elyza grinned. “We’d have to find the supplies of course. I’m not giving you some janky prison tatt no matter how badly you want one.”

Madi looked like she’d just died and gone to some very odd twelve-year-old version of heaven. Maybe purgatory? But the vaguely nice kind. “You can do tattoos? Like, you’re a tattooer?”

Raven rolled her eyes, “You are not tattooing a twelve-year-old Lyza.”

“Well no, that would be irresponsible.” Elyza rolled her eyes, “But if Madi wants a tattoo when she’s older, and we find some equipment, then why not?”

“How is it that this is the one time I’m the responsible one?”

“Because needles give you heebie-jeebies and I can’t convince you to get one even if Wynona was on the line.” Elyza mocked.

“That’s because when having to choose between permanent scarring and losing my baby, I’ll knock you out and drive away.” Raven sniffed, “Needles have nothing to do with it. So what are we going to do with sleeping beauty?”

“Leave him to die,” Bellamy muttered.

“Okay, we get it.” Elyza raised her eyebrows at him, “Don’t mess with the baby sis. I understand you’re upset, but we don’t murder people. Got it? The only people-shaped things we kill are the ones that are already dead.”

“We aren’t taking him with us.” Bellamy insisted.

“Can’t we just leave him with a few things?” Madi asked, “Some food and water, maybe some medical stuff for his leg?”

“Sounds good to me.” Raven squeezed Madi into a side-hug. “Let’s go pack that up while the rest of the adults finish dressing themselves.”

Madi nodded her agreement, and together they put together a modest pack of supplies that should keep Quint going for a week, more if he rationed. A good idea since they’d just finished ransacking the neighborhood.

Quint was still out cold when they laid the pack next to his head and climbed into their vehicles. Elyza didn’t feel great just sitting in the passenger seat of the semi while Raven pulled away from the small patch of suburbia. “Hey,” A hand rested on her leg and she looked at her best friend, “We did it for Madi. You and I both know she would have been the next one on his list.”

Elyza shuddered just thinking about the way he pursued and checked each of them off. “Yeah, I know.” The idea that he would ever do that to the little girl sleeping in the cab made her want to turn around and run him over a few times, just to be sure he couldn’t.

It wasn’t the nicest of thoughts she’d ever had, but despite it being the end of the world and all, somehow it wasn’t the meanest thing she’d ever thought either. Oh well, there’s always room for
They drove for what felt like an hour, but it couldn’t possibly have been that long, the fuel gauge on the semi would have had to drop much further for that. Raven hopped out of the truck, waiting for the other two vehicles to come to a stop in the same parking lot.

As soon as everyone was out of their vehicles, and giving her the attention she so desperately desired, Raven, spread her arms, “Welcome to Temecula High, our new home.”

“Uh, don’t we have to see if it’s occupied first?” Octavia asked.

“Damn it! I was having a moment! It was all dramatic and appropriate and shit.” Raven snapped.

“If you say so, honey.” Elyza patted her shoulder, and all save the pouting engineer got to work.

Chapter End Notes

This was fun and now stupid Quint is gone!! Also, Bookwyrm and I totally stood in my living room and slow-moed through Octavia’s fight moves, we wanted realism for you and I hope you appreciate the sacrifice I had to make to lose that mock fight.
Ah, Love the smell of Napalm

Alicia sat in her usual perch, a giant boulder about the size of the ranger’s station just a ten minute walk away from their temporary home, trying to perfectly match the black lines of the heart on her forearm. Boots scuffed against stone and Alicia pulled the permanent marker away to keep from messing up the lines. “Chris I told you I wanted to be-” She looked over her shoulder and saw Anya climbing up near her, “What are you doing here?”

“Wanted to check in.” Anya found a smaller rock to sit on below her, “What’s that?”

Alicia frowned, looking at the marks on her arm, “You remember that guy I told you about?”

“The artsy one?” Anya hoped that was the right one.

“Yeah.” Alicia capped her pen and shoved it in her pocket, “He drew a heart on my arm, two days before we showed up at your place. It feels like forever, you know?” She turned sad eyes on her aunt.

Anya looked at Alicia a little more closely, “What happened to him?”

She pulled her sleeve over the fading heart to protect it, “We were gonna meet after school. He got attacked by some homeless guy on the way there and when I went to check in on him…” She trailed off, biting her cheek to keep the tears at bay.

Anya shifted on her rock. This was the new normal, and it fucking sucked that Alicia had to deal with it. But there was nothing she could do to offer comfort. Alicia’s… friend was gone, in an awful way, and there was no way to bring him back or even to know if he was at peace.

“Yeah.” Alicia scoffed, “So I sit on this stupid rock and I watch the damn sunset and I color in this fucking heart.”

Anya made a face, “That’s seriously fucking sappy.”

“I know.” She cracked a smile, “It’s awful.”

“Eh, it could be worse.” Anya squinted her eyes, “Not sure how, but it could be.”

“I could keep a lock of his hair in my journal and tack his last name after mine?”

“Ugh, I think I just threw up in my mouth.” Anya shuddered.

Alicia laughed, “Thanks.” Her smile faded but she looked down at her aunt, “At least now I know that I’m not the most pathetic I could be.”

“I mean you kind of are, you get too much worse and I’d have to put you out of your misery.” Anya glanced over at Alicia who’s face suddenly looked odd, “Too soon?”

“What is that?” Alicia pointed to a half dozen glowing things drifting to the earth like leaves in fall. It would have been really pretty if they hadn’t turned into giant columns of blackened smoke upon touching the ground. “What the hell was that?”

Anya just kept staring, watching the smoke plume and spread, “It’s the end of life as we ever knew it to be.”
“Melodramatic much?” Alicia raised her eyebrows, “You didn’t hit your head on the way up here did you?”

Anya shrugged and grinned, “I always wanted to be a poet.”

“But did you always know it?” Alicia rhymed, rolling her eyes.

Anya laughed, “Damn I’m gonna miss that.” She looked back to where the clouds of smoke were slowly being overtaken by bright orange and yellow flame. “They’re burning the city to the ground. Probably trying to control the walkers.” Anya braced her hands on her thighs and pushed herself up, “We’ll need to keep an eye on it, we don’t want it to move our way without a heads up.”

“How are they burning the city down? It’s all steel and concrete.” Alicia asked, looking back to the now glowing horizon.

“Napalm.”

Alicia’s mouth fell open and she watched the fires spreading beneath the sunset, it was quite pretty in a ‘your world is falling to pieces faster than an Oreo in apple juice’ kind of way. “That’s why we couldn’t go home?”

Anya nodded, “Wasn’t positive, but I heard that might be the plan. Didn’t want to risk it.”

“Do you think it’ll help?”

“Right now? No.” Anya shook her head, “But in a decade, it’ll be a good thing, the earth will take it over again.”

“Welp here’s hoping we get to be here in a decade,” Alicia muttered.

“Hey, guys!” Nick came flailing down the path, “The city’s on fire!”

Anya looked up at Nick, then looked back to where their view of the fire filled most of their sightline, “You don’t say.”

He stopped, hands on his knees and breathing hard, “You don’t have to be a dick about it.”

“Have you met me?” Anya raised an eyebrow.

“Fair point.” He muttered, earning a laugh from Alicia. “Either way you should go tell mom and Travis that they can’t go charging in.”

“If I go tell them that, then no one will be able to stop Travis from charging in.” Anya grumbled, “Plus I’m all for handing out Darwin awards.”

“Ahh?” Nick looked confused, but he was finally breathing normally and able to stand upright.

“If they want to go charging into a massive fire, then they deserve whatever they get.” Anya explained, “It’s kind of obvious, even to a 5-year old that you don’t go running to the massive fire.”

“Oh, I just thought I’d let you know, after everything that’s happened it kinda feels like you’re the only one who doesn’t want to die.”

Anya growled a bit under her breath, “Fine. I’ll go talk to the pouting idiots.” Anya stood and started back up the sort-of path towards the ranger station they had been camped out in. It was a nice little walk, quiet and calm, which made her dread walking into the station even more.
Anya pushed the door open and looked around. Madison and Travis were huddled together at the dining table talking quietly, Chris has curled in on himself on the futon sofa, staring off into nothing.

Anya walked over to the table and spun a chair around, straddling it while facing the now quiet couple. “Someone has dropped Napalm on the city. It’s burning and will continue to burn for a few days.”

“Well, what are you planning to do about it?” Travis glared, his tone angry.

“Wait for it to burn out, then find a place to dig in.” Anya ignored his anger.

“I know you’re heartless, but even you can’t leave all those people to die,” Travis grumbled.

“First off, I’m not the one who dropped Napalm on the city so it’s not my fault. Second, I can’t actually save anyone. If I get too close, or anyone else does,” Anya emphasized, “They’ll just die, fire or suffocation.”

“How do you even know it’s napalm?” Travis accused.

“Because that was the plan I was told before we left my place.” Anya shrugged, “It’s unlikely to be anything else. The option was to drop a huge bomb on the city, but napalm is easier to recover from.”

“Why didn’t you tell us this earlier?” Travis demanded.

“Wouldn’t have changed anything,” Anya shrugged.

“Maybe we could have helped people get out!” Travis cried.

“Travis,” Madison soothed, “I’m sure they got as many people as possible out, we couldn’t have done any more than they did, and it wouldn’t have really changed anything.”

“Maybe if we had left earlier it would have changed everything.” Travis shoved himself back from the table and walked into the back room where the bunk beds were.

“I’ll talk to him,” Madison promised, following him into the bedroom. Between Alicia’s ability to handle herself with Tris, and Anya’s choice to deal with Liza far away from her children and Travis, Madison had tried to be more understanding of Anya’s choices. She couldn’t argue that they kept everyone safe.

Travis on the other hand…

Nick and Alicia walked in, letting the door slam behind them “Hey I’m home, what’s for dinner?”

“Guess.” Anya looked at him before standing and moving to the camp stove they had set up. It was a pretty simple set-up but it worked.

“Deer.” Alicia threw up her sarcastic jazz hands.

“Right in one.” Anya chuckled.

“Is starvation an option?” Nick asked hopefully.

“No.” Anya continued pulling out canned green beans. “You will eat.”
Nick groaned, throwing himself into the pantry to carve them a piece of meat. “If death is the only way out of this hell then I’m planning an escape.”

“Nickolas!”

“Sorry, mom.”

“Or you could just wait for Anya to take you on a walk.” Chris bitched, finally getting up from his spot on the couch.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Alicia snapped, “Without Anya, we would be burning in a literal fire right now!”

“She!” Chris jabbed his finger towards his aunt, “KILLED my mother, and then didn’t even have the decency to bury her. That’s what’s wrong with me.”

“Would you rather your mom ate your face off?” Nick asked, ducking his head out of the pantry just long enough to speak.

“Or would you have rather had to kill her yourself?” Alicia added.

“Shut up.” Anya said, opening cans with shaking hands, “What happened, happened.”

Chris threw himself into one of the dining chairs, “Well it shouldn’t have happened at all,” he grumbled under his breath.

“Make yourself useful.” Anya slid some bowls to Chris.

“Go fuck yourself!” He shoved them back hard enough to send the pile flying off the table.

Alicia lunged for them, catching all but two of the bowls, “Chris!” Her voice joined the sound of shattering porcelain.

He folded his arms over his chest and refused to look at Alicia.

Anya raised an eyebrow and considered the mess on the floor. “If you are going to act like a spoilt child, then you are welcome to leave. I will not allow you to put us at risk for your temper tantrums.”

“I am not throwing a tantrum” Chris crossed his arms over his chest.

“Dude, you just threw bowls because you didn’t want to do something. You threw a tantrum,” Nick came out of the pantry broom and dustpan in hand. He walked around and offered them to Chris.

“No.” Chris refused.

“What is going on out here?” Madison walked out of the bedroom.

“Chris is making a mess and refusing to clean it up.” Alicia looked up from where she was grabbing two more bowls from the cabinet.

“Chris.” Madison softened looking at him, “We know you are upset, but we are not in a place where we can make allowances right now. I’m sorry.”

He snatched the broom and dustpan from Nick, “You’ll allow Anya to kill my mom.” He snarked, cleaning it up.
Madison sighed, “Anya made a choice that we can’t just fix, and there are consequences for that too, they just aren’t as straightforward as having her sweep up the mess.”

“You mean she gets to do whatever she wants.” Chris grumbled, “Two weeks ago she would have been tossed in jail, now she gets to boss people around.”

“And do you see how well that’s working?” Anya groused.

Madison leveled a look at her that clearly said she wasn’t helping the issue, and Chris added his own glare to that. Travis didn’t come to eat dinner with everyone else. Instead, he scooped up some leftovers after everyone else was gone and ate in his room, he’s been doing this since Liza. The only time he really tries to talk with people is to argue with them.

“Anya, what would have happened if you hadn’t…” Alicia trailed off, looking out over the porch railing at the burning city.

“Which part? If we buried her, who knows what that would have done to the water supply or the animals. Because she wouldn’t have stayed there.” Anya grimaced.

“No, I get why bodies need to be disposed of properly.” Alicia was hesitant to spell out her confusion.

Anya sighed. “There’s no cure and the bite would have killed her. Slowly. When she died it’d be just like Tris. After a little while, she’d wake up and try to bite us. She wouldn’t care, wouldn’t be able to think.”

“Oh.” Alicia looked down, “So if anyone else gets bit, then, that’s what we need to do?”

“Yes,” Anya confirmed.

“Got it.” She sighed.

“I guess we should get a bit more comfortable with knocking people off huh?” Nick asked, trying to make it sound like a joke.

Anya grunted, “We will need to get more comfortable doing a lot of things if we want to survive.”

“Like?” Alicia raised an eyebrow, “We’ve already learned how to hunt a little bit and take care of wild animals.”

“Eventually we will need something that we can’t hunt or grow,” Anya kicked back in her seat, “We will likely need to take what we haven’t earned or paid for at some point. We may also need to use force to protect ourselves.”

“So just another day on the streets then.” Nick nodded, “Works for me.”

Alicia scoffed, “Great.”

“It’s not far from the truth,” Anya shrugged, “Everyone’s going to need to decide what they’re willing to do, how far they’re willing to go.”

Alicia’s eyes widened just a bit as she thought about how that sounded. Nick put his hands over Alicia’s ears, “Hey, you’re scaring the kids.” He hissed.

Anya motioned his hands down, “Better scared now, then dead later.”
“I guess.” Alicia mumbled, leaning heavily on the railing, “Thanks, Nick.”

“Why did I teach you kids how to shoot a gun?” Anya asked.

“To protect our lives, our shit and our stomachs.” Alicia parroted Aunt Anya’s saying.

“Why couldn’t I have waited until now to teach you? Travis certainly didn’t know how to use a gun until a few days ago.” Anya had smirked as Alicia repeated her phrase.

“Because it has to be muscle memory.” Nick bumped his sister’s shoulder, “Draw, safety off, aim, shoot. God knows Travis is terrified of the things, and ‘scared people don’t shoot straight’.”

Anya nodded, “If you know about all of this fucked up shit now, you can be more prepared. I can’t prevent any of this shit from happening, but if you can be safer by knowing beforehand, then that’s what I’ll do. I’ll make sure you know everything I can tell you.” Anya’s face was serious.

“Thanks, Auntie.” Alicia scooted over and gave Anya a hug.

Anya chuckled and returned the hug, “Anytime kid.”

“Group hug!” Nick came in from behind and crushed them both into a hug.

Anya and Alicia both groaned as Nick squeezed them tight, “Get off!” They both started shoving at him, he just kept hanging on gripping tighter. “If you don’t get off Nick I’m going to tickle you!” Alicia threatened. A few seconds later Nick finally let go as their group hug devolved into a tickle fight between the siblings.

Nick finally had to run off, slightly less flailing than before, but still bad enough to get Anya to groan. “Someday that boy is going to break something doing that.”

“Probably.” Alicia agreed, “I guess we should get ready then. For whatever happens.”

Madison tugged Travis into the living room for dinner, “I’ve been thinking, and now that the fires have died down I think it’s time to move on.”

“Why? We have food and water, and we’ve only seen two infected since we got here.” Alicia argued.

“Just, hear me out.” Madison raised her hand, “We barely have enough space in here, and there are not enough beds for everyone. I think we should take what we have, maybe see about preparing another deer and going back to the city to find a bigger place.”

“Absolutely not, there’s nothing left in the city.” Travis shook his head, “We should go find the government, or where the military has camped out.”

“If you do that, you will most likely be separated and shipped out to different facilities.” Anya replied, “And I will be drafted. That’s the best case scenario for the military.”

“Sounds good to me, where do we go?” Chris snarked.

“San Diego. Good luck getting there.” Anya saluted to him.

“Anya that’s enough, Chris, you too.” Madison huffed, “We are not going to split up. We are not going to go to the military, we are going to stay together, like a family.” She made eye contact with
“Some of the buildings are still standing, did the fires really take out the whole city?” Alicia asked. She turned to Anya, “And you said that the fires would be helpful after a while, what did you mean?”

Madison raised her eyebrow at Anya who rolled her eyes, “Come on. We’ve been avoiding fires, real fires in this area, for decades. A good burn out is only going to help the ground and wildlife come back. It’s going to crack pavement and tarmac, shit’s going to help the city grow back. Make it the natural kind of jungle. Give it a few years and L.A. might actually be a decent place to live again.”

“Can we live there before it gets to that point?” Nick asked, finally joining the conversation.

“Did you manage to get by without money and a job?” Anya raised her eyebrows, knowing more than enough about his arrest record to know the answer to that question.

“Yeah.” He shrugged.

“Picture it without the cops, and cashiers breathing down your neck and a few million fewer inhabitants.”

“Fair enough.” He grinned, looking a little excited at the prospect, “This actually sounds like fun, I vote yes.”

“We don’t know that anything is still intact though, it’ll take a while for plants to start growing back. Going back to the city is a stupid idea, we should go north.” Travis insisted.

“What’s north?” Alicia piped up. Everyone shifted to focus on Travis.

“Space, like Madison wants. No cities, so we won’t have to worry about infected people. Lots of farm space too.” Travis had started off scrambling for reasons, gaining confidence as he spoke.

“And food?” Nick raised his eyebrows. “I can find a shitload of stuff to eat in downtown, I can’t even imagine the truckloads we could find in suburbia. What are we going to eat in the middle of buttfuck nowhere?”

“Nick!” Madison slapped his shoulder.

“We don’t even know if anything still exists in downtown, and that’s what the farmland is for. We’ll grow our own food.” Travis refused to back down.

“Does anyone else remember the pea plant I tried to grow for my science class?” Alicia piped up, “Because I don’t remember it ever living. I’m pretty sure it died upon contact with our family.”

Madison winced, “And the gardens. There’s a reason Mrs. Tran always came over instead of letting us visit them.”

“Well you’ll figure it out,” Travis faked a positive attitude, “You’ll have to since it’s the only way you’ll get to eat.”

“I want to go home.” Chris snapped, “So you can take your stupid farm and shove it.”

“Home doesn’t exist anymore, Chris,” Alicia said gently.

“You don’t know that!” He yelled, “All of you are talking like it’s gone and you don’t even know!”
You’re giving up and you haven’t even checked to see if the city is still there!” He shoved out of his chair and stalked out the back door.

“I’ll go with him.” Nick snagged his go bag and went after Chris.

“Even if your old place is still there, it’s not going to be defensible, and there’s no land to grow on either.” Anya made the point quietly.

“We’re really not good at growing stuff though, like, we can’t just depend on a garden.” Alicia pointed out, “It’ll take weeks for the food to grow even if we do do it right.”

Anya grinned, “I can grow enough food for all of us, but it will still take weeks. We’ve got enough canned food that we can make it, especially if we can add in meat from hunting and fishing.”

“So you don’t want to go to the city?” Alicia asked, a little upset. Part of her agreed with Chris, she wanted to see it all again, to make sure that it’s gone.

“Actually I think it’s the smartest choice.” Anya shrugged a shoulder up.

“Why?” Madison quirked her head, a little lost on Anya’s reasoning.

“Now that most of the buildings are gone, there’s plenty of space to grow food, maybe even raise some animals. There should still be some buildings though, so that’ll provide shelter. It’s a reasonable distance to the ocean for fish and the woods here for deer.” Anya ticked the points off on her fingers, “And finally, every building that does survive will be a shop for the resources we will need.”

Madison blinked, a little surprised by the degree of thought Anya put into her rather spur of the moment plan. “Yeah, that.. That sounds good to me.” She forgot how much time and effort Anya put into preparing things.

“The fires will have destroyed most of the walkers and driven out a lot of the living too,” Alicia added. Anya nodded to acknowledge her point.

Madison folded her hands behind her and looked to Travis. She wasn’t going to ask him because he knew what she wanted, and she wasn’t going to push him because they both knew that it wouldn’t go well.

“I don’t want to go.” Travis almost pouted.

Alicia looked annoyed, “You don’t have to go with us.”

“Alicia.” Madison scolded, “We are not separating.”

“No, if Travis doesn’t want to come with us, we won’t force him.” Anya stood up, “But I’m leaving and I’m taking everything I need with me, and anyone who wants to go. So take some time out of your bitch schedule to think about that Travis.”

“You can’t just take off with all of our things!” Travis protested, anger building in his voice.

“You mean my car, my guns, my food, the deer you hunted using my weapons, that I prepared, and showed you how to do yourself? What part of the shit anywhere in twenty miles actually belongs to you Travis? Because all I can see is the shit you keep taking from me because you feel entitled to hate me and rely on me at the same time. So man up and take care of your family, or recognize the fact that I’m doing it for you.” Anya got up and followed Chris and Nick out the door.
Travis turned nearly purple and the vein on his temple throbbed. He barely lasted a minute before turning away and storming into the bunkroom, slamming the door behind him.

“Well, that went well.” Alicia offered her mom a small smile before getting up and finding a spot on the couch to read a book on.

“Yeah, it went perfectly,” Madison said.

Despite their refusal to talk to anyone, Chris and Travis were both packed up and ready to go the next morning when Anya jumped into Baby. They still refused to even look at each other as well so Baby was filled and they were left to their awkward ride in the truck.

Anya pulled out slowly, the vehicle path was well packed down by the rangers vehicles, but there were still a lot of rocks and holes that tossed them every which way. The road was pretty, enclosed by tall trees and the smell of forest, and it was calming to be on it, especially away from Travis and Chris who had been giving her grief ever since they arrived at the hotel.

“This is nice.” Alicia smiled, letting her hand drift out the window to catch the wind.

“No. Deer!” Madison pointed to the clearing slightly ahead of them, there was a small group of deer grazing in the sunlight.

Anya pulled over to the side of the road, “Rifle.” She demanded, turning off the car and standing in her seat to brace against the roll cage. Madison passed her the weapon and ammunition. Anya nodded and loaded the gun before aiming carefully at her target. Behind them, the truck pulled to a stop.

Crack.

All but one of the deer took off into the trees. The one flopped on its side and didn’t move. Anya grinned and passed her weapon back to Madison, “Come on Licia, time for you to skin a deer.”

“Augh, gross.” Alicia grumped, getting out of the car. It wasn’t really a choice.

Anya chuckled and jogged over to her kill, checking to make sure it was actually dead, then passed Alicia her knife, “Here, yours is going to get gummed up trying to cut through this.”

Alicia grimaced and took it. “How does this work?”

“Okay,” Anya walked her through the process of cutting away right under the tail, and then slicing from the groin right up to the base of the sternum, using her other hand to stop the knife from cutting through the intestines. “Now for the gross part, I need you to reach in there with your knife and cut through the diaphragm, that’s the thing that separates the heart and lungs from the rest of
Alicia blanched, “I have to reach inside it?”

“Yeah, so try not to cut yourself. When you do, just cut through that membrane and grab a hold of the lungs and everything should come right out.” Alicia did as she was told and in a matter of seconds, she was kneeling next to a steaming pile of organs.

“Oh god,” Alicia dropped the knife and stumbled over to a tree to empty her own guts across the grass, “That’s fucking disgusting.”

“It’s offal.” Anya corrected, grabbing the hocks and hooked them onto her gambrel. By the time Alicia had finished collecting herself, Anya had the deer hoisted up a couple feet from the ground. “You want to do the honors?” Anya held out another knife.

Alicia shook her head, “I think I’m good.”

Anya chuckled, “Fair enough.” She cut a light ring around each hock and a line down the inside of each leg. In a couple of careful cuts and a tug, she managed to skin the legs and tail pretty easily, “Back up kid.” Anya gave a few solid yanks and stripped the hide off all the way down to the shoulders.

Alicia covered her mouth again, but she kept a hold on her stomach. Anya seemed to enjoy seeing her niece’s squeamishness and finished off the shoulders in a few seconds. Overall the whole process only took five minutes.

They stepped back and let the deer drain while Madison fetched the field dressing kit from the back of the truck. “I figured you would want to cut it up here,” Madison said.

“You figured right, no point letting this thing make a mess of the truck bed.” Anya agreed, setting out her plastic sheet and cutting board. It wasn’t nearly long enough to fit under the whole animal, but it gave her a stable surface to cut on.

Fifteen minutes later and what once was a living, breathing animal was nothing more than a pile of trimmings and tasty cuts of meat.

Anya stood back, wiping her head with the back of her hand, “Well that was profitable. You mind hauling this back with your mom kid?”

“I got it.” Alicia was happy to help now that it looked like steaks at the grocery store. She didn’t struggle with the whole animal or the pieces, but the transition between just made her stomach churn.

It wasn’t long before they were back on the road.
A little meeting

Chapter Summary

A long-awaited meeting!

Chapter Notes

SO here's hoping you don't need to be too awfully productive for the next little while because it has begun. What you may ask? The spamming. We are just a few chapters (like 6) away from completing this story and y'all are so far behind (By 14 chapters, what's up with that?) so we are going to be posting a lot more often, and once we get those last few chapters done it'll be one chapter a day til its done. ENJOY!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Bellamy!” Octavia yelled she fell. “You have got to pick up your shit!”

“What?” Bellamy ducked under the open flap of the tent, “Why are you on the floor?”

“You have a whole fucking tent to yourself, why can’t you keep your shit in the tent?” Octavia reached down and began untangling herself from the pants she had tripped over.

“Uh, I mean I don’t want to leave my shoes inside, and those pants are gross. I don’t want outside getting all over my tent.” Bellamy pointed out, “Besides, your tent is a mess too.”

Octavia was slightly horrified thinking about what could possibly be on the pants, “The inside of my tent is a mess. I don’t leave my crap wherever it falls. Plus are you really stripping out here? There are innocent eyes that would be permanently scarred if they saw you.”

“I wear underwear.” He waved her off, “You’re just making excuses for being the clumsiest person alive.”

“He’s not wrong!” Raven called from the kitchen.

“Does that mean I can walk around in my underwear?” Octavia asked, gaining catcalls and considering glances from the others.

Bellamy grimaced, “Okay, first of all, you guys are all pervs. Second of all, no.”

“I get a pass to walk around in my underwear every time you do it,” Octavia smirked.

“As much as this sounds like a fun conversation,” Elyza interrupted, “The fire is out, and I’m going insane. Who’s up for a trip into town?”

“Can we even get out after Raven’s mad scientist barricading?” Octavia asked.

“Hey!” Raven walked out of the kitchen and waved a drill at Octavia, “I’ll have you know that I’m
You don’t even know what we’re talking about.”

“That’s beside the point. You are dising science. MY science.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “Do you want to go outside? We’re not sure if it’s possible to go out the front door.”

“Shit! Just a second.” Raven ducked back into the kitchen with a cacophony of crashes following her. She stumbled back out wearing her hiking boots and wielding her replacement spear. “We have to hit the roof.”

“The roof?” Elyza questioned. “I thought we were building garden beds up there.”

“Yeeessss, but I also found a way out that doesn’t involve taking down the barricades right yet.” Raven replied, “Come on.” She waved everyone to the stairs.

The trip to the roof was quick, but it took a few minutes to navigate the piles of lumber, plastic, hose, wires, tools, manure and everything else Raven had decided they needed from Home Depot and told the boys to throw up there.

“Why can’t boys ever lay stuff in neat piles?” Madi asked as she almost tripped over a bag of manure.

“No clue,” Elyza grabbed Octavia’s arm and helped her through the mess, not even pretending their resident klutz could avoid hurting herself, “But I’m pretty sure it’s so they can help out all the damsels in distress.”

“Huh, I never thought of that,” Raven scratched her head, “You could have a point.”

“It’s all a conspiracy,” Eliza replied, grinning as she felt Raven’s brain start mulling over that little thought. She loved setting Raven off on paranoid theorycrafting and watching her best friend obsess over something ridiculous.

“How do we get down now?” Madi asked, peeking over the raised edge of the roof, “I’m not jumping.”

“Well duh.” Raven gestured to her leg brace, “We only have room enough for one cripple here. They installed an emergency ladder.” She unrolled the giant yellow rope ladder over the edge of the wall.

Elyza cocked an eyebrow, “And you’re staying here, right?” It wasn’t really a question.

“Hell no.” Raven put her hands on her hips. “I’ve been doing my exercises and then some. I’m perfectly fine to come along.”

“You’re on dish duty for a week if I have to haul your ass around because you weren’t.” Elyza challenged.

“If I’m not, then I’ll be on my ass for a week.” Raven snapped back, “So let’s move it before I take the truck and leave you hoes to walk.”

“You wouldn’t leave me behind, would ya Rae,” Madi checked with a mix of sarcasm and seriousness.
Rae sighed dramatically, “No, I wouldn’t leave you behind squirt. With your little legs, you’d never keep up.”

Madi glared, “Your leg doesn’t let you run, She,” Madi pointed at Octavia, “Can trip over thin air, and Elyza refuses to run. I’m faster than all of you.”

Raven put her hands on her hips and opened her mouth to argue, but nothing came out. She looked down at the ground, then to Elyza, “When did our baby girl get replaced with a bitch? A smart bitch. I’m confused.”

“It’s the teenager syndrome,” Madi nodded her head sagely, “That’s what my mom always said.”

“Well then.” Raven shook her head, “Children and assholes first.” She directed Madi to the ladder.

The ladder wasn’t fun to climb down, way too much movement for it to feel comfortable. But 10 minutes later they were all on the ground and moving to the truck. There was only one dead...thing between the school and the truck and its very crispy body was quickly dispatched with a bat to the head.

“I kind of wish I had tried out for softball now,” Octavia swung her bat in a circle, “I’m pretty good at this shit.”

“We can always play in the field across the street,” Madi stood on her tiptoes to look over at the fields, “Once we clear it out. And the grass grows back.”

“Grass is for lesser women.” Raven shrugged, sticking her hand out the window, “Where are we going anyway? I doubt the zoo is open.” She joked.

Elyza gasped and smacked Raven’s arm, “We should find that tattoo machine!”

“Ow, ow, ow! Stop hitting the cripple. I’ll sic satan on you.” Raven threatened.

Madi frowned, “I was always told not to hit the driver.”

Octavia giggled, “Yeah well, with only one driver in town, we’re pretty safe. Unless Raven forgets to drive ON the road.” Octavia pointed to the curb that Raven was clearly aiming for.

“Meh.” Raven swerved a bit, and beyond being shaken up, they survived unscathed. “So tattoos... I think there’s a parlour somewhere in the sketchy side of town, honestly, there’s probably a couple shops down there. Lots of bars too.”

Octavia laughed, “I wonder why?”

“There’s probably nothing in the bars though,” Elyza was thinking, “If I was a different person it’d probably be one of the first things I went to get.”

“If you were a different person, you’d be dead.” Octavia raised her eyebrows.

“The clumsy one is correct. You probably would have been too scared to jump out the window and then you’d die all alone knowing you were less brave than a cripple.” Raven sighed dreamily.

“Wow Rae, what a motivational speech.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“What can I say?” She shrugged, “It’s a gift.”

“Turn down this street, Raven.” Octavia pointed, “There’s a bunch of bars down here, but I don’t
remember if there’s a tattoo shop.” Octavia paused for a minute, “Why do we need a tattoo shop again?”

“Gotcha.” Raven made the turn, “We need it because Elyza is trying to corrupt our children, but she’s also trying to avoid HIV, so it’s a bit of a moral grey area.”

Elyza hit Raven in the arm, “We can use the supplies for more than just tattoos, they’ll have a bunch of medical supplies. Plus we need art during the apocalypse.”

“Yeah, infusing our open wounds with ink, that’s the kind of art we need at the end of the world.” Raven rolled her eyes.

“I’m going to get you one of these days. A little raven on your back.” Elyza suggested. “Or a little pipe bomb on your wrist, you little pyromaniac.”

“Oh, that would be so cute!” Madi exclaimed.

“I don’t do cute.” Raven stopped the car. “But I found your tattoo joint.” She pointed to a tattoo shop that had three crispy crunchies meandering around in front of it. “And some eager customers.”

Elyza snagged the bat Octavia used from the back seat, “I’ll be just a minute.”

“Hey!” Raven popped her door open, “You don’t get to have all of the fun. Share!”

“I don’t share with cripples.” She teased, drawing the bat back and swung full out for the first critter’s head, sending the thing crashing to the ground. “Whew!” She hopped a bit, trying to shake the harsh vibrations out of her arms, “That’s kinda fun.”

Raven grabbed the collar of the one closest to her and slid her knife into its ear letting go as it dropped to the ground. “You are seriously messed up. And mean.”

Elyza wrinkled her nose at Raven’s hand, “Ew, you’ve got some.. Person on you.” She gestured to the blackened char that had rubbed off on Raven’s hand.

Raven got an evil grin on her face, “Come here, help me clean it off!” She began limp running, chasing Elyza with her gooey hand outstretched.

“Ew no!” Elyza shrieked, “You’re going to get us both killed you nutjob!” She ducked under Raven’s hand and tried to swing at the last crispy at the same time and just ended up tripping herself, still laughing.

“And you call me the klutz,” Octavia and Madi walked up, chuckling at Elyza on the ground. Octavia jabbed at the last one with the end of her lacrosse stick, taking it down.

“Can we go inside?” Madi pleaded, “It smells really bad out here.”

“It’s not going to smell any better with Raven going in,” Elyza pointed out, “Somebody decided to start groping the zombies.”

“Ew.” Raven shuddered, wiping her hand off on Elyza’s back, “That’s almost as gross as your shirt.”

“Bitch!” Elyza tried to squirm away from her own shirt. “You owe me a new shirt!”

“Well, it’s not like that one was getting any newer miss I have to spray brains all over the place with my fancy bat.” Raven snarked, opening the door to the store.
“You’re not getting any newer.” Elyza shoved in past Raven.

The shop was rather dark but quiet and clean. Guess nobody thought it was necessary to get a tattoo while the world was going to shit. “Grab the Aquaphor and any other good stuff from behind the counter.” Elyza directed as she walked into the back section.

“Yes, ma’am.” Madi saluted and started digging behind the counter.

“Oh my god that was so cute I think I may puke. Elyza what did you feed our baby!” Raven called, following her into the back room.

“I wish they would stop calling me a baby,” Madi grumbled.

“It’s a term of endearment.” Octavia quirked her head, “I think.” She started checking for anything that looked interesting, “I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you.”

“If you say so.” Madi started putting bottles of the Aquaphor stuff up on top of the counter, “Can you grab a bag for all of this?”

“Yup!” Octavia started being helpful.

“So is there anything else we need or was this mostly to get out all the pent-up energy you’ve been saving for most of your life?” Raven questioned, leaning on one of the chairs. “Oo, this is comfy. We should get more comfy chairs into the school. You think we could fit a lazy boy in the truck?”

“I mean probably?” Elyza shrugged, “And not really, this was mostly just to prevent me from lighting someone on fire.”

Raven blinked, “You know usually that’s my line.”

“Rae, we couldn’t be friends if I didn’t have homicidal tendencies too.” Elyza smiled, yanking another drawer open.

“I guess so.” Raven grinned, “You think we should just pack up this whole thing?” She slapped the toolbox full of colors and needles and random shit that looked like it was just a rolling supply case for the whole store.

“Yeah, we only need one of the toolboxes.” Elyza pointed to the big one, “That’s the one to grab, I just want to get all of the piercing supplies too. They might be useful.”

“For what? You think a belly button ring is going to help you be better at survival?”

“It certainly hasn’t harmed my chances.” Elyza rolled her eyes. “

“You have one of those?” Raven threw her arms up in the air, “How did I not know that you got your belly button pierced? Did I stop being your sister? Have you just forgotten to talk to me during your wild ‘poke holes in everything’ phase??”

Elyza’s eyebrows had raised during Raven’s rant, “Do you want a rundown of all my piercings and tattoos?” She waggled her eyebrows, “Some of them are fun.”

Raven closed her hands and brought them close to her chest looking highly concerned, “What happened to my baby sister, and who the fuck are you?”

“Someone who discovered the joys of piercings and tattoos.” Elyza’s grin had grown bigger.
Raven shuddered, “Okay needle freak, I’m going to put this in the car while you finish finding your implements of torture. Just know that if I wake up with ink or holes in me, then I know where you sleep.”

Elyza chuckled, “You still haven’t told me if you want a rundown!”

Raven shook her head and grabbed the toolbox, retreating back to the truck as fast as she could. “Octavia I need your muscles for a minute.”

“Take me to dinner first.” She joked.

“How bout I take you to dinner after?” Raven stopped by the bed of the truck and dropped the gate. The two girls got the large toolbox lifted into the bed and strapped in by the time Elyza and Madi came out of the shop.

“Do we want to check out any of the bars?” Elyza slung her bag into the back.

“I don’t see why not, worst that happens is we find somebody in there still holding on to their beer.” Raven grinned.

“I would not mind getting a little wasted,” Octavia commented.

“Maestro,” Elyza gestured to the door and Raven smirked, crouching by the double doors and began working her magic.

When she had it open, Raven pulled both doors wide open, “Alcoholic bliss, here I come.”

From inside the bar, they heard the collective hiss and growl of dozens of walkers breathing in as one beast.

“Oh shit.”

“Back up, back up,” Elyza grabbed Raven’s arm and pulled her back towards the truck, “Everybody in the truck.”

Madi turned around and scrambled into the bed, pressing her back to the cab and watched a seemingly endless mob start to file out of the bar towards them at a decent pace. Octavia joined her by the cab, watching Elyza and Raven move around the back end of the truck before they scrambled inside, giving them the time they needed to get in without any grubby hands grabbing them.

“Ready for some more fun?” Raven picked her spear up from where it had been tucked into the side of the truck bed.

“Hell yeah I am, come on you burned chicken nuggets!” Elyza called, cracking a skull with a swing of her bat.

“Ew.” Octavia made a face, “Good thing I’m never going to eat chicken nuggets again. She jabbed at one of the charred beings, shoving him off with her foot.

Raven nodded, “She gets like this sometimes. Here kid.” Raven passed her blade back towards Madi, “Make yourself useful.”

“Wait, I get a knife?” Madi’s eyes went wide, “Quint never let me have a knife.”

“Duh, girl power chica.” Raven rolled her eyes and stabbed one through the eye. “Fucking come at
“Bitches rule the world!” Raven shouted, raising her arm high in a victory punch before bringing her spear into the next body.

Madi nodded, her body clenched with terror but also feeding into the excitement from the other girls around her. She gave a timid, “Hell yeah,” and stabbed one of the crispy critters in the head. Staring in stunned silence at the realization that she had just killed a walker.

Elyza saw it and grinned from ear to ear, “Hell yeah!” She picked up the battle cry.

Anya slowed the car, listening to a chorus of shouting in the distance, “What the fuck is that?” She leaned forward, trying to understand what they were saying.

Alicia frowned, “I think they’re saying ‘hell yeah’?”

Nick popped up and stood in the backseat of Baby hanging onto the roll cage. “I think it’s coming from over there,” He gestured the way.

Anya shook her head a little, trying to decide if this was a good idea but one look at the mom squad had her driving the way Nick pointed, “Let’s go see what we can do.” She muttered, hoping against hope that everything would be dead on arrival.

Alicia pulled out her gun and checked the clip, “Anyone need any weapons?” She asked sliding her gun back into its holster.

“Honey put the gun away!” Madison protested, “We’re going to help whoever’s in trouble, not rob them.”

Alicia rolled her eyes, “It’s already in the holster mom, I’m just making sure it’s ready in case.”

“Honestly, it sounds less like they’re in trouble and more like they are trouble.” Nick commented, listening to the rowdy shouting and laughter emanating from a few blocks over, “They have to be drawing every walker that still has ears.”

Anya took a deep breath and tried to remind herself that good people help other people and that she didn’t need to have this argument again. Not with Travis, not with Madison, and definitely not with herself.

“What are you doing?” Anya heard a shout from behind her, glancing in her rearview mirror she saw Travis leaning out of his window gesturing to get her attention.

Nick leaned as far out of the back as he dared, still gripping the roll cage and shouted back, “We’re gonna see what all the yelling is about!”

Travis ducked back inside the truck and stepped on the gas, advancing in the road until they were driving side by side, “This is insane, we should just turn around and go back the way we came!” He yelled through Chris’ window.

“I thought you wanted to help people!” Anya snapped, aggravated that she was somehow in a drag
race with a shitty truck that didn’t even have the balls to actually be white.

Travis accelerated a little bit more, pulling ahead of Anya. When he was finally ahead of her, she must have slowed down a bit, he pulled the wheel to the right positioning the truck in front of Baby.

Anya slammed on the brakes, “What the FUCK do you think you’re doing?” She yelled at him.

“We are not going that way, we are going to avoid them.” Travis declared.

“Pffft,” Anya scoffed, reversing and pulling towards the tail end of the truck. She pressed the gas slowly and gently rammed the back Travis’ truck, putting it into a turtle-like spin as she nudged by. “Baby can take your rust bucket any day of the week, Trav.”

Travis glared at Anya who stepped on the gas as soon as Baby was no longer at risk of getting scratched, and he was forced to slowly maneuver his way back around in a four-point turn. By the time he caught up to them again, Baby was parked in front of one hell of a show.

Four sweaty, blood-spattered girls? Or women were laughing maniacally, or hysterically as they bashed in brain after brain, creating a small ramp of crispy bodies around their truck. They threw in frequent insults and challenges for a better fight, but their enemies seemed to only know the one tactic.

“Please tell me this is just a weird fucking nightmare?” Anya asked, looking to Madison for some sanity.

Madison shook her head slowly, “I don’t think it is?”

“We-” Alicia blinked as one of them stabbed their lacrosse stick through a skull and all the way to the other side, “We should help them?” She put her hand on her door, hesitating halfway through the action, “Right?”

“They seem to be doing just fine.” Nick had a grin on his face, watching the party, checking out the girl with the spear.

Travis yelled through Chris’ window again, “They’re fine, let’s go.”

“Dad! No way!” Chris protested, eyes riveted. “This is better than women’s mud wrestling.”

Travis stared at his son in shock, “How the hell would you know that?”

“I’m fifteen, not stupid.” He rolled his eyes and leaned out his window for a better view.

“Okay, whatever they are, they still shouldn’t have to fight alone.” Alycia decided, getting out of the car and moving towards the edge of the group. Anya quickly followed, not wanting her only competent relative to die.

“I’m at 10, how many you at Rae?” Elyza yelled over her shoulder, “Loser buys lunch!”

“Only ten?” Raven cackled, “I’ve got thirteen and counting!” She whipped the butt of her spear around and snapped the neck of her next victim.

“Wimps, I’m at 17, looks like you are going to owe me!” Octavia laughed.

“I don’t have any lunch money!” Madi protested, a little terrified.
Everyone in the truck stopped mid-motion and stared at her, “What??” Elyza giggled, “How are we going to eat if we can’t take your lunch money?” She cackled.

“We can always check the couch for change.” Raven laughed, “Oh my god, kid you are my favorite.”

A hand grabbed at Octavia and she turned back around to kick at its head. It crumbled underneath the force.

“Oh shit, yeah!” Elyza blinked in surprise and started swinging again.

Raven laughed, “Did you seriously forget they were here?” She doubled over, holding her gut.

“Watch the spear!” Madi pushed the pointy end away from her face with wide eyes, “I don’t want to die please.”

“Yeah, Rae.” Elyza muttered, “Don’t want to kill your favorite.”

Alicia couldn’t help but wonder how long they had been out here to be this crazy, they had to have been trapped in the bed of this truck for at least a day she thought. There was no way anyone could just be like this. She approached one of the walkers at the edge of the group, grabbing it by the shoulder and lifted her knife.

Even though it didn’t look much like a person, she hesitated.

Anya’s blade flashed in front of her and the person became dead weight. “Don’t hesitate,” Anya growled, moving on to the next one. Soon enough there were a few of the crispies turning around to converge on Anya and Alycia. That was when Raven noticed the presence of their audience.

“Hey! Cheaters! Those were mine!” Raven shouted over the ramshackle remains of the horde.

“What are you blathering about Rae?” Elyza asked, taking a moment to kick the piled bodies away from her side of the truck where they had stacked against the side.

“That bitch stole my crispy critter!” Raven complained.

“Fuck off!” Elyza waved her bat at them, “Find your own … thing!”

“I think at this point they count as things.” Octavia informed her, feeling comfortable enough to climb out of the truck and go after the stragglers.

“Did you just call me a bitch?” Anya questioned in disbelief, she was here helping them.

“You bet your nicely shaped ass I did! As a cripple, I retain the right to not share anything, that includes near-death experiences with walking corpses.” Raven stomped her foot and it slid in the blood puddled at their feet, and she grabbed onto Elyza’s shoulders to keep from slippin’-sliding out of the truck. “My point still stands!”

“Even if you aren’t?” Elyza laughed.

“I still killed more of them than you did!” Raven defended.

“I’m pretty sure I lost.” Madi admitted, “I only got three.”

Elyza turned with wide eyes, “You got three? That’s awesome!” She dropped Raven on her ass and gave Madi a hug, “You did great. I vote since it’s your first time that all your kills count as at least
“What the Fuck Lyza!” Raven yelled from her spot in the puddle of blood. “You just dropped me like a hot potato!”

“I’m pretty sure I dropped you like a noisy, one-legged bitch.”

Any blush, a little pissed off that she was thoroughly being ignored. They went from insulting her to insulting and complimenting her, to dropping each other in blood and she wasn’t even sure they knew she was still here.

She couldn’t decide if these people were the most unintelligent scrubs she’d ever been forced to witness or an actual force to behold. There were enough bodies on the ground to indicate that they clearly knew what they were doing, but also they were yelling and shouting like a bunch of frat boys. And she just couldn’t.

“You bitches going to get down here and help me finish this off?” Octavia grunted, “If not I’m claiming any and all alcohol for myself. I’ll be getting drunk for days!”

“I will cut you if you try it!” Raven started sliding her butt across the bed of the truck, grimacing as it soaked into her clothes, wet and cold and thick. “Come help me out!”

Alicia ran over and climbed the mound of corpses to help yank the gate open, holding out a hand to Raven, “Here.”

Raven squinted her eyes, considering. She glanced over the girl’s should at the pile of bodies and shrugged, “Wish it was cheekbones, but you’ll do.” She reached out her hand and grabbed onto the girl offering help.

Any raised an eyebrow, “Excuse me?”

“You deaf? I’m crippled so it’s not a problem.” Raven glanced the older woman up and down.

Any gaped, “What the fuck did you just- are you flirting with me? Your gym shorts are so full of blood that I can’t even think of a way to describe that as anything other than disgusting and you have the gall to be trying to flirt with me?”

Alicia raised an eyebrow at her aunt, a little surprised at the lack of venom there, and then looked to the ‘Rae’ person she was helping.

“I’m gorgeous no matter what I’m wearing, and you’re hot.” Raven shrugged, “Course I’m flirting with you.”

“I think she’s going to die,” Chris admitted to his father.

“Ten bucks on the Latina!” Nick shouted.

“Anyone who bets against me will go BOOM!” Raven yelled to the peanut gallery.

Elyza nodded her head, “She really will.”

Alycia moved back to her aunt and patted her arm. “It’s ok Auntie.” Her grin was so big it almost hurt, “We all get speechless when talking to a pretty girl.”

“Oh, we all do?” Elyza grinned at the girl, she wasn’t half bad looking.
“Not all of us,” Octavia rolled her eyes, “Some of us like a little testosterone in our lives.”

“Can I just like cookies?”

“Of course you can baby girl.” Elyza kissed the one clean spot on Madi’s forehead, “You can like anything you want.”

“Ugh, I need new clothes,” Octavia tugged at the soaked shirt that was clinging to her body.

“Hey cheekbones, you want to go shopping?” Raven wiggled her eyebrows at Anya.

“Is she serious? Are they serious?” Anya turned from Elyza who seemed to be vaguely sane, and then to Alicia, “What the hell is going on? I-I” She looked back over at Raven, “How the hell are you still alive? You’re actually crazy.”

“Crazy awesome.” Raven grinned.

“Faith, trust, and pixie dust.” Elyza put her hand to her heart, “Disney will always see us through.”

“As long as it’s not fucking Barbie, it’s all good.” Raven rolled her eyes

“Will you shut the fuck up about those stupid Barbie movies? I was nine! Oh my god!” Elyza shook her head and hopped over the side of the truck, “Come on, your girlfriend looks like she needs a drink.” She gestured to Anya.

“I liked Barbie movies,” Madi said to no one in particular before she followed the group into the bar.

“She’s not wrong,” Anya muttered, finding herself following the insane people into the bar.

“About the drink? Or the girlfriend?” Alicia asked, following Anya.

Anya shot Alicia a withering look and shouldered into the dark structure, immediately going for the bar itself while Raven and Elyza went for the back room to look.

“Are they coming back?” Nick asked his mom.

Madison looked between the building they had just entered and her son before shrugging, “I don’t know.”

“Ugh, Zangief.” Raven grimaced at the bright red panties in the lost and found box, slingshotting them across the room.

“Flying panties alert!” Elyza yelled, ducking to avoid them.

Octavia and Madi both looked up confused, the underwear brushing the side of Anya’s head.

“Sorry!” Raven called.

Anya glared at Raven, “You’re lucky you missed.”

Raven winked, “Only for you gorgeous.”

“What does that even mean?” Anya snapped, slamming the tumbler in her hand to the counter.
“Hey, be careful! That’s hand carved mahogany.” Raven laughed, “Panty alert!” She flung another pair at the bar, “I don’t know where all of these are coming from, but you can bet your ass if I had a washer I would think about coming here.”

Elyza gagged, “Oh that’s disgusting.”

Octavia stared at Raven, her hands clamped over Madi’s ears, “Okay when the twelve-year-old is in the bar, we keep things panty free, got it?”

“Going commando?” Raven grinned, “Only if cheekbones goes first.”

“Aren’t you an actual commando?” Alicia asked her aunt.

Anya shook her head and just ducked under the bar to grab a half full bottle of Vodka that someone had missed. She didn’t even bother saying anything, just put it to her lips and started chugging.

“Don’t drink it all!” Octavia protested, “I won that!”

“We bet lunch, not liquor.” Elyza corrected hauling a bag of peanuts out from the back. “Is anyone allergic, if not we’ve got 200 lbs of peanuts we can take home.”

Raven stared at the bag, “I think I’m going to be allergic by the time we finish them.”

Elyza nodded, “That is a possibility. However, I’m hearing no disputes so we can toss this in the truck as soon as we get it cleaned up.”

“Oh fuck.” Raven thumped her head against the wall, “We have to clean the truck…”

“How are we going to do that?” Madi asked.

“They should have a mop and some buckets in the back. If there’s any water pressure left we can fill it up and even get a decent sanitize on the bed.” Octavia pointed out, “I’ve cleaned up many a mess in bars like this.”

Raven raised an eyebrow, “That’s a story I need to hear. Cheekbones, let’s go check out the back.”

She grinned at Anya.

“I have a name.”

“But you haven’t bothered sharing it yet.” Raven pointed out.

“Neither have any of you, you’re too busy yelling like maniacs.” Anya snarked.

“Well then gorgeous,” Raven turned and started pointing “That is Octavia and the baby girl next to her is Madi. That is my best bitch Elyza. And I am the fabulous Raven Reyes.”

“Anya.” She pointed to herself, then jerked a thumb at her niece. “Alicia.”

“Hmmmm,” Raven purred. “I like it, but you’re still cheekbones.”

“Licia, yell if anything happens, I’m going to make sure the cripple doesn’t start flirting with the floor.”

“Why, would you be jealous?”

“Oh my god.” Anya shoved Raven into the kitchen, ignoring the mess on her hands, “Let’s just
clean your damn truck.”

“You know I like it rough and dirty, but I prefer dinner first.” Raven laughed.

“According to her, you can do dinner after too!” Octavia called after them, yanking open the cleaning closet next to the bathrooms.

“My aunt is going to kill your friend.” Alicia giggled, “Or kiss her.”

“Either way it’ll end in screaming.” Elyza snorted.

Madi looked between them, “What?”

“I thought I said to keep it PG!” Octavia scolded.

“You said no flying panties, nothing about PG.” Elyza protested, “I don’t even think I know how to be PG. What is a PG rating?”

Octavia huffed, pulling out a mop bucket and some cleaning fluid, “You’re hopeless. It means Disney level. Got it?”

“I like watching Disney, I can’t live Disney.” Elyza shook her head

“I dunno, Disney has some dirty stuff in there if you look for it,” Alicia commented.

Elyza raised her eyebrows.

“Haven’t you heard about the vault of Disney porn?” Alicia laughed, “That was a whole thing, my mom flipped out about it and wouldn’t let us watch the movies anymore. She only caved for Tangled.”

“You’ve only seen Tangled?” Elyza sounded horrified.

Alicia quirked her head, “I think I’ve seen everything up to Lion King.”

“Oh, you poor thing.” Elyza really was horrified now, “How can you possibly live without Moana and Princess and the Frog and Mulan?”

“And Avengers?” Madi wasn’t sure how that could be possible, “Loki should totally be a Disney Princess.”

“He-yeah.” Octavia nodded, “He spends more time as a chick anyway.” She looked around, “You think I should tell the dynamic duo that we found the mop?” She glanced down at her mop bucket.

“You can,” Elyza pointed to Octavia, “Just be careful, Raven’s not exactly well known for keeping her...escapades to appropriate venues.” Elyza waited a beat, “Was that PG enough for you?”

“It’ll do.” Octavia shook her head, “You find more booze, I’m going to clean the truck. Madi you want to mop while I dig us out of the trench?” She jerked her head at the roadblock of bodies.

“Sure.”

“I’ll help too.” Alicia volunteered, rolling up her sleeves.
We are almost done, BUT we want to keep going. That said other than Ranya and Clexa/Elycia....we're lacking in ideas for where to take a part two, SO if you have ideas, thoughts, dreams, nightmares, or inklings, send them our way! Please and Thank You
LOL apparently Bookwyrm is STILL exhausted as she skipped a chapter. Don't worry, here it is and I'll make her take a nap or something.

“What is going on?” Madison took a few steps away from Baby where she had been leaning when she saw Alicia and one of the dark-haired girls come out of the building they had entered. “What is she doing?”

Alicia and the other girl jumped up into the back of a truck and started….mopping?

“Apparently they decided to do a little cleaning?” Nick shrugged, eyes glued to the girls. “Are we gonna go down there?”

“No. We aren’t going anywhere.” Travis was still sitting in his truck, refusing to get out or even consider it. “We shouldn’t be here in the first place.”

“Yet here we are.” Chris piped in, slouched against the seat sulking. “We could just go.”

“We are not leaving Alicia and Anya behind.” Madison scolded, beginning to pace. “Why is Anya still in there, and why is Alicia mopping?”

“Why don’t we just go down there and find out?” Nick suggested, waving down the street.

“Because it isn’t safe.” Travis snapped.

“Well if it isn’t safe, why are we leaving the girls there alone?” Chris rolled his eyes, “I mean, unless you want Anya and Alicia to die.”

Travis glared at Chris, “Putting ourselves in danger won’t help them.”

“So then we just sit here until someone pulls out a gun or they walk away?” Chris scoffed, “Yeah right.” He got out of the car and started walking for the truck.

“Chris! Get back here!” Travis yelled, finally getting out of the truck to chase after Chris.

“I’m going with them,” Nick followed after, looking around like a tourist.

“Ugh,” Madison shook her head and grabbed the shotgun. None of the other group looked like it had any firearms, so even a single shotgun seemed like it would provide some decent leverage.

“Woah, Lady with a gun!” Octavia stopped cleaning and watched the new group approach, crouching lower in the truck to make a smaller target.

“Mom!” Alicia yelled, “Point that thing somewhere else, these are good people.”

“Yeah, what she said.” Octavia agreed from her hiding spot.

“You can’t possibly know that, Alicia.” Travis walked over to the truck bed and tried to grab at
Alicia’s arm.

Octavia reached over and snagged his arm. “We don’t touch people without permission.” Her voice was very flat.

“She’s my step-daughter, and I can take care of her just fine without you, now come on Alicia.”

“I don’t care if she’s Mary and you’re the Baby Jesus, if you don’t move your fucking hand I will remove it for you.” Octavia was cold and had increased the pressure of her grip, bruising now.

Travis frowned at her, “Let me and Alicia go now, or you’ll regret it.” He looked pointedly towards Madison.

Octavia raised an eyebrow, “I’m not keeping anyone here, and if you feel like shooting at me, I’ll turn you into the target.” She increased the pressure, forcing Travis’ hand to slacken and shoved it away from them.

Alicia took a step back with a frown, rubbing her wrist where Travis had held it, “I’m telling you, they’re not here to hurt anyone Travis. Anya wouldn’t trust me with them if they weren’t decent people.”

“Anya doesn’t think about the consequences of her actions Alicia. You should know that by now. Come on, we’ve done enough to help them with their problem, it’s time to move on.”

“Travis, just stop for a minute okay, we need to wait for Anya to come back, and we might as well do some good here while we do it right?” Madison tried to reason, her gun now pointed at the ground where it wouldn’t hurt anyone.

“They’ve probably taken Anya hostage, we won’t get her back,” Travis argued, arms crossed over his chest.

Chris snorted, “Good riddance.”

“Hey,” Nick smacked him upside the head, “just because you don’t like someone doesn’t mean you wish them dead kid, it’s not right.”

“Then she shouldn’t kill people. That’s what’s not right.” Chris glared at Nick, venom dripping with his words.

“Alicia, get down.” Travis tried again. “We need to go.” He reached to grab at her again.

Octavia hopped off the side of the truck and got between Travis and Alicia, “I don’t think you understood me the first time around. You need to back off.”

“What the fuck is going on here?” Anya walked out and dropped a huge burlap sack on the ground. “Talk to me.”

“Squidward over here doesn’t know how to take a hint,” Octavia informed her, eyes glued to Travis. She didn’t trust this guy as far as she could throw him, “And I don’t like how he’s talking to your girl.” She jerked a thumb back towards Alicia who looked a little torn and confused by this all. She wasn’t exactly used to being uncomfortable around Travis or feeling threatened by him, but she was definitely grateful to not have him grabbing at her.

“Travis.” Anya looked at him, demanding an answer.
“It’s not safe to be here, you said that people are dangerous and then you leave Alicia with a bunch of strangers. I’m not going to just sit by and let her get hurt because you know what’s best for us.” He snapped, turning away from Octavia to glare at his half-sister with clenched fists.

“From what I can see, the only one trying to cause a problem is you.” Octavia commented, “We don’t hurt the living.”

“Then what do you call that?” He turned on her again, pointing to the carnage spread around the truck.

Octavia raised her eyebrows at him, “Cathartic. They aren’t alive Squidward, they’re capital ‘D’ dead, and anyone who tells you otherwise is trying to sell you something.”

“They aren’t dead, they’re sick.” He snapped, beginning to just lash out at everything he could.

“If they can walk around without their organs on the inside of their bodies, then they’re dead.”

Elyza came up behind them startling the Mom squad and Chris, which was surprising because she had a box full of bottles clanking to announce her presence. “And when they can literally separate their lower halves from their upper halves and still drag themselves over to eat you, they are also dead.” She looked over the edge of the truck, decided it was clean enough and plunked the box down.

“And who the hell are you?” Travis turned to follow her, getting a little overwhelmed by the number of people he was trying to argue with at once.

“Who the hell is she? Who the fuck are you?” Raven and Madi came up, also lugging burlap sacks that they dropped on the ground.

“What the fuck is life?” Nick joked

“Not helping Nick.” Madison informed him, getting a little antsy at the number of agitated people standing so close together. If Travis wasn’t careful, then he would be in the center of a lot of upset people looking to hurt him. Specifically, the petite brunette standing between him and Alicia who looked very ready to do something violent.

“Alright, introductions.” Anya raised her hands wanting to diffuse the situation. “That’s Madison, Nick, Chris, and Travis.” She pointed to each one in turn. “They are Raven, Elyza, Madi and…” She hesitated.

“Octavia.” The brunette supplied, cracking her knuckles ominously. Elyza rolled her eyes and just hoped Octavia didn’t try walking. Most of her intimidation tactics were quickly followed by some form of giving the ground a surprise hug.

“I don’t care what their names are.” Travis was still not backing down.

Raven arched her eyebrow, pissed off, “Well maybe you’d care to know that since your girls were so nice,” She gestured to Anya and Alicia “We were going splitting the peanuts and the alcohol we found with you guys.”

“We don’t need any handouts.” Travis spat through gritted teeth.

Elyza looked to Raven in a silent question and received a firm nod in response. “Excellent, since you’re so self-sufficient and shit, I suggest you back the fuck up to your car and get the hell out of here. Because I’m pretty sure Octavia would be more than happy to beat you to death with your
“Let’s go.” Travis snapped to the others, turning towards his car.

“No.” Madison sounded shocked, “We need food, and supplies and honestly these girls are the most likely to know which places have already been hit. Travis, you need to calm down. Now.”

“Mom’s right, you’re losing it, dude.” Nick pointed out.

Travis was starting to turn a little purple in the face, “We don’t need their help Madison.” He was starting to sound like he was pleading now.

“Go wait in the car Travis,” Madison told him, sounding almost as tired as she felt.

Raven opened her mouth and then closed it with a squeak, rubbing her side where Elyza had shoved her elbow.

“You can come on our supply run with us,” Madi offered, “Then you can see we aren’t bad people and you can get the help you need.”

Elyza and Raven both looked to the girl with shocked expressions. Clearly, this guy is not good people, why in the world would Madi be offering this to them. The tween responded with a shrug and Elyza sighed.

“You can’t be serious.” Octavia snapped, “We are not taking that asshole with us anywhere.”

“Yeah, we are.” Raven replied, her voice slipping into the dramatic cadence of a woman throwing herself on the altar of sacrifice, “Because we aren’t assholes, not even to other assholes.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it,” Octavia replied.

“If Madi vouches for them, then we give them the chance, simple as that,” Elyza replied, shrugging it off. “Let’s get the rest of this crap into the truck and get moving. We have more places to hit.”

“We’ll pull up to you here,” Anya called taking off to the vehicles.

Travis was already in the truck, glaring at the new group and gripping his steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles were stark white. But his windows were down, so Anya was able to let him know the plan.

The group down by the bar got the bodies shoved out of the way and the alcohol and peanuts loaded into the back of the truck.

Raven turned at the sound of the new vehicles pulling up, “Oh sweet mama..”

“Oh shit, here we go,” Elyza muttered, rolling her eyes.

“Shhh,” Raven walked towards the jeep with reverence, “Aren’t you gorgeous.”

Anya rolled her eyes, “I think we’ve established that flattery gets you nowhere.”

“No you.” Raven shut her down, running her hands over a matte black hood. She didn’t have words to express what she was feeling, so Raven just walked around this gorgeous hunk of metal, trailing a hand along the side as she listed all the modifications to the relatively common model. “Roll cage, reinforced sides, full offroad harnesses, custom leather..” She bit her lip, “I want to make sweet love to you.” She murmured.
“Do you need a few minutes Rae?” Elyza called over, “I’m sure nobody would mind so long as you washed her afterwards.”

“I mind!” Anya snapped. “It’s my damn car.”

Raven gasped and slapped her hands onto the car like she was covering its ears, “She didn’t mean that baby, you’re not just a car.” She hugged it, “You’re a beautiful, beautiful work of genius.”

“She even guessed Baby’s name,” Nick laughed.

“Oh god.” Elyza rolled her eyes as Raven swooned, “Rae, you can flirt with it later.”

“Her, I can flirt with…” Raven stopped, eyes squinted. “No. Just.. what..? No why would you...some stupid… I’m gonna…don’t worry, I’ve got you” Raven had her hands behind the grill muttering to herself now, and crooning to the car. “Get my tools.” She called, mimicking a surgeon in the operating theater.

Elyza just sighed, grabbed the tool bag out of the cab and walked it over to Raven, not even bothering to question or protest.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Anya growled, walking forward to protect her Baby.

Raven shot her a dirty look, “I’m going to fix the heinous abuse that has happened here. Some stupid asshole didn’t do their job right when they put this cage on here.” She took her toolkit and got to work rethreading two of the nuts on the right-hand side and tightening them down all the way, and then focused her efforts on the winch reel, shooting Anya the occasional dirty look for hurting such a gorgeous machine.

“Ha, Anya screwed up on Baby?!” Chris crowed, “That’s great!” His joy at Anya’s mess-up caught him a glare from Nick and Alicia.

Anya grumbled, her eyes glued to Raven’s hands monitoring what she was doing. She didn’t say anything, but her lack of protest was admission enough.

“If we’re all done playing with the vehicles, can we go?” Elyza was bored and looked ready to take off on her own.

Raven finished up, putting her tools away and wiped her hands off on her pants. “You’re all good now Baby, aren’t you.” She cooed at the jeep, ready to go if she had to. She tossed her tools back in the cab of the truck and climbed in, “Follow us if you want, not if you don’t.” She twisted around, getting a clear view of Baby, “I really wanna see you later,” She blew a kiss at the jeep.

Anya blinked at this ridiculous woman and shook her head, climbing into Baby and feeling slightly weird about it. “Let’s move people.”

Everyone took up their proper positions in vehicles and held on while they drove.

“So where are we going now?” Raven asked Elyza, “We didn’t exactly plan for this to be more than a casual outing.”

Elyza looked over her shoulder to Madi and Octavia, “Ideas?”

“We could always go to Walmart or something?” Madi offered, “If they need supplies for a big trip
we can help them out.”

“Isn’t Walmart going to be completely empty?” Octavia looked confused, they had thought about stopping in one, but it had been mobbed before things shut down and there didn’t seem to be a point.

“Much to learn you still have young padawan.” Raven smirked over her shoulder, “Hold on ladies.” She pulled a tight left turn with a whoop.

“Don’t throw us out!” Madi yelled, getting squished by a bag of peanuts. Octavia reached over and helped pull it off her once the truck had straightened out. “You like me, remember!”

“Are the ducklings still with us?” Raven called back, knowing Elyza would hit her if she turned around all the way to look.

“Yep,” Madi yelled back.

“You can have shotgun on the way home Madi,” Elyza promised.


Elyza turned around and lowered her voice, “I’ll tell them that we’ll probably find another semi to take home later.” She grinned at Raven.

Raven pulled into the parking lot, slowing down to avoid cars that had been left in the middle of the lanes as people freaked out. She drove around the backside and parked near the loading bay taking note of a couple of semis, one she could probably hot wire if she needed to. She turned off the car and got out, grabbing her spear and hefting the toolbag over her shoulder.

“What are we doing here?” Travis didn’t even bother to turn off his truck, already complaining. “This would be the first place people would come for supplies. There won’t be anything left.”

Any also looked around looking skeptical, “I’m with him on this one, there isn’t going to be anything useful here.”

“Psh, you people are so cute.” Raven mocked, leading the way to the side door, pausing only long enough to put down one of the dead shambling around. She worked on the door while the rest of her group took care of the random infected visible.

Any frowned, watching the efficiency of their actions with a critical eye. Clearly, they weren’t as hapless as she originally thought, but they put a lot of energy into taking out the dozen or so random walkers, going so far as to jog to the other end of the loading zone to make sure there was no one there. She glanced over at the rest of her people and saw the same confusion on Madison and Nick’s faces too.

“Alright, the place is ours!” Raven shouted, kicking the door open and letting it smash into the metal walls. Anya flinched, fighting the urge to duck for cover.

“Okay, scour and sweep, load up everything we can on the trucks and make use of those pallet jacks. Those babies are backsavers.” Elyza commanded, “Madi you want to work on drinks?” She gestured to the thirty-foot high wall of soda waters, bottled drinks, juices, and water jugs directly in front of them.

“Yeah boss.” Madi saluted playfully, getting to work.
Madison paused at the doorway, “Oh my god…”

“Well, that’s an accident waiting to happen,” Nick mumbled, scooting around his mother to get a better look at the precariously balanced stacks of beverages.

“I take back what I thought about you guys,” Anya admitted to no one in particular.

“You know the first step is admitting you’re wrong.” Raven grinned.

“And the second step?” Anya didn’t seem impressed.

Raven looked her up at down, “The second step is all about the motion of the ocean gorgeous.”

Elyza barked out a laugh as she moved past, “Are we getting a semi or not Rae, there’s a lot of shit here we don’t want it to go to waste once they’re filled up.”

“Is that where you got that monstrosity?” Octavia turned on Elyza.

“Yup!” Raven answered for her, “I’m a genius.”

“I hate to inflate her ego, but it wasn’t an awful idea,” Elyza admitted.

Travis and Madison were still standing just inside the door, mouths slightly open as they took in the pallet-fulls of items. Chris walked up behind them, shoving past as he got a glimpse. “Is there more?” He took off through one of the dividing doors, “Hey! There’s food!” He yelled back, the sound muffled.

“Octavia go after him. No one goes anywhere alone.” Elyza snapped.

“Got it.” O raced after him, a tight grip on her lacrosse stick just in case he was already in the middle of a tangle.

“So cheekbones.” Raven hip checked Anya, “You wanna help me get us a ride?” She winked.

“Uh, maybe I should do that.” Travis raised his hand, sounding normal for the first time since they had come across each other.

“You know something about driving a semi big guy?” Raven went from flirtatious to analytical in a split second, giving Travis the same look-over she gave Anya but with far less appreciation.

He nodded, “I’m a pretty handy guy.”

“Alright.” Raven nodded, her eyes flicking to Anya, “Next time.”

“Uh ok?” Anya sounded unsure.

Raven slapped Travis on the shoulder on her way outside, “With me jumbo.”

Madison and Anya walked further into the warehouse, going through dividing doors until they found Chris, Octavia, Elyza, and Alicia lining up pallets in front of one of the loading doors. “What do you guys need right now? We can load you up and strap it down.” Elyza asked and she watched Chris maneuver a hand truck into another pallet.

“We’re focused on water, shelter, medical supplies and food, in that order.” Anya listed off, “I’d like to fill Baby with water and then the truck can take everything else.”
Elyza grinned, “Guess that means we need to go shopping.” She grabbed Alicia’s arm and started looking for the door into the main store, “We’ll load up a couple of shopping carts and bring them back, cool?”

Alicia nodded, a little overwhelmed by how calm and organized everyone was, moving together and taking orders. She’d never really been in a situation where someone gave a command and it was actually followed without an argument in between. “So where do we go first?”

“Camping supplies. There should be plenty of water to go around in the back, what we need are tents and sleeping bags…” Elyza pursed her lips, “Oh! Raven wanted us to snag fishing wire too.”

“Fishing wire?”

“Yeah, she’s paranoid,” Elyza said it like that was all the explanation necessary and started for the camping section. It looked very much like world war two happened between the camp chairs and the coolers.

“What a mess,” Alicia commented as she tripped over a pile of fishing lures spread across the floor.

“I know, right? It’s not like the world ended or anything, the least they could do is pick up after themselves.” Elyza joked, grabbing a flipped cart and turned it over, tossing the random shit out of the bottom, “Would you guys rather have a family size tent or a bunch of littles?” She asked.

“One family size and a few littles?” Alicia suggested, unsure of what would be best, but not wanting to share space with...anyone else.

“Got it.” Elyza got up on her tiptoes to reach the better tents up top, passing the heavy rectangles to Alicia, “I can never figure out how these things are so heavy.”

Alicia grunted as she swung the tents into the cart, “I don’t know.”

A few aisles later and they were each pushing a cart and Elyza was pulling another behind her. “I remember the good ole days when a shopping trip was limited to two frozen pizzas and a box of tampons.”

“Just as long as I don’t have to remember the days when tampons were a thing, I think I’ll survive,” Alicia said.

“Preach.”

“Speaking of….” Alicia stopped pushing the cart, “We should make a quick detour.”

“I’ve got you girl, this way.” Elyza started back towards the back room where they had been stacking pallets. “They keep the big boxes back here.”

Alicia followed with a relieved smile, she had been running low enough on supplies that her next cycle was an object of dread. That smile only grew when Elyza found one of the many pallets of pharmaceuticals and just started tossing boxes of pills and shoe inserts and a dozen other things aside until she stood up in the midst of her mess with a triumphant smile, “Victory!” She held up a cardboard box, “Spoils to the lovely lady.” She tucked the box under Alycia’s cart.

Alicia laughed, “You guys are a real strange group aren’t you?”

“Eh,” Elyza shrugged, “It works for us.” They finally got their carts to the bay where Raven and Travis had only just gotten a semi backed into the loading dock.
Raven jumped down from the cab of the semi and walked around, she looked at the loading dock with her eyebrows furrowed. “How the fuck am I gonna get up there?”

“We’ve got this Rae.” Elyza started directing the others to load up the pallets and to take the carts to Travis’ truck and Baby.

Rae grumbled but got back into the cab. She wasn’t exactly keen on looking like an idiot in front of cheekbones. Elyza couldn’t help the tiny sigh of relief that Raven was willing to take care of herself, even if they both knew that it was for her lady crush.

“How are you so good at this?” Chris asked watching as Elyza gave directions.

“We had some practice the last time. If we had known what we were doing it would have taken us half the time, and we would have gotten a few more pallets in too.” Elyza shrugged.

“Yeah well, I for one am glad that we didn’t have any more pallets.” Octavia grouched, “I’ve had my fill of moving those bigass bitches around the last week.”

“You’ve done this before?” Travis looked between the girls, curious.

Madison shook her head, “I dunno what you’d do with all of this. I mean, I doubt having a semi by your place is particularly easy to hide.”

“It blends in pretty well,” Madi looked thoughtful, “It’s helpful to have all this stuff, and it’ll mean we can start living normally.”

“There’s six of us, this won’t last nearly as long as we’d like.” Elyza pointed out, “But it’ll hold out long enough for us to be a lot more self-sufficient.”

“It better, these pallets are going be the death of me.” Octavia complained again, shoving another one into place in the back of the truck.

“You want to be self-sufficient?” Anya asked, sounding intrigued.

Elyza gave her a look, “Of course, unless the world suddenly fixes itself, this is it.” She glanced at the others, “If we can’t provide for ourselves, no one else is going to do it for us.”

“Surely you know that the government is working to fix this?” Travis protested the idea that things weren’t going to change.

“They just set fire to L.A. They aren’t working to fix anything,” Elyza scoffed, “I’m not going to wait around for a fairytale ending that won’t happen. I’m not a princess and this isn’t a storybook.”

“You know I’ve heard that you actually are a princess.” Octavia teased. “I seem to recall Raven calling you that.”

“You can shut the fuck up.” Elyza interrupted her. “Either way, we’re looking to get ourselves set with this stuff until we can put together a real living situation and by the time these babies run out, we won’t need to get anymore. Or that’s the plan anyway.”

“I’m still not convinced that school needs to be a part of the plan though,” Madi sighed, “Not having to go to school is the best part of the world ending.”

“You plan on having school?” Madison asked.

“She’s a kid.” Elyza scoffed, “I may be a drop-out in the making, but she’s going to know how to
read and write and all that shit just like anyone else.”

“As long as that school stuff doesn’t apply to me,” Chris interrupted Madison’s intrigued look, “I’m done with that crap.”

“School is important, Chris.” Travis reminded him, sounding like a recording.

Elyza scoffed, “No it isn’t, but learning? That is.” She tossed the last of the tents into the bed of the truck, “I guess this is good luck then?” She held out a hand to Madison.

“I guess so.” Madison shook her hand.
The girls welcome the new people with confusing statements and a surprisingly loose security plan that is probably one of the least likely to cause a riot somehow, while the new people send pointed looks at the members of their group who may or may not be a serious risk to their chances of getting in.

Hey guys! Turns out, I'm exhausted and so I haven't been the one posting in like weeks? I have a habit of forgetting, BUT it's good to be back, and hopefully you guys enjoy this new chapter cus we finally got the band back together.
Keep up the commentary, we love to hear what you think and towards the end of this bigass bitch of a story we're gonna start asking for your input about the sequel. YES I said sequel, because nothing is ever done with book 1.
Kisses, cuddles and of course coffee for all unattended children. - BW

“Uh, just hold on a second,” Anya came in between them, “Why is this goodbye? You guys are building something sustainable, we’re looking to do the same and you seem like strangely reasonable people. Except for the latina, she’s nuts.” Elyza nodded in agreement. “Why don’t we just head in the same direction?”

“We have a strict policy on new people.” Octavia replied, shooting Travis a dirty look, “And it starts with not being an asshole.”

“Actually.” Elyza’s eyebrow ticked up, “The only people who have a say in that are me, Madi and Raven.”

Octavia deflated a bit, “Come on, don’t we get a say too?”

“Not really, no.” Elyza shook her head, “Your people are only temporary right? If you reserve the right to leave, you lose the right to vote. I’m gonna go talk to Raven, Madi with me.” Elyza gestured, taking the tween with her to the truck to confer about the new arrivals.

“Are they seriously going to just toss us on our ear?” Chris stage whispered to Nick.

“I mean Anya almost did.” He joked.

“Not all of us have made the best impression,” Alicia glanced pointedly at Travis, “It’s not like they need us. At all. They seem to be made for this.”

“Would they really let us in?” Madison questioned Octavia, “They met us a few hours ago, that’s a lot of trust.”
“Do they even have enough space? I’m not looking to be squashed into a three-bedroom house.” Travis also looked curious.

“Yes and yes.” Octavia nodded, keeping her eyes trained on the trio conversing at the front of the truck. “There’s more than enough space. And they took us home after 10 minutes and a scuffle.”

They stood around in silence, their faces ranging from impressed to wary, to anxious. The silence was almost painful with anticipation of the verdict. Finally Octavia noticed that they were being beckoned towards the trio.

“Close the bay doors before you come down!” Raven called, gesturing to the wide-open door. “No need to advertise the goods.”

Once the door was closed, they all walked down to hear what there was to be said. They all stood quietly for a moment, no one wanting to break the silence. Raven and Elyza just stood there, considering each person before turning to look at Madi. Madi stood there a few minutes longer, watching the now confused faces as everyone looked to her. A few more minutes and Madi nodded.

Raven nodded in response and turned to yank the door open and began climbing in. She got herself situated and allowed Elyza to slam the door closed.

“So what does that mean exactly?” Madison asked, looking between the trio in utter confusion.

“You’re in.” Octavia slapped her shoulder


“You’re in.” Elyza confirmed. “Raven’ll drive the semi, I’ll drive our truck. You’ll follow us.”

“They’re really slow on the uptake.” Madi murmured to Octavia.

The older girl shrugged, “New people.” To Madison and Travis’ group she said, “See you in a bit.”

Octavia hopped in the passenger seat of the semi while Elyza and Madi went for their truck. “Uh, shouldn’t we be going for the cars?” Nick urged, nudging them into motion. The rest of them began moving quickly, dispersing to their respective vehicles, only just getting into them as Raven pulled around the corner and out of sight with Elyza ready to follow.

“Are we really doing this?” Madison asked.

“You seemed all for it back there.” Alicia leaned forward in her seat to see her mother’s face.

“I mean it sounds great. Really great.” Madison shifted in her seat.

Anyà nodded, “A little too good to be true.” She agreed, “I’m not sure on it either.”

“You can’t be sure of anything.” Nick rolled his eyes, seeming irritated. “I know you’re all used to knowing what the correct choice is all the time, but welcome to my world, where you can’t be sure of anything. We go with it until it isn’t a sure thing anymore.”

No one seemed to know what to say in response to that. Silence reigned for next few miles.

“Are Travis and Chris going to fuck this up for us?” Nick asked suddenly, glancing behind him at the other vehicle.
Anya hit her head on the steering wheel.

“I’m gonna take that as a yes.” Alicia grumbled, “But what else is new?”

“Anya, eyes on the road please?” Madison asked, her hand clenched on the oh-shit handle.

Anya sat up fully, eyes on the road. “We need to keep them in line as much as we can.”

“I really don’t think that’s necessary. Travis is a grown man and he will make sure Chris will behave himself.” Madison defended them.

“Mom.” Alicia said, “We both know they haven’t been behaving since Liza died.”

Madison sighed, “This isn’t about being nice at the dinner table, this is about finding a place to live. They won’t mess this up.”

Nick scoffed, “They might. They don’t always think things through before they do or say something.”

“Well here’s to hoping that they start.” Alicia crossed her fingers while Madison gave a terse nod.

Anya frowned, “They’re stopping?” She looked around, “You’ve gotta be kidding. They’re using a school as their home base? This place has to have more escape routes and hidey holes than a new york subway.”

Alicia grumbled, “I just left school, dammit.”

“Home sweet home.” Nick chuckled.

Anya followed Elyza as she pulled around the back side of the school and stopped for a moment as Raven pulled up and parked next to a semi that was sandwiched between school busses and the school building. Noticing Elyza had gotten out of the truck she started up again and parked behind her, jumping out of Baby and grabbing her bag.

“We can get in this way?” Octavia questioned, gesturing to the loading dock.

“Yeah, we have to do some backtracking inside to get up to home, but nothing too bad.” Raven was pulling up the doors to reveal a storage room.

“Why the hell did we come down off the roof?!?” Madi screeched.

Raven, Elyza and Octavia stopped and turned to stare at her. “What?! That was freaky shit!”

Octavia looked at the other two, “She’s been hanging out with you two for a while, you didn’t think that the cussing wasn’t going to catch did you?”

Raven blinked, “Not really?”

Anya snorted, “Clearly you haven’t spent a lot of time around kids.” She walked over to the inner door to try and open it only to realize that it didn’t open. She frowned and turned around, “So how exactly do we get in?”

“Oh we don’t.” Raven lifted the door on the back of the truck, “Not unless you feel like riding up with the merchandise.”

Elyza shuddered, “No thank you, I’ll take the ladder.” She forced the elevator doors open and
looked up, “You know this thing is still sketchy as fuck.”

“It’s fine.” Raven waved a hand at her.

“Hey guys!” Elyza yelled up the shaft, “Anybody home?”

“ELYZA??” Bellamy stuck his head into the elevator, “WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?”

“Out.” Elyza yelled back.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN OUT?” Bellamy yelled back, “ARE O AND RAVEN WITH YOU?”

“Yes! Will you stop screaming. I’m not fucking deaf!” Elyza complained.

Bellamy clenched his jaw, make a noise somewhere between a snort and a growl, and then shook his head, “Fine! What are you doing over here anyway?”

“Just throw down the ropes looped around the fire hose loop.” Elyza waved, “We’re bringing up some more shit.”

“You went and got more shit? Why didn’t you tell us that you were leaving?” Bellamy was starting to get angry.

“Uh, didn’t we tell you we were leaving?” Elyza looked uncomfortable and awkward. “Sorry about that.”

“We are going to talk about that when you get up here.” Bellamy growl-yelled, finally walking away to get the ropes.

“Okay angry boy, if you are going to keep yelling can you just get Tarzan to throw down the damn ropes? I’m ready for a bubble bath.” Raven snapped.

“I’m getting them!” He shouted, tossing them down, “What are these even for anyway?”

Raven snagged them and wrapped them around the two sides of the pallet, “It’s a dumbwaiter you dumb waiter.”

“And we couldn’t just turn on the power for this?”

“We are not going to waste precious fuel moving shit upstairs just because you are too lazy to lift a two hundred pound pallet of mac and cheese Bellamy!” Raven yelled, “I’m saving it for my xbox!”

“I get first dibs on Call of Duty!” Bellamy claimed.

Elyza rolled her eyes, “I can’t believe you’re willing to do all this work, just so you can play that damn Xbox.”

“You’d do all that work for your Disney movies.” Raven pointed out, “One of you non-crippled people come start unloading this baby.”

“I think she means us.” Nick pointed to himself and Chris. “Did you figure out how to use this thing?” he asked grabbing the hand truck.

Raven got the dumbwaiter situated and stood directing things while the boys moved the pallets
from the truck to the platform and then while Lincoln and Bellamy hauled them up to the second floor.

“So, I have to ask.” Anya said between loading pallets into the elevator, “How exactly are we supposed to get in?”

“Well, I kinda blocked off every external entrance while the fires were going on.” Raven scratched her head, “You know, didn’t want anyone trying to steal our crib. So our only real entrance is the rope ladder from the roof.”

“You climbed down three stories with that?” Anya pointed to Raven’s leg brace.

“Excuse you, Jorge is very good at getting me through the day. He’s very supportive of all my vertical endeavors.”

“You named it Jorge?” Alicia stopped unloading Baby to ask. “Why?”

“Why not?” Raven put her hands on her hips, “What would you call the most supportive thing in your life?”

“How about Elyza?” Elyza butted in.

“Eh, she’s kind of a bitch.” Raven gave her a cheeky grin.

Elyza gave a dramatic sigh, “The things I do for family.”

“Wait.” Chris looked between them, “You’re related?” He’d kinda been under the impression that they were dating or ex’s or something. Normal people did not talk to each other like that.

Elyza stared at him, then looked to Alicia, “Please tell me he’s joking.” Alicia bit back a smile and shook her head. In response, Elyza walked over to Chris and started talking in a patronizing tone, “When a mommy and a daddy love each other very much, but neither of them wants to deal with that pregnancy bullshit, they do this thing called adoption. The best way to do this is to find one of the worst neighbors on the street and just adopt their kid without all the pesky paperwork. No offense Rae.”

“Huh?” Chris still looked incredibly confused.

Raven shrugged, “I still think mama Lex loves me more.”

“Yeahhhh, you’re not wrong.” Elyza pursed her lips, “I should probably be upset about that, but we both know Grandma Reyes loves me more than air.”

“Only because you can actually cook.” Raven scowled a bit, “I tried to learn, it’s just so damn boring without the explosions.”

Elyza raised an eyebrow and blinked slowly at Raven, letting her ruminate in that sentence a little longer. Raven huffed and turned back to her work muttering about stupid recipes not multiplying temps and times well.

Chris scratched his head, “I still don’t understand, are you actually sisters?”

“Whatever weird fantasy you’re dealing with, you can drop.” Elyza patted his head, “We grew up across the street from each other and just kinda traded the family members we didn’t like, and ditched the rest.”
Raven decided to mess with him by adding, “If you dig in Elyza’s back yard you can still find the bodies.”

Chris’ eyes got wide and he just kept quiet.

Nick came up and clapped Chris on the shoulder, sweat pouring off him, “We are unloaded. So’re Baby and the trucks.” he gestured to the dumbwaiter platform now loaded with an odd assortment of camping gear, bags and two odd shaped, funny smelling lumps wrapped in plastic. “Now what?”

Raven tossed the semi keys to Travis, “Move the truck over will ya?” Travis trudged off and got the truck moved while Raven led the group to the side of the building where the rope ladder still swung.

“Now you climb.” She tugged on the ladder and gestured to Nick.

He looked up and grumbled before hauling himself up the gently swaying structure. Raven stayed at the bottom looking bored while she held onto the ladder, keeping it from swinging all over the place with Nick’s haphazard movements.

She did this for everyone until it was just her and Elyza.

“Up.” Elyza jerked her thumb, raising an eyebrow at Raven. They made the deal and now it was time for Raven to make good on her end.

Raven grimaced. “Yeah I thought so.” Elyza muttered, “Get on my back you useless lesbian.”

“Excuse me?” Raven’s eyebrow ticked upwards.

“You are not excused, now get on my back before I make bellamy haul you up in a picnic basket.”

“I’m not even going to try explaining the physics of how bad an idea that is.” Raven muttered, moving around Elyza and putting her hands on her friend’s shoulders, “You sure about this?”

“I’m sure I’m going to leave you if you don’t get on.” Elyza snapped.

It was a long, awkward, exhausting climb wherein Raven realized that while she is not afraid of heights, there is a certain level of ‘oh fuck I am going to die’ that comes with dangling twenty feet above hard pavement, resting all of your eggs in the basket of your best friend’s out of shape, trembling biceps.

“I’m ALIVE!” Raven’s tense silence was broken the minute that Bellamy grabbed her by the arms and hauled her up onto the roof like a toddler. She flopped on the gravel rooftop and clung to the ground, “Sweet mother of god, I will never do that again.”

Elyza shot her a dirty look. She was covered in sweat from head to toe and her face is beet red from the exertion, “You bet your fatass you aren’t.” She slithered more than climbed over the lip of the roof and slid face first across the gravel, coming to a stop at Bellamy’s feet, “Thanks for nothing you useless manchild.”

“Lyza, Rae who are they?” Bellamy barely waited a moment.

Elyza dragged one shaking arm up and pointed, “Alicia, Anya, Squidward, Mom, Pervy kid. They’re probationary invitees.” Her arm dropped to the ground, “Somebody better find me a pillow because I think I’m going to die now.”
Bellamy huffed and scooped Elyza up over his shoulder, “No you aren’t. You’re going to explain to me why we’ve doubled the size of our group.”

“Did she forget I’m here?” Nick whispered to Alicia.

She shrugged, “At least she didn’t call you pervy kid.” She shot a sympathetic look to Chris who was blushing up a storm.

“Why does no one care about my pain?” Raven whined, pushing herself to her feet.

Madi gave her a look, “You did promise you could make it on your own.”

“Yeah, but nobody actually believed me!” Raven protested.

Octavia nodded her agreement, “Come on, let’s go watch the parents fight.” She gestured to Elyza and Bellamy going down the stairs.

“They got the Madi seal of approval.” Elyza slumped into Bellamy. Every step he took down the stairs had her bouncing lightly, just enough to kick him in the exact same place on his left thigh, and slap the one buttcheek. Had she been a couch potato all day, Elyza would have pretended to give a shit about the awkward situation that he must be in, but as she was not in fact a couch potato, Elyza didn’t give two shits about it.

Bell’s face was bright red, “Is that seriously all it takes?”

“Pretty much.” Elyza tried to nod, “Rae and I get veto power, but she’s the boss.”

“What if she’s wrong?”

Elyza didn’t have the energy to shrug, “We can burn that bridge when we get there.”

Bellamy walked into camp cafeteria, as Madi had so lovingly dubbed it, and waited while Lincoln got Elyza’s tent unzipped. “We’ll take care of dinner tonight.” He put her down, but continued to hold on until she had stumbled her way onto the mattress on the floor of the tent.

“If you fuck it up, I swear I will glare at you so hard that your face will catch on fire.” Elyza informed him, flopping onto her mattress face down.

By the door to the stairs Raven was directing the new arrivals, “Okay, until we’ve properly zoned the school everyone sleeps in here. Pitch your tents wherever and leave your shit inside, kitchen is over there, if you need to eat something, make sure that you mark it off on the inventory that…. Someone made.” She shrugged, “If you touch the generators, or anything else that looks even vaguely electrical in nature, there’s a 50/50 chance you catch fire. If you don’t, then I will light you on fire. Tour over.”
“Let's Vandalize the building, yeah?”

“Shit. Urgh. Fuck!” Anya was struggling to open a window on the back end of the cafeteria, and despite the muscle she was putting into it, it was not moving.

“That one doesn’t open, cheekbones.” Raven walked up behind her, amusement showing.

“Why the fuck didn’t someone tell me it doesn’t open?” Anya demanded, throwing her hands up in frustration.

“Then we wouldn’t have gotten the show.” Raven smirked, eyes roving over Anya’s now sweaty back, Elyza and Bellamy nodding in agreement from their spots at a lunch table “The one next to it is the one that opens smoothly, maybe someday I’ll fix it. Or not.”

Anya moved one window over and almost put too much effort into opening that one. She grunted, then stood for a moment allowing the fresh air to wash over her. “It smells like shit in here.”

“No, it doesn’t. We moved the toilets a week ago.” Raven glared at her.

“Fine. It smells like BO, yesterday’s dinner, today’s breakfast, and Travis’ farts.” Anya complained.

“That venison was amazing, like I don’t know if our screams of joy properly conveyed it, but thank you.” Raven sagged a little, “Ok yeah, it does. We’re doing the best we can here, alright.”

Madi hurried over and shot a glare at Anya, wrapping Raven in a hug, “You are the best and we would’t be here without you. We are grateful.” She threw that last at Anya with venom.

“Hey,” Anya threw up her hands to ward off the little girl, “Nothing personal.”

“It’s ok Madi.” Raven hugged the little girl back, “I know I’m awesome.” It wasn’t said with Raven’s usual pep and confidence, instead it sounded tired.

Elyza crawled out of her tent, where she had vanished a few minutes before. She walked over to Raven, snagging a bottle of water off the table as she walked past.

“Here,” She shoved the water and two tablets into Raven’s hand. “You need a walk and a nap today. No arguments.” Elyza gave her a pointed look and watched while she swallowed the pills.

Raven walked away, doing an odd partial crawl keeping her injured leg straight into her tent.

“What was that about?” Anya asked, shifting to lean against the wall.

“Her leg is bothering her.” Elyza shrugged, glancing at Anya. “She’ll be fine.” Anya nodded, straightening up and walking over to where Travis, Madison, Nick, and Alicia were sitting in front of the family size tent.

“I’m going for a walk.” She ducked under the flap of her own tent and grabbed her weapons, strapping the gun in place on her thigh opposite where her knife had been sitting all morning.

Nick and Alicia both perked up, “No you aren’t going with me.” She cut them off before they could even suggest it. If Raven was struggling with her leg, she wouldn’t want much of an audience. “Don’t do anything foolish.”
Nick and Alicia had both slumped down to the floor, looking sad. “It’s kind of boring here,” Alicia complained.

“You really suck at doing nothing.” Nick poked at her.

Anya walked away from the now squabbling siblings and stood by Raven’s tent, getting there just as Raven began struggling her way out. Anya kept her eyes trained away, giving her some dignity. “I’m coming with you.”

“Why?” Raven grunted, her foot catching on something in the tent and requiring her to bend awkwardly over her extended leg to free herself.

“No one should go anywhere alone,” Anya shrugged, “And I don’t think Elyza can haul you up the ladder again if your life depended on it.”

“I had Bell and Tarzan clear a path downstairs to the storage room.” Raven rubbed the back of her neck, “It won’t work for long, but the roof obviously won’t work for everyone.” Her face twisted into a sour expression.

Anya didn’t say anything, just waited while Raven pulled on a backpack. Once they had their packs and had thrown an extra water bottle in, Raven led the way through the school and down into the basement. She pulled open a seemingly random door revealing the storage room they had been in the day before. Anya made quick work of unchaining and pulling up the rolling door, allowing Raven to go first before she yanked it back down.

Anya paused and considered the door, “How are you planning to secure this door while people are out?” She questioned.

“I’m not.” Raven walked away towards the end of the dock, clomping down the stairs.

Anya stared after her waiting for her to elaborate. Realizing that she was not going to get anything more than that without bugging the latina she hurried after her. “Why not?”

“Because nothing says ‘come steal my shit and fuck me up’ like a big ass lock, or whatever, on the door. We’ll do something inside,” Raven shrugged and stopped looking around, unsure where to go.

Anya also looked around, noting the lack of walkers, “Why aren’t there walkers here? Did the fires really take care of all of them?”

Raven scoffed and quirked her eyebrow, “Yeah right. Those flames were great where they dropped it, but out here it mostly just created walking bonfires to catch our shit on fire.” Raven turned and began walking at a fairly fast clip, finally having a direction.

“So then what happened?” Anya kept up with her, on the lookout for anything that could cause them problems since Raven didn’t seem to be as clear headed as usual.

“Most of the bitches migrated in-city to look at the pretty lights. The rest are right here.” She pointed her spear at the chain-link fence and slowed down a little bit, to give Anya time to take in the group of angry zombies waving at a boombox. It was definitely to give Anya time. Raven is perfectly stable.

“You draw them out here?” Anya’s eyebrows were raised, she was impressed.

Raven’s steps stuttered so that she could shrug without falling over, “It’s that or fill the bottom of
the elevator shaft with them and hope somebody falls in.” She wasn’t going to tell Anya how long she had considered that plan.

Anya had been keeping an eye on Raven and stopped walking when she saw the girl’s odd movements. “Are you high?”

“High is a matter of perspective.” She frowned, “Or leverage.” Raven narrowed her eyes, “I don’t remember.”

“No, it’s not.” Anya rolled her eyes, “You’re high, we shouldn’t be out here when you’re high.”

“You keep saying that word, and I think it means exactly what you want it to mean, and that repeating it doesn’t change that I can fly,” Raven informed her, using her pointer finger to help her sort out who exactly she was talking about think about… things.

“What the fuck did blondie give you?” Anya paused for a second, “And keep that shit away from Nick, he’ll eat it like candy.”

“You know what I would like to eat like candy?” Raven poked Anya’s shoulder, “You.” She leaned back against the waist-high fence and half fell, half rolled onto the other side, “But you’re playing hard to get.” She waved her finger in the air, “So here we are, playing baseball with dead people instead of… “ She waved her hand in the air vaguely.

“Okay.” Anya’s eyes were bugged out even as she hurried to hop over the fence and catch up to Raven. “We don’t need to play baseball with dead people, let’s just keep walking.”

“We aren’t playing with them.” Raven rolled her eyes and her head rolled just a little bit with them. She raggedy ann walked her way over to the speakers and picked up a bat, “We are playing with them.” She explained like that was the end of the conversation.

“I’m not gonna convince you to go inside like a normal person am I?” Anya asked, recognizing the sheer stubbornness of the latina.

“Batter up!” Raven yelled, swinging her bat at the head of one of the zombies on the other side of the fence, her body swinging in a circle after she connected, and Raven stumbled a little bit while her target slumped over the fence.

Anya grunted and rolled her eyes, time to deal with this problem. She pulled out her knife from its holster and walked up behind the group that was still trying to get to the boombox. She had dropped the first four before any of them even noticed her, the music was so loud. Anya was sure she’d be a little bit deaf after this.

A few more quick jabs and half of them were gone, and Anya’s hands were officially disgusting.

“Wooo!” Raven stumbled like a drunkard, swinging at whichever zombie caught her eye first, and then stumbling back upright and going again. “You have to admit, this is cath-catheder-cathartic?”

Anya grabbed at the torched jacket of one of the walkers who was getting a little too close to Raven, not that she’d noticed, and put it down, letting the body fall. “No this is stupid. Cathartic is beating the shit out of someone who can hit back.” She wiped her slick hand off on her pants trying to improve her grip on her knife.

“Yeah well, I’m a cripple so I take what I can get.” Raven snapped, shooting Anya a glare, “Bum legs make the fights a lot less in my favor”
Anya scoffed, “Only because you haven’t learned how to use it to your advantage.” She stabbed the last walker in the ear, glad to be done, “I bet that brace can do some serious damage..”

“Fuck you!” Raven interrupted her, “Fuck you, and not in a nice way!” She pointed her bat at Anya, “I was going to be a motherfucking astronaut you bitch!” Raven threw the bat and missed Anya by about ten feet. “I didn’t need my leg, but then the goddamn world ended! So FUCK YOU.” Raven turned around and started walking away.

Anya’s eyes had widened in surprise, confusion and a little bit of fear, (maybe), but she took off jogging to catch up with Raven, grabbing her arm and whirling her around. She had to hold on just a bit longer to keep her from falling, girl could practically run but she couldn’t walk a straight line or even turn around without mimicking a tilt-a-whirl.

“You always needed your leg.” Anya corrected her, “You just chose to hide in your smarts. Now you have to make it work. And you will.”

“Go fuck yourself.” Raven sniffed, trying to pull out of Anya’s arms. “You don’t know what it’s like with your stupid fucking perfect body and your stupid face and I hate you.”

“You can hate me all you want,” Anya replied, it wouldn’t be the first time that someone used their hate of her to motivate themselves to be better, “But you’re going to make this work, because this?” She shook Raven gently, “This isn’t working.”

Raven started to cry, actual fucking tears, and she just stood there not knowing what to do with herself. Anya pulled her fully into her arms and let Raven cry on her shoulder, soaking her shirt.

After a few minutes, Raven calmed down and sighed, wiping her nose off on Anya’s shirt.

“Did you just wipe your fucking nose on my shirt?” Anya practically shrieked in disgust.

“I dunno,” Raven sniffled, “Did you put your gross organy hands on my shirt?”

“I was being nice you little shit.” Anya grimaced.

“Aw,” Raven sniffed again, a watery smile peeking out, “I knew you wanted me in your arms.”

Anya rolled her eyes again, “Is there anything else out here I should see?” She changed the topic hoping to avoid all the awkward topics.

Raven scrubbed her face with her hands, still off balance enough that even that made her stumble a bit, “There’s a construction site over that way,” She waved her hand, “They’ll probably have some useful shit, and I really want to play with the crane.”

“Play with a crane?” Anya questioned, “I don’t think the world can handle you playing with a crane.”

“I’ll do something useful with it. Maybe.” Raven turned back towards the school and started walking again, “The zoo is that way,” she pointed, her torso following her arm causing her to trip, “but that’s pretty much everything. We tried to avoid anyplace interesting.”

Anya nodded, “That’s probably a good idea. Have you scouted out the zoo yet?”

Raven shook her head, “Nah, we just hope that dingos don’t steal our baby.”

“Har Har.” Anya rolled her eyes. She’d never actually heard that one, but that doesn’t mean she’s going to humor it with a laugh, Raven would never let her live it down.
“Should we be checking the zoo?” Raven asked, suddenly serious and looking a bit worried, “I don’t really do animals, neither does Lyza. We figured the lions would eat us if we went for a visit.”

Any snorted, “They probably have some things we can use, if only for their food sources. Most zoos have fruit trees and stuff like that to lower food costs.”

Raven’s eyes brightened a bit, “I haven’t had fruit in a week.” She paused and made a face, “Except for the canned shit, and that’s hardly fruit.”

“Agreed.” Anya knew the value of canned fruit when your life is nothing more than MRE’s and canned soup, but real fruit is the shit.

Elyza watched Anya take her place by Raven’s side and let out a deep breath. She had seen the storm brewing for long enough that she is more than willing to let Anya take this one for the team. Okay, so what to do now? She noted Alicia and Nick still standing at the ready to follow her on her walk and shrugged, “Okay, lose the packs, we’re gonna get to work on the first floor.”

Nick and Alicia did as they were told, tossing their packs into their tents and started following. “What are we doing downstairs?” Nick asked, trotting after Elyza.

“Covering our asses.” Elyza ducked into Raven’s tent and started going through the bag labeled ‘grenades’ for the colors she needed. She tossed all the black cans of paint into a bag and stepped back out again. “What are you doing here?” She asked Chris. He’d made it a point to stick to his corner outside of mealtimes and pointedly refuse to help anyone he didn’t want to.

Chris shrugged, “It looks like you’re gonna do something. I’m bored.”

Elyza scoffed, “Nice to meet you bored. We’re painting the windows black.” She tossed a can of spray paint at him.

Chris looked a little awestruck, “Dude.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, it wasn’t hard to figure out he was excited for his first act of vandalism. “We don’t want anyone out there,” She jabbed a finger towards the walls, “to know we’re in here, and keeping the windows painted will help with that.”

Chris nodded, “That’s awesome.”

“Great, let’s go.” Elyza led the way downstairs and picked the first classroom to the right of the stairs, “We’re going to work our way around the whole building until we run out of paint, or windows.”

“Come on, let’s go.” Nick grabbed two cans from Elyza’s bag and nodded to the next room over. He and Chris moved with a lot more energy than Elyza expected, surprisingly eager to paint windows black.

“Weirdos,” Elyza mumbled, hating the lack of finesse that went into just painting flat colors.

Alicia followed Elyza, mimicking the older girl’s actions in grabbing a can, shaking it up and putting her shirt over her mouth before she got started. “Why are they weird? It’s nice to be doing something.”
Elyza watched Alicia copying her while she covered her own window with a thick even layer, “It’s not that, I get that.” She rolled her eyes, “But it’s just so…” Elyza shrugged, “It’s crude. I could do so much better.” Elyza huffed.

“You could do better?” Alicia questioned.

Elyza nodded, moving on to the next window, “This used to be my thing, back before everything went to shit.” She grinned, “I was that kid who went around tagging the school. Mostly just the principal’s face.” She giggled, “He had an awful nose.”

Alicia had drooped hearing about Elyza tagging the school, but she gave a barely-there smile hearing about the principal’s face. She stepped over to the next window on the other side of Elyza and began painting it over, quiet now.

“You okay there?” Elyza bumped Alicia’s hip with her own, “The silence is getting ominous.”

“Yeah, just..My boyfriend Matt, he liked art and would do graffiti murals.” Her smile was just a little bit bigger. “I miss him.”

Elyza nodded, “I know how that is. My boy Murphy, he’s a real asshole but he has a way with a paintbrush..” Elyza trailed off a bit, “He always joked he was going to be the next Da Vinci, brains, looks, and creativity.” Her smile came back a bit, “I said he’d have to grow a brain first.”

Nick barreled into their backs, knocking them both forward a bit “It’s getting too serious in here. I’m allergic.”

“You’re an asshole is what you are.” Elyza snapped, her front covered in paint.

“Not my fault you’re clumsy.” He teased, skipping back a step, “Come on, we’re tagging a school, not attending a funeral.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “This is a far cry from tagging a school, I’ll talk to Rae about lending me a few of her other colors and show you what tagging should really look like.” She sighed down at her shirt. “I guess I don’t need a smock now.”

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“Alicia bumped Nick on her way past, “You don’t need to protect me all the time.” She muttered.

Nick gave her a slightly sad smile, “Eh, I’ve got some time to make up for.”

She nodded, trying not to be a jerk about agreeing with him.

“So what’s your story scarecrow?” Elyza asked, “You seem pretty chipper for someone at the end of the world.”

Nick shrugged, his lips twisting, “Maybe your world ended, but mine’s kinda the same. It’s just not rabies you’re worried about getting from the crazy hobos.” He replied, knowing full well that he was one of the crazy hobos at some point during his life.

“How very cryptic.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“And you?” He looked over from his window.

“Well after I finished my training in the temple on the mountaintop, I re-entered the world to finally face my rival and prove once and for all who the best pokemon master is.” Elyza snarked in
reply.

Nick nodded, “Cool.” He walked away, moving to the next classroom to black out those windows too.

Elyza and Alicia finished the room they were working on and skipped the one Nick and Chris were walking in.

“What the hell?” Alicia stopped just inside the door of the room, “What are they doing with all this wire at school,”

“Oh, that wasn’t here before.” Elyza waved a hand at Alicia, “That’s for the windows, we’re going to reinforce them later, or the guys are anyway. I have Bell and Lincoln on it.”

“Which one is Lincoln?”

“Tarzan.” Elyza grinned, “Without the hair.”

“Got it.” Alicia snorted, “So I assume Raven came up with all the names?”

“Mostly, yeah.” Elyza chuckled, “She doesn’t do names.”

“I got that.” She thought about Raven’s different names for Anya, “It’s uh… Not what I’m used to, my family never really was into jokes like that.” Alicia wrinkled her nose, “Or jokes at all. Unless you meant Nick’s future. That’s pretty much it.”

“They’re going to hate Rae, aren’t they?” Elyza considered, “She can’t open her mouth without making a joke or saying something sarcastic.”

Alicia nodded, “Probably. My mom wouldn’t know a joke if it bit her on the ass, and don’t get me started on Travis.” She shot a dirty look up at the ceiling.

“Rae’s will definitely bite her on the ass.” Elyza just chuckled.

“I can’t wait.” Alicia rolled her eyes, knowing that she was going to hear the angry rants about inappropriate behavior for young ladies. Because it wouldn’t be right to lecture their host, even if she is the one being crass.

Speaking of the Mom squad disapproving of everything, “No, no we need copper tubing for this part.” Bellamy pointed out the spot on his blueprints for his distillery.

Lincoln nodded, “We should be able to find some of that from the boiler room in the basement. We also have those plastic buckets we can use to hold it.”

Bell frowned, “I’m pretty sure we need something with a spigot, my mom said something about the first bit being undrinkable.” He studied his blueprints carefully, “And glass for the final storage.”

“Mason jars.” Lincoln elbowed him, “They have tons of them at Walmart, and there were a bunch of houses that had them too.”

“We’ll also need to cut the final product before drinking any. It’s 180 proof out of the still.” Bellamy rubbed the back of his head.
Lincoln’s eyes went wide, “Yeah, yeah.” He nodded. “Definitely.”

“Then we need the yeast, sugar and either cornmeal or fruit.” Bellamy made a note on a piece of paper, “Cornmeal is better for non-drinking stuff, fruit tastes better.”

Madison walked over, “So what are you boys up to?”

Lincoln glanced away from the plans, “Plans for the still.” He scratched at his chin, “Is one of these setups going to be enough, or do we need a second one to have enough?”

“Why do we need a still in the first place?” Madison frowned, “There are kids living here, we don’t want one of them to mistake it for drinking water.”

“I’m the only kid here, I can figure out what alcohol looks like.” Madi looked up from where she was reading a book Elyza had assigned her.

“Chris and Alicia are underage, and so is Elyza if I’m not mistaken.” Madison replied, “And I still don’t see why we would need it.”

“Good luck telling Elyza she’s underage.” Madi scoffed, not even bothering to look up from her book this time, “If she can be covered in tattoos and piercings she can probably drink alcohol. Plus you need alcohol for cleaning wounds, which is why she mentioned it in the first place.”

Madison looked scandalized, “She has tattoos? That’s not legal without parental consent! What irresponsible woman let her child do that to themselves?” She had completely missed Madi’s practical breakdown of their need for alcohol.

“The same one who let her learn to be a tattoo artist,” Octavia piped up, walking back from the kitchen. “We’ve got 40 bags of cornmeal, 100 lbs of yeast and I didn’t bother with the sugar. We have a shit-ton.” She plopped down next to her brother and pulled the plans closer.

“Why do we have a 100 lbs of yeast?” Bellamy looked disturbed at the thought of that much yeast.

“I think Rae and Lyza just grabbed all the yeast they could find.” Octavia shrugged, “Something about homemade bread being better than an orgasm after a while?”

Madison paled a little, and Travis couldn’t keep himself out of the conversation at this point. “You need to watch your language, there are children here,” Travis growled.

“I’ve heard worse,” Madi stated, again not looking away from the stupid book she was reading, if they killed the dog she was going to cry.

“If anybody had innocent ears before this, they won’t by the time the week is done.” Octavia laughed, “Have you heard Raven and Elyza talk?”

“They aren’t that bad,” Madison argued. She’d heard the occasional inappropriate comment, but nothing that made her uncomfortable.

Bellamy, Lincoln and Octavia’s eyes bugged out as they looked at her before they all three burst out in laughter. “They aren’t...hahahaha...they aren’t...hahaha...that bad?! Bahahahaha!” The trio was practically falling onto the floor in their hysteria.

“What are you laughing about? This is not funny.” Madison huffed in irritation, “Anyway I still don’t see why we need a still.”
Lincoln wiped his eyes and sighed, “We need alcohol because it’s necessary for cleaning wounds. Also if our water gets contaminated, alcohol will be the only safe thing to drink.”

“And for getting that stick out of your ass,” Octavia muttered under her breath.

Bellamy kicked his sister under the table and gave her a look. “We’ve got our shopping list for the still, we can give it to Rae and Lyza later.”

“Kay, what now?” Octavia rubbed her hands on her thighs, still slightly damp from wiping her face.

“Raven left us with a ‘honey-do’ list?” Lincoln shrugged, “Next thing is securing chicken wire over the windows downstairs.”

“That’s not safe, windows are an emergency exit.” Travis protested.

“You really want to get out on the ground during an emergency?” Octavia lifted an eyebrow, “Odds are, that’s where the emergency is.”

“We still need it in case of fire.” Travis insisted.

Lincoln smiled, “I appreciate your awareness of fire safety protocols, however, I have assessed the likelihood of any of us being on the first floor during a fire, and I think our best solution will be keeping ladders on the second floor.” He tried to sound as pleasant as possible about it.

“I’m sure you did as best you could, but I’m going to trust the fire department’s assessment on the best possible escapes,” Travis replied.

Octavia snickered and Lincoln suddenly looked a bit irritated, “I am the fire department now.” He told them, “And I have 5 years experience.” He got up and stretched, “I’m going to work on the list, I don’t want to find out how Raven reacts if her ‘honey-do’ list isn’t done.”

“She might have a cow.” Octavia paused, “No do it, I want a hamburger.”

“I don’t know, I could use some burgers,” Bellamy said, grinning when he realized he and Octavia were saying the same thing. He held out his hand and got a high-five.

Travis looked properly chastised and got up, “Let me help you.” It was probably the closest Lincoln was going to get in the way of apologies and he accepted it as such. Madison quietly did the same, following the boys as they wove around pallets full of...stuff.

“Hey, Lyza. Alicia.” Lincoln greeted as they walked out of the classroom he was heading into.

“Which rooms are done?”

“Done?” Madison questioned, looking at her daughter.

“We painted over all of the windows in those 5 rooms,” Alicia pointed the rooms out.

“What!” Madison practically yelled, peering into the classroom behind Alicia. “Why would you damage the windows that way?”

Elyza furrowed her eyebrows, “So no one outside can see inside.”

“Now we can’t see out and you damaged school property.” Travis practically growled pushing in the room and gesturing to the windows
“Oh my god,” Elyza rolled her eyes, “If painting the windows black counts as damaging the school property, then remind me never to tell the administration that I regularly strip, camp in the cafeteria, and carry a knife longer than two inches in my pocket.” She gave them a pointed look, “OH WAIT, I’m the fucking administration, so if you have any complaints about the way I run my school, then you can give them to my secretary.” She kicked a trash can towards Travis.

Madison shook her head, “This isn’t about administration, Elyza we have to live here, and this vandalism doesn’t make it a pleasant place to live in.”

Elyza raised a finger, “First if you ever say my name like that again, I will cut you.” She raised a second, “And, the whole point of living upstairs is so that we can do whatever the fuck we want to make the downstairs safer. We won’t be here to look out the windows. We will be upstairs looking out our pristine, clear glass, while any motherfucker who wants to ‘vandalize this facility’ will be right outside these windows wondering what the fuck is waiting for them because for all they know it’s a shithole of zombies.”

Alicia glanced between her mom and Travis, filled with trepidation and a little bit of awe. Nobody talked to them this way. “Uh, maybe we should go work on the next room?” She edged towards the next door, “Chris and Nick are probably way ahead of us.”

“Chris is involved in this?” Travis exploded.

“You bet your ass he is.” Elyza stepped up, going toe to toe with this giant of a man and not even flinching at his raised voice, “And he is going to continue to be involved so long as you want him to stick around.” She clenched her fists to keep from grabbing this condescending asshole, “If you don’t contribute, you’re a detriment, and I don’t deal with lazy ass motherfuckers trying to throw their weight around to get their way. The last guy who tried that got his leg snapped in half and left for dead.”

“I think that what Travis means is that we would like to be consulted before our children are taken on any more adventures. We have the right to decide what’s best for them, and we don’t want any of you getting involved in vandalism, or anything dangerous.” Madison tried to diffuse the issue.

“You take that shit up with them, not my problem.” Elyza was pissed, “And if you don’t want them getting involved in anything dangerous, I suggest a bullet to the brain because dangerous is the only thing that exists now.”

Madison took a step back from Elyza’s intensity, “We’re trying to build a better life here, Elyza, that’s all.”

“So am I.” Elyza snapped, heading for the door, “If you want your family to be safe, I suggest in the future you try to think less about the way things used to be.” She let Alicia do what she wanted, not wanting to start another argument before she had time to cool off. Elyza’s hands were shaking with the effort to keep her hands off those two idiots, and she wasn’t sure she could deal with their attitude much longer.

“You two are just awesome at making friends aren’t you?” Bellamy clapped Travis and Madison on the shoulders, “Let’s vandalize the building, yeah?” He steered them towards the chicken wire and staple guns.

Lincoln had Madison hold up the wire against his window and stood on the countertop, stapling the wire to the window frame. Bellamy had Travis do the same for him, figuring that it would be easier for them to just assist rather than take part in the actual vandalizing. After a lot of time spent thinking about Elyza’s words and the way she said them, Madison turned to Lincoln, “What do
you know about Elyza?”

He searched her face for any sign of ill intent before shaking his head, “Not much. She and Raven are thick as thieves though, smart too. When we found them, they’d set up a nice little place in the ‘burbs, living with Madi and another guy easy as you please.”

“They were living with an older man? Were they related?” Madison wondered if abuse was the cause for Elyza’s rage at Travis, she seemed to butt heads with him more than anyone.

“No,” Lincoln shook his head again, “As far as I know he never touched them, but he tried with Octavia. He’s the one Elyza was talking about. He fought them on everything, from what Raven said, he pushed a lot. Like Travis. Then he decided he didn’t just want to be in charge.” The bigger man frowned, trying to keep the anger out of his voice, “He’s lucky Octavia only broke his leg.”

Madison gasped, “That’s awful, Travis would never, he’s not that kind of man. He just lets his temper get the best of himself sometimes. He never used to be like this.” Madison sighed.

“He doesn’t have to be like Quint.” Lincoln replied, making sure Madison was listening to this, “All he has to do is keep pushing until someone gets hurt.”

“You don’t think…”

“I think that people have a habit of doing crazy things when they aren’t in control of themselves.” He grabbed another coil of wires, “And as much as Elyza and Raven are still young, they are in charge here, and they don’t tolerate hurting living people.”

Madison rubbed her temples, “I’ll talk to Travis.”

Lincoln nodded, “It might be a good idea. You seem like good people, I would hate to see you go.”

“So, who was it?” Bellamy asked Travis, “You lost someone right?”

“That’s none of your business.” Travis looked away.

“It is when you start fighting with the boss.” Bellamy scoffed, “It’s like the saying goes, if mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.”

“You don’t seriously let that girl think she’s in charge do you?” Travis was incredulous, “She doesn’t look old enough to have even graduated high school and you’re letting her run wild telling everyone what to do. It’s not healthy.”

“No, a grown ass man turning purple trying to argue with one of the only sensible people left, that’s not healthy.” Bellamy’s voice was so chill that it was hard to tell if he was actively insulting Travis or just stating facts. “Lyza and Raven found this place, found the food, fortified the building, as far as I’m concerned, that makes it theirs.”

Travis scoffed and rolled his eyes. The idea that two teen girls could be sensible, let alone have the presence of mind to be a leader was ridiculous, most of his students couldn’t get their mind out of the gutters long enough to do their homework, let alone make important decisions about the lives of a dozen people.

“You didn’t answer my question.” Bellamy informed him, “Who did you lose?”
“My wife.” Travis muttered, “Anya shot her.”

Bellamy arched his eyebrows, “I feel like there’s more to it than that, you don’t seem like the kind of guy to hang out with your wife’s murderer.”

“There’s not. Anya took her out on a walk and shot her when all she needed was medicine.” Travis spoke with rage.

“Medicine for what?” Bellamy asked, “Was it a bacterial thing? I know antibiotics are a hard find.”

“No, I-I don’t know. But my wife, she was a nurse. All we needed to do was find a hospital and we could have gotten what we needed to help her.” Travis growled, “We could have helped her.”

“I wouldn’t touch a hospital with a ten-foot pole. We lived near one. Sort of. It was insanity, they had cops surrounding it and shooting walkers coming out.” Bellamy had a distant look on his face. “If they had to shoot that many walkers coming out the barricaded doors, I can’t imagine what the inside was like.” He shook his head.

“We would have figured something out.” He snapped, “But Anya wouldn’t listen, she convinced Liza that she didn’t have a chance, and she…” He grunted his frustration, “It shouldn’t have happened, and it did because I let them trust Anya.”

“Travis.” Madison sighed.

“Why would you still have her around if she did that?” Lincoln questioned, glancing at Bellamy, maybe they needed to have a chat with Raven and Elyza about Anya.

“Because she’s family, and maybe that doesn’t mean anything to her anymore, and maybe it never did, but I don’t abandon people,” Travis muttered.

“Travis.” This time Madison almost barked it, “She had been bitten. You make it sound like she got a bad cut and so Anya killed her. She was bitten and she asked Anya not to let her turn into one of them.” Madison shook her head, “I’d have done the same thing.”

“Don’t say that.” Travis snapped at her, “Liza didn’t have to die, you have to know that. Anya was just afraid to look for the medicine that Liza needed, she’s a coward hiding behind her guns and her attitude so that she doesn’t have to get her hands dirty.”

Bellamy and Lincoln both had unbelieving expressions on their faces, they definitely needed to have a conversation with Raven and Elyza but not about Anya, about Travis and his delusions.

“I don’t know what kind of medicine you’re thinking of,” Lincoln voiced what everyone was thinking, “Some of the paramedics tried antibiotics, painkillers. We even had one guy try to use some weird holistic herbs. Those who had been bitten still died.”

“And everyone who dies turns into a walker.” Bellamy confirmed what he had seen, “I worked as a janitor in the stadium and the first guy who turned? He wasn’t bitten. He just choked on a hot dog, and then twenty minutes later when the paramedics got there, he was up and trying to eat people.”

“We could have saved her.” Travis refused to hear any disagreement.

Bellamy shook his head and opened his mouth to argue, but Lincoln put a hand on his shoulder, “We’ll talk about it later.”
Shall we play a game?

Chapter Summary

How much will we hate ourselves in the morning?

Chapter Notes

First off, HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!

Second of all...yeah we suck. We are down to writing the last six chapters and let's just say that they are a bitch and I currently hate writing them. So send us some love to help us barrel through this last bit and then we'll spam you with all the chapters.

Also still want more ideas for where this fic goes after this part is done, so send us ideas if you've got them!

Anya stares at the fucking fish sitting on the table, trying to decide how much she wants to hate herself in the morning. She sighs deeply and transfers her gaze to the rest of the group, eating in varying levels of angry, stressed silence. “Okay, this bullshit needs to hit the fan already.” Anya decided out loud.

Raven turned around to stare at Anya, with most of the others doing the same, “What exactly does that mean?”

“It means we are going to do a game night.”

“I don’t know about you, but Monopoly wasn’t high on my list of necessities.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“We brought our copy.” Alicia volunteered, an evil glint in her eyes.

“Maaayyyybe Monopoly isn’t the best plan?” Elyza looked to Raven who will never admit to having knocked three of Murphy’s teeth out when he built his third hotel on Mediterranean. Or that one time that she broke into a daycare for the sole purpose of burning all their copies of ‘Satan Jr.’s Candyland’ because not even Monopoly Jr. could escape her wrath.

“Oh come on,” Nick whined, “It’s not that bad.”

“You only say that because you won the last game.” Alicia rolled her eyes.

“I don’t care if we play truth or dare.” Anya replied, “But you people need to relax.”

“I don’t think this is the best time for a game night,” Madison chided, “We still have-”

“Things we can’t do until morning.” Elyza countered, “I don’t see the harm in locking the doors and settling in a bit earlier tonight.”

Anya shrugged, “I don’t really care, it was just the first thing that came to mind.”

“How about we have a campfire and roast marshmallows instead.” Raven offered, “I’ve got all kinds of scrap from the shop class downstairs and we could put it on one of those giant cookie sheets from the kitchen.”

“That is a terrible idea,” Travis informed them.

That decided it. “I’ll get the booze.” Elyza hopped out of her chair.

“We don’t need booze!” Madison spluttered.

“I need booze.” Anya countered.

“I need firewood, Lincoln, get us some wood,” Raven ordered, going for the matches in the kitchen.

“This was your idea!” Octavia shook her head, was she really getting sucked into a game.

Anya sniffed, “I’m not above taking one for the team, and this is necessary. You all look like you’re attending a funeral.”

“We’ll need teams,” Alicia was pulling out the board and the various pieces.

“I call cheekbones!” Raven didn’t even come out of the kitchen.

“Hey!” Elyza yelled, “What am I? Chopped liver you bitch!”

“You aren’t the kind of bitch I’d like to eat so sure!” Raven shot back.

“I’m going to CRUSH you, like a ho!” Elyza cried in outrage.

“Are you admitting that your fat ass has crushed a ho?” Raven stuck her head out, “I thought you’d never get there.”

“At least I have an ass, Miss shovel-butt.” Elyza taunted, “Tits too.”

Anya sat down on the floor to help Alicia set up the board game, doing her best not to think about what was being said. Madison was gaping at Elyza, struck speechless.

Travis couldn’t decide between glaring his disapproval and blushing, so he did both, ending up like an angry tomato photoshopped of Squidward.

“I’ll be your partner Lyza.” Madi offered, completely ignoring the crudeness flying around her.

“At least Madi loves me!” Elyza shouted, “Because I’m her favorite and you fucking know it.” She grinned at Madi, “Thanks baby girl.”

Raven gasped in absolute outrage, “You are not! I don’t care how delusional you are there is no way you could think that you are babygirl’s favorite. I’m the cool bigger sis.”

“Oh yeah? Say that to Finn! We both know you crapped yourself at the idea of asking him out. In every way.”
Raven came flying out of the kitchen, S’mores ingredients tumbling from her hands, “How dare you bring that up you fucking whore! He was mine first! Then your skanky ass stole him from me!”

“Stole?” Elyza’s face split into a grin, “You mean when your desperate friend with benefits became my hopeless puppy? Don’t even try.”

Raven extended her arms clearly ready to strangle Elyza, “At least I didn’t put out for that cheating bastard! Did you even get an orgasm out of him?”

Elyza didn’t say anything but she turned just a hint purple. Raven knew that was a big fat ‘No.’ and so did Elyza.

“You two are so….special,” Octavia finally commented, enjoying the entertainment. This was live TV at its best and she didn’t even have to convince Bellamy to pay for cable.

Elyza scoffed, sitting down beside Madi with her arms folded over her chest. Alicia and Nick teamed up. Lincoln didn’t say a word but Octavia sat next to him and gave him a smile. “ Seriously?” Bellamy glared at her, moving to sit next to Chris’ sullen ass.

Travis didn’t deign to join in, but he sat behind Madison who was playing for them. Anya didn’t even bother arguing with her placement, knowing that Raven would find some way to make it awkward. “We’re taking the car,” Raven informed the group.

“Heeeyyy,” Nick slapped his hand over it, “I’m the car.”

At the same time, Elyza laughed, “Like you did when we were twelve?”

Raven shot her a dirty look, “No. We aren’t going there.” She grabbed the top hat, shooting Elyza a solid No.

Octavia grinned, “Now I gotta know,” She leaned forward in eagerness.

“It was three kids in a hijacked car, with 50 lbs of pixie sticks.” Elyza grinned, “They didn’t catch us until we made it to Grandma Reyes’ house.” There was more than one shocked face staring at her, “Raven had just tried her first pot brownie and she got the munchies.”

“I fucking hate you.” Raven folded her arms and pouted.

Elyza smirked, “Raven was in the back, trying to eat them all before the cops could see them, my friend Murphy was fixing his hair, and I was just trying not to puke because he is an awful driver. Or he was at twelve anyway.”

Madison shook her head, “What were a bunch of twelve-year-olds doing driving a car? And how did you get pot? And.. Why couldn’t the cops see the pixie sticks? And where in god’s name were your parents?”

Madi blinked, “I don’t think you can spell ‘your parents’ with God’s name.”

Raven and Elyza started clapping and hooting, loving Madi’s sass. Their baby girl was growing up.

Raven sighed after catching her breath, resigned to explaining, “We were driving because it was too far to walk. We got pot from the pot store. The cops probably would’ve eaten all my fucking pixie sticks. And our parents were at Grandma Reyes’ house, which is why we had to go.”
“Best Veteran’s day ever.” Elyza grinned.

Raven nodded. “You aren’t wrong.”

Somehow that didn’t really seem to help anyone’s understanding of the event, nor did it answer their remaining questions about their escapades. Like how they got so far away from home that they had to drive there, how they got a car, or everything about this happening on a Veteran’s day.

Octavia shook her head, “So you two have just always been like this then?”

“Like what?” Elyza grimaced when Raven threw her leg into Elyza’s lap. “Bitch.”

“Get to work,” Raven replied. Elyza rolled her eyes and started rubbing Raven’s foot.

Octavia just shook her head, “Nevermind.”

Anya sighed and pulled the case of beers Elyza had brought closer and started passing them around. She did not have the energy to deal with these people sober.

“Gimme gimme.” Elyza took two and passed the second one to Madi, “Don’t drive, ride scooters, or sleep with strangers.” She warned the girl before releasing the can.

“Elyza! That’s illegal.” Madison exclaimed.

Elyza looked at the twelve-year-old and nodded, “It is, you want to go find a cop? We can confess to squatting, armed robbery, and multiple counts of body slaughter? Grave robbing? Whatever killing the undead in self-defense counts as.”

Madison huffed in frustration and Bellamy coughed into his hand, trying to hide his smile. Madi opened her can and sniffed it, wrinkling her nose, “This is supposed to taste good?”

“Nah.” Raven shook her head, “It’s supposed to get you fat so you get drunk on the lite stuff.”

“What?” Octavia was completely confused.

Elyza shrugged, “I have no clue, ignore her.” She looked at Madi again, “You might like the taste, or not,” she shrugged again “It’s more about getting to drink alcohol in the most disgusting form possible. I’m more of a tequila girl.”

“Vodka,” Raven threw in her preference. Bellamy reached over and high-fived her, apparently agreeing with her choice.

“Wine.” Anya threw in, gaining her confused looks from...everyone. Even Chris.

Raven stared at Anya, then slowly began to nod, “Huh.”

“Everclear.” Lincoln added his with a small smile.

“What is Everclear?” Octavia looked up at him.

“Illegal in most states.” Elyza snorted, “Respect.”

Alicia looked to Nick and quietly said, “Redhot shots.”

He whistled, “Don’t let mom hear you say that.” He grinned, bumping her shoulder. “Didn’t know you had it in you.”
Madison ignored the pointed looks and rolled the dice, moving her piece across the board. “Oh come on mom.” Nick grinned, “We aren’t stupid. Everyone drinks sometime.” He leaned over and stage-whispered, “I always liked the taste of rum.”

She rolled her eyes, deciding that the group bonding was more important than remaining aloof. “Whiskey.”

“Am I the only one here over the age of fifteen that doesn’t go for hard liquor?” Anya asked, blinking in surprise, “Seriously?”

“Beer,” Travis muttered.

“Fucking hell.” Anya rolled her eyes and her head along with them.

Raven giggled, “It’s okay cheekbones, we don’t judge. This is a judgment free circle.”

“Ugh, I hate those.” Nick wrinkled his nose, “Can we just once, have a judgment circle?”

Elyza squinted at him, “That’s called life.”

“Not mine.” He smirked, “It turns out that if you’re high enough, no one can judge you.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works,” Alicia informed him.

“That’s definitely not how it works,” Elyza confirmed, “No amount of drugs has ever saved me from judgment. Hell people get even more vocal about their judgment.”

Nick turned his whole body to face Elyza, and everyone but Raven and Madi did the same.

“What’s your poison?”

“Whatever I could get my hands on for awhile.” She wiggled her eyebrows, “Mom’s a Dr so I got to experiment a lot. But then I found my poison. Needles.”

Nick grimaced, “I did heroin and I still can’t deal with those things.” He raised his hands to the sky and said, “Only for the high.”

Elyza smirked, “Well then you and Rae have something in common.”

“How are you so...so...” Madison was shocked and just couldn’t put words together.

“Well adjusted? Functional? Not death spiraling into a horrible pit of self-harm, depression, addiction and every other fancy word that rehab clinics like to toss around?” Elyza raised her eyebrows.

“Wait, I’m confused,” Chris spoke for the first time, startling some of them, Bellamy most of all who had forgotten he was there, “What do you mean your poison was needles? Nick says that and means his addiction. So, you’re addicted to needles? What does that mean?”

Elyza lifted the hem of her shirt all the way up to the base of her bra, revealing a tattoo spreading across her ribs that looked like her skin was peeled away to reveal a portal to a fairy realm of chaos and partying. There was also a metal stud poking out of her belly button, “Needles.” Chris stared and leaned forward with his arm outstretched and Elyza put her shirt back down, “Down boy.”

Raven was shuddering, refusing to look. She had finally gotten to see some of Elyza’s new artwork but she still hadn’t seen it all and after hearing about some of the more...extreme piercings Elyza had gotten she couldn’t even think about it.
“Go to Jail!!!!” Octavia crowed, grinning as the thimble was forced into jail.

“Why are we playing this game again?” Raven asked Anya, irritated that they weren’t doing so well. “I hate playing board games.”

“Just as long as you don’t deck anyone, it’s fine.” Elyza hummed, looking to Anya, “It’s your job to restrain her by the way. Raven tends to be a violent loser.”

Raven’s grin overtook her face, “Yes. Please. Restrain me.”

Anya drained her can and opened another one. “Fuck me.”

“That would be the point,” Raven nodded, serious as a cop.

Alicia couldn’t help but giggle at her aunt’s distressed expression. She’d never seen Anya so upset and also so unwilling to do anything about it.

Their game lasted long past the attention span of everyone but Octavia and Nick who were dueling it out for first place, having bankrupted everyone else about an hour and two bottles of vodka ago.

“Okay, while those two are arguing about who is the best pretend banker, we should talk about our plan for the next week,” Lincoln announced.

“Agreed.” Elyza had drunk half a bottle on her own and was still going strong if leaning against Madi a little more than when they started. “The garden is pretty much ready for planting, but we still need to decide on seeds, and where to get our seeds.”

“There’s a nursery on Washington that has a pretty big selection.” Bellamy offered, “They should have plenty of heirloom breeds.”

Elyza jotted that down on a little notepad, pursing her lips while she tried to think of what else they needed to do.

“We need to get some kind of water collection system going.” Raven grouched, rubbing her hip. Even with her ass on a pillow, this whole sitting on a floor thing was not comfortable at all.

“Rain barrels?” Chris asked.

“Ehhh,” Raven frowned, “Maybe for the garden, but if we want to have any kind of reliable supply of drinking water, then we’ll need a much larger, more secure storage system than that.”

Madi lifted her drooping head from Elyza’s shoulder, “What about the pool?”

“But how do we get the water from outside to the pool?” Bellamy lifted an eyebrow.

“Mmmn,” Alicia twisted her lips, “Most schools have a rain gutter thing, we could clean it out and point it into the pool?”

“That.” Raven jabbed a finger in Alicia’s general direction. “And we need some fucking furniture or I’m going to cut a bitch.”

“I wouldn’t mind a few real chairs.” Madison agreed with her.

“How long do we need to do the tent thing?” Lincoln asked suddenly, “It’s not good for…” Lincoln paused, “uh tall people.”

“Smooth.” Elyza rolled her eyes. “I think it’s best to keep everyone close to the cafeteria, safety in
numbers, but if you want to pair off, by all means, save me the nightmares.”

“No one is pairing off. That’s the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard.” Travis grumbled.

Elyza pointed at him suddenly, gaining everyone’s attention, “Your parents had to have hot kinky sex to make you happen.” Travis shrank back, his eyes a tad wider and she put her arm down, “So I think we should stick to the closest classrooms for safety.”

Anya had started dry heaving as soon as Elyza mentioned his parents having sex. Kinky sex. Oh fuck, that’s disgusting. That was her mother they were talking about, well, eventually. Gag. “It’s okay cheekbones.” Raven rubbed her back, “Everyone’s parents had to have had sex at some point.”

Elyza nodded and grinned, “It’s just a lot more fun if it was kinky.”

Alicia shuddered in tandem with Nick. At that moment they definitely looked like siblings.

Madi cocked her head, “What exactly makes sex kinky?”

Elyza laughed, “Oh sweet baby child, you need to decide that for yourself, just know that if they want to use rope on you, you get to tie them up first. It’s a trust thing.”

Madi quirked her head and nodded, “Okay..?”

Alicia shook her head, “No, no rope. Rope gives you burns that can bleed for days. Velvet, strapping or neckties. Skip anything else.”

Now it is Alicia’s turn to be the center of attention. “Good to know!” Octavia giggled. Madison looked terrified, but Raven and Elyza were a mixture of impressed and amused.

Raven’s cackle filled the air and she exclaimed, “I knew you weren’t as vanilla as you looked.”

Alicia gave a small smile, “I’m a little more neapolitan.”

Elyza blinked, her head filling with possibilities and she blanked out of the conversation for a minute. When she tuned back in, the adults were talking about bed frames, and furniture choices, and something about hitting an RC Willey.

“If we aren’t using the tents how are we getting privacy, I am not changing in front of people I am not screwing.” Elyza finally jumped back into the conversation.

“You change in front of me all the time.” Raven shot back.

“Ew.” Elyza scrunched up her nose, “We are not screwing.”

Raven gave a full body shudder, “Hell no, I was just pointing out the flaw in your logic, ugh gross.”

“Wait, you two aren’t together?” Chris asked, gesturing between the two of them.

“Have you…” Raven stared at him, “I have been trying to get into Anya’s pants since the first second I knew she existed, what kind of confused, brainless child is trying to run your existence?”

Elyza shook her head, “Yeah no, I think I’d rather fuck a sub-zero flagpole than Raven.”

Raven looked offended, “Seriously! THAT’S what you’d rather fuck than me?”
Elyza looked Raven dead in the eye, “I wouldn’t be choking on my own vomit so I’d say it’s preferable.”

“OK. Moving on.” Anya waved her hands at the girls, continuing a little longer than needed, “I don’t want to think about Raven with anyone else.” She stopped and cocked her head, “Er, wait…”

“Anyone else?” Raven grinned, leaning up close to Anya, “Is that because you want to be thinking of me with you?”

“Get a room.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“Trying to,” Raven said, still waiting for Anya to say something.

“Can I get another shot?” Anya asked, desperate for a little liquid distraction. “Please.” She caught the bottle Lincoln tossed her and took a gulp, skipping a cup.

Elyza dissolved into giggles, shaking Madi awake with her laughter.

“Huh?” Madi looked around, brain still asleep, “Did we win?”

“No honey.” Elyza patted her head, “Go to bed.”

“Uh huh.” Madi turned around and crawled to her tent, and flopped inside.

“Drink some water first!” Alicia jumped up, grabbing a bottle and handing it to her, “Hangovers suck.”

Madi nodded, “Hangovers suck.” She agreed, drinking some of the water and setting it by her bed. “G’night.”

“Night Madi,” Alicia pulled up a blanket, tucking the tween in before pulling the zipper on her tent partially closed. She returned to her seat, trying to get comfortable on the floor, it wasn’t working.

“You’re sweet,” Elyza informed her, patting the pillow beside her. She’d grabbed one for herself when she got Raven’s.

Alicia got up and walked over, plopping herself down on the pillow, wasn’t great. But it was much better.

“I think I’m going to follow Madi’s fine example,” Madison said, taking the bottle from Anya and capping it. She waved Travis along behind her, keeping the bottle.

“Does she know we have like 5 more in the kitchen cupboard?” Raven asked, trying to keep her voice quiet, and actually succeeding for the first time in an hour.

“Shut the fuck up.” Elyza hissed, waving her hand at Raven, “What the mom squad doesn’t know, won’t hurt them.”

Alicia nodded her agreement, she had managed to sneak a few shots worth of vodka into her cup while Nick had distracted her mom and Travis with the end of the Monopoly game.

Elyza offered Alicia her half-full cup, “I probably should be responsible, and you didn’t look like you managed to sneak much.”

Anya chuckled, “Yeah because one minor giving up some of her alcohol to another minor is totally in the realm of responsible.”
Elyza half shrugged, “Probably not, but drinking most of a bottle of vodka by myself is definitely not responsible.”

“How am I being drunk under the table by teenagers?” She threw her hands up then paused, “Drunk? Drank? I know it’s not drunked.”

“It’s drunk.” Elyza giggled, falling into Alicia’s side, “And you are definitely drunk cheekbones.”

“WHY is that my nickname? There are so many cooler ones out there. Why cheekbones.” Anya protested.

“Because sexy goddess of Australian heritage was taken,” Elyza informed her.

Raven nodded sheepishly.

“Well take it back,” Anya demanded.

Raven nodded, taking a deep breath and did her best approximation of kneeling by Anya, “Cheekbones, will you be my sexy goddess of Australian heritage?”

“I am. But not to you.” Anya nodded seriously.

Raven grinned and laid back on the floor, “I’ll take it.”

“Not to interrupt this...interlude, but we need to talk.” Bellamy whisper-shouted, “Lincoln. Tell them. I’m too drunk.” Bellamy fell back onto the floor.

“Is this it?” Elyza looked to Lincoln, “Is he finally coming out of the closet?” She gasped playfully.

Alicia snorted.

“Is there anyone here who’s IN the closet?” Raven snarked.

“I mean, I slept in a closet one time.” Nick volunteered.

“You’re not even gay.” Alicia waved her finger at him.

“Maybe I should be, everyone else seems to be,” Nick suggested.

“Yeah! More ladies for us.” Elyza called, her voice very much too loud and earning her a chorus of spit and ‘ shhhhhhs.

“Except none of the guys here are gay.” Bellamy piped up from where he was sprawled on the floor, he started to laugh, “Madi’s the only one up in the air, but so far we ALL like women.”

“Damn straight.” Raven giggled, more at the pun than her agreement.

“I thought we just covered that most of us aren’t,” Alicia rolled her eyes.

“I think we have lost the topic.” Lincoln shook his head, “We need to talk about Travis.”

“Only thing I want to talk about with Travis, or to Travis, whatever,” Elyza shook her head, “Is about sewing his face shut.”

“Don’t you mean his mouth?” Nick asked.

“Nope,” She waved her hand in the air, “I want the whole thing. Poof.”
“Right.” Lincoln tried again, “Travis is being such a…”

“Bitch?”

“Asshole?”

“Opinionated Bitch?”

“You said that already.”

“He’s being Travis.” Anya finished, “He thinks, that I killed his ex in cold blood.” She wagged her finger, “But she was gonna die, and Travis refuses to think that dead people aren’t so dead anymore.” She finished, pursing her lips.

“I thought it was his wife,” Bellamy’s voice was muffled under his arm, he was still sprawled across the floor.

“Isn’t Madison his wife?” Octavia asked, half asleep on her brother and Lincoln.

“Liza was his ex-wife, and my mom is his fiance.” Alicia clarified, “It’s complicated.”

“You know, I’m definitely not.” Elyza informed Alicia, “And I don’t think I could ever marry a guy named Squidward.” She blinked, “Or is that why we divorced?”

Alicia blinked slowly, her foggy brain trying to parse that. “Oh! No! Her name was Liza, L.I.Z.A.” Alicia spelled it out.

“Well thank god I have a ‘Y’ or that would have really confused me.” Elyza tried not to giggle and failed terribly.

“Yeah, so Travis thinks that Anya killed his..ex-wife because he thinks that someone who’s been bitten just needs medicine,” Lincoln interjected before this could become another drunken tangent.

“Okay…” Raven nodded, “So he’s fucking stupid.”

Universal head nods followed.

“So what do we do with him?” Elyza asked, “It’s not exactly a Quint situation.”

“He won’t let it go, he’s going to be an ass about anything and everything every chance he gets.” Anya offered, “But he seems to be making an effort.”

“Too many words.” Raven whined, “Are we throwing him out the window or not?”

“If you throw him out our mom will follow him,” Nick looked a bit panicked, “And she’ll drag Licia and me with her.”

“I’m not one to separate parents from their kids, but nobody is dragging anybody.” Octavia informed him, “If you wanna run off into the sunset with angry Squidward, then sure, but I don’t like dragging.”

“She does not lie.” Bellamy waved his hand in the air.

“Still.” Anya said, “Kicking Travis out would be a problem.”

“Kay, so we un-stupid him, or we kill him?” Raven raised an eyebrow, “If I’m following.”
“We could go find someone currently alive and bitten, tie them up, force Travis to hang out with them until they die, and then make him sit in the same room as them for a few hours?” Elyze offered, perking up a bit.

Anyia stared, “Or we could not.”

“Getting a little creepy there Lex,” Raven informed her.

“Fine, but the first half still works right?”

“Let’s save that as a last resort.” Alicia patted her arm.

“Then where’s our first resort?” Raven frowned, “I vote Tahiti.”

“Thailand.”

“New Zealand.”

“Off topic.” Lincoln sighed, this was starting to be a very long night.

“We could put him on house arrest?.. School arrest? We could suspend him.” Nick nodded.

“That means he goes home dumbass.” Alicia tried to smack Nick and just threw herself off balance.

“Detention,” Elyza said.

“That’s the one!” Nick pointed, “We detention him.”

Everyone laughed at that.

“Ok, so we detention him, that’s what we’ll do.” Elyza nodded once, “But tomorrow cause I’m tired. And a little bit drunk.” She sagged a little, “You smell nice.” She told Alicia as she leaned too far trying to get up and practically shoved herself into Alicia’s lap.

“I washed my hair,” Alicia said, pleased by the comment.

Elyza nodded, finally getting her feet under her and standing up. “G’night. If I’m in any of your dreams, remember I like it a lil rough.”

“Good night Elyza.” Lincoln got to his feet a lot easier and scooped up Octavia, only swaying a little bit as he carried her to her tent.

“Wow.” Alicia nodded, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Ugh gross, not you too, the gays are everywhere.” Nick made a cross towards his sister with his arms.

“You already knew that.” Alicia huffed, rolling to her feet.

Anyia lifted her head to glare at Nick with one half-opened eye.

“Not that there’s anything wrong with them!” He protested, raising his hands, “I like the gays, competition makes for something else,” He scrambled for something to say and when he couldn’t find anything, settled for going to bed before Anyia could kill him.

“You know it’s sexy when you do that,” Raven informed Anyia, her head lolling over towards the
older woman.

“Do you ever stop flirting?” Anya groused, trying to understand how it got to be just her, Raven, and the man-boy dead asleep on the floor.

“Not even in my dreams,” Raven assured her, eyes falling shut as she fought off sleep. “But for you, I’d stop long enough to get something done.”

“You’re drunk.”

“I like you too.” Raven grinned.

Anya sighed, “Can you get up?”

“Nnnnnope.” Raven popped the ‘p’.

“If you cop a feel, I’m dropping you,” Anya informed her, getting to her feet and spending a solid three minutes standing there, making sure that she could, in fact, do this. “Okay, I can do this.” She informed them both, sliding her arms under Raven and lifting the girl up with a grunt.

“You’re so sweeeeet.” Raven smiled, flopping her face onto Anya’s shoulder.

“I’m not sweet.” Anya groused, shuffling to Raven’s tent, “I’m a bitch with a gun.”

“And that’s why I like you.” Raven poked her shoulder.

“Shut up.” Anya struggled to get into the tent for a minute, and when she did it was a kind of stumble shuffled that landed Raven on the mattress a little harder than she intended, but Anya did not crush her, so that was probably a plus. She patted Raven’s face and threw a blanket on her, “Now sleep.”
New Liver Smell

Chapter Summary

It's just a little hangover.

“Cooooofffffeeee,” Raven moaned mimicking a zombie groan, stumbling around with no coordination.
“Shut the fuck up.” Anya shot her a dirty look and shoved the pot towards her.
“Someone woke up on the wrong side of the tent this morning.” Octavia chirped, tossing a pan onto the stove with a loud clatter that made Anya and Raven flinch and duck.
“What’s wrong with you?” Raven whispered, hands hovering over her ears, looking betrayed.
“Not a damn thing.” Octavia allowed her spatula to clank against the pan loudly, “Unlike the rest of you,” She smirked, gesturing to Bellamy and Lincoln both staggering their way to the coffee pot as well.
Elyza bypassed the coffee for a jug of water, holding a bottle of aspirin in her other hand. She popped two of them and started chugging.
Bell and Lincoln watched in mixed awe and confusion as Elyza remained in that position until she drained the last drop and set down the bottle, breathing hard. “Morning.” She coughed a little bit.
“What the hell?” Anya squinted, gagging a bit. That much water would have her spewing her guts.
Elyza sat down at the table, “Best cure for a hangover, water and some aspirin. It’s just glorified dehydration.”
“Glorified or not, I want caffeine.” Raven poured herself another cup. She hadn’t indulged in two cups since the world went to hell. Today seemed like a good day to fix that.
“Big baby.” Elyza stuck her tongue out at Raven.
“Stupid teenagers.” Raven growled into her mug, “With their stupid new livers. I bet you still have that fresh liver smell.”
Elyza quirked her eyebrow, “You know, you’re probably right. Since I drank more than you and I can function.” She grinned just a bit, “I’m going to wake Madi up, see how her liver’s handling it.”
Elyza ducked into Madi’s tent, shaking her awake. “Wakey, Wakey baby girl.”
“Mghalkjh,” Madi mumbled, shoving her head further into her pillow and burying deeper under the covers.
“Are you going to wake up or leave me stuck with the hungover grouches?” Elyza tried again.
“Stuck.” She grunted, putting both arms over her pillow clad head.
“I’ll make you hot chocolate from my secret stash of the good stuff,” Elyza tried bribing her.
Madi groaned and poked her head out from under the pillow, “How good?”
“Ghirardelli.” Elyza didn’t bother expounding.
Madi shoved off the blankets and rolled over, flopping onto her back, “With liquid creamer?”
Elyza squinted, was it worth it? She sighed, “Fine. With liquid creamer. But if you tell Raven where I’ve put it you’ll join the brain munchers.”
Madi nodded, running a hand through the bird’s nest that is her hair, “Deal, gimme a minute.”
Elyza got out of the tent and quickly walked into the storage area attached to the kitchen. She glanced over her shoulder and pulled out a small container of the liquid creamer. She cracked the seal and sniffed it. It was supposed to stay good for a few years so it shouldn’t be bad, but bad creamer would destroy the hot chocolate. She set the container on the counter, checking again to make sure no one could see her before she walked over to where the pots and pans were stored and climbed up on the shelving carefully. A quick press on one of the ceiling tiles and she had a jar of
the good hot chocolate.
Elyza collected a pot to carry her stash in and joined Octavia at the stove.
“What’cha got boss lady?” Octavia asked, waiting for her water to boil with a can of powdered eggs.
Elyza waggled her eyebrows and let Octavia get a peek.
“Oh, Shit!” Octavia spoke too loudly, earning herself a jab in the ribs.
“Volume.” Bellamy groaned, holding his head.
“I want some,” O whispered to Lyza, holding onto her side.
Elyza just nodded and started prepping the mix, careful not to let anyone else get a clear view.
Raven gave them a bleary-eyed glare, “What are you bitches whispering about?”
Elyza froze, she couldn’t say anything or Raven would know. She nudged Octavia, “Oh, uh..I was asking where Lyza put the..uh..tampons.” Octavia stuttered.
Raven blinked. “In her cooch like everyone else.” She shook her head at them and let it fall back on her arms.
Any a was still inspecting the two girls at the stove. Her head hurt, but there was an element of subterfuge going on. What were those little brats hiding? Anya slowly stood, holding onto the table for an extra second to get her balance, before joining them.
Anya’s eyes widened and she gripped onto Elyza’s elbow all of a sudden, “A cup for my silence.”
Elyza bit her lip and looked to the heavens for patience before nodding, “If anyone else asks,” She hissed, “I pour it out the window.”
Anya slowly spun around, guarding the stove with the precious liquid chocolate. No one was going to get past her. She’d take them down first.
Lincoln looked at the water for the eggs. “O,” She didn’t respond. “Octavia.”
She jerked her head up. He pointed to the boiling water and she blushed, “Thanks Linc.” Octavia poured in the powder and started mixing it up.
A few minutes later the entire group was seated around the cafeteria table eating eggs and downing their coffee. Slowly conversation was starting, as hangovers receded enough to let them think.
“What is going on with you four?” Nick had been watching them, while everyone else was eating, Octavia, Elyza, Anya, and Madi were all scrunched up together at the far end of the table. An obvious space between them and everyone else. They were ignoring their food, slowly sipping on their mugs like it was the best thing ever.
“It’s called coffee.” Anya glared at him, “There’s the pot.” She looked to it pointedly.
“The coffee isn’t that good.” Nick was shaking his head, “You’re holding onto that cup like it held heroin.”
“I’m pretty sure if it was heroin I’d chuck it at your face,” Anya informed him.
“I think you should let it go.” Alicia tugged Nick’s arm and lowered her voice to a whisper, “She looks like she might stab you.”
Raven glanced over, Anya looked like she was going to kill someone. Elyza was practically hiding behind Anya. Weird. Maybe her liver wasn’t all that new.
“So who wants to come to the zoo with me?” Anya asked, turning her glare away from Nick to look at everyone else, “I want to know what’s there for us to use.”
“Be sure to grab all the veterinary meds, who knows when we will need bear tranqs…” She quirked her head, “Or Paxil.”
Raven perked up a bit, “Bring all the cage wire you can find too. Oh! And sawdust.”
“You can stop right there.” Anya waved her hand at Raven, “This is exploratory. I’ll grab the drugs, but we’re leaving pretty much everything there until we have a solid inventory of what we want.” She gestured around the school, “We’ve only got two floors to fill with shit, and if you keep hoarding everything, we’re going to drown in newspapers.”
“Not possible.” Raven just shook her head. “We can never have too much stuff.”
“Regardless. Who is going with me?”
“I can go.” Nick offered, looking fairly okay after his night of drinking.
Lincoln smacked Bellamy’s arm, “We can go.”
“Chippendale’s boys and squirt. Great.” Anya finished her cup, looking to the others and seeing that they were finished too she grabbed their mugs. Hurrying to the kitchen she began washing the mugs. Maybe if she made sure it stayed quiet she’d be able to get more. That cup of hot chocolate had been the best thing she’d put in her mouth in months.

“I’m a Chippendale boy?” Bellamy asked, a smug smile growing on his face, causing Octavia to groan.

“What’s a Chippendale boy?” Madi asked.

“Only the best kind.” Elyza winked.

Alicia wrinkled her nose, “They’re male strippers.”

“Good ones,” Madison commented without thinking.

“Mom!” Nick grinned, really wanting to puke.

“Mom!” Alicia was a little shocked.

“We should not be talking about this in front of kids.” Travis gave significant looks towards Chris and Madi.

“You raise your kid how you want and we’ll raise ours.” Raven rolled her eyes.

“Amen to that,” Elyza raised her fork, then glanced to Chris, “My condolences.”

He glared into his eggs, “I’m used to it.”

“Great, well while the kiddies are suffering and the parents are doing their bit to make the world a better place,” Anya shoved away from the table, “I’m going to find me a new rug. Let’s go boys.”

“Find one tomorrow, I wanna get out of here.” Nick rocked up on his toes.

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Madison took a step towards them.

“Perfectly.” She studied Bellamy for a minute before grabbing a second rifle and a blade for him.

He took them hesitantly, looking stiff with the rifle over his shoulder.

“Loosen up manboy. It’s not even loaded.” He adjusted the strap with a grimace but it didn’t do much to help the constipated look on his face. Anya shook her head, “Come on. Travis, we’re taking your truck.”

“Just let it go Trav.” She informed him, snagging the key on their way out.

He huffed, sitting back down. Elyza looked to the kids, “Come on, we still have windows to paint.”

She led the little band of vandals back to the classrooms.

Anya grumbled under her breathe, “This fucking truck. Such a piece of shit,” She flinched a bit when it squealed.

Nick grimaced, “Why aren’t we taking your car?”

“Because it can’t carry jack shit, and I’m not driving Baby through actual bear shit.” Anya groused.

“Let it go, dude.” Bellamy patted Nick on the shoulder, “She’s determined to hate the car.”

Lincoln chuckled, leaning out the window, “There’s a lot of corpses on the ground out there,” He gestured, “You think the animals have been eating the zombies?”

“Uh, animals can’t turn, right?” Nick looked incredibly concerned all of a sudden.

“Nope,” Bellamy shook his head firmly. “They die if they get bitten.” Bellamy paused and
considered, “The dogs who ate that one corpse didn’t do anything weird.”
Lincoln shook his head, “They got vicious, but what wild animal doesn’t in the right circumstances?”
“Fair enough.” Nick nodded, “Remind me not to pet any of the nice dooggies.”
“Good idea.” Bellamy chuckled.
“Let’s not pet any of the animals in the zoo, unless I tell you to.” Anya leveled a look over her shoulder at the others.
“Yes, scary lady.” Bellamy gave a mock salute.
“You did that wrong,” Anya told him.
Bellamy snorted, “Sorry.”
The short ride was finished in silence, other than the damn truck’s groaning protests and screaming squeaks. “Everyone out,” Anya commanded.
“Thank god.” Bellamy rolled out of the back of the truck, holding onto his back, “This stupid thing is awful.
“See, I’m not the only one who hates this damn truck,” Anya told Nick, shoving him just a little bit.
Nick rolled his eyes, “You’re just cranky because you should have stopped about four shots before you did last night.”
“That is beside the point.” Anya looked through the scope of her rifle, sweeping the horizon.
“Let’s find a map.”
Bellamy and Lincoln walked up to the admission office, Lincoln used his ax to get under the cage and reached around to look for a map. Finding one he grabbed it, unfolding it. “Where do we want to go?”
Anya leaned over the map, scanning it quickly. “We need medical areas, food court, and… Petting zoo.”
“Petting zoo?” Nick quirked an eyebrow, “For the sawdust?”
Anya scoffed, “Sure. Let’s go, Tarzan navigates.” She started walking, weapon braced against her shoulder with the muzzle down.
“Left, past the gorilla cage, and then the second junction will be the food court,” Lincoln instructed her.
Anya started off, making the turns Lincoln had told her to, her eyes scanning constantly for any form of movement.
“Oh, just how secure do you think these cages are?” Bellamy asked, shoulders tight.
Nick scoffed, “Dude, it’s been like three weeks. If they’re still in their cages, then they’re hella fucking dead.”
Bellamy relaxed, “That a technical term?” He laughed a little.
“It’s the ones that got out that I’m worried about.” Lincoln was also scanning the area, though it was a bit harder now that the smell was really starting to hit.
They stopped walking for a few moments, taking the time to try and breathe through the awful smell. Even Nick was gagging, although not as bad as any of the others.
“What is that?” Bellamy gasped.
“Natural protection.” Anya grunted, “Special mix of shit, rotting food, and corpses.” She grimaced and took a deep belly breath of the smell before coughing hard, “Take it in boys, this smell is going to be our best protection from the survivors.”
“I’m good without, thanks.” Bellamy stumbled over to the unkempt hedge finally losing the fight to not throw up.
Lincoln patted the kid’s back. “You don’t like powdered eggs anyway.” He joked weakly.
Bellamy wiped off his mouth, grimacing back at Lincoln, “You’re an asshole.”
Anya walked off, no way was she going to listen to man-boy throwing up anymore. They didn’t need to know she was a reactive vomiter. Nick followed her, “So do you think there’s anything worth grabbing in the food court?”
“It’s worth a look.” She was struggling to remember the shit they’d come for, mostly because the
whole place was so rank that she wanted to die just a little bit. “Let’s go while Manboy finishes blowing chunks.” She walked over to the second junction and smashed the doorknob off the door to the back of the concessions building.

The smell was not as bad, though it still didn’t smell good. Anya saw a door to the refrigerator or the freezer standing wide open, looking in she saw boxes leaking fluids, dripping down onto the boxes below them. Some of them had trails of fluid connecting them to other boxes, and all of it was covered in a film of green, blue and black.

“I always wanted to visit the jungle.” Nick remarked, “I just didn’t expect it to be so… tiny.” He leaned in and wrinkled his nose, “You want a cigar? They have about a million green ones.” He pointed to a moldy pile of hot dogs.

Anya shrugged, her eyes suddenly catching, “Go see if there’s a pantry,” she jerked her head towards the wall. Once Nick was walking away she walked to the display of candy, pulling her backpack open and stuffing it full.

“Hey! I found paradise!” Nick came running back holding two massive bags of chips, “They have three more boxes of chips and a shelf full of nacho cheese!”

“Grab em. Anything else back there we can use?” Anya made to move slowly away from the now empty candy display. No need to make him wonder.

“There’s a bunch of boxes of lunch-box chips, bags of cookies, candy, soda, water.” Nick shrugged a bit, “We’ll probably need to bring the truck right up to the door to get it all loaded up.

Anya nodded, “Alright then, leave it here. We’ll find the back entrance and drive up. Let’s go find whatever else there is to find.”

Anya and Nick left, getting smacked in the face with the stench. Bellamy and Lincoln were still outside, Bellamy was sitting on a bench, head between his knees doing an odd deep breathing thing, but only when he absolutely had to breathe.

“We’re going to go find the vets office next.” Anya slung her pack on her shoulder.

Bellamy stood, Lincoln’s hand on his arm helping steady him for a minute. Lincoln held out the map, offering it to Nick.

With Nick giving instructions and Lincoln leading Bellamy they walked through the zoo. The exhibits were mostly disgusting, corpses and animals decaying along with vegetation. The few pools of water were a slick mess of growth that reeked of rot. A few of the exhibits were empty though, and those were the most disturbing. Nothing like thinking that there were some wildcats and wolves that managed to escape the zoo.

The vet's office had enough supplies to fill the boys backpacks and so they continued on to the petting zoo. They made a note of the drink carts and vending machines on their map. A few of them would be worth emptying.

“Okay, last stop and then we can breathe some real air,” Anya promised, rounding the bend to an empty enclosure of dried hay and animal droppings. “Shit!” Anya kicked a rock, “Spread out, see if you can find any of the animals, especially the chickens and rabbits.”

Lincoln and Nick went left, while Bellamy followed Anya.

“Hey, I think I saw one.” Nick pointed, running after an angrily squawking chicken.

Lincoln walked over to a little garden. The cute painted sign indicated it was for the animals. He pulled up a few scraggly carrots and ripped off a bunch of lettuce. He walked over to the center of the grassy area, a bunch of picnic tables scattered around. He sat down and just waited.

“What the fucking shit.” Anya was flabbergasted, “He’s a fucking Disney Princess.”

Lincoln was sitting with a sparrow on his head, a goat nibbling the back of his shirt, and a small hoard of fat bunnies trying to climb into his lap. “Help,” He mouthed, looking terrified.

“What did you do?” Bellamy asked, wide-eyed.

“I had a carrot.” Lincoln shook his head, trying to get the sparrow off of him, but it just hopped down to his shoulder and started probing his ear. He twitched violently and scared a couple of rabbits off his lap.

“Stop!” Anya hissed, holding out her hands, “Just wait.”

Lincoln grimaced and pressed his ear to his shoulder to keep the bird away from him, “Be fast.”
“Go get the biggest boxes you can find.” Anya smacked Bellamy’s shoulder, “Nick, go with him.” She jerked her head. The two boys ran off and Anya took a few steps forward, “Lincoln, do you think you can get a grip on that goat?” He made a face like an upset toddler and nodded, twitching when the goat tickled the back of his neck with its nuzzling.

“Oh, I’ll let you know when I want you to grab it. We need one of each.” Anya just kept watching, her eyes widening when she saw a chicken poke its head out of the playground bushes and start walking over to Lincoln, joining the menagerie.

“Woah, you really are a Disney Princess dude.” Nick and Bellamy both came up carrying huge boxes.

“We can marvel later,” Anya informed them, grabbing one box. “Nick, you think you can catch a chicken?”

“Okay, when I say go, we are going to get as close as we can. If they start running, so do you. Lincoln, you grab that goat, Bell and I will go for the rabbits, Nick is on chicken duty.” Anya broke down their action plan as quickly as she could, seeing Lincoln beginning to lose his shit.

“Ready?” She looked between them all until she got their nods of assent, “Okay, slowly now.” She held her box in firm hands, taking careful steps towards Lincoln’s little colony of woodland beasts. 5 minutes of chaos, squawks and a few panicked bleats later and the animals were secured. “That was fucking ridiculous.” Nick panted, soaked in sweat from having to chase a few of the chickens. Eventually, they had all had to help chase the chickens.

“If anyone tells Raven, I will end you.” Lincoln informed them, giving a full body shudder, “That was awful.”

“Congratulations,” Nick patted him on the shoulder, “Tarzan is the best Disney princess.”

“We can’t get all of these in the bed of the truck,” Bellamy gestured.

“No, we can get exactly these in the truck.” Anya chewed on her cheek, “I think what we do is we drop these guys off at the school, you and Nick can unload the animals, and then Princess and I will come back for food and bedding.”

“We agree.” The agreement was unanimous.

“I vote Princess rides in the bed.” Nick grinned.

Lincoln gave him a dirty look.

“Who volunteers others, volunteers himself.” Anya jerked her thumb to the bed, “Enjoy the smell of rabbit shit Nick.”

“I deserve that.” He nodded, climbing into the bed with the goats. Anya pulled the truck up next to the loading bay, parking it with a squeal of the gears. Anya jumped out, slamming the door a little hard than necessary.

“Where are we putting these bitches?” Nick grunted, a goat butting him in the thigh.

“That one’s male.” Anya yanked up the door.

“That makes him a Billy, not a bitch,” Bellamy informed Nick because that actually matters? “I don’t care.” Nick grunted again, “SERIOUSLY IM GOING TO FUCKING EAT YOU!” He yelled at it as it headbutted him in a slightly more..sensitive area. It stared him in the eye with its freaky sideways pupils and screamed at his face.

“It’s okay,” Bellamy grabbed the goat around its ribs, one hand on the horns to keep them away from his neck, “He’s not going to eat you until you’re a very old goat.” He promised, carrying the cute little guy into the storage room and up the stairs.

Anya rolled her eyes, grunting her frustration when she saw a walker watching them from the waist-high fence on the other side of the loading zone. She shook her head and left the damn thing, choosing instead to scoop up a box of rabbits.

On her way up the stairs, Elyza passed her with a confused look, “Hey,” Anya paused then glanced down at her box, “It’s rabbits.” Elyza nodded her understanding, “Yeah, I need you to keep an eye on the unloading. Nick was yelling at the goat and it drew in one of the dead guys. He shouldn’t be
an issue so you can just leave him.”
Elyza froze on the stairs for a few seconds as Anya continued up the stairs. She started moving again when she heard a door shut somewhere above her. Elyza stopped on the dock, eyes scanning for the walker Anya had mentioned. Finding him, Elyza jumped down, knife in hand and walked over. He was a lot less crispy than any of the others they had seen recently, just slightly singed around the edges and like Anya said he was stuck behind the fence. He still managed to grab her as she slipped her knife into his ear and brain.
Elyza turned around and walked back, joining Nick as he finally got himself moving and into the school with the box of chickens. She followed him up the stairs after pulling the door shut, ignoring his commentary.
They walked into the cafeteria, now filled with a cacophony of people talking and animals making their animal noises. It was chaos with the goats going exploring and one of the chickens had somehow gotten out and was being chased by Madi and Chris who were enjoying chasing the damn thing.
“We need to get these animals situated and then we need to talk,” Elyza stated to no one in particular, but she saw a few heads nod in acknowledgment.
Raven gave her a sidelong look, silently asking what the hell had Elyza looking so grim. Elyza shook her head and Raven nodded. They would talk soon enough.
Raven went back to peeking in the boxes and gasped, “Oh my god it’s a bunny!”
Lincoln smiled and reached in, pulling one of the rabbits out, cradling it in his arm where it just rested like a newborn with its mama. “Do you want to hold it?”
Raven nodded, wide-eyed and holding her hands out like she was afraid of dropping the thing that wasn’t anywhere near her hands yet. Lincoln chuckled and held out the rabbit, setting the calm creature right in the middle of her nestled palms.
The rabbit rolled over a bit.
Raven screamed and dropped it.
“It moved! Uh-uh! I don’t do moving!”
“What did you think it would do, genius, it’s a living thing. They move.” Elyza laughed at her, watching Raven back away from the little rabbit.
The creature turned from Raven and bolted straight for Elyza who was standing between it and an open door.
“Oh fuck no!” Elyza backed up, getting out of the rabbit’s way, “I don’t do animals!”
“Get the fucking door!” Raven shrieked, pointing at it.
“Not it.” Elyza threw her hands up.
Octavia ran over to the door, managing to get it shut before the rabbit got there. She turned around a grin on her face, but twisted too far and fell to the floor, scaring the shit (literally) out of the rabbit who took off again, this time towards Lincoln who scooped the rabbit up as it went past him and dropped it back in the box.
“You two are ridiculous.” Octavia informed Elyza and Raven, pushing herself to her feet with a wince.
“No, those are ridiculous.” Raven pointed, “Why do we have them?”
“We’re going to eat them genius.” Anya rolled her eyes, “Meat isn’t exactly piling up at our front door.”
“Uh well, I’ll take care of anything but them.” Raven shook her head, still eyeing the animals.
“Where are we going to put them? We can’t leave them outside, right?” Madi asked, petting one of the rabbits still safely in the box.
“They aren’t staying here.” Elyza snarked, “As much as my mother jokes that I was raised in a barn, I don’t really want to live in one.”
“Yeah, no.” Raven shook her head. “We can assign them a bunch of classrooms. Away from us, I’m not smelling their shit while I’m trying to sleep.”
Any a rolled her eyes, “Big babies. Come on Princess, let’s get these animals settled.” Anya gestured.
“I believe I established that I don’t-” Elyza started.
“Not you.” Anya jerked her chin towards Lincoln, “Princess.”
Raven’s eyebrows were suddenly sky-high, “Lincoln is Princess now? Oh, this has gotta be good,”
she rubbed her hands together in glee.
“Thanks.” Lincoln drawled, hauling up the panicked box of chickens.
“You should’ve seen how they all just started crawling into his lap, he was the picture perfect
Disney Princess,” Nick laughed.
“Dude, Lincoln is gonna strangle you in your sleep,” Bellamy informed him.
Octavia rolled her eyes, “Come on guys, I think it’s kinda cute.”
“That’s exactly what makes it funny little sister. Lincoln isn’t cute.”
“Speaking of things we do not do, before everyone starts running all over the place, I think I need
to establish something,” Elyza called out.
Everyone stopped what they were doing, boxes and animals still in hand to turn and look at her,
quizzical looks on their faces.
“I want to make it very clear to everyone, that we are only safe here because there are no dead
people walking around.” Elyza’s voice was tinged with anger.
“Duh,”
“No shit Sherlock.”
“That means,” Elyza gave a significant look to those who had piped up, “that if you are anywhere
near the school, and I mean the parking lot, the baseball fields, the football field or the road and
you see a walker. You kill it. Do not ignore it, do not assume it’s not or won’t become a problem.
Put it down.”
“What are you talking about, Lyza?” Raven looked concerned, “What walkers? I’ve been visiting
the fields every day and the radios are still working.”
Elyza looked over to Anya, “The goats and Nick drew one in.”
“I left it there,” Anya admitted, pursing her lips and looking at the ground, pissed at herself for
doing something so stupid. She should have been thinking. Instead, she just wanted to get their
stupid shit into the school and she forgot to pay attention to the most important part of keeping
their safe haven safe. She looked back up, her jaw tight with anger, “I fucked up.” She nodded.
“No one fucks up that way again.” Elyza didn’t make a bigger deal of it, “If you see a walker, kill
it unless it’s going to get you killed and then you get the help you need to kill it.” Elyza looked
around waiting for agreement, “Great, now get these smelly things out of here.”
Anya nodded, grabbing both of the goats by their horns and tugging them out the door.
“Glad that I’m not the only one who realizes the great Sergeant can screw up,” Travis muttered to
Madison, just barely loud enough to be heard by Raven and Elyza.
Raven turned to him and Elyza caught her arm, “Not today.”
Raven gritted her teeth and nodded, the tension leaving her shoulders as soon as it arrived. “Fine.”
“No, no, no,” Bellamy protested, “We cannot leave the chickens and the goats with each other. The goats won’t let us near the chickens and the chickens are freaking out.”

“What the fuck does it matter if the chickens are freaking out? They’re chickens.” Raven threw her hands up in exasperation.

“Have you ever tried to shit out dead embryos while you’re freaking out?” Bellamy raised his eyebrows with his hands on his hips.

“Every fucking month. It’s called a period you moron.” Raven rolled her eyes.

“Try doing it every day, but also with goats screaming in your ears.” He snapped, “The goats need a separate space, preferably with the rabbits, it helps them feel more secure to have a nanny goat.”

“What the fuck?” Raven looked bewildered, “How the fuck do you know this shit?”

He blinked, “Because I don’t scream at them when they move.”

“Yeah well, I’ve got enough shit to deal with, without their shit too.” Raven glanced away.

He frowned, “Then let me take the extra two rooms.”

“Two? I thought you only needed one??”

“Well if we’re going to breed them, and we are, then we need to give them time, space, and an extra room to act as a nursery once they get up to their bunny business.” Bellamy listed on his fingers.

“Why do they need a nursery? Aren’t mama’s and babies supposed to be together? Bond or whatever?”

“Yeah well, when you have an average of two million babies a year, sometimes you get a little pissy.” He shrugged, “Rabbits.”

Raven raised her eyebrows in acknowledgment. “Ok, so one room for the chickens, three rooms for the goats and rabbits. I’m guessing you want those three rooms to be combined into one?”

“Well actually two rooms for the chickens would be good too,” Bellamy admitted, rubbing the back of his neck, “We want the chickens for the eggs, but if we can hatch some of them then we’ll have a continuing supply of eggs. Chickens don’t lay as many eggs when they get older.”

“How the fuck do you know all this shit?” Raven threw her arms up, “And don’t you fucking shrug and say chickens.”

“Big brother has a thing for Animal Planet,” Octavia spoke from the doorway, she had been wandering the halls, bored when she heard their conversation.

“Fine.” Raven let out a huff of air, “Whatever, take over the whole damn school with your domesticated animals and shit.”

“I plan to. I like meat and I’m already getting tired of pasta.” Bellamy grinned knowing Raven was getting tired of it too.
Raven pulled a marker out of her pocket and poked her head out into the hallway. She popped back in, ignoring the questioning gazes of the siblings. She walked over to one wall and drew a huge X in it. Adding more X's to windows, furniture, and finishing up with a line across the door into the hallway. Raven walked out into the hallway and went into the adjoining classroom, doing the same thing. She finished with the third room before moving across the hall and doing the same thing in two of those classrooms.

“What are you doing?” Octavia tried again, she had followed Raven during her marking, but Raven had shushed all of her questions.

“Raven!” Elyza had seen the growing number of X’s, “Why the fuck are we knocking down half the school?”

“What?!” Bellamy and Octavia both shouted.

“Drama queen!” Raven yelled over her shoulder, continuing her procession of X’s.

“Raven!” Octavia shouted again, “Answer!”

“Ugh. Fine,” Raven grunted, “This one,” she pointed to Bellamy, “Wants two classrooms combined into one for the chickens, and three classrooms combined into one for the rabbits and goats.”

“So we’re blowing out walls?” Elyza snapped, “Do you know how much fucking work that’s going to be? Where the hell are we going to keep the damn things while we fuck up the structure of the safest place we’ve lived in?”

“They can hang out in one or two other classrooms while we do the work in here.” Raven was not interested in trying to work around any of those animals while blowing out walls, “And calm the fuck down, we aren’t going to break the school. They’re built to survive teenagers.”

“Okay then Ms. Engineering genius, how the hell are we going to break down these walls?”

Raven’s grin grew positively evil, “We’re going to make a trip to Home Depot for some power tools.”

Elyza groaned, “I’m starting to hate that place.”

“Bite your tongue you whiny bitch!” Raven jabbed a finger at Elyza, “That place is going to do many amazing things for us.”

Elyza shook her head, “Nope. Nope, you can just play with your stupid toys by yourself.”

Raven arched an eyebrow, “You know we could stop for those too.”

Elyza leveled her with a look. “I’m not letting you jerry-rig some kind of ghetto ass sex toy. I choose celibacy.”

“Lex.” Raven rolled her eyes, “I don’t need to jerry-rig anything. We just need to find a toy shop and then we can find anything you’ve never dreamed of trying.” She waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

“You seriously underestimate how many people are necessary to overcome my dreams.”

Bellamy choked, coughing and hacking in his corner of the classroom where he had been emptying
the closet onto the desk.

“You got a problem over there Manboy?” Elyza arched her eyebrow.

He shook his head, still wheezing, “Nope.”

Octavia rolled her eyes, “Bell’s a prude.”

Bellamy’s head shot up, “Octavia!”

“Relax big brother.” She waved a hand to calm him down, “He really is though,” she fake whispered to the other two girls.

Elyza snorted, “It happens.”

Raven just shook her head, “It’s sad though.”

Raven looked around and slapped her hands on her thighs, wincing slightly when it jarred her bad leg. “We need a supply run. A big one.”

“How big?” Octavia questioned, “We’re going to start running out of room soon.”

“Should be good if we fill both semis.” Raven considered.


Raven rolled her eyes, “I wish.”

Both girls chuckled while Bellamy practically squeaked in discomfort.

“But seriously, there’s so much shit we just can’t make ourselves,” Raven sighed a bit, “Every day that passes is one more day’s worth of chances for someone else to take the supplies we need to survive. And it’ll seriously fucking suck if we end up dying just because we didn’t grab everything we could get our hands on.”

Bellamy walked over slinging his arm around Octavia’s shoulders, “If we’re taking both semi’s we’ll need the others, so let’s go get them.”

The group walked into the cafeteria, they really needed to visit a furniture store, both Chris and Madi were lying on the floor with books spread out in front of them. Madison and Travis were leaning against one of the walls having a quiet conversation, while Alicia, Nick, and Anya had a bunch of parts spread across the table, rubbing them with cloths.

“Alright bitches, I need you to ditch the scrap, scrap the conversation, and let’s conversate about some furniture.” Raven clapped her hands together, “We need to make a run to a furniture store and then to home depot for all the shit to make our little farm-y dreamland a reality. Who’s ready to rock?”

“Does that mean you want to go on a supply run?” Madi asked, clearly confused.

Raven sighed, “Yes.”

“We also need a gun range,” Anya started putting the parts in front of her back together, forming one of her guns.

“We should also hit Walmart again, the stuff there won’t last much longer.” Elyza suggested
before grinning, “And that sex shop.”

“No way,” Madison shook her head, “Just, no, but also we can’t possibly do all of this in one day. We need to prioritize, and right now we have more than enough food to keep us going.”

“First off, not all of us have a man to keep us occupied,” Elyza shrugged, “Second, should we do the furniture store another day? Probably not a huge run on those and that’ll take a ton of space in the semis.”

“We can leave furniture for another day, but my girl is right, some of us get lonely.” Raven grinned over at Anya, “Especially when certain elements like playing hard to get.”

Anya rolled her eyes, refusing to even comment. She finished reassembling the weapons then stood up, she just needed her pack and she was ready to go.

“Okay, let’s mount up buttercups.” Raven went for her pack, “Everyone’s going field tripping today,” She waved at Madi encouraging her to get a move on.

“What vehicles are we taking?” Alicia asked, her pack slung over her shoulder, “I’m not riding in Travis’ truck.”

“Both semis need to go.” Raven’s voice was muffled by her tent.

“What? That’s way too much stuff!” Madison protested again, “We don’t need all of that.”

“Have you ever tried to shop for everything everyone in your house is going to need for the next year?” Elyza questioned her, “Cause that’s basically what we need to do. No one’s restocking the stores anytime soon and we really can die all because we didn’t have enough fucking bedsheets.”

Anya gave her a slightly confused look, dying because of bedsheets, huh? “If we’re taking both semis we should take Baby too. We’ll be really obvious out there and the artillery gun might be useful if we attract attention.”

“I call artillery gun!” Nick’s hand shot up in the air faster than he’d ever moved before.

“We’ll see.” Though it might not be a bad idea, “We ready to go?”

“How come Nick gets to do all the fun stuff?” Chris whined, “Why can’t I man the gun?”

“Because you’ll get bored and take potshots at whatever catches your eye,” Alicia suggested.

Chris just pouted, crossing his arms over his chest.

The group made their way to the loading bay in bursts as they were ready to go, but eventually, they were all out, the inner door locked and the rolling door was pulled shut behind them.

“Home Depot sweet Home Depot!” Raven called, landing with an ungraceful thud when she jumped the last foot out of the semi, “Mama missed you baby.” She started walking towards the store, not bothering to wait for the other vehicles to even park.

Elyza’s hand shot out, grabbing onto her, “Wait for the rest of us.”

“The rest of you are fucking slow. Hurry up,” Raven whined, pouting when Elyza just rolled her eyes and maintained her grip.

It took a few minutes longer before everyone was ready, Anya had to teach Nick how to use the
gun on the back of Baby. Once he was set, the rest of the group gathered in front of the doors, Raven still trying to convince Lyza to let her go, without waiting for the ‘slow fuckers.’

“We’ve got two classrooms full of lumber, the shop classroom, and a bunch of chicken wire left over, what more could we possibly need from here?” Madison waved her hand, still unconvinced that this would be necessary.

Raven sighed, she just wanted to go shopping, not explain to the Mom Squad what would be useful. “We’ve got plenty of lumber and we only need a few tools, which I’ll get, for taking down walls. It’ll be easier than trying to use the shop tools.” She barreled on through a few more protesting mumbles from Travis and Madison, “What we really need is anything that can be used for animal bedding, gardening tools, dirt, fertilizer, seeds, plastic, plywood, pipes, garbage bags, cleaning supplies and anything else that looks like it might be useful one day.”

“And if you see something and think ‘hey, that could make our life easier or more enjoyable’ then grab it. We aren’t worried about the bill at the end or if it’ll take time before we can use.” Elyza looked around.

“One of these days the supply runs won’t even be possible,” Anya put out there, finally getting Madison and Travis to stop making comments, although Trav looked pissed that he was listening to her, “All of the useful shit will either be used up or destroyed and then our jobs will be a lot harder. Instead of just going out to collect this shit, we’ll have to figure out how to make it ourselves or do without it.”

“Great. Grab all the shit. Can we go now?” Raven turned and walked towards the store as fast as she could, not letting Elyza get ahold of her again.

The rest of the group followed, breaking off into pairs, which somehow left Bellamy with Chris again. Each pair grabbed a cart and went off in slightly different directions. It was rather eerie at first, the store was deathly silent, only interrupted by the squeak of bad carts, at least until Raven and Elyza caught up to each other and began their neverending commentary filled with cuss words, innuendos and snide remarks. Normally listening to their back and forth got them scolded at least once while they were with a group, but this time the entire group was grateful for it. Even when the topic caused them to cringe in embarrassment.

After the first 10 carts were filled and dropped off near Nick, who nodded in acknowledgment every time someone came out, Lincoln and Octavia busted the gates to the garden center open and began using the pallet loaders to shove all the dirt, shit, and mulch in their pallets into the first semi. Seeing that, Anya and Alicia followed their example, loading up pipe and extra lumber. After just a few almost collisions they finally got the rhythm down so there was little waiting or finagling to get it loaded.

“That was fucking exhausting,” Bellamy leaned against the truck, panting with streams of sweat pouring down his face. He nodded in gratitude when Elyza walked over, shoving a bottle of water and a granola bar in his hand.

The rest of the group was in a similar state, soaked in sweat and tired, but they had a truck that was packed and this Home Depot was pretty much wiped clean. There had been a few eyebrow-raising items that had been shoved in, how were Christmas lights, a hammock, and lawn furniture going to help? Hell nobody was really sure where Madi had gotten the Christmas lights from in the first place, she’d just shown up pushing a cart half-full with them. But they had been told if it fits it goes, and they managed to get it all to fit. There’d be a few crushed boxes, and whoever opened the door might need to jump out of the way, they’d shoved stuff up to the ceiling, standing on the pallet loaders to get high enough, but they were done.
“Can we just go back and do Walmart another day?” Chris whined, he’d been begging to be done after the first thirty minutes had gone.

There were many rolled eyes but Elyza spoke up, “If we get this done today then we can rig up some way for everyone to take a bath,” Heads shot up at that, excitement at the prospect of more than a sponge bath feeding new energy into the group.

Raven had been looking forward to taking a bath since they found the two huge metal trough things. It would be a pain in the ass to empty it until she’d had some time to work her magic, but it would be worth it if it meant that she’d get a bath tonight and she was determined to be one of the last ones in so she could sit and soak.

They grabbed their wrappers, the world had ended but they still weren’t going to litter, and their empty water bottles and got into the vehicles, eager to get to Walmart, empty it and go home.

The trip to Walmart was short and they’d had enough practice loading in pallets of food and water that it took very little time.

“Is that all we’re doing?” Alicia asked, watching the last pallet being loaded.

“That was the easy and quick part,” Raven shook her head, “Now we need to go through the store and get all of the shit out of there that’ll be useful. Anything to help with cleaning, lighting, clothing, shoes and whatever else looks useful. We should fill this truck to the top too.”

Everyone in the group nodded and they once again formed smaller groups, leaving Nick in the back of Baby ready to defend the trucks if needed.

“Oh fuck, that smells awful,” Raven gagged, her hand covering her nose in an attempt to stave off the stench.

“I really never wanted to know what 3-weeks of rot smelt like,” Elyza hadn’t gagged, but she was panting shallowly trying not to get too much of the smell, or taste.

“At least we didn’t have to go to the zoo with Anya and the guys,” Alicia swallowed heavily, “They made it seem like that was worse than this.”

“It was,” Anya’s nose was wrinkled up, but she didn’t seem to be having any issues with gagging.

“We’ll take this half of the store,” Raven waved to the section to her right. “You three can comb through the food and pharmacy stuff,” she gestured to Madison, Travis, and Chris, “And can you see what you find in clothes,” she asked Bellamy, Octavia, Madi, and Lincoln.

“I’m a size 8 with a small waist,” Elyza called over her shoulder, she had already started pushing a cart off towards office supplies.

“Or a size 6 with a fat ass,” Raven added, “either one works for her.”

“Do I look like your personal shopper?” Octavia snarked, “I’ll grab whatever we find and tie you into it.”

“We’ll see if I find anything specifically for you or not.” Raven groused, moving quickly to catch up with Elyza, Anya and Alicia.

Elyza turned down the bedding aisle and took great pride in sticking her arm out and just walking forward as all the bed sheets and pillowcase sets cascaded off the shelf and mostly into her cart.
“Do you feel better now?” Anya asked, an eyebrow quirked.

Elyza bobbed her head, “I do indeed, thanks for asking.”

“Do we even need any of that stuff?” Alicia said, “We have more than enough sets for the mattresses we have, shouldn’t we save the space for more important things?”

“Bandages, filtering, privacy, cooking, bags, clothes, and as replacements for what we’ve got.” Elyza ticked each item off, in between adding every fuzzy blanket she could get her hands on. “Why do they put the good blankets up so fucking high?” She was hopping up on her toes, trying to get the height she needed.

“So that short bitches like you can’t get to them,” Anya muttered, reaching up to knock them over onto Elyza’s head.

Elyza ducked and grinned, “Aw, you like us so much you’re starting to sound like us.”

Anya’s eyes widened slightly and she pressed her lips shut just in case anything else tried to slip out.

“That’s alright cheekbones, you’ll do more than just sound like me when I get you where I want you.” Raven sauntered down the aisle, grabbing hand towels, washcloths, and bath sheets.

Alicia clapped a hand over her mouth to hold back a laugh.

Anya pursed her lips, “So is this banter something that waited until after the apocalypse broke your minds, or have you two always been a little unhinged?”

Raven gave a little grunt of outrage, “We have always been this fucking awesome! Unhinged? I think you mean fucking fabulous bitches.”

Elyza just chuckled a little, “Why would we want to be quiet and ‘normal’?” she did little finger quotes, “Normal people are absolutely miserable and completely uninteresting to be around.”

“Oh, I’m not asking why you aren’t normal.” Anya snorted, shooting Raven a look, “I think we all know why you aren’t normal. I’m asking why you feel the need to be in everyone’s face all the time about every little thing that crosses your mind.”

“You’re welcome to leave if it bothers you,” Elyza offered, eyebrows raised.

“Uh, no she isn’t.” Raven replied, “Not until she admits that I’m the sexiest thing she’s ever met.”

“You’re a thing alright.” Anya smirked, “It’s the sexy part that everyone’s questioning here.”

“Oh cheekbones,” Raven patted her on the arm, “It’s alright that you’re so overwhelmed by me that you can’t manage to think properly. No one is questioning my sexiness.”

“She’s right. I’m sure Bellamy’d take care of that for you if Anya can’t handle it.” Elyza patted Raven’s ass as she walked past.

“Do we need pots and pans?” Alicia interrupted, who knows where this would go if she didn’t redirect them.

Elyza shrugged, “It never hurts, and of all the post-apocalyptic survival classes I took, blacksmithing in non-stick was one elective I skipped.”
“You lazy bitch,” Raven mocked, shaking her head throwing a bunch into the carts.

“I know.” Elyza shrugged, “I was just afraid to take all those after-school courses and learn how to be a tattooist, I was betting on the wrong damn horse.”

“Wait, you’re a tattoo..uh, ist?” Alicia asked, hesitant in the pronunciation.

“I prefer apprentice needlesmith,” Elyza informed her.

“I prefer well-paid sadist.” Raven stuck her tongue out.

“I’d have been better paid if I was an actual sadist,” Elyza snarked back at her.

Raven rolled her eyes, “Please, you’d have to be legal to drink before you could start whipping on poor rich bankers.”

“I wouldn’t. Just like I wouldn’t have to be legal to drink to work down at the kitty-cat club, where I could also make more money.” Elyza laughed a bit.

Raven shuddered, “I’m so glad your mom talked you out of that one.”

Alicia and Anya both looked a little bit horrified, “Your mom had to talk you out of working at a place called the kitty-cat club? That was even an option?” Alicia asked in disbelief.

“Well I mean, sex work is always an option.” Elyza laughed, “But the doctor in her said that communicable diseases are not worth the full tattoo machine and kit that I could get it with, not to mention setting me up for an internship with a better shop than the ‘Spider’s web’ that place has the worst name.”

“One day I want to meet your mother,” Anya said, not even thinking about it.

Elyza looked down suddenly, “I don’t think you’ll get that chance.” She spoke quietly for the first time...ever, since they’d known her.

“Candles.” Raven was not subtle in her change of subject, “We should wipe out the candle section, then arts and crafts.”

“I love candles,” Alicia bounced and squealed.

Elyza nodded, “Then you guys take the candles, Rae and I can hit up the craft supplies.”

“Well fuck,” Anya muttered, she hadn’t thought there was anything she could say that could shut up either of those two girls, apparently talking about Mom could do that.

“She’ll be ok,” Alicia rubbed Anya’s back a bit, “It’s easy to forget that if someone isn’t with us they’re probably dead.”

“Yeah,” Anya thought about Gustus, Indra and the rest of their crew, “No kidding.” She shook her head, “Come on kid, time to feed your addiction.” She gestured to the candle aisle.

“YES!” Alicia shouted with glee and began adding all of the candles into the cart. By the time the shelves were empty, Alicia was doing a happy tribal dance around three carts loaded with candles.

Raven and Elyza stood on the side watching, a big smile on Raven’s face and at least no obvious tears on Elyza’s blotchy face. “This is beautiful, how long have you been an interpretive dancer?” Raven teased.
Alicia blushed and Elyza elbowed Raven, “Come on, let her alone.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

Raven raised an eyebrow and smirked at Elyza, “Uh huh, sure thing baby sister.”

“Raven,” Elyza warned.

“Ooooh, we made it to a whole name, I wonder why?”

“Raven Lindsey Reyes.” Elyza lifted her chin.

Raven took a whole step back, “Oh my god, when did you become Grandma? Fine! I give.” She folded her arms over her chest and shot Elyza a glare.

Elyza narrowed her eyes right back and nodded, “Okay, now that Raven remembers who’s in charge here, I think we can take these suckers back to the semi.”

Anya nodded, leading the way back with one cart in front of her and another being dragged behind. She took them down the big aisle that led from the front of the building all the way to the automotive center in the back corner, and right past all kinds of displays of seasonal shit that no one really needs.

“Anya.” Raven was stopped in the middle of the aisle, “What are you doing? The carts aren’t that full.”

“Huh, shit!” Anya questioned, trying to stop and getting rammed into by the cart she was pulling. “Ugh, what are you talking about?” She had to bump the back cart away with her hips.

“You just walked by batteries dude.” Raven’s voice was flat.

Anya turned and saw the display, still quite a few packs of batteries on the hooks and on the floor around it, she turned back, opened her mouth and then paused realization coming over her. “Fuck.”

“You know hotness, as much as I love me a flawed woman to cuddle up to, you might wanna back off on that.” Raven teased lightheartedly, tossing the packs into Anya’s cart and then patted her ass, “You may proceed.”

Anya rolled her eyes and let it go, knowing that if Travis had been there she never would have heard the end of it. She could take an asspat from Raven.

The front of the store was blocked by carts full of merchandise that they and others had loaded up, leaving them there so they didn’t waste time outside. It took a few minutes for Madi to climb over some of them so that a path could be made to the front door.

“Hey Nick, you couldn’t have moved some of these while you were sitting on your ass?” Madi called, “Some of us have been working over here.”

“I’d have torn his head off if he left Baby, and his post.” Anya defended him.

Nick kicked back with a huge grin, “What can I say, some of us have a higher calling in life than manual labor.”

“I vote higher calling unloads by himself back at the school,” Octavia volunteered him, he was the only one who didn’t reek of sweat.

“Seconded!”
“Thirded!”

“Is thirded even a word?” Alicia asked, handing a cart over to the guys loading the truck.

“No, it isn’t,” Travis informed her, pushing his cart to the back of the truck.

“It’s the end of the world, we could make it one.” Raven offered.

Elyza sensed Travis getting annoyed and grinned, her voice taking on a heavy drawl, “Ya’ll an yer damn englishen needs some fukin work, I dunno wha’cha’ll’re talkin bout half the time.”

“Honey, ya’don evn know what’cher talkin bout. We coul ge’some real talkin goin on righ’ here,” Madison drawled, her speech suddenly picking up an accent.

Travis grumbled and growled, irritated with the mocking.

“Now sweetie,” She cooed at him, southern honey dripping from her tone, “I’m jus rememberin the tongue o my people.” She gave him a little wink, finally earning a small smile from him.

“I’m going to get more carts,” Travis mumbled, walking away.

Anya watched Travis go, waiting till he was out of earshot, “Fuck me dead, ya bogans’re chockers ‘o shite, but you’ve got me clucky watching him go.”

Everyone just turned to Anya, confusion written all over their faces, “Huh?” Alicia asked.

Anya rolled her eyes, “Americans.”

“Okay, I think we just have one more trip and the Semi’s full.” Lincoln dropped onto the back bumper of the Semi and scooted himself off, too tired to try for a graceful landing from that height. “I vote we give it a few days before we try this again.”

“Or a month,” Bellamy muttered.

Chris started walking away from the group, quietly turning the corner of the building and disappearing from sight.

Travis came out with two carts in front of him, no control over which way they were going, managing to tip one over with a loud crash and thud as boxes of shelves slid out of the cart. He started pushed the upright cart over to the truck and handed it over to Octavia, “Where’s Chris?” he asked, looking around.

“Last I saw he was heading for the parking lot.” Nick offered, gesturing to the side of the building, “He’s only been gone like two seconds.” He just figured that Chris needed to pee and didn’t want to run for the front of the building.

“He’s supposed to wait for someone else,” Travis griped, ignoring the cart he dropped in favor of following after his son.

“Dude I think he’s peeing!” Nick called after him, “No one needs to see that.”

“No one goes anywhere alone!” Travis shouted back, unintentionally parroting Anya’s directions from weeks ago, finally disappearing around the corner.

Anya smirked and waited for Travis to come back dragging his son by the collar and giving him the same speech she’d given everyone when the buddy system was first introduced.
One minute turned into two and Anya began to get concerned, it shouldn’t take this long to walk right around the corner, take a piss and come back. Anya glanced around, noticing that Madison, Alicia, Elyza and Bellamy were the only ones not starting to shift in discomfort over how long this little bathroom break was taking. Anya walked over and slung her bag into the back of Baby, ready to go after them when she noticed some loud but indiscernible noise. Like static on the TV when the volume was just barely turned on but the room was so quiet it couldn’t help but be loud.

Anya cocked her head, listening and trying to figure out what she was hearing.

Nick perked up a bit when Anya froze and he got out of his chair to start looking around with a bit more energy, he wasn’t going to pass up the chance to use an artillery rifle.

Nick’s movement’s caught everyone else’s attention although Madison just went back to her snack, not seeing anything wrong.

“What’s going on?” Bellamy asked, still a bit spaced out.

“Let’s pack it up.” Anya moved to the semi and shoved Lincoln off the bumper so she could yank the door closed and lock it up.

“What about Travis and Chris, we’re not leaving them.” Madison frowned.

“We’ll pick them up on the way out,” Anya started urging people into vehicles.

Chris came hurtling around the corner, his eyes wide and his shirt lightly speckled with blood. Travis was tripping across the pavement right behind him, “Move! Move!” He waved his arm at them.

Anya backed out of Travis’ way, knowing a runner out of control when she saw one, “Move where?”

“Just go!” Chris’ voice cracked hardcore as he yanked Alicia’s arm towards Baby and then scrambled inside, “We don’t have time to explain!”

“Which fucking way?” Raven yelled, crawling up into the semi as fast as she could.

Elyza gave her a boost, “I’m going to assume anywhere but the front of the store.” She bolted around the cab and jumped into the passenger seat.

“We have to go through the front, but we can come around the close side or the far side,” Lincoln called from his position in the driver’s seat of the other semi.

“It’s all blocked, we have to find another way,” Travis shouted, helping the girls into their vehicles.

“Nick, you’d better be ready to use that thing,” Anya informed him, firing up Baby just as soon as everyone was in their chairs.

“Born Ready!” Nick crowed in excitement, bracing himself.

Anya pulled ahead, ready to use Baby and the artillery gun to barrel a path for the semis.

“Son of a Motherfucking Bitch,” Anya muttered, eyes widening at the sight of the horde in front of her. It was so wide that it covered all of the road and parking spaces if the horde was too deep, there probably wouldn’t make it. “Cut a path Nick!”

Everyone in the jeep flinched as the gun started, its sound loud and piercing. They watched as
bodies fell to the ground, a path opening up. Lincoln took the path first, starting from a ways back and picking up speed, his back end fishtailed a bit as he passed over the pile of bodies, losing traction on the blood-soaked ground. He kept going, coming to a stop just past the parking lot, drawing a few of the walkers after him.

“Again!” Anya instructed Nick hoping they had enough ammo loaded to get the other truck through. Raven had started backing it up, giving her a little more distance to build up speed. Nick fired again, wiping out the walkers who had filled in the space he’d previously cleared. He had barely stopped firing when the jeep’s inhabitants felt the rush of wind as Raven barreled past them.

“Oh god, is she gonna be able to stop?” Alicia asked, wide-eyed.

“Not a chance in hell,” Anya mumbled.

Elyza leaned out the passenger seat of her car, whooping as Raven ripped out of the lot. “Race you home losers!” She called.

“Those idiots.” Anya muttered, “Let’s move!” She revved up the engine, “Lincoln you good?”

He gave her a thumbs up and pulled out of the lot, grimacing as they ran into more than one moving corpse milling around them.

Alicia gave a shriek when a pasty white hand reached through her window and started grabbing at her. “They’re getting in!”

“Get the fuck off of her!” Chris leaned over Alicia and punched the person trying to grab her through the window.

Nick rapped the side of the jeep, “Go go go! They’re trying to make friendly back here!” He clung to the roll cage and kicked one in the face, slumping a little bit when Anya revved and her tires sprayed gore for a few seconds before they caught traction on the asphalt. The whole car lurched when they ripped out of the lot, quickly catching up with Lincoln’s truck.

“Well that was..an experience,” Madison grimaced at the mess now covering her, the major downside to the lack of windows.

“The question is why the fuck it happened.” Anya growled, “We weren’t making that much noise, and it shouldn’t have brought in that many.” She looked into the mirror at the still sizeable mass of walkers behind them. “We’ve barely seen any up and walking around, let alone that many in one place.”

“Maybe there are more people moving around in the area now that the fires are gone?” Alicia offered, “We can’t have been the only ones that thought to come back and raid the city.”

Anya tensed, “Not making me feel better kid. That many in a big group probably means that they were trapped somewhere and got out. We need to be more careful.”

“How?” Alicia asked they’d been pretty damn paranoid about everything so far.

“We need to stop driving around the semis, and we definitely need to stop parking them by the school when we’re done. And if there are groups that big moving around, we should take the sound lure by the baseball field and move it back by the football field, just in case it catches something a bit bigger.”

“We should also be a little more careful walking into stores,” Nick shouted into the wind, “Maybe
check out the area, so we aren’t surprised by a group.”

“Agreed.” Anya nodded, “We can’t just run into a place yelling at each other about shit.”

Alicia chewed on her lip, “I don’t know that Raven or Elyza is really going to go for that.”

“They’re smart.” Anya seemed to struggle with that sentence a little bit, “They will understand the necessity of stealth outside the school.”

Chris scoffed, “They already do, that doesn’t mean they’re going to change at all. Raven and Elyza have balls.”

“Don’t say that,” Alicia elbowed him, “It sounds weird.”

“What? They do!” Chris held his side where Alicia had elbowed him, she had some pointy joints on her. “They’re the only ones who stand up to her,” He jerked his chin at Anya, “And dad, and everyone else who gives them shit. They’re the only ones around who still have a spine on them, and I don’t see why they need to be hiding, they know how to take care of themselves just fine. We saw that the first day we met them!”

“It’s not about being able to take care of yourself, Chris,” Anya snapped, “It’s about choosing to do so. They run headfirst into situations that don’t need to be dangerous and make them that way, that’s not being brave or cool, that’s being stupid and trying to get yourself hurt.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re too chicken to do more than hide.” Chris sassed her, arms folded over his chest. For once Travis didn’t shut his son down, as much as he didn’t like hearing Chris being so disrespectful, he didn’t necessarily disagree with Chris either.

Nick reached in through the back hatch and smacked Chris upside the head, “Until you’re smart enough to call for help when a horde shows up, you can shut up.” He didn’t love the idea of hiding all the time, but just because you don’t like a plan doesn’t mean you shove it out the window.

“If they don’t go with it, then what?” Alicia asked, Anya was serious but they’d finally found a safe spot.

Anya didn’t respond because she really didn’t have an answer. If Raven and Elyza are determined to put everyone in danger with their tactics, then maybe the school isn’t the safest place.

“They’ll listen.” Madison reassured Alicia, “They’re not in this to get people hurt.”

“Yeah, but have you met them?” Alicia couldn’t imagine either girl compromising, “They don’t do chill, like ever.”

“Then we compromise, separate teams for scavenging. If they want to risk themselves, that’s their business.” Travis looked between them, “Isn’t that the whole problem? That we are being put in danger? So Elyza and Raven just don’t come with us, and that’s the end of it.”

“That’d work,” Anya shrugged, it would be a pain in the ass, but better than risking their lives. Travis nodded and sat back, “They’ll see reason.”
Elyza threw herself out of the semi breathing hard, “That was crazy.” She informed Raven, trying not to pay attention to the thick coating of red on the hood, “You’re insane.”

Raven laughed breathlessly, slithering out of the semi, “You are most welcome, just know that I charge by the hour but I offer only the purest of adrenaline rushes.”

Elyza snorted, “Trust me, I know.” She stumbled to the back of the truck, her legs still mostly made of jelly, “How long do you think it'll take for the others to catch up?” She looked back at the empty road, “I mean, we cleared the path for them.” She snickered, opening up the back gate and pulled out the loading ramp.

“I dunno, Tarzan drives that semi like it has a bigger ass than the Kardashian collective, he takes those turns slower than you in a calc test.” Raven teased, pulling out the jack.

Elyza shot her a dirty look, “If I didn’t time out of that test with only half of one answer, I would really hate you for that.”

“We can’t all be geniuses.”

“Thank god.” Elyza started packing in the loose materials piled on top of the pallets, “We wouldn’t be able to fit all the egos in the school.”

“Speaking of enormous things that don’t fit in the school.” Raven wiggled her eyebrows.

Elyza blinked, “Please tell me you’re not talking about your lady-boner for Anya.”

“No!” Raven grunted her frustration, “I’m talking about yours for Alicia!”

“No.” Elyza shook her head, “Not a chance.”

“Oh come on! You and I both know it’s not just a banana in your pocket.”

“The last time you tried to help me get a girl, you threw whipped cream at us and told us to get a room.” Elyza accused.

Raven started giggling so hard that she almost got run over by the pallet jack, “Okay, that was comedic gold.”

“And you wonder why I don’t let you help.” Elyza was making a rather sizeable pile of loose tools, screws, light bulb kits, and other random crap that they’d grabbed from home depot in the corner of the storage room. For every one of Raven’s trips to the truck, Elyza made three. “You’re just going to keep it to yourself.”

Raven scoffed, “Okay, you are talking like it’s my goal in life to ruin yours, and… well I mean that’s not my only goal in life. Besides, if we had whipped cream, I would not waste it on you exploring Alicia’s kinky side.” Raven wrinkled her nose, “God, could you imagine cleaning that up with those stupid baby wipes.”

“Yes, it’d suck.” Elyza scoffed, “Especially off the tent and the mattress… At least we have the tubs now to make things decent enough.”
“Just as long as you aren’t having sex in the tub.” Raven warned, “Because I am not bathing in there after that, and we do not have enough to just throw them out willy-nilly.”

“We are not having sex.” yet. She hoped. “And WE are not talking about this, there is no this. There is people, living cramped into the only cafeteria in a three-story school, where the only rule about personal space is that you have to share it.”

“Share it with your crush.” Raven grinned.

Elyza narrowed her eyes, “If you say a word to her, if you even think a word at her, I will tell cheekbones about your seven minutes in heaven with Luna in the seventh grade.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“You said it yourself, you wouldn’t like me if I wasn’t a colossal bitch.” Elyza reminded her.

Raven folded her arms over her chest, “Fine, but when you finally do the dirty with your little squeeze, I’m the first one to know. Got it?”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “Fine. Voyeur.”

“Only on Tuesdays.” Raven gave her a shit-eating grin.

Elyza pointed at her, “Don’t even go there.”

Raven gave a dramatic sigh, “Fiiinnnneee. I don’t see why you get all the blackmail fodder.”

“Not my fault you went to college before I found my rebellious phase.” Elyza gave a pleased wiggle.

Raven rolled her eyes, “You’ve been tagging schools since before you could pronounce ‘illegal’ kid, you just have no shame.”

Elyza laughed, “And you have too much, so who’s the nutcase here?”

“Still you.”

Baby and the other Semi rolled up just in time for Raven to set down the fourth pallet. “About time you bitches showed up!” Raven hollered, one hand cupped around her mouth, “Some asshole decided to let the cripple do all the hard work.” She glared at Elyza who did her best to look innocent.

“Just means you’re good at working through the exhaustion.” Elyza snarked back at her.

Any got out of Baby, slamming the door shut behind her. “Can you take my bag upstairs?” She asked Alicia, handing her the bag when she got a nod.

“Can I talk to you two?” Anya asked, interrupting more bickering between the two girls.

They stopped moving stuff out of the truck and looked at her, waiting for her to continue, “Alone.” They exchanged a look, shrugged and followed Anya into the school and down to the pool.

“What’s up cheekbones?” Raven asked, dropping to the floor and leaning back, legs outstretched. Elyza joined her sitting cross-legged.

“Today can’t happen again.” Anya ran her fingers through her hair, “That shit could have gotten us
“Uh, what in particular?” Raven asked, like she hadn’t been there too.

“For one that horde showing up, if we didn’t have the gun on Baby we would have died,” Anya grimaced, thinking about all of the blood and bits inside of Baby.

Elyza took a deep breath, “We can’t just stop them from showing up Anya, the vehicles make as much noise as we do, and we can’t walk, that’s just suicide.”

“Which is why we shouldn’t take the semi’s out anymore, we shouldn’t be drawing that much attention to ourselves.” Anya retorted.

“I guess we could take the vehicles,” Raven shrugged, “Of course by the time we fuel all three of them up we’ll have used more gas, Travis’ truck is a piece of shit rust bucket that makes more noise than sorority girls winning a shopping spree, and we’ll have to make more trips to get what we need. Sofas won’t fit in the trucks.”

“So we replace it.” Anya took note of that, “And we go on smaller trips. No more big runs.”

“We still need furniture, but after that we can retire the semis, drain the saddle tanks and leave them for scrap.” Elyza agreed.

“And you can’t just leave when shit hits the fan like you did today.” Anya brought up her next point, “You had no fucking clue if we got Baby out from behind the horde, you were already gone.”

Raven raised an eyebrow, “You can back the fuck up right here cheekbones. That’s an eighteen-wheeled monstrosity loaded to the ceiling with building materials that I had to drive across a parking lot of bodies piled two and three deep back there, if we slowed down, then we would have gotten stuck and swarmed. And by the time we got out, we couldn’t stop without rolling the whole rig. So you can take that shit and shove it. I trusted you to take care of the kids and you did.” She didn’t say it, but Raven wouldn’t have trusted anyone else to take care of Madi like that.

“Look it’s probably something we should figure out for the future,” Elyza waved her hand, needing Raven to calm down, “But if the semis are going to be out then it will be different anyway, so we’ll just have to figure out caravan protocol. Anything else?” Elyza was tired, it had been an unexpectedly emotional day.

“One last thing,” Anya hesitated, she really couldn’t see this going well, “We..uh, well you two need to be quieter when we’re out there. You draw too much attention to us with your..antics and it’s going to bring us trouble.”

“Fun story,” Elyza pursed her lips, “If it weren’t for our ‘antics’,” She finger quoted, “Then I would be dead right now. I heard a noise and called out and if I hadn’t, I would have run right into a dozen of those dead fuckers hiding in plain sight. So I get where you’re coming from, but I would rather know they’re there, so I know where to run, then shit my pants 24/7 wondering if the next door I open is full of people looking to eat me.”

Anya sighed, pinching her nose. “If we ran into that horde with the cars in formation there’s a chance that we couldn’t have blown our way through, but if we hadn’t been so loud, maybe they wouldn’t have been there at all.”

“It’s better to have a thousand enemies outside your walls, than one inside.” Elyza quoted, “I’m not going to hide from what’s out there for fear that I’m going to find more of it, that’s not intelligent,
and it’s just as likely to get us killed.”

“Those fuckers are drawn to sound. Whether it’s the sound of a vehicle, or the sound of a cart crashing or the sound of us talking.” Raven shifted, she could see both sides of this argument, “We have no idea what drew them to us, it really could have been when Travis’ cart fell, or the carts squeaking. But we really didn’t have any idea what was around us.” Raven shrugged, not really sure where she was going with this.

“We need to perimeter check places before we go inside, we haven’t done that and that might have given us more warning.” Anya ran her hand through her hair again, it was going to be a rat’s nest if she didn’t stop soon.

“We can be more careful, I can agree to that.” Elyza nodded, “Vet the place, but I’m not spending hours wandering around shopping in silence. I’m pretty sure that’s only ever happened in my nightmares.”

“Yours and mine both,” Raven smiled and shoulder bumped her best friend. She turned back to Anya, “And maybe we look into some sort of decoy, like the boombox in the baseball fields to draw the walkers out and away from us in an area so we’re prepped for them instead of being taken by surprise...Maybe a radio-controlled car with music attached.” She started thinking out loud.

Anya nodded, “Sounds good to me.” She was relieved that neither of them had flipped out on her. Much, and that they were willing to compromise. Sorta. Anya was far too tired to deal with any kind of serious drama. God, she’s so glad that Travis and Madison didn’t find the damn school. That would be hell.

“We good?” Elyza asked. Raven nodded.

“Well..” Anya ran her hand through her hair again, “about those baths.”

“I don’t even give a fuck, I just want to lay down.” Elyza mimicked Anya, “I vote we leave the semis for tomorrow and call it a day.”

“Not cool.” Anya groused, she’d been desperate for a bath since Lyza had mentioned it earlier that day.

“Seconded,” Raven replied.

“And the motion passes.” Elyza threw her arms up, “The tubs were the first thing we unloaded and that’s all anyone gives a shit about anyway. I’m going to bed.”

“She always such a bitch?” Anya asked, she’d actually fallen for it and thought she’d have to wait for a bath.

Raven looked Anya over with a lot less flirtiness than usual, “I mean, you’re the bitch who brought up her mom. You deserve it.”

Anya grimaced a bit, “Ok yeah, I do.”

Raven thought about saying more, but instead, she just turned around and followed Elyza upstairs.
...Sorry? I know we promised to have this done and get you caught up but life's a bitch. Medical shit, family shit, and the last 6 chapters are taking more mental energy to write than the previous 30. BUT I should get the last of it done today or tomorrow and then we will back in business.

“Raven, how can you snore so loud?” Octavia grouched as she plopped down on the bench beside the girl in question. She dropped her head on the table, tired from trying to sleep through the noise, “Do we have ear plugs somewhere?”

“I’ve got some in my bag,” Anya offered, she stood up at a nod from Octavia and went to rummage through her bag.

“That was nothing, she wasn’t bad last night.” Elyza leaned against Octavia, “It’s worse when she’s tired, stays up too late and has taken pain meds.”

“Who has pain meds?” Nick’s head popped up in interest.

“No one.” Raven, Elyza, and Anya spoke in unison as Anya came back with a bag of earplugs and handed them to Octavia.

“And I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Raven continued, “I slept great.”

“You may have slept great, but no one else did.” Bellamy groused, “Even I don’t snore that badly.”

The group fell into a tired silence, content to just share company while they waited for Madison and Travis to finish making breakfast. When Madison called for Nick and Alicia to fetch the tableware, Elyza got up and braved Madi’s tent, not willing to bribe her with chocolate this morning to get her up and going.

“What’s the plan for today?” Lincoln asked, in between shoveling oatmeal into his mouth. “Get the semis unloaded?”

Everyone nodded in agreement, “As soon as we get the semis unloaded, we need to take one to a furniture store and get all that shit.” Elyza said.

The Manawa-Clark group exchanged a look, shooting confused glances at Anya. Hadn’t they covered this yesterday?

“We should decide where we’re going to park the semis when we’re done with the furniture run.” Raven spoke with her mouth full, “I know we said we were done with using the semis and big runs,” She said to Anya, “But I think we should keep it somewhere usable in case we need to make a quick exit.”

“Not that quick,” Bellamy protested, “It’d take a while to load them up with the shit we’d need.”

“It wouldn’t be nuclear bomb being dropped on top of us quick,” Raven pointed out, “But 24 hours
is all it’d take to get it loaded with essentials and be gone.”

“So we aren’t going to be using the semis again?” Travis questioned, wanting to be sure.

Anya shook her head, “Not after the furniture run. We’ll leave them somewhere away from the school too, so they don’t draw attention to us.”

“I’m going for furniture, I want a comfortable chair,” Madison slid along the bench, getting a thigh caught as she tried to stand too soon. “And a real dining table.”

“I can go be muscle,” Lincoln offered.

“We need to get the animals figured out today, they like you better than me,” Bellamy practically pouted.

“I need to go on the furniture run too,” Raven directed to Bellamy, “I won’t be able to help with the animals today, or at least not until we get back.” She gave him a pointed look, “You could get started on blowing out walls without me, it's not rocket science.”

Bellamy’s eyes widened and he shifted in his seat, “Uh, I’ve never done anything like that.”

“Anything like that?” Octavia scoffed, “Bro, you’ve never touched a hammer, screwdriver or wrench in your life.”

“I did yesterday!”

“That doesn’t count, you threw stuff into a cart. I mean to use it,” Octavia poked at him.

“I can stay and help with construction.” Travis offered.

“Great, it’s all marked. If it’s got an X take it down, except for the windows, those just need to be damaged so the school looks more..apocalypse-y.” Raven instructed, stacking her bowl into Elyza’s who’d just stood to take her dishes into the kitchen, she ignored the protest Elyza gave her.

“Let’s get the Depot truck emptied first, the other one has tons of little shit in it that’s going to be a pain in the ass to empty.” Raven awkwardly swung out from the table, almost tipping her ass onto the floor at one point.

Anya rolled her eyes and grabbed Raven’s elbow to give her a point to stabilize on, and waited for Raven to be vertical before she let go. “Come on gimpy.” She took off at a quick clip for the loading zone.

“Hey! Wait up!” Raven grouched, limping after Anya. She growled when Anya did no such thing and grimaced with each step, “I’m talking to you blondie!”

Elyza’s head popped up from her speed nap, “What?” She looked around blearily.

Alicia suppressed a smile and patted Elyza’s head, “Go back to sleep.”

Elyza nodded and slumped back against the table, already asleep again. Madi glared at Elyza sleepily, “How come she gets to just pass out on command but I get to stare at my tent for hours every night?”

“Some people are just born lucky honey.” Madison reassured her, “Maybe you’ll grow out of it. I know Alicia used to be quite the insomniac growing up, but now she sleeps just fine.”
Madi looked over and Alicia nodded, smiling at the girl. There was a little tightness around the corners of her eyes, but no one really seemed to notice. She was never an insomniac, her dad just stopped working late. He stopped working at all.

“Humph.” Madi rested her chin on her arms, “So I get to go insane from lack of sleep or wish for puberty, no thank you.”

“Puberty isn’t all that bad.” Madison waved her off, “You’ll survive.”

“Puberty opens doors to all sorts of new fun things,” Elyza piped up.
Alicia snorted, “You woke up for that?”

Elyza popped her up, “I will always wake up for sex.”

“I’m going to go help the boys unload the car.” Madison turned around and headed for the stairs rather directly.

“Do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars.” Elyza snort-giggled, her face smushed onto her arm, “Your mom is easy.” She informed Alicia.

“I think she might say the same about you.” Alicia grinned.

Madi barked out a laugh and quickly covered her mouth, “Sorry Lyza.”

Elyza smiled lazily and flailed her arm, “It’s all good, she can think what she likes. I know I’m a classy lady.”

“I don’t feel like leaving today, so what are we going to do?” Madi asked, leaning against Elyza.

Elyza slung an arm around Madi’s shoulders, “I would suggest more binge-drinking, but I find that most parental units can sniff out a hangover from a mile away unless they are also hungover.” She tapped her nose, “Which leaves us with rampant vandalism, group naps of the PG variety for you kid.” She poked Madi’s nose, “Or a romp in the baseball field.” She looked around like she was about to share a secret, “At least one of these is going to get us in an assload of trouble, hopefully, more than one.”

“How can a nap be anything other than PG?” Madi asked in confusion.

Alicia snorted, “That comes with puberty.” She ruffled Madi’s hair, smiling when the younger girl ducked out from under her hand, “I vote on baseball or vandalism, then nap.”

Elyza sighed and stretched her arms out in front of her, “When was the last time you handled a spray can?”

“The last time you gave me one.” Alicia sounded hesitant suddenly.

Elyza blinked, “Shit, that’s right. You ever use one to paint something?” Madi giggled at them.

“I thought we covered that last time,” Alicia was rubbing her left arm while she spoke.

Elyza frowned, staring at Alicia’s arm, then her mouth fell open into a nicely framed ‘o’. “And then Nick ran in like a dick, I remember.” She nodded to herself, “You know what we could do instead of vandalism? We could make that thing permanent.” Elyza tapped Alicia’s arm.

“Huh?” Alicia’s head had snapped up, eyes focused on Elyza.
Elyza gestured to the ink underneath Alicia’s hand, “We could make that mark permanent, I’ve seen you messing with it a lot,” Elyza said, “Seems important and important things should be kept.”

Alicia stilled even more, “My mom will kill me..” She said, not really seeming like she was talking to anyone specific.

“I did say that all of my plans ended with us getting in trouble.” Elyza turned to actually face Alicia, straddling the bench, “Besides, it would be my honor to take credit for vandalizing your body.”

Alicia blushed and laughed, “It sounds weird when you say it like that.”

“It does.” Madi agreed, her pointy little chin digging into Elyza’s shoulder.

Elyza gave her a look, “Well I can’t ink you up until you’re at least fifteen, OR you can hold your liquor, whichever one happens first. So, for now, my best canvas is sitting in front of us.”

Madi wrinkled her nose, “Can we try something other than beer next time?”

“Tequila.” Alicia agreed, “Or I can mix up some shots if we can find the schnapps?”

“So are we doing this?” Elyza

Alicia nibbled on her lip for a moment before nodding, “Yeah, but we should find somewhere out of the way just in case someone comes looking for us.”

“I love it. Madi, you grab the generator, I’ll grab my kit and we’ll head for the third floor.” Elyza rubbed her hands together with a wicked grin.

“What’s on the third floor?” Madi quirked her head, not sure they had gone up there except to access the roof for the gardens, which she had also only seen in passing. Elyza had taken it on as her personal project up there, and as such, no one else’s business.

“A couple of bigger classrooms, and the gym. That’s about it.” Elyza shrugged, “The left half of the floor is cut off to make room for the gym ceiling.”

Madi lugged the small generator, struggling just a bit to carry it.

“Here, let me help you with that.” Alicia grabbed the bottom edge and helped lift it up the edge of the stairs.

Elyza waved them into a classroom just across from double doors. “Here,” She gestured beside her. It took a few minutes for her to get everything set up and organized, “Are we doing black like the original? Or color?”

Alicia was sitting across from her, growing more antsy by the second, “Uhm, I don’t really know.” She fingered the heart carefully inked across her forearm, “I-I think…” She bit her lip, trailing off.

Elyza pulled out a pad of paper and some colored pencils. A few quick strokes outlined the distorted heart drawn on Alicia’s arm, she repeated the shape, filling one in with all black, one in a black and white color gradient and one in a rainbow gradient, “We can also do a solid color inside, ink your boyfriends name with the white space, we could do a watercolor version or we could take these thick lines,” Elyza traced her finger over Alicia’s arm, “And fill them with scrollwork.”
Alicia blinked, a little overwhelmed by all the different options in front of her.

Madi could see how overwhelmed Alicia was, “If it was me I’d leave it the way it is, maybe with his name,” She had no idea whose name but that didn’t matter, “You can always do something different next time.”

Alicia nodded, “I don’t think I want his name,” She went quiet, trying to avoid talking about how much it would hurt to see his name there all the time, “But I’ll leave it the way it is.”

Elyza nodded, “Names can be a...not great idea. For many reasons.” Elyza pulled out the black ink and got her tools arranged, a short snap of gloves later and she was ready to start.

Alicia clenched her jaw a little bit, trying to brace for pain, and anything else that might happen. Elyza’s gentle, business-like treatment of her arm with the antiseptic and application of the stencil were calming, but she could still feel her heart racing when Elyza hunched over her forearm.

“Relax,” Elyza smiled up at her, “It’s not half so bad as you think it’ll be.” She looked down to her work and the buzzing of the machine filled the room with a nice static background noise.

Alicia relaxed after the first few minutes, sure it hurt but it had settled into a buzzing sting. It was a relief to know that it wasn’t going to be agony.

Madi looked on in rapt focus, “That is so cool!”

Elyza hummed in response, not looking away from her work.

“Shhh,” Alicia chided, “You don’t want her to mess it up. We don’t exactly have any laser surgeons or whatever just sitting around.”

Elyza pulled her machine back to refill it with ink at just the right time so that her twitch left a few droplets of splattered ink on the table instead of a jerked line across Alicia’s arm, “I’m not going to lose focus over Madi.” She didn’t look up, “I’m used to having clients and friends hovering over my work, just don’t move.” She wiped Alicia’s arm carefully before getting back to her work.

Elyza finished up and leaned back, doing a slow wiggle from side to side to stretch out the small kinks that had formed. It wasn’t bad and she’d definitely had worse kinks after really long sessions, but it still left her achy. She grabbed a tube and began spreading the Aquaphor on the finished ink before covering it with the gauze pad and taping it down.

“Keep it covered and dry for 24 hours, then you’ll need to put this stuff on it.” Elyza waved the tube, “for the next three days, clean skin only. I’ll keep an eye on it too.” She started collecting her trash, dropping the used needle into a tupperware box. It’d do for sharps disposal.

“So this is my ticket to staying home for the next few days?” Alicia joked.

“You get this bitch dirty and I will personally skin it off you,” Elyza jabbed a finger Alicia turned pale and she nodded, “Okay.” She squeaked. “Clean as a whistle.”

“Damn straight,” Elyza waited a beat before offering a smile, “But I’m not worried about it, you seem like one of the smart ones.”

“Do I really have to wait til I’m fifteen?” Madi bounced and whined, “I want one.”

Elyza snorted, “You take that up with Raven, she’s the one worried about needles and permanent
marks and all of that jazz, just know that I’m only kidding about the cleanliness so long as you keep it fucking clean.”

Madi rolled her eyes, “I’m Raven’s favorite so I can convince her.” She offered a smug grin, “And you’ll make sure I’m good.”

“I’m not touching shit until I have it in writing.” Elyza replied with a smirk, “We both know she’ll take it back as soon as you turn around.”

“Really? In writing?” Madi whined.

“Do you even know what you want?” Alicia questioned her.

Madi shrugged, “I just thought I would let Elyza decide.”

“Genius plan.” Elyza rolled her eyes, “I’m not taking a blank check from you until your third tatt, because I don’t have a portfolio to show you, and I don’t know what the hell you like.”

“What’s your favorite thing, ever?” Alicia asked, trying to help her come up with something.

“Harry Potter and Minnie Mouse.” Madi didn’t even hesitate.

“Oooh, a really small pair of Minnie ears OR you could do the Deathly Hallows triangle.” Alicia looked excited.

Elyza groaned, “Please god no. Let me do an illustration of Dramione riding a hippogriff, or the blind dragon in the basement of Gringotts fighting Minnie mouse, or fucking Fantasia, just not mouse ears and that dumb triangle. You know how many zombies out there have that triangle? A lot. Because there are a lot of dead nerds out there.”

“Tell us how you really feel.” Madi drawled.

“Come on, it can’t be that bad!” Alicia protested, “They’re cute, and who cares if someone else has them?”

“Not someone else. Every fucking other person out there.” Elyza dropped her head into her hands, “I did those stupid things for half of my first hundred flash tatts.” She stood up and turned around, yanking up the back of her shirt to show off a tattoo of four women, faces skeletal, riding horses into a cloud of mist. “This is the kind of thing that you permanently mark on your flesh, it means something and is an independent work of art. And when I’m old and dead or fuck it even the walking dead, someone’s going to see this and have to stop and admire it. They are going to fucking cry if they have to damage my art.”

Madi’s mouth was hanging a little open, enraptured by the mixture of words and artistry. She reached out hesitanty, “Can I touch it?” She asked reverently.

Elyza grinned and nodded, “Sure thing.”

Madi gently brushed her fingers over Elyza’s skin, watching the art shift and move when Elyza breathed. “That’s amazing.”

“He was one hell of an artist.” Elyza agreed, looking over at Alicia to see the other girl staring too. “I would say take a picture, but I already did that.” Elyza joked, releasing her shirt to nudge Alicia, “You okay over there?”
“What?” Alicia startled a bit, “Oh, yeah, yeah I’m fine.” She gestured to Elyza’s back, “It really is beautiful.”

Elyza’s smile softened and she ducked her head a bit, “Thanks.”

Madi waited for the sexual remark, or some kind of commentary about Alicia being allowed for a free viewing anytime and was confused when that didn’t happen. In fact, Elyza and Alicia were just looking at each other weirdly.

Madi narrowed her eyes, “Is this another puberty thing?”

“I still think we should go to La-Z-boy, not..” Raven squinted, “RC fucking Wiley? Who names their store willy? That’s just asking for it.”

“It’s not willy, it’s Wiley, like Wil-E-Coyote,” Lincoln corrected her not wanting to hear willy jokes all day.

“I thought it was Wile-ey? Like the coyote.” Octavia tilted her head, “Right?”

Raven sighed, “That’s so much less fun. Besides, this sectional definitely doesn’t go with our living room.” She threw her arms up in the air, “And what are we going to do about these throw pillows?”

“Oh no!” Octavia mock gasped, “Those stripes with this leather! Whatever shall we do?”

Any chalked said striped pillow at Octavia, “We move the damn thing.”

“Why did we pick the biggest fucking sofa in the place?” Raven asked, watching everyone else grunting as they tried to maneuver through the maze of furniture with the different parts of the sofa.

“Because you have a penchant for adopting strays,” Lincoln grunted.

Chris raised his hand and waited patiently for someone to give a shit about his existence while he watched the others struggle with their heavy loads.

“What is it, Chris?” Madison grunted as she noticed him, damn this thing was heavy.

“Why aren’t we using the carts?” He pointed to the large-ish lorries in the corner of the showroom.

Raven squinted at him, trying to figure out if he was serious, “Because this bitch is wider than the aisles? We’d have to move the rest of this stuff to use one and the sofa would still be too damn big for it.”

He blinked, looking between the carts and then to the sections of the couch, and the aisles, “Huh, nevermind.”

Octavia rolled her eyes, “Thanks genius. You want to come help now? That’s why you’re here right?”

Chris pouted a bit, “Why isn’t she helping, then?” He pointed to Raven.
“Let’s educate you in the universe of Satan’s children,” Raven gestured to her leg, “I am a cripple, and as such do not need to help with heavy weight lifting as I am even more useless than you. However, I am also an engineer, which means that I am intelligent enough to figure out the path of least resistance to get shit from point A to point B.” Raven explained in the most condescending tone she could muster.

Chris just grunted before finally joining the others in carrying the sofa. Despite his joining in though, no one felt like the weight they were carrying had been lessened.

Raven gave the last of the directions before hurrying over to prop the doors open, standing back out of the way as they finally maneuvered the sofa up into the back of the truck.

“We’ve got one big ass sofa, we need one more. Dining table, chairs, and beds.” Raven practically squealed in joy at the last.

“Maybe we should get an extra sofa,” Madison wiped her forehead shocking everyone at the suggestion. She noticed and shrugged, “Like he said,” She gestured to Lincoln, “You like to take in strays. And having more than one place to relax in wouldn’t be a bad thing.”

Raven looked to Anya, as she was slowly becoming one of the de facto leaders with Elyza and Raven, not to mention being part of the heavy lifters. “Opinions?”

“What’s the worst that could happen?” Anya muttered under her breath, turning back to the store, “You guys get that sectional loaded while I work on the next one.”

Anya came out again, shoving one of the lorries with two reclining chairs resting on it, “I’ve got this one and one other loaded, and I shoved two more sofas into the aisle. They’re smaller so we might be able use the cart?”

“Holy shit woman, it’s only been forty-five minutes!” Raven exclaimed, “You sit down.”

“We are getting this shit done,” Anya growled.

“Yes we are, but that doesn’t mean you need to go crazy and hurt yourself over it.” Raven snapped, “You,” She put her hands on Anya’s shoulders, “Sit.” She pushed down hard.

Anya grumbled under her breath, not budging under the pressure of Raven’s hands. She ignored the smaller girl, who was now applying more pressure to force her to sit, “Are you done loading that beast yet?”

Raven growled and pushed harder on Anya’s shoulders, and all activity on the truck stopped as Raven started climbing Anya in an attempt to make her sit down. Anya did not smile, somehow, nor did she respond to Raven’s antics at all, but even Lincoln was laughing at the two of them.

“We’re having a hard time getting this bit to fit.” Madison nudged the biggest chunk of the sofa with her foot.

“I told them to just shove it in,” Raven grunted, still half-hanging off Anya’s torso. “But Nick over there started making ‘that’s what she said’ jokes and now we’re trying to make you sit down woman! God, what are you even made of? Are you real?” Raven latched her legs around Anya’s waist and started poking her face, “Are you like a statue or something, possessed by the soul of a cranky asshole?”

Anya barked out a short laugh, she just couldn’t hold it back anymore, damn it. She wrapped her hands around Raven’s waist, leaned in and whispered in her ear. Raven blushed and dropped her
legs, while Anya held her up, slowly lowering her to the ground.

Raven coughed a little bit, trying to cover for herself while she stood up and dusted herself off, “Anyway, let’s get this bitch loaded!” She yelled, trying to distract everyone by making them work.

“What did she say?” Nick asked, looking at Anya with a tinge of awe. Not even Elyza could get Rae to change gears that fast unless Raven was already planning to do so.

“If you don’t get that sofa loaded in the next five minutes, I’m going to start throwing these chairs on your head,” Anya interrupted, not willing to risk Raven repeating her words.

Not that Raven would, she was still in recovery, and almost as worried that Anya would repeat herself.

A few more struggles and the sectional was finally loaded. Madison was still protesting that it would get damaged as it shifted in transit, but she was the only one worried about it.

“It’s not like we’re worried about resale value.” Lincoln shrugged her commentary off, “We can always patch any damage to the frames if it fractures.”

“Elyza’s good with needles, right? She could fix the fabric.” Chris suggested.

“Wrong kind of needles kid.” Raven rolled her eyes. She walked back into the store, dragging Nick by the sleeve. Time to get some real beds.

With Lincoln and Madison in the truck, Chris and Anya (mostly Anya) managed to get all the armchairs and couches loaded up about the same time Raven and Nick returned with a massive bundle of frame pieces tied together into a piecemeal log.

“We’ve got two more of these things in the bedroom section,” Nick motioned to Anya to help him lift the log up.

“I got’em.” Lincoln jumped out of the semi and ran for the other two bundles. He’s done moving shit for the day, and the minute they close the truck doors, he can sit down and relax.

Anya and Nick got the first bundle loaded and were ready for the next two bundles when Lincoln rolled them out on the final lorry. Lincoln got each of them handed up and was relieved when the doors were closed once they were in. “Can we go home now?” He asked, looking to no one in particular.

“Yes.” Madison was just as enthusiastic as Lincoln was. “Can we not unload the semi until tomorrow?”

Raven pouted just a bit, then perked up “We can let those bitches that stayed home unload. I want a bed tonight.”

“Of all your plans, I can actually agree with that one,” Anya said.

“Oh come on! Using an Iron Maiden for the front door would be awesome.” Raven groused, “And you know it.”

“I know nothing of the sort.” Anya sniffed, climbing into the driver’s seat of the semi, “Let’s load up people.” She called.
Raven whined the whole way home about Anya getting to drive, right up until Anya narrowed her eyes and raised an eyebrow at Raven, then the latina clamped her mouth shut and stared straight ahead.

“Oh Wilma, we’re home!” Raven called up through the elevator shaft.

“About damn time!” Elyza snapped, using their pallet-elevator thingy to lower herself down, “You guys have been gone forever.”

“Sorry dear, there was a brontosaurus parked in the driveway.” Raven joked.

Elyza nodded sagely, “Sat down for too long? I would say you’re more of an Apatosaurus, but that’s just me.”

“What?” Raven was confused.

“I’m…” Elyza sighed, “I was calling you a bigass dinosaur. It’s fine, just, where’s the stuff we need to move?”

“Did you get something comfortable?” Bellamy asked.

“Holy shit, Bell!” Octavia wrinkled her nose, backing away from her brother, “You reek, what the hell have you been doing.”

He scratched his neck and fished a few pieces of straw out of his collar, “Laying down bedding, solving disputes between the goats and one of the chickens, normal stuff. That and major construction in between rabbit escapes.”

“One of those fuckers escaped?” Raven jumped back out in horror, putting...everyone else between her and any escaped bunnies.

“We caught it, oh my god, you’d think they’re vampires or something.” Bellamy rolled his eyes, “And to think you were so excited about them when we first dragged them in.”

“That was before they started smelling and escaping and shit.” Raven defended herself.

“ Especially before the shit,” Elyza added.

Octavia raised a finger, “I think that two of those are closely related.”

Bellamy grumbled, “Well if you guys are gonna be assholes, I’m going to go back to my smelly rabbits.”

“Not a chance.” Lincoln clapped his hand on Bellamy’s shoulder, “You and Travis get to move all of this, upstairs.” He jerked his thumb behind him, “Or most of it anyway. We can leave the sectional until tomorrow.”

“If I have to help, then so do those three,” Bellamy gestured to the three girls that had stayed behind, “They vanished right after you left and only came down when you showed up.”

The girls glared at him, “Wow Mama Bell, thanks for keeping track of us.” Elyza snarked at him, obviously a bit pissed off.

“If you wanted help with your stuff, all you had to do was ask,” Alicia crossed her arms in front of her.
“Alicia!” Madison hurried towards her daughter, arms outstretched as she reached for her arm, “What happened, are you alright?”

Alicia yanked her arm back from her mom, tucking it against her body. “I’m fine Mom,” she shifted from side to side.

Anyà walked behind Alicia, grabbing her shoulders and spinning her around. She used the girls’ confusion to pull her arm away from her body, peeling the bandage down, “Oh.” Anyà raised her eyebrows in surprise before glancing up and behind Alicia to see a very anxious and pissed off Madison, “Good luck with that.” Anyà smoothed the bandage back in place, finally letting go of Alicia.

“What? Good luck with what?” Madison was starting to panic now.

Alicia turned when she was nudged with an elbow, “I told you to wear a hoodie,”

“Really?” Alicia complained, “You’re going to tell me ‘I told you so’ now?”

“Well, she did tell you.” Madi shrugged, “About the hoodie and the trouble.”

“It was her idea in the first place.” Alicia protested, gesturing to Elyza.

The person in question smirked, “My idea was generic vandalism, you’re the one who picked the how.”

“You vandalized my daughter??” Madison exclaimed, not exactly sure if that was a reference to sex or something worse, considering the bandage.

“As much as I love the whole concerned mother thing, can we just tell her now so she can shriek at us while we move stuff? I want to sleep tonight.” Elyza asked Alicia, leaving it up to her. “And as I warned, there’s an earful waiting for us.”

Alicia sighed, “Mom she gave me a tattoo.”

“You what?” Madison stormed over to Alicia, reaching for her arm when Elyza stepped in between them.

“No.”

“Excuse me?” Madison paused, “Get out of my way.”

“No.” Elyza shoved her hands in her pockets, “Look at yourself, you’re covered in dirt and sweat and who knows what other shit, you aren’t touching an open wound so that you can feel some kind of maternal stimuli while you shout at your kid. If Alicia deigns to show you, and you wash your hands, then knock yourself out, but you aren’t grabbing at a fresh tatt with your nasty hands.”

“How dare you talk to me like that.”

“How dare you risk Alicia’s life over something so stupid as hygiene,” Elyza replied placidly.

“You’re the one stabbing my daughter full of holes in the first place.”

“Yeah, to remember someone important to her, and to commemorate a story permanently on her skin. I’d say that’s a lot more important than what you were gonna do.” Elyza refused to back down, “Additionally, I’ve actually had training to poke people full of holes, are you experienced in how to deal with the damage wound contamination would cause?”
Madison huffed and grabbed Alicia’s other arm, hauling her further into the school, “Don’t think I’m done, Elyza.” She called over her shoulder, still dragging Alicia behind her.

“You did know you were going catch shit for that, right?” Raven scolded Elyza.

“I get you don’t like needles Rae, but the mark on her arm was just as important to her as mechanics are to you. Just because she wasn’t born with it on her skin doesn’t mean that it doesn’t belong there.” Elyza defended herself.

“Alicia and Madison will deal with it now,” Anya decided they could discuss this til the moon turned green if she let them, “I want to sleep in a real bed, so help unload.” She nudge Elyza towards the truck.

Elyza shook her head, “Yeah, sure.” She started grabbing stuff, and despite her protests of being unathletic, the last few weeks had done a lot to bring them all closer to athleticism, or at least the capacity for manual labor. She used her frustration to fuel her, and Elyza ended up moving more than anyone else as Travis and Bellamy were exhausted by their efforts, and Alicia was getting the inquisition upstairs.

Every other lap or so, Alicia would glance at Elyza and wish she hadn’t been as big a jerk about the whole telling her mom thing. Elyza had done her a favor, and she didn’t really deserve the shittalk she was getting from Madison. Elyza may not be girl-next-door level of perfect, but she isn’t some ‘irresponsible, reckless teenager who’s going to get everyone around her hurt if she doesn’t start-‘.

“Alicia, are you even listening?” Madison growled.

“Uh,” Alicia glanced back, “Elyza’s a terrible person, I shouldn’t be her friend, and you don’t trust anyone under the age of thirty to know a donut from their own ass.”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you.” Madison admitted, looking a little defeated, “You used to be such a good girl Alicia.”

“Oh, you mean when Nick was so fucked up that you didn’t have time for me? You mean when you were so busy chasing after him that I had to pay the damn bills and clean the house and do the fucking shopping?” Alicia was furious, “You thought I was a good girl because I stood back and took care of everything so that you could ignore your responsibility to me in favor of running after the one who wanted nothing to do with you.” Alicia took a breath, calming herself down, “You’ve never known a damn thing about me Mom, and as soon as I turned 18 I was going to be gone, only unlike Nick, you would have never been able to drag me back.” Alicia’s voice had become deadly calm and she stood, “You may be my Mother, but you stopped being my Mom a long time ago, and I’m tired of you pretending otherwise.”

Madison stood stock still, watching Alicia turn away from her and walk over to Elyza, helping with the armchair she was dragging across the room. The two struggled past Anya who was watching Madison’s shock with approval. A calloused hand landed on Alicia’s shoulder before the soldier got back to work, and Madison watched all of this, wondering when everything changed.

When did everything get so wrong that her baby girl was speaking to her like this? What did she do that all of her family wanted nothing to do with her.

Nick eventually took pity on his mother and stood beside her. “She doesn’t mean it.. Well, she means it.” He pursed his lips, “But she would have written, sent gift cards for Christmas.” He bumped his mother’s shoulder with his own, deciding that reassuring people is not his strong suit, “She’ll come around.”
“You really think she means it?” Madison asked, doubt filling her.

“Yeah,” Nick stated like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “When has Lycia ever said something she didn’t mean?”

“You good?” Elyza asked Alicia, “That was some hard shit you just said.” She jerked her chin at Madison’s shocked face.

Alicia nodded stiffly, “Fine.”

“Yeah, I don’t believe that,” Elyza scoffed, “I’m here when you feel like talking.”

Alicia nodded again and worked in silence.

By the end of the day, everyone was quiet, gathered around their canned beans with the enthusiasm of a long day’s work and little else. They moved to their respective tents. The only break in the silence was when Elyza passed Alicia a bottle of Aquaphor for her arm. Every one of them slept like the dead.
Broccoli kills

Chapter Summary

Broccoli kills and naps are necessary.

Chapter Notes

Two in one week! That hasn't happened in months, but I needed to celebrate our current progress somehow, lol. Enjoy and Comment!!!

“Are you planning on getting up today?” Nick popped his head into Anya’s tent, ducking out again when he saw a bare back sprawled on the bed, “Oh shit, sorry.”


“Uh, just, uh, wondering if you want food today? Or, you know, if you plan on leaving your tent, or whatever.” Nick stuttered, mortified.

“No.” There was a soft thump of her face landing on her pillow again and Nick nodded.

“Okay, sleep tight.” Nick backed up with his hands up.

Nick wandered around the cafeteria, no one was really up and moving, though usually someone had been asked to take care of breakfast at this point. He paused by his Mom and Travis’ tent, hesitating before pulling on the semi-open zipper, not wanting a repeat of Anya’s tent.

“Can I come in?” He asked, shaking the flap to the tent. He ducked in, kneeling on the canvas floor when he got the ok. “Nobody else is awake, should we start breakfast or something?”

“Do what you like.” Madison flapped a hand, “I doubt anyone’s going to be moving around today.”

“Well, shouldn’t we take of them?” Nick asked.

“No, they can take care of themselves.” Madison didn’t feel like helping anyone today.

Nick frowned, recognizing the lethargy in her. Like an old friend, Madison’s depression is back for a visit. “Okay, well, don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” He muttered, crawling back out of the tent.

He heard through the thin fabric, “Sounds like a plan.” And then the clink of heavy glass bottles. Nick sighed, Madison drinking was never a good thing. He went into the pantry, rummaging around for something quick. A granola bar in hand, he bumped into Octavia on the way out, “Hey, what are you up to today? Doesn’t seem like anyone else is leaving their tents today.”

“Breakfast.” She shook her oatmeal packet. “I think I’m going to veg, but I saw Raven up a while
ago with a sledgehammer? She was humming, and awake so I just kinda let her be.”

Nick whistled, “Fair.” He looked down at his granola, “I think I’m going to see what the Library
has to offer.”

Octavia nodded, pulling a bowl down and opening her oatmeal, “Catch you later.”

He waved and meandered downstairs.

On the far side of the building, Raven had a little cd player set up with some janky country Christmas music she’d found in one of the teacher’s desks, and she set to work smashing through walls before the sun had fully risen over the horizon. She didn’t much like the way that Elyza had been acting, but nobody would talk to her, and that left her with one option. Destruction.

The guys had gotten one of the walls torn down the day before, who the fuck knew why it had taken all day to knock down one fucking wall. “Lazy ass, ineptitude,” Raven muttered under her breath, taking a solid swing at the wall. She ignored the twinge in her lower back, it was nice to do something physical..that didn’t involve running for your life.

She hefted the hammer and curled her whole body into the swing, grinning when the heavy hunk of metal chopped down through drywall and wiring. It’s satisfying, to feel the crunch, to watch the wall crumble with almost no effort at all after the initial hit. Raven started singing along with her janky-ass tunes, ripping away the drywall after lifting the hammer got too exhausting.

“You having fun in here?” Octavia asked, spooning food into her mouth, leaning against the wall.

“Huh?” Raven turned around, “Sorry, I couldn’t hear you over the sweet sound of destroying public property!” She shouted, louder than she needed too and grinned, chucking a hunk of drywall through a window and laughing when it shattered.

Octavia grinned, “You really are having fun in here.” She hopped onto a desk that had been shoved beside the wall. “It almost makes me want to do it too.”

“You can always take a turn sawing through those studs.” Raven gestured to the wooden posts standing up between the giant holes in the drywall, “Or you can hang back and desk-surf while I do the real work.”

“That last part kind of sounds like fun,” Octavia smirked, eating another bite.

Raven rolled her eyes, “I doubt you even know how to surf a desk the proper way.” She snarked, grabbing her Sawzall and plugged it into the generator, “I, however, can both surf a desk like a badass, and chop down walls with the power of science.”

“Is it really science if it’s power tools?” Octavia was doubtful.

“Yes, yes it is, and the power of power tools sounds stupid.” Raven started cutting through the studs. With those out of the way she could move on to her next wall, and only two hours into her little demo session.

“On that, we can agree.” Octavia set down her bowl and grabbed the sledgehammer, “So I just put this through the walls with X’s on them?”

“Pretty much.” Raven stood on a desk to reach the ceiling where she could cut the top of the studs.
Octavia took her first swing, the vibrations from impact working their way up her arms, shoulders, and back. Her hand slipped a bit, the sledgehammer sliding awkwardly towards the ground as she tried to ready herself for another swing. Her second swing was harder, and a lot more satisfying, this one crumpled the drywall, releasing a cloud of dust with impact.

“It’s good right?” Raven chuckled, kicking down the stud and watching it fall to the ground with a bounce and a puff of dust, “Man, I don’t know how those losers only took down one wall yesterday, this shit is fun.”

“They probably spent the whole time bitching about something,” Octavia took another swing, glee filling her face as half the wall collapsed, “Boys.”

“They’re such queens about everything.” Raven agreed, taking a running jump at the next desk over and bracing herself as the whole thing slid across the classroom, taking her only a foot and a half past the stud she was aiming for. “This is the life.”

Octavia’s eyebrow was hiked sky-high, “As long as you don’t kill yourself.”

“O. I’m a professional,” Raven assured her.

Octavia looked down at her sledgehammer, then back up to Raven’s still active Sawzall, “It’s probably fine, we’re like twelve.” O got back to breaking down walls while Raven sang horribly and cut down beams.

Together it only took them about six hours to get all the appropriate walls… Mostly knocked down, and the windows were properly jagged, broken by Raven and Octavia having contests to see how far they could throw debris out the window. You know, to make it look more realistic. It was for authenticity. Definitely.

Octavia dropped her sledgehammer, dropping to the ground to sit cross-legged beside it. “Now what do we do?”

“Pancakes?” Raven quirked her head, “Or maybe Lyza will make pasta. We don’t have the cream to make it right, but I’m sure she can improvise with that cheese powder from the pantry.”

“I could get behind that,” Octavia didn’t move, “But I’m not trying to get anyone moving.”

“What do you mean?” Raven asked.

“No one was moving when I left. Everyone refused to move this morning.” Octavia leaned back on her hands. “I thought you were hiding too, until I heard the noise.”


Octavia nodded, “I don’t even think most of them bothered to eat breakfast.” She shrugged, “Nick was the only other one moving, he went to the Library.”

“Well fuck.” Raven leaned back against the desk, “I can’t cook worth shit,”

“We’ve got cup o noodles,” Octavia suggested.

Raven nodded, getting off the desk, “That’ll work.”

Octavia sighed and flipped the switch on the generator, blinking when everything went from the din of country music overlaid onto power tools into nearly perfect silence. “I can see why you had
“Right? It’s creepy.” Raven led the way back to the cafeteria with a sigh. One glance told her that not only was everyone still in their tents, but the flaps were all zipped shut. “I take it back, this is creepier.” She muttered.

“Linc and Anya are just tired, they moved a lot of shit yesterday.” Octavia defended. “Same with some of the others.”

“Yeah, the difference is that instead of being just tired, they’re all hiding.” Raven pursed her lips, hoping that it wouldn’t turn into a habitual thing. She didn’t want to have to drag Elyza out of depression and a tent. “I’ll grab the noodles.” She figured that when people started smelling food they would start emerging from their little hidey holes.

“Afraid to heat up water?” Octavia teased, putting the pot on her little burner.

Raven ducked her head, “I may burn water,” she mumbled, “on occasion.”

“What was that? Speak louder,” Octavia paused, “Never thought I’d say that to you, ever.”

“Oh har har.” Raven sneered, “I burn water okay? Laugh it up, miss I-can-cook-food, while I enjoy the ability to pull apart a fully functional motorcycle and put it back together again with one hand tied behind my back.”

“Yeah, because that’s totally a useful skill for the end of the world.”

Raven stuck her tongue out, “When we’re trying to run away from a bunch of walkers and we find a motorcycle, I’m leaving you behind.”

“I’m just saying maybe you should use both hands,” Octavia turned off the stove and pulled the pot of boiling water over to the noodles, pouring it in, “might be faster that way.”

Raven humphed and poked the little lid down over her noodles, “So how do we know they’re done?”

Octavia paused, “Seriously? They’re done when they get to be all,” She wiggled her fingers at Raven, “Noodly again.”

“Noodly?” Raven asked, “What does that even mean?”

Octavia gave her a look before walking into the pantry, coming out with another cup o noodles. She opened it up, pouring water in and putting the lid back down. Grabbing an extra fork, she grabbed two cups.

“Feeling hungry today?” Raven asked, her eyebrows raised as she pulled her cup towards her.

“Not both for me,” Octavia just walked away.

Raven poked her head out of the kitchen just in time to watch Octavia walk, not to her brother’s tent, but to Lincoln’s. Raven grinned, taking her first bite of noodles. She grimaced as they crunched a bit in her teeth, then shrugged and kept eating them.

“Those aren’t supposed to crunch,” Madi grumbled, fishing a container for herself from the pantry and pouring the water in it. “You have to let it sit.”

Raven looked down at her half-eaten noodles, “But do I?”
Madi rolled her eyes, “Impatient.”

“Duh, have you met me?” Raven turned around in her chair so she was leaning back against the table, “How long you think before the dead rise again?” She chuckled.

“I think that already happened.” Madi giggled, “But maybe an hour?”

“Hmmm,” Raven murmured.

Raven walked over to her tent ducking in for a minute, she popped back out and settled into her preferred armchair, reclining back and getting comfortable. She dry swallowed one of the pills she had grabbed, her back was going to bitch at her in a few hours, and opened her book.

About twenty minutes later Raven heard the sound of a zipper and watched Alicia stumble out of her tent and shamble over to the pot of lukewarm water, following everyone else’s example. She meandered over to the couch and curled up around her noodles.

Alicia made eye-contact with Raven and they traded a nod before going back to their individual things.

Eventually, Madison, Travis, Nick, and Bellamy meandered out, pouring lukewarm and then cold water into their noodles before shuffling back to their preferred spaces. Raven shifted in her seat trying to find a more comfortable spot. She glanced at the clock over the cafeteria door, 3. Elyza still wasn’t up. Fuck. This was going to be a problem.

Finally, Raven marked her spot and tossed her book back into her tent, “Madi, you wanna lend me a hand?”

“Sure,” Madi got up, “What are we doing?”

Raven gave her a wicked grin, “We’re huntin’ wabbits.”

Alicia raised an eyebrow at the Elmer Fudd accent, but it wasn’t enough to motivate her to follow them. Raven would come back bragging about it later.

Before the door shut behind them, Alicia heard Madi say, “But didn’t we already catch the rabbits?”

An hour. That’s all it took for Raven’s evil plan to come together. Okay, it took twenty minutes for the plan, fifteen to find all the pieces, and the rest was just getting the damn thing up the stairs, but that’s beside the point. Raven held a massive stack of plastic cases in her arms and Madi pushed a rolling cart with a TV on top of it. “I bring to you, the magic of television.” Raven proclaimed.

All they had to do was plug the TV and the DVD player into the generator, and shove in the first disk. Then they just had to wait for the first song to start playing. Raven grinned, knowing that Elyza hated this movie with the passion of a thousand dying suns.

She lasted a long time. An impressive amount of time, but no one. *No one* can outlast the ‘happy little working song’. Raven smirked when Elyza’s head popped out of her tent and she snarled, “Who the fuck invited that shitshow into my house?” She growled, climbing out of her tent and stomping over to the player to turn it off.

Madi shuddered, still freaking out over the use of rats and cockroaches to clean a house.

Raven held out a stack of Elyza’s favorite movies, “Nice of you to join us, want to pick the next
“I hate you.” Elyza grabbed Lion King and put it into the player, but not before she snapped the other DVD in half, “We are NEVER watching that abomination again.”

“It’s not that bad,” Alicia grumbled, she kinda liked the peppiness of… whatever her name is. Princess blondie or whatever.

Lincoln stepped out of his tent, grabbing hold as Octavia jumped onto his back. He walked over, dropping her on one part of the sofa while he sat next to her. He stayed there until the little cub was shown off to all the animals before he got back up and walked back into his tent. Octavia had the biggest pout on her face until he came back dropping a huge blanket over her before he cuddled next to her under it.

Raven smiled at the cuteness, only to have a butt in her face. “Hey!” She protested, squirming out of the way just in time for Elyza to wedge herself into Raven’s chair. “Are you serious right now? You’re going to damage the frame.” Raven whined.

Elyza glared at Raven “I need a cuddle-buddy. You’re it.”

Raven sighed and wrapped herself around Elyza, “Come here, you big nerd.” She grumbled. Elyza snorted but she didn’t say anything, just kinda sniffing quietly and curling up into her best friend.

They watched movies until the sky went dark again, and then some. Going right up until the moment that the generator gave its last putter and died, right at the scene in INside Out where the bored goth kid handed them a broccoli pizza.

“What?”

“You’re kidding!”

“Welp kids, it goes to show, broccoli kills joy AND televisions.” Raven smirked, “So eat canned green beans instead.”

Elyza wrinkled her nose, “I think I’d rather die by broccoli.”

“That’s going on your gravestone,” Raven informed her.

“If that’s all that goes on there, then you obviously have died before I did.” Elyza said, “It’d be a relief, although they probably won’t let you put anything too risque on there.”

“The best part about the apocalypse, no one will be there to prevent me from putting something sexy on there.” Raven gave an evil grin.

“What on earth kind of mphm!” Nick had started to ask, but Elyza slapped her hand over his mouth before he could get too far.

“There are some things, Nick, that you should just avoid asking. Ever.” Elyza told him, keeping her hand where it was until he nodded.

Raven chuckled to herself in a way that disturbed even Madi and they left her to her plotting. Alicia sighed and looked around to see that almost everyone was there. Almost. “Has anyone seen Anya?”

“Cheekbones, or shall I say, lazybones, is still in bed.” Raven sighed dramatically, “I haven’t even
seen her leave to eat.”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “Stalker much?”

“It’s called childlike curiosity, thank you very much.”

Alicia laughed, “I don’t think there’s anything childlike about you Raven.”

“SEE?” Elyza pointed, “Even the new kids get it. You’re a menace.”

“WHO USED THE TOILET LAST?” Chris shouted, running out of the room and slamming the door shut.

“You realize it isn’t a toilet, right?” Raven asked no one in particular.

“Well someone shit the pot and left it there!” He snapped, “That thing is disgusting!”

“... Have you just not gone to the bathroom all day? You need to drink some water.” Elyza informed him.

“He doesn’t drink water. Ever.” Alicia considered for a minute, “Unless his mom made him.”

“If he dies of dehydration I call dibs on his stuff,” Madi called out.

“I call dibs on putting him down,” Bellamy muttered.

“Nope, I’ve put up with him longer.” Anya’s voice filtered through the fabric of her tent.

“Is no one upset about the fact that some lazy asshole didn’t empty the toilet?” Chris interrupted.

“Since we get up before noon, we’ve all had to deal with it, so no, we aren’t upset about it.” Elyza rolled her eyes at him, “And since you were the one to find it, you get to deal with it.”

Chris muttered angrily under his breath and stomped back into the bathroom to take care of the mess.

“Thank god,” Octavia mumbled, pulling the blanket over her head. Lincoln grumbled his agreement and pulled her a little closer.

Raven and Elyza watched them for a moment.

“Is anyone else kinda pissed off about how cute they are?” Raven asked.

Elyza made a noncommittal noise, “But they’re so cute…” She wrinkled her nose, “Are they just going to sleep on the couch?”

“You’re just mad you aren’t in the running, you know you’d try and be cuter,” Madi mumbled, her face shoved into the sofa cushion.

“Yeah,” Elyza agreed, “But with Raven’s face, we’re just not winning any cute contests.”

“Excuse you bitch?” Raven snarked, “I could wear a mask.”

“Fair enough.” Elyza grinned, “Hey Raven, you want to join a cute contest?”

“I welcome you into my house, into my armchair, and this is how you disrespect me?” Raven glared, “Out!” She did her best to shove Elyza off her chair while Elyza went boneless and flopped
back against Raven.

“Oh no! I.. Can’t… Moveeeee….” Elyza moaned, grabbing the back of the chair, “Gravity! It’s…. Increasing on me!”

“No it’s not! You’re just fat!” Raven finally shoved Elyza onto the floor.

Elyza pouted, “You got the quote wrong.” She gave Raven a sad puppy look until her friend finally rolled her eyes.

“Fine. You rotten sister, your butt is crushing me.” Raven said in a monotone, staring up at the ceiling for patience.

Elyza sighed, “You skipped a few lines, but it’ll have to do.”

“Are you going to bed anytime soon?” Anya yelled from in her tent. “I want to come out and get something to eat!”

Alicia frowned, “We don’t judge you for eating Auntie, you can just get food.”

“Not if I don’t want to bother putting on clothes!” Anya yelled back, “I want you to go to bed so I can wander around naked.

Raven smirked, “Hey guys, who’s up for a movie marathon? Cus that’s one show I don’t want to miss.”

Nick shot up from his spot, “Nope, I’m going to bed,” He almost speed-walked his way to his tent, crawling inside.

Elyza sighed, “You suck Anya.” She called, getting up off the floor, “She’s all yours Rae.” Elyza gave a little bow and shuffled to her bed.

“Same.” Alicia jogged to her tent with Madison and Travis not far behind, though they were rolling their eyes about the whole affair. They didn’t see why Anya couldn’t just put on clothes like everyone else.

Raven waited till everyone else had crawled into their tents, “All clear Anya!”

“I’m not giving you a free show, Raven,” Anya stated.

“I’m more than happy to pay you,” Raven assured her, “Chocolate or Orgasms.”

“…” Anya couldn’t argue that the first one was on her list of appropriate bribes, and the second was on her list of… acceptable inappropriate bribes. “I’m a little sick of chocolate, and you’d find far too much enjoyment in the latter for it to really count as payment, so I’m afraid it’s blindfolds or bust.”

“Kinky.” Raven grinned, “I’m down.”

Anya smacked her head.

Raven whipped around hoping to get a view, she slumped back in disappointment when she saw the large Tshirt Anya was wearing, although her interest was piqued again when she saw that it was...all she was wearing.

“Fucking perv,” Anya muttered, stalking into the pantry for something not candy coated. Anya
likes living off chocolate just as much as the next sane person, but after ten hours of aching muscles and vegging out in bed with candy, she felt gross, and more than a little sick. She came out with granola and a few sticks of decent jerky.

Raven pouted at Anya, looking over the back of her armchair like a little kid caught waiting up for Santa. Sexy Santa?

“Oh grow up.” Anya huffed, “I hope this isn’t how you tried to flirt with women before the apocalypse.”

Raven chuckled, “I guess you just need more wooing than most of the girls I’ve gone after.” She waggled her eyebrows, “I like the chase.”

“You’re awful,” Anya informed her, crouching down to get into her tent.

“You like it.” Raven hummed, knowing that she would forever cherish Anya’s delightfully long legs.

“Stop perving on my ass,” Anya called back through the tent.

“Show me something better and I promise I will.” Raven paused, “Though it’ll be hard to top something that phenomenal.”

Anya grumbled, “I’ll give you that one.”
“Food!” Madi groaned in joy, scrambling and tripping out of her tent, “I need food.”

Madison gave her a smile as she handed over a plate loaded down with breakfast. She turned back to the stove and started loading up another plate.

“Ooo,” Elyza snuck two slices of toast right off the pan and onto her plate. “Thanks, Madison.” She skipped out of the way, snagging syrup from Raven and pouring a modest amount over her toast before passing it to Alicia. “Don’t let Raven get the syrup first. Ever.”

“Where’s the peanut butter?” Nick asked, scanning the table.

“Got it.” Bellamy shoved it towards him

“Yes!” Nick took it and smeared a thick gob on his slices of toast.

“Ugh, that’s so gross,” Chris wrinkled his nose in disgust.

“You’re gross,” Nick retorted through a mouthful of french toast.

Raven threw her arms in the air as Alicia passed the syrup to Travis, “What the fuck are you doing with my syrup?!”

“You have a fucking lake already, grow up.” Elyza snarked.

“It’s not enough!” Raven protested, “It’s too dry still.”

“Anything short of a bowl full of syrup is too dry for you, Rae.” Elyza rolled her eyes.

“At least I don’t need an entire bottle of ketchup for scrambled eggs,” Raven mock gagged.

“You leave my ketchup alone.” Elyza pointed her fork at Raven with an angry glare, “I will fuck you up.”

“Children.” Madison reprimanded them, “What is the plan for everyone today,”

“Bellamy, Lincoln, Elyza..” Anya paused, looking around the room, “And Travis, we need to unload the semis.”

Elyza wrinkled her nose, displeased at being included in the unloading but she didn’t complain. Out loud, anyway.

“Yes!” Chris gave a little victory fist pump.

“Oh no, you’re with me moving the garden supplies to the roof.” Nick grinned, “We need to get that shit put together before we’re running out of food.”

Alicia looked up, “I’ll help with that,” She nudged her brother in the arm.

“Rae, you need any more help with construction?” Octavia asked, trying to make sure she got something fun.
“You bet your ass,” Raven nodded, “We need to get the debris cleaned out, then we need to start the building. I need some of the tools and materials out of the Home Depot truck though,” She directed the last to Anya.

“Got it.” Anya nodded.

“I can help you guys with that.” Madi smiled at Raven.

“Sweetness.” Raven leaned over to muss the girl’s hair.

Madison smiled and sat down with her own food, “I’ll be with the boys on the garden.”

A few minutes of silence passed as everyone focused on eating their food. In groups of two and three, they finished their breakfast, spending time in the kitchen cleaning up their dishes.

“Let’s get things rolling.” Raven hooked her arm around Madi, “O, we’ll see you in the construction zone.”

“Yup!” Octavia tried to catch a bit of syrup dripping down her face. Raven snorted.

“I’m going to get started downstairs,” Elyza yelled over her shoulder as she walked out the doors.

“I’ll be right behind you,” Lincoln told her as he disappeared into the kitchen.

Bellamy finished his dishes with a sigh and didn't bother saying anything as he followed Elyza down the stairs.

Nick bounced by the table waiting for Chris to finish his breakfast. “Dude come on, you have to be the slowest eater in the universe.”

“Well, I’m gonna get slower if you keep hovering.” He snapped, throwing his toast back onto the plate.

“Fine.” Nick huffed, stepping back like two feet to bounce behind Chris where he couldn’t see it.

“Chris, we don’t have all day,” Madison told him, walking into the kitchen to take care of her own plate.

Chris started muttering under his breath, taking another bite.

“FINALLY.” Nick snagged Chris’ plate off the table as soon as he took the last bite. “Now let’s go.” He dragged Chris downstairs by the elbow.

Chris leaned back, resisting being pulled after Nick, “Let go,”

“No.” Nick just kept pulling him after him.

“Boys, stop it.” Madison separated them, “Let’s just get started okay? Nick, you grab the fertilizer, and Chris and I can get the seeds and barrels.”

“Stop!” Chris yanked his hand out of Madison’s loose grasp, “Stop pretending you’re my mom, I don’t need your help.” He grabbed a massive bag of fertilizer and left the room before she could say anything.

Nick just shrugged his shoulders, grabbing a bag himself and taking off after Chris.
Elyza walked up behind Madison, her eyebrows creased, “Do they know that Rae has a pulley platform set-up for the roof?” She gestured to where the boys had gone.

Madison suppressed a smile, “It’s fine, I’ll load up the platform and they can unload it when they get to the roof.”

Elyza grimaced and nodded, going back to her own job. “They’re fine.” She informed Anya, sounding unconvinced. Anya just shook her head and shrugged, not really caring about their job, she just wanted to get the damn trucks emptied.

Madison grabbed a barrel and tossed all of the garden supplies she could find into it. She spun/walked the barrel down the back of the building until she found the roped platform just sitting on the ground. She spun the barrel onto the platform, making sure it was fully on before she walked away, ready to get another barrel.

She got the platform loaded in the time that it took for the boys to get back downstairs, laughing at their grouchy looks when they realized that they hadn’t needed to haul those bags up the stairs individually. They grabbed some of the longer garden tools, making the walk back up the stairs.

“Oi!” Nick called over the edge of the roof, “You ready for us to haul that up?”

“Yes!” Madison yelled back. She took a step back as the slack on the rope vanished, keeping an eye on the platform and its contents as it slowly began to ascend the side of the school building.

“What did you put on this thing?” Nick yelled down, “Chris looks like he’s about to have an aneurysm.”

“It’s a couple of barrels, this should be lighter than the fertilizer!” Madison yelled back at him.

“Well fuck,” Madison didn’t think she was supposed to hear that.

The platform continued to rise slowly, causing a bit of a heart attack when one side slipped a bit. Madison ignored the cusses that rained down as the platform paused and evened out once again. “Okay, we got it,” Nick called down.

Finally, the boys got it hauled up, though there was a definite scramble as they tried to figure out how to prevent the platform from dropping while they unloaded it. They did finally get it figured out and got it unloaded quickly, sending it back down quickly once it was empty.

“I’ll start loading it, but come back down and help,” Madison yelled up when the platform had settled.

“Yeah, mom.” Nick leaned over to give her a thumbs up and patted Chris on the shoulder, “Let’s go.” He leapt down the stairs, but Chris was quickly running out of energy. Those bags of fertilizer were heavy, and then the pallet too. He’s officially out of anger to fuel him, and so he trudges after Nick.

They set up an easy rhythm of bringing a pallet over with a jack and then loading the platform up. With Chris out of energy, Madison and Nick lifted the platform and unloaded it on the roof.

By about the fifth load, Madison sat down, “I’m done.” She admitted, fanning herself.

Nick nodded, “You stay there, I’m going to get all this organized.” He bounced over to where they had mostly just dropped bags of stuff, and started sorting it into dirt, fertilizer, and tools. He finally sat back, the garden stuff was fairly well sorted, but there were a bunch of seed packets that needed
to be sorted still.

“Have you seen Chris?” Madison frowned. He hadn’t come back upstairs when they finished the last load.

“He probably took off to hide somewhere,” Nick rolled his eyes, “He’s not exactly big on actually doing anything.”

“Can you go find him?” Madison asked, “I’ll sort those, just... Make sure he’s sulking and not doing something dangerous.”

“You know he’s going to be a problem with the others, right?” Nick gestured towards the side of the roof, “No one is ok with how he avoids doing any sort of work.”

“... I know.” Madison sighed, “I need to have a talk with him, but you know how he is. He’s struggling Nick, and he has good reason for it.”

“No one is going to care how good his reason is if he doesn’t pull his weight. And he isn’t going to listen to you.”

“He’s not listening to anyone at this point Nick, but no one else is willing to put in the effort either.” Madison snapped, “Please, just, go find him.”

Nick gave her a look. He shook his head, why should he make an effort if his own Dad wasn’t going to? He took off down the stairs slowly, this was an irritating waste of time. The cafeteria and the toilet were both empty, which left Nick with no clue where to find him.

Nick was extremely irritated as he checked into the animal rooms, the bathroom (not that Chris would fill his own damn tub), and the storage room. Giving up on finding Chris in one of their usually used rooms, Nick started going room to room, checking each one to see if he could find him. Nick was actually starting to get a bit worried.

About forty-five minutes of running from room to room and he finally found the little asshole.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Nick snapped.

Chris sat up and snapped the video camera shut, “What crawled up your ass and died?” He sneered.

“You little shit.” Nick snatched the camera from Chris’ hands, “You know how long I’ve been looking for you? What are you even doing in here? You’re supposed to be helping us with the garden.”

“Give that back!” Chris got up from the little nest he’d made of an extra sleeping bag and some decorative pillows he’d snatched from the storage room, “That’s mine!”

“Did you even hear a word I said?” Nick held it up, “Do you even care that you’re skipping out on work again?”

“I was tired alright? So I decided to sit down for a bit.” Chris glared, “Now give me back my shit.”

“Not a chance kid. You get this back when you grow the fuck up and start pulling your weight. If you think for a minute that Raven and Elyza won’t throw your vagrant ass on the streets, you’re stupid as well as lazy, and they aren’t the only ones who want you gone. You need to make yourself useful before someone decides they’re done with your shit.”
“Why should I?” Chris threw his arms out wide, “Let them throw me out. I already know how to survive and take care of myself.”

Nick snorted, “Yeah, eating beans from cans. You’d survive right up until you cut your own hand off trying to open up your dinner. You’d be dead on some street right now if it weren’t for our parents and Anya, and now everyone else here.”

“I told you, I don’t need them!” Chris yelled, “You’re just too afraid to be on your own.”

“You can’t even be bothered to help with chores, but you think you can survive out there? Go convince Mom and Travis and the rest of us will throw you a fucking party.” Nick turned on his heel and walked out.

Chris narrowed his eyes and folded his arms. He’s gonna show all of them he can survive on his own.

He started digging through the A/V buckets for another camera and shoved it in his pocket. Then he went upstairs to his tent in the cafeteria. Bag packed, and sleeping bag shoved into the remaining space, Chris was ready to go prove his point.

Without informing anyone of his decision, Chris broke a window in the library and climbed out, taking off towards the football field. He broke into a jog all the way across the field until he was out of sight, leaving behind a couple of shambling walkers. When he made it around the corner he popped open his camera and pointed it at himself, “You thought I couldn’t live without you motherfuckers? Well, guess what, I’m going to do just fine on my own.”
Nick climbed the last of the stairs and pushed the door to the roof open. Bellamy and Lincoln were standing by the edge of the roof, unloading the pallet that was once again full. Nick looked over to the piles to find that they had added a fair bit to them.

“He’s just sulking,” Nick told his Madison who was sitting at a new picnic table, sorting seed packets. “Didn’t seem like he was going to come back and help.”

Madison just nodded her head, making a note on the pad in front of her.

Nick walked over and joined the other two guys in unloading. May as well get this shit done. Once it was unloaded, Nick took a turn lowering the pallet and turned ready to go back downstairs to get it loaded up.

“They’ve got it downstairs,” Lincoln told him, knowing where he was headed.

Nick nodded and looked over the edge. Travis, Anya, and Elyza were all working together to load up the lift. “You guys are lifesavers. I was starting to think I was gonna be doing this on my own.” Nick joked.

“Nah, we wouldn’t leave you hanging.” Bellamy tossed the ropes to Lincoln and together they lifted the next pallet, working at the same pace and never once letting the edge slip. It’s a far cry from trying to get Chris to even try to pull, and then trying to keep up with his manic attempts to just jerk the damn thing to the roof.

Nick nodded, helping get the ropes secured around the pole they had been using to keep the lift secured while they unloaded. “It’s nice not to have to run up and down the stairs too.”

Lincoln nodded, “We finished the semis. Didn’t seem right to just leave you to figure it out yourself.”

“You’re a good guy.” Nick decided.

“What am I? Chopped liver?” Bellamy huffed, “Lincoln isn’t the only one here helping you out.”

Nick gave Bellamy a deadly serious look, “I didn’t want to be the one to tell you, but… The results came back. You’re chopped liver.”

Lincoln chuckled, ducking his head when Bellamy shot him a dirty look. Bell gave a long-suffering sigh and grabbed the table from the pallet, “Why do we even need this?” He lugged it to an empty space in the middle of the roof. They had a surprising amount of real estate to work with.
“Because no one wants your ass to get too pasty!” Raven hollered from the door to the roof, where she was leaning against the wall.

“Please don’t talk about my brother’s ass,” Octavia begged, jumping in to help.

“I second that motion!” Elyza shouted up from the ground, “No one wants to be scarred today.”

“Apparently your ass is scarring,” Raven chuckled, “Anyway Bellboy we need you down in the animal pens. I have no idea what the fuck I’m supposed to be doing with the,” Raven flapped her hand, “houses or whatever for the little shits.”

“They’re called hutches,” He grumbled, “I’m on my way. Have fun with all this.” Bellamy gestured at the pile of things still at the base of the school waiting to be hauled up.

“I guess I’m up now.” Nick grinned at Lincoln as he lowered the lift once more. Hopefully, it would be less painful than working with Chris. “So what’s your deal?” He jerked his chin at Lincoln’s heavily muscled build, “You aren’t like, Tarzan at Disneyland, are you? Cus if you have the wig still I need to see that.”

Lincoln shook his head, “Firefighter, I had to stay in shape. You never know when you’ll be caught in a house fire with an unconscious person or three to carry out.”

Nick nodded, “That’s a shame, you woulda made a great Tarzan.”

“He makes a better Disney Princess!” Anya called from the base of the school, “It’s freaky!”

Lincoln sighed and shook his head. He’s never going to live that down. Ever.

Nick chuckled, “That’s going to stick.”

“You can still be my Tarzan,” Octavia offered, nudging him with her shoulder as she walked past. “I’ll be your Jane,” she winked at him.

“Would you be saying that if Bellamy was here?” Madi asked, standing by the door, waiting for her.

Octavia just shrugged, “Probably, he’s just overprotective. He and Lincoln seem to do that well.”

Lincoln grabbed the ropes, ready to haul up another load, and maybe stop blushing. That’d be nice.

It was a little bit harder for Lincoln and Nick to get their rhythms synced, but at least they didn’t tip the platform over or drop supplies on the group below them.

They managed to finish getting everything moved to the roof about an hour after noon, and by then everyone was ready for a break. Madison who had disappeared after she finished sorting the seeds out called through the window, “Food is ready!”

Anya and Elyza traded a confused look. “Did you ask her to-?” Elyza pointed.

“No… And you didn’t.” Anya twisted her lips, “I guess we should eat?”

“Yeah.” Elyza nodded, feeling weird about it. She’d never exactly been a scheduled person before the world went to shit, and she usually based her meals around when Raven’s whining got too annoying. Between Madison and Travis always wanting to prepare meals at specific times, it was getting a little weird.
Anya kicked the platform to the side so it looked a little less intentional and led the way back into the school. “We should ditch the semis after lunch.”

“Raven said something about that, mentioned wanting to check out that big construction zone over yonder.” Elyza jerked her thumb.

“Of course she does.” Anya rolled her eyes, “Probably wants to ride in the cranes.”

“Nah, Rae’s scared of heights.” Elyza paused, “Heights that she has to work to get to. Pretty sure she would jump out of a plane without a parachute, but she wouldn’t if she had to walk up there.”

“That makes an odd amount of sense for her,” Anya said.

“Right? Girl has a very shaky grasp on reality sometimes.”

Anya snorted, “And you don’t?”

Elyza shrugged, “Ehhh, reality is overrated.”

“I see why you two get on so well,” Anya shook her head, pushing into the cafeteria.

Elyza just smiled and made her way over to food. She’d been snacking throughout unloading the trucks, but when there’s hot food on the table, it’s rude not to eat some right?

“What are you smiling about?” Madi asked.

“Vienna sausages.” Elyza popped on into her mouth, “They’re like smaller grosser hot dogs. It wouldn’t be an apocalypse without them.” She sat on a vacant table to watch everyone interact. It’s kinda weird to think that just a few days ago these were all strangers. Or a week now...? Time is strange without any reason to track it. No school or work or birthdays or holidays. It’s all just days and nights now.

“Get your ass off my table, you’re getting daydreams all over it.” Raven poked Elyza.

“They aren’t daydreams.”

“No?” An eyebrow hit the roof.

“I was... Okay, I was considering the concept of time in relation to our current situation.”

“Yeah.” Raven gave her plate an incredulous look, “What was I thinking? That’s definitely not daydreaming. Dirty philosophers.”

“How are philosophers dirty?” Madi asked, hopping up to sit next to Elyza, “I always thought they were boring.”

“Even boring people have to get laid.” Elyza joked.

Raven rolled her eyes, “They’re just useless, spending all their time arguing over whether it’s love or friendship or charity or whatever instead of doing something useful with their lives. I like a good argument as much as the next bitch, but god it’s just so fucking pointless.”

“Raven’s a nihilist.” Elyza summarized.

“Huh?” Madi asked, her face twisted into confusion.
“It’s dirty philosopher speak,” Raven narrowed her eyes at Elyza, “It means I think that this is it for us, and so you should fucking live and do shit because when you die, the only thing that matters is what you leave behind.”

“Which is like the most optimistic take on Nihilism that I’ve ever met,” Elyza admitted.

“Right.” Madi blinked slowly before shaking her head and hopping off the table, “I’m going to go eat.”

“Right behind you babygirl.” Raven followed after her, ready to eat.

Elyza grumbled to herself while she finished her snack-sized meal and waited for some of the others to finish up. She didn’t really want to ditch the semis without a decent sized group, just in case there was anything trapped inside the construction site.

“Alright, I need some volunteers to come drop the semis.” Anya called after the dishes were done and people had been milling around for a bit, enjoying a break from the morning, “This is really the last thing we need to get done today.”

“I can go.” Bellamy raised a hand, “And Octavia would just love to go, right sis?” He gave her an overblown grin.

She huffed, “I was already going to volunteer you ass.”

“I need to get out of here.” Nick spoke up, “I’m down.”

“Okay, that’s five including Elyza who already agreed to go,” Anya looked to the blonde for confirmation and got a nod, “We can take one more in Baby, and that way we’ll have even pairs.”

“There’s no way you’re going to my playground without me cheekbones,” Raven said from right behind Anya, who jumped a bit and shot a glare at Raven who suddenly was jogging to her tent with a shit-eating grin. That little shit just goosed her!

“Who’s ready to go?” Raven hauled her go-bag onto her back, practically bouncing with energy.

Elyza looked between Raven’s excited expression to Anya’s murderous glare and decided she didn’t want to know. She can infer a lot, and honestly, this is one of those things that she doesn’t need to know.

“Alright, let’s pack it up.” Elyza said after a long pause. Anya was still staring at Raven hard enough that she might have been attempting telepathy… Or spontaneous combustion. Maybe both?

A few short, but chaotic minutes later and Baby was following behind the two semis as they bumped along the back road. “You could probably drive a bit faster,” Nick suggested from his spot in the passenger seat.

“Are you kidding me? She would fuck me up if Baby got a scratch.” Elyza shook her head.

“She trusted you to drive it,” Nick was still shocked that Anya was behind the wheel of a semi and Elyza, fucking Elyza, was driving Baby.

“Only because she didn’t have a better option,” Elyza was stressed out, gripping the steering wheel hard, her knuckles turning white.

“Okay, but how is she gonna react when you snap her steering wheel?” Nick teased.
“Shut up!” Elyza punched his shoulder, “Oh fuck,” She latched back onto the wheel when the vehicle swerved in their lane to smack into one of the dead. Elyza flinched just in time to avoid getting gore all over her face.

Nick suppressed a grin, “Now she’s going to kill you.”

Elyza whined wordlessly and hunched her shoulders, focusing on driving a straight line for the remaining mile to the construction site. Anya’s never going to trust her again. Or let her drive anything bigger than a golf cart.

The construction site had a rather large chain link fence across the entrance, so Elyza pulled to a stop right in front of it. “Looks like you get to open the gate.” She informed Nick, “I’ll yell if someone shows up.”

“Thanks.” He got out and jogged to the gate and Elyza kept her eyes peeled for any signs of movement. The whole site looked abandoned, but in a creepy way, like the school when she and Raven first hit there. It just felt like every shadow was hiding a dozen bodies, and a thousand more were just watching, waiting for someone to make a false move.

She jumped a little when the fence rattled and clinked its way open. As soon as the opening was big enough for the semis to skinny through, Nick threw himself back into Baby. He gave a full body shudder, “This place gives me the creeps.”

“Same.” Elyza was hunched over the wheel, hoping to get a better look before she committed to driving into the empty space at the front of the site. “I really wish this thing had windows.” She muttered.

“If wishes were rainbows, we’d all be on acid,” Nick replied, standing up in his seat to keep an eye out while Elyza parked next to the foreman’s building.

She couldn’t argue with that so Elyza just watched the semis drive into the lot. They just brought the semis around to the right of the gate with some of the other construction vehicles and turned off the engines.

That’s the moment that Elyza heard them.

Low groans echoing between steel beams and machinery. “Nick,” Elyza turned the engine back on, “Nick!” She snapped.

He ripped his eyes away from the individual bodies emerging from the darkness.

“Get on the gun and if they get between us and the semis, start shooting,” Elyza instructed, revving the engine and pulled a U-ey. She parked right next to Raven and Octavia’s semi, “Move your asses!” She snapped to the frozen individuals in the semis.

Nick scrambled into the gunner’s chair and sat there watching in horror as Elyza climbed out of Baby and approached the first of the dead meandering towards them. “What are you doing?”

“Thinning the herd, there’s no point leaving a group this large so close to home,” Elyza called over her shoulder, putting her spear through one’s head in a smooth motion.

Anya ditched her semi and ran over to join Elyza in drawing the horde to the far side of the courtyard, keeping them away from the others. “We’re running out of space here, I think we need to ditch the power tools.”
Elyza didn’t respond to Anya’s urgent aside, instead calling out, “Raven how bad do you want this shit?”

“About as badly as Anya wants me.” Raven shot back.

Elyza growled her frustration, circling back towards Baby when she saw that everyone was in the little jeep. “Well you’d better think of something to get rid of these fuckers because if we leave, we aren’t coming back to this shit hole.” She looked over her shoulder to see Raven, Octavia, and Bellamy jump out of the jeep. “What the hell are you doing??” Elyza shouted.

“Get your asses back into the car!” Anya demanded, pulling her side-arm and began shooting the ones closest to her and Elyza. They could only back up so fast and they were out of space. More zombies were coming in from the construction zone and starting to surround Baby. “Elyza let’s go!” Anya broke away from the crowd and ran beside Elyza, helping the girl into Baby before climbing in herself.

“Nick, get in here, we aren’t using that gun.” Anya yanked Nick in through the back hatch and grimaced as the bodies surrounded the car. “Did those idiots say what they were doing before they ran off?” Anya asked Nick.

“Raven just said she had an idea and told me to guard Baby, said you would kill her if she abandoned your crowning achievement.”

Anya gritted her teeth and started stabbing at any heads presenting themselves in the windows. “We are going to have a long conversation about that woman’s priorities if we get out of this alive.”

“We will,” Elyza assured her. Even streaked in blood and exhausted Elyza still had faith in her insane best friend. “If Raven has a plan then we’ll get out of here just fine.” She and Nick manned the other side of the car, keeping any walkers from reaching in too far.

“Mother fucker!” Nick gasped, stabbing one in the head and punching it. He scooted back from the window to examine the deep scrapes on his arm, “How come you didn’t baby-proof your damn Baby?” He snapped at Anya.

“Whine later, disinfect now.” Elyza chucked her backpack at him, “It didn’t bleed on you, right? Or scratch you?” She asked while she stabbed another one trying to climb through the windows. They had some height, but not enough to keep the walkers out all the way.

“No no, the base of window got me.” He reassured them, “The bitch tried to drag me out of the fucking car.”

“In the future try not to let the bitches get grabby.” Elyza snarked.

“Oh, you’re one to talk.” He muttered, hissing as he poured the alcohol on his arm and then wrapped it in gauze.

Elyza glared at him, “And what exactly is that supposed to mean?”

Nick didn’t get to answer that because the moment he tried, they were overwhelmed by the sound of a truck horn to their left.

“BEEP BEEP MOTHERFUCKERS!” Raven hollered out the window of her giant dump truck, smashing through the bodies around them.
The three in Baby watched in horror and fascination as Raven crushed the horde around them into nothing more than a crunchy soup.

“See,” Elyza grimaced at the smells that started swirling around her, “Just fine.”

“Your friend is batshit crazy,” Anya shook her head and leaned against the roll bars.

“She may be crazy but she’s got style,” Nick watched as Raven backed up aiming for a few dead behind her, “And it’s effective.”

“No arguing there.” Anya muttered, climbing into the trunk of the jeep and waved down Raven and crew, “Did anyone get hurt in that bullshit move of yours?”

“I resemble that remark,” Raven pretended to be offended, though she was quick to look around and make sure no one had been hurt.

Octavia leaned over her and called out, “We’re fine in here!”

“Great. Let’s get the fuck outta here, then!” Anya looked eager to leave.

“But I want a bucket loader and a bulldozer!” Raven whined.

“Now RaeRae, you know we can’t get everything we want when we go shopping,” Elyza mocked her.

“Bullshit.” She huffed, “I get everything I want, even if I have to build it my damn self.”

“Yes but we are not talking about rocket ships, we are talking about garbage disposal.”

Raven sat back and folded her arms over her chest. “Okay,” Bellamy climbed out on his side of the car, “I don’t think we need the bulldozer, but might I suggest the port-o-potties?” He jerked his thumb, “I don’t know how many guys died on the shitter but we passed like, seven of them running for this one.” He patted the nose of the dump truck.

“Would that mean we don’t have to shit in a bucket? Cause I’ll be all over that.” Nick jumped out of Baby, “Lack of toilets was always the worst part of living on the streets.”

Anya heaved a sigh, “That’s exactly what it means. Let’s get them before Raven finds something else she wants to take home.”

“We’re taking partially full port-a-potties home with us?” Octavia questioned in disgust.

“Did we do a drive around and see if there are any empty ones? Or one of those septic tank vacuum things?” Elyza really didn’t want to move a semi-full anything.

“We could always do the adult thing and just empty them out.” Anya said with just a hint of sarcasm.

Elyza grimaced, “I vote vacuum thingy.”

“Seconded.” Octavia threw her hand in the air.

“And the motion passes.” Bellamy said, “O, Nick come with me, we can look for the vacuum thingy while the demonic one and commando grab the toilets.”

Both Elyza and Raven folded their arms, “Hey!” They looked to each other and grinned,
“Heyyyyy.”

Anya rolled her eyes and jogged to the back of the dump truck. She hopped up onto the back to check out the bed. “We can get a few of them in the back of here.” She called to the group up front.

“We’ve got plenty of gas to make trips,” Raven informed her cheerfully.

Bellamy gave them the thumbs up and hefted his crowbar, leading his little team around the back of the foreman’s building. Behind the building was a little alley of construction materials and in the distance, they could see the Porta-johns themselves. “Come on, I think the vacuum thingy will be with all the vehicles.” He pointed to the large bank of vehicles parked in the back.

“Why are we whispering?” Nick asked, “Didn’t you run over all the walking ones?”

“Do you really think we’re that lucky?” Bellamy asked.

Octavia pointed, “Company.” She gestured to a small group of dead milling around, moving in their general direction. “I got these ones.” She grinned, swinging her stick in a circle to loosen her wrist up.

“Show off,” Bellamy muttered.

Octavia ignored her brother, taking out the walkers with efficiency. “You’re just jealous,” Bellamy watched as O swiped some chunky bits off her face, “Not really,” he assured her.

“I could admit to some jealousy.” Nick grinned, “Not every day you get to be a badass and a hot chick.”

“Dude.” Bellamy elbowed him, “That’s my sister.”

“Oh grow up Bellamy.” Octavia rolled her eyes, “You would be just as mad if he didn’t compliment me.” She huffed, not realizing that one of the walkers at her feet was getting back up.

Nick froze and Bellamy rushed into action, running straight at his sister. “Bell what are you-”

Bellamy knocked her out of the way and grunted as the walker grabbed his wrists and leaned forward, snapping at him. “Fuck-” Bellamy yanked his hand out of the walker’s grip, “-OFF!” He ignored the scratches across his collarbones and chest, slamming his fist into the walker’s head.

It jerked back and gave him time to jam the straight end of his crowbar into the thing’s face. He dropped it, panting, “Next time,” He looked to Octavia, “Can you make sure they’re dead before you start flirting?”

Octavia checked over her brother almost frantically, “Oh my God, are you ok? Did it bite you?”

He frowned, “Nah I’m good,” He saw the red on her hands and looked down at his chest, patting at it and realizing there was more red, “Oh shit,”

“Stop touching it!” Nick snapped, “Either of you have a first aid kit?”

Octavia grabbed the bag she had dropped before getting into the fight. She handed it over to Nick, she was covered in gore and would do more harm than good.

Nick unzipped the bag, pulling out water and the first aid kit, he ripped Bellamy’s shirt apart, leaving it hanging off his arms and wrapped around his waist. The bottle of water was emptied,
doing a surface clean, then Nick pressed an alcohol pad to it. “This is going to need something better than this,” He said, dabbing at the claw marks scoring across the other man’s chest. He taped a bandage over the worst of the injury before packing the supplies away.

“Hear that?” Bellamy looked over at Octavia, “No more messing around until we get back to the school.” He teased.

Octavia just gave him a look, she wasn’t going to put her brother’s life at risk. “Can you make it to look for the vacuum thingy? Or do you want us to take you back?”

He rolled his eyes, “I’m not going to chicken out because of a few scratches. Let’s go.” Bellamy shrugged his shoulder a bit, testing the mobility with the bandage on and swapped his crowbar to the other arm.

“Shirtless avenger over here.” Nick rolled his eyes, “Do either of you know what this thing is even supposed to look like?”

Bellamy rolled his eyes, “It’s a big truck with a round container on the back, it’ll have warnings about human waste on it.”

“Ah. Yeah, that makes a bit of sense,” Nick nodded. “I bet it even has a vacuum hose thingy on the back right?”

“Shut up.” Octavia rolled her eyes, “Let's just move before more walkers show up.”

Nick chuckled and helped Bellamy to his feet, “I thought you guys were all about screaming your way into battle like savages.”

Bellamy snorted, “That's Elyza and Raven, they've been like that since the day we met them.”

“It's not about the rush,” Octavia said, leading the way through the alley with one hand on the building beside them. She seemed to trip every step so it's just safer to keep her hand on the wall. “It’s…” She bit her lip.

“What do you mean?” Bellamy nudged her for more, but she wasn't saying anything and worse Nick seemed to get it too. “What am I missing?”

“It makes sense.” Nick pursed his lips, “They're afraid to be alone. I knew a couple people who would talk to themselves, hum, play music, anything to deal with the silence.”

Bellamy looked down, hesitating to say anything. He couldn't even imagine that concept, he knew how hard it was to sleep after everything went quiet. Even in the middle of the LA riots, it got pretty quiet at times, but between O and Lincoln, he'd never thought about being alone. They just went everywhere together until they met Raven and Elyza.

“Oh thank god.” Octavia pointed, “There's our truck.”

Nick sighed, “Thank god, I was starting to think that all of this was a waste of time. Anya would kill us if she went through all the work to get those things loaded up just for us to miss on the vacuum.” He informed them, breaking into a jog.

“What is it with you two and running ahead?” Bellamy snapped, running after Nick.

Nick paused halfway into the driver's seat and looked around, “The coast is clear, I just wanted to hotwire this baby before we die of old age.”
Bellamy shook his head agenda slumped against the side of the vacuum truck, “Whatever..” He waved his hand, a little out of breath. “I don't care anymore.”

The vehicle started with a loud roar that had Bellamy and Octavia jumping into the cab quickly, not wanting to deal with more walkers. They pulled around to where the others were finishing up loading the dump truck up.

“Is that thing full?” Anya asked, jumping out of the dump truck, covered in grime.

“Nope, it’s empty.” Nick called over the still roaring vehicle. “But we need to get back,” he jerked his thumb, “Bellamy needs medical attention.”

“What?” Elyza yelled, dashing over to Baby to grab her bag. She was ripping the door of the sewage truck open before anyone else had really moved. “What happened?” She inspected his chest and carefully lifted the edge of the bandage to peek at what was underneath.

“Got clawed by one of those shits,” Bellamy grunted, wincing as the adhesive pulled on the edge of the open wound.

“We did the best we could, but it needs to be cleaned better at the very least,” Nick told Elyza.

Elyza set the bandage back against the skin, “It’s not bleeding too badly, we can wait until we get back to take care of it. Any bites?”

“Nope, I don’t do teeth,” Bellamy laughed, “Just scratches to show where I’ve been.”

“Ew, Bell.” Octavia made a face.

Elyza snorted, “Teeth can be fun, but I’ll agree with you on this one. Good to see you can joke about it.”

“Let’s get going then,” Anya took her rightful position in Baby, glaring a bit at Elyza when she saw the gore on the interior.

“You helped.” Elyza huffed, climbing into Baby. “.. I’ll clean it.”

“Uh no,” Anya scoffed, “You aren’t touching her.”

Elyza grumbled under her breathe, but she wasn’t going to fight having less work to do. Especially if Anya was anything like Raven with her cars, she could argue til she was dead and it still wouldn’t change anything.

“You did kinda shit the bed on this one,” Raven informed her.

“Let’s just go home.” Anya sighed, pulling out of the lot.
“Is that food I smell?” Raven pushed past Anya and Nick, practically running towards the yummy smell.

“Well, it certainly isn’t the goats.” Bellamy snarked, trudging up the stairs.

“If dinner smelt like the goats, I’d skip eating forever,” Elyza said, gaining a small chuckle from those who heard.

“But seriously, that smells amazing,” Nick pushed the cafeteria doors open, the smell intensifying.

“Just in time, stews ready,” Madison was just sitting down with a bowl in hand.

Elyza checked Bellamy over quickly and decided that his injuries could wait until they had gotten some food in them. She grabbed a bowl for herself and an extra for Bellamy.

“Ohmysh” Raven moaned, she swallowed the mouthful of food, “This is soo good.”

“Wow, talking with a mouth full of soup, that’s the full Reyes mark of approval.” Elyza admitted, “Still don’t know how you do that without spraying.”

“Talent,” Raven mumbled, staring into her soup with the kind of loving gaze only reserved for Baby, and now this bowl of soup.

“Seriously, so good.” Madi praised, “It doesn’t even taste like venison, and I’m so tired of venison.”

“Preach.” Octavia raised her spoon.

“Not that we aren’t all grateful to have real meat to eat,” Madison interjected, giving that mom glare that scolded them for being ungrateful.

“At this point, even I might be ok going veggo for a while,” Anya said.

“Venison is a lot more opinionated than beef.” Elyza agreed, “I feel like if this was a burger I could deal with it a lot longer.”

“Could we make burgers with the venison?” Madi perked up looking excited.

“If it was fresh, sure,” Anya told her, “But dehydrated venison doesn’t work so well for that.”

Bellamy chuckled, “Yeah, not to mention all the fat we trimmed off.” He looked to Madi, “A
A decent burger has fat, no matter what those health nuts say.”

She nodded seriously, not sure who ‘those health nuts’ are, but that seemed like a detail.

“Nick, what happened to your arm?” Madison flipped his arm over to examine the loose bandage wrapped there.

“It’s just a scratch.” Nick rolled his eyes, “One of the walkers tried to drag me out of the car and they just cut the shit out of me.”

“It’s on the list right after Bellamy,” Elyza assured her, sitting down with another bowl-full of soup.

“What happened to Bellamy?” Madison’s head shot up in concern.

Raven gave her a concerned look, “Did you not notice the half torn shirt he’s sort of wearing?”

Madison blushed a bit when she realized that what she was seeing was bandage and not shirt. “Uh, I didn’t notice.”

“Well thank god, I don’t want to know my mom is checking out younger guys,” Alicia mock shuddered.


“What? You’re the one going on about how you like to drink whiskey.” Alicia raised her hands, “For all I know you’re bored of Mr. Grouch and his trash can over there.” She jerked her chin at Travis who was serving himself soup and very lost in his own little world.

Raven sprayed soup half across the table, “Please tell me the little shit is the trash can.”

Elyza stared at the soup sprayed everywhere, “That is so gross… and such a waste.”

Alicia nodded sagely, “Duh.”

“That’s going to stain the table,” Madi pointed to the mess, continuing to eat.

“Not like Raven’s going to clean it up.” Nick sighed, “I suppose we will always remember them as the mark of Mr. Grouch and his trash can of a son.”

Travis walked back to the table and sat down, not even noticing when he set his bowl down in the wet of Raven’s spray. He just started eating, still oblivious.

Anya grimaced, watching his bowl scoot around a bit in the spittle and soup. “Damn.”

“Okay, enough about the soup,” Madison snapped, “Why aren’t any of you concerned about the boys? They could be seriously hurt, they could get some kind of infection. Did you clean them?”

“Clean them?” Elyza stared at Madison, “Is that what you’re supposed to do? I thought you were supposed to rub them in dirt and mud and blood.”

“Yeah, it builds character right?” Raven rolled her eyes.

“Of course they were cleaned,” Elyza spoke before Madison’s head could explode, “But since we’re all covered in filth, there’s only so much cleaning that can be done without getting buck-ass naked and that’s something we try to avoid when there are walkers around.”
“Let’s just avoid that when anyone else is around, thanks,” Bellamy had looked up in concern.

“As soon as we’re done eating we’ll get them up to the tubs, they’ll wash, we’ll disinfect, wrap them up and we can all go to bed.” Elyza finished up her food.

“It’s too late! Bacteria is already in their systems!” Madison began tugging on Nick, trying to urge him...somewhere. “They could die if they get an infection!”

“Oh my god woman, can you stop panicking for like ten minutes?” Raven snapped, “If they were going to die instantly, they wouldn’t be stealing my soup. Therefore, you can chill the fuck out, they take their bubble bath, and we let the medical expert in the room deal with them.” She gestured to Elyza, “Now can you shut up? I’m having a moment here.”

Elyza just sighed and rolled her eyes at Raven, the snark was not helping the panicking woman, “We’ve got antibiotics if we need them. They won’t die.”

“But how do you know?” Madison insisted, “You’re a teenager training to be a tattoo artist, not a doctor. As far as experience goes, Alicia’s volunteer work at the hospital is the most experience we have between us. We should find a doctor and have them check the boys out.”

“First off, you were a candy striper?” Elyza grinned at Alicia, “Second, people with no medical access in Africa don’t really care if you’re the Doctor or the Doctor’s kid, people show up and you treat them so I do have a clue. Third, you’d be surprised how much medical training comes with the needles.”

“And good luck finding a Doctor around here,” Anya interrupted Elyza’s rant.

“I forgot you and Mama Lex did that.” Raven sucked on her spoon, “You were kinda a bitch after that. Power goes to your head.” She informed Elyza, like it was some kind of revelation they all needed.

Alicia blinked, “You and your mom went to Africa?”

Elyza nodded, “It let us get out of town for awhile, Doctors without Borders, or whatever.”

“Wow, that’s really kinda cool.”

“And it really isn’t the point.” Madison huffed, “If your mother treated someone with compromised injuries, I can’t believe she would tell them to go take a bath and call it good enough.”

“Have you ever been to Africa?” Elyza questioned, that really had been one of the first steps of treating so many people.

Madison rolled her eyes, “Of course not.”

“Ever been someplace where the preferred dress is none and the sewage system is the ditch outside your front door?” Elyza questioned her again.

Madison was fuming at this point, “Get to your point.”

“My point is, either come up with a way to find a real Dr. without putting everyone in stupid amounts of danger,” Elyza jabbed her finger in Madison’s direction, “Or shut the fuck up.”

“Do we have any popcorn?” Raven asked Octavia quietly, her eyes glued to the exchange.

“I wish,” Octavia mumbled.
“Finding a Dr isn’t putting anyone in danger, it’s smart.” Madison fumed back at Elyza, “They need someone who knows what they’re doing not some half-ass hack who thinks she’s the shit!”

“There’s a hospital a few miles down the road, we could head there.” Travis finally spoke up, “There’s probably Drs, military, who-ever would be needed to get things started over again.”

“Things aren’t going to be like they were ever again, Travis.” Anya rolled her eyes, annoyed at this repeat argument.

“Even if they aren’t, those people would have gathered at hospitals, and they would be the most important people to keep safe. What if there’s a whole group of doctors and soldiers stuck in the hospital and we’re just a few miles away and in the perfect position to help them.” Travis argued, “There’s just as much risk in ignoring possibilities as there is in accepting them.”

“If they need help, they aren’t the important people.” Raven shook her head.

“We needed help.” Anya pointed out. She wasn’t agreeing with Travis, in fact, she made it a point to always do the opposite, but he wasn’t wrong that emergency plans nearly always started with fortifying the hospitals.

“You’re different.” Raven replied, “You had luggage.”

“Ok, so let’s say that the Hospital fortified itself,” Elyza jumped back in, “Soldiers and Doctors have somehow managed to keep themselves alive, and fed, and they have enough water, and they didn’t die in the fires. What do you expect from them?” Elyza gestured around them, “We are fully stocked with food, water, medical supplies, and everything else we could think of. So what are you willing to give them? What are you willing to part with? How much will you give up for a possibility? Because right now? They aren’t sick.” She pointed at the two injured men, “And you’re so unconcerned about their health that you’re still here arguing about what we should do when we could actually be doing what we need to do.”

Madison had opened her mouth to argue when Elyza’s words fully sunk in. She looked a bit stricken at the realization that she had spent all this time ignoring treating her son when it needed to be done right now.

Nick shot Elyza a dirty look for bringing him and Bellamy back into this argument and pushed his bowl away, “It’s fine, I’ll go take a bath first.” He didn’t need warm soup, or a nice sit-down meal, because it’s not like he did anything strenuous with his day. One day. One day he will not have to deal with his mother fighting everything he does.

“Thanks, man.” Bellamy toasted with his bowl and went back to eating. He was waiting for the fighting to start up again, Elyza had a habit of antagonizing Madison… Or the other way around? He wasn’t sure, but it’s always good to watch. Like tv but without the hum of the generator.

Madison huffed and followed Nick out the door, leaving the others watching her.

“She does know she’s following her son to where he’s going to strip naked, right?” Raven asked the others.

Elyza sat down again and sighed. She turned to Anya, “Not that I really want to admit this, but Nick needs a Tetanus shot.”


“Would you rather I told Madison during that?” Elyza waved her hand. “We’re fine on antibiotics
if they need them, we even have pain meds and suture kits, just not Tetanus vaccine.”

“If we end up going to a goddamn hospital after all of this,” Anya threatened, all the wind leaving her sails as she sat on that. She just shook her head and went to sit in her comfy chair in the corner, “I’m too fucking old for this shit.”

“I really want to be able to find another option. Any other option,” Elyza told her as she passed.

“Well, I’ll start looking too,” Anya muttered.

“Alright,” Elyza walked back to the table and urged Bellamy along. He was taking forever to finish eating.

A short while later Bellamy was clean and had been sterilized, stitched, and bandaged up. “Don’t scratch, don’t pick, and let me know if it bleeds tonight,” Elyza instructed.

“Yes, ma’am.” He gave a casual salute.

“Do you need anything for pain?” Elyza asked, her voice pitched lower for this question.

He pursed his lips, “I wouldn’t mind some ibuprofen or something, but I don’t need anything serious.”

Elyza nodded and grabbed the pills out of one of her pockets. She handed six over, before tucking the bottle back into her pocket. “Take two now, two in 4 hours and the last two in 8 hours. Let me know when you want more,”

Bellamy nodded, “Thanks,” he popped the first ones in and dry swallowed them, grimacing when they got stuck.

Elyza gave him a look, “You know we have drinks for that.”

Bellamy just shrugged, “But then I’d have to get up.”

“Oh the horror,” Elyza got up and walked over to where Nick was sitting in front of his tent, “You good? Need anything?”

Nick peeled the edge of his bandaging back, “I’m pretty sure this doesn’t actually need stitches, what do you think?”

Elyza twisted his arm back and forth, “These two spots could use a stitch or two each,” She gestured to two puncture wounds that were deeper, “You might be able to get away without it, but I’d stitch it if it was me.”

Nick looked around before nodding, “Go ahead then,”

Elyza raised her eyebrows as she got what she needed out of her bag, “You’re that afraid of your mom?”

“I mean, afraid is a strong word. I’m more concerned that she’ll murder you in your sleep if she catches you stabbing me repeatedly.” He joked.

Elyza just chuckled, “Even if I did stab you repeatedly, this little needle won’t do much damage,” She held up the needle in between stitches.

He laughed, “Did you fall asleep during that little fit she had over Alicia? Cus I’m pretty sure that
needle did even less.”

“Nah, this needle will do less damage. You won’t even be able to tell I stabbed you with it in a few weeks. Alicia’s will be there for a long ass time.” Elyza finished up her stitching.

“Why’d you do it anyway?” He watched Elyza, trying to distract himself from the vaguely sickening feeling of his skin being tugged all over the place by little strings, “You had to know that it was gonna be a thing.”

Elyza just smiled, “It was important to her,” she got a fresh bandage and began wrapping his arm, “And the rules we used to live by don’t exist anymore.”

“Guess so.” Nick smiled, “You done already?”

“Yep,” She threw her supplies in her bag, “Scale of 0-10, where’s your pain level?”

He narrowed his eyes and nodded, “A twenty-five.”

“Man, it fucking sucks to be you then,” She smirked, “If you can joke about it, you’re not that bad.”

He shrugged, “I figured Anya’s already told you to keep me away from the good stuff, not that you have any,” He winked, “So it’s not worth popping that drugstore shit.”

“Riiiight,” Elyza just nodded her head in collusion. “Get some sleep, Non-Dr’s orders.”

Nick laughed, “I’ll get right on that.”

Elyza nodded and walked back to her tent. She changed her clothes and tucked her medical stuff away. With a book in her hand, she crawled back out, not quite ready to go to sleep just yet. She flopped on the sofa, adjusting to get comfortable before starting to read.

Anya paused on her way to bed and turned a full circle, frowning.

“Forget something?” Madi asked her, having stopped to watch Anya look confused for probably the first time, without Raven in the room anyway.

Anya pointed at nothing in particular and then turned the circle in the other direction, “Has anyone seen Chris?” She pursed her lips, “I haven’t seen him since we got back from the construction site.”

“Maybe he went to bed already?” Madi shrugged, not particularly concerned about Chris disappearing himself for a few hours.

Anya shook her head, “I would have noticed.”

“I haven’t seen him in a while,” Elyza had looked up when Anya had first asked about him.

Anya walked over to Madison and Travis’ tent, rattling the canvas, “Have you seen Chris?”

“What?” The reply was muffled and drowsy.

“Have you seen Chris?” Anya repeated, her patience wearing thin.

“No.” The reply was terse, and Anya still wasn’t quite sure who was speaking.

“Nick said Chris was sulking in the A/V closet.” One of them muttered, clearly two-thirds asleep.
“When?” Anya asked.

Madison finally stuck her head out of the tent, “This morning, what is this about?” She asked groggily.

“Has anyone seen Chris since this morning?” Anya boomed, it wasn’t a yell, but the sound definitely carried.

Tent zippers sounded as people started to emerge from their tents.

“The fuck are you asking about that little shit?” Octavia asked, looking ready to murder someone for waking her up.

“He’s gone, and unless anyone here has seen him in the last three hours, we’re going to start looking.”

There was general silence as everyone looked at each other and waited for someone, anyone, to respond so they could go back to bed. After a minute of silence, most of them began reaching into their tents, pulling out shoes, jackets, and weapons.

“I’m gonna kill that little runt,” Raven grumbled.

Elyza snorted, “You have to find him first.”

“Oh, we’ll find him,” Bellamy growled.

“Anya. There’s no need to go looking for him,” Travis tried to convince her, “He’s just wandering around the school somewhere.”

“Really Travis? Really?” Anya strapped a knife to her thigh, “So if you haven’t been seen in over 8 hours, we should just ignore it because you’re probably wandering around?”

“I would.” Octavia was giving anyone and everyone dirty looks. Her already iffy coordination relied entirely on sleeping as much as humanly possible and if she spent all day tomorrow tripping over her own feet, then she plans to strangle Chris.

“You argue about your waste of space son all you like. I’m going to find the little squirt, kick him in the shin and go back to sleep.” Raven informed Travis, walking out of the cafeteria.

Elyza ran after her, catching up with her just after she smacked the door open. Bellamy and Nick just walked after them, not even bothering to listen to the argument. It just needed to be done and the faster they started the sooner they’d find him.

Nick and Bell went right for the first floor, digging through the A/V closet. Elyza and Raven took the second floor, each of them taking each side of the hallway and checking every room. Presumably, the others took the third floor, roof, probably the school grounds too, not that they could see far in the total darkness.

About two and a half hours of yelling the pipsqueak’s name, they heard Nick shouting out, “That MOTHER FUCKER!” And the delightful way that it echoed down the halls and even up to the roof. The reason being of course, that he yelled it out the broken window.

The hall was soon echoing with footsteps, mostly moving quickly, as everyone began to converge on them.
Nick was sitting on a bookcase next to a broken window with a mildly confused Bellamy patting his shoulder. “The books are fine Nick, look, it’s just a little breeze. We’re in California, they’ll be fine.”

When Travis walked in Nick jabbed a finger at him, “You see what your shitstain of a kid did?” He pointed at the shattered window, “The whole library’s going to be ruined if it rains because your spawn was too lazy to use a fucking door.”

“How do you even know it was Chris? Anyone could have damaged that window.” Travis crossed his arms over his chest.

Nick’s face split into a grin? But the vindictive kind. The kind where you’re so angry that you don’t care about all the reasons you don’t say things, and you’re so pissed that you’re going to enjoy saying them. “But you wouldn’t know would you?” He threw his arms out, “You’re too busy screwing my mother and pouting about your ex to even realize that your own kid ran off! Even after dad died, at least mom noticed when we ran off!” He gestured at Madison, “But no, you just ignore your problems until they go away, and guess what? Your kid’s fucking gone. Because anyone else would have mentioned breaking the window, anyone else would have had the decency to suggest moving the books. ANYONE ELSE.”

“Maybe someone broke in.” Travis offered.

“We literally just searched the whole building.” Raven pointed out.

“There’s no one but us here,” Elyza agreed with Raven, “They might be able to avoid a few of us, but not all of us.”

“Are you seriously telling me that we just spent the last 3 fucking hours, looking for the fucking shit, when he just fucking took off without a fucking word to anyone? Fucking seriously?” Octavia asked with almost no expression.

“O!” Bellamy whipped around to look at his sister, “He’s not here, maybe you should just go to bed?” He made the suggestion hesitantly, O didn’t usually swear, but when she did her temper was on an incredibly short leash.

“Yeah, I’m going to do that.” She stomped back upstairs, “I hope he fucking dies!” She called over her shoulder.

“She doesn't mean that,” Bellamy reassured them.

“I think she really does, and I can’t really blame her.” Elyza spoke up, “If we were anywhere else, and even here, going to look for Chris for a couple of hours in the middle of the night has put us all at risk.”

“Oh come on, the school is safe, there’s no risk.” Travis protested.

“First off, don’t ever claim that we’re safe because nowhere is safe anymore.” Anya was pacing, “Second, she’s right. There could have been dead wandering around the school that we could have run into and been hurt by because it’s dark and we’re all going to be tired as hell tomorrow, which is also a safety issue.”

“If he messed up the trap by the baseball field, this place could go from nice to deathtrap pretty damn quick.” Raven pointed out. “Who knows what else he fucked up. Your kid finds a perverse amount of pleasure in making things difficult.”
“He does not.” Travis snapped, “Chris is a troubled kid but he doesn’t deserve this treatment. I’m sure we just missed him or he’s out in the football stadium. Something like that.”

Lincoln clapped a hand on Travis’ shoulder, “I hope you find him.” He turned around and trudged his way up the stairs, leading an exhausted entourage upstairs to bed. They left Travis to do whatever he wanted, no more judgment or arguing because, at this point, they didn’t have the energy to even be mad about it.

Nick headed off in a different direction, coming back a few minutes later with a roll of plastic and duct tape. He took a few minutes to cover the window and make sure it was well sealed before he too headed back to his bed.

Chris, on the other hand, is not moping or pissy, he’s actually enjoying himself quite a bit all cozy in his little nest. Lounging on a king size bed in the suburbs a few blocks over, pigging out on granola and jerky from his bug out bag, and watching his footage from the day to delete anything embarrassing. He hummed tunelessly as he watched, occasionally rewinding to watch something again. Finally done, he stretched out on the bed and got comfortable, shoving wrappers and bits of food onto the floor. Man, this was so much better than being told what to do at every turn. This was going to be great.
Trash Can

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chris woke slowly, squinting at the sunlight blaring into his eyes. The tents had their issues, but at least they muted all of the light so he could sleep as late as he wanted. He rolled over to his other side, wanting to go back to sleep. He smiled a bit when he notice the watch draped on the stand, one-thirty. He hadn’t been able to sleep in so late since before the world ended. Now, or at the school, he hadn’t been able to sleep much past 10 with all the noise and complaining of the rest of the group about his sleeping. They were so irritating and self-righteous, why did he need to get up early to help with crap that someone else could do.

He lay in bed a while longer before giving up on falling back to sleep. He sat up and kicked the blankets off of him, letting them pool on the floor in a pile. No one here to make him clean up. He got up and pulled on clothes before he started wandering around the house. When he had broken in last night he had been hungry and tired, he basically just climbed into bed, but now he could explore.

The kitchen wasn’t much to talk about. He smiled to himself as he knocked down the mugs on the counter, casually walking through and tossing the inedible stuff off the shelves and onto the floor to crunch with the glass shards. There was a box of cereal that hadn’t been opened still laying in the back corner of one of the cupboards so he swept everything off the counter and sat his ass there to tear into the box. Not like anyone was going to yell at him for sitting on the counter were they?

He munched on as much as he wanted, pouring the remainder on the floor and watching it fall to join the mess. He hopped off the counter and moved into the dining room. There wasn’t anything too special in there so he kept going into the living room. He inspected the..doll things in a glass cupboard, dropping them on the floor one-by-one as he looked at the creepy little things.

Before he left the living room, books, games, snapped DVD’s and shattered electronics littered the floor, crunching under his feet with every step he took. He paused when he heard a thump, sounded like it was coming from the kitchen. He walked back in, looking to see what it was.

For a split second when he saw the walker, he panicked a bit. He had left his knife and gun upstairs, but before he had fully reached out to grab a knife out of the block on the counter he noticed that the thumping noise was being made every time the walker bumped into the glass door. Chris chuckled, stupid thing wasn’t going to turn the handle, it wasn’t going to be a problem.

He turned back, yanking open closet doors and tossing everything out. He didn’t find anything, but he wasn’t actually looking for anything, it was more to see what was there. Finally, he went back upstairs. There wasn’t much up there either, jewelry, books, clothes that were all tossed. He did find a leather jacket that was pretty cool. A bit big, but still awesome.

“Looking good.” He grinned at himself in the mirror, turning every which way to see how it looked on him.

He walked back into the bedroom he’d slept in last night, tripping over the pile of blankets on the floor. “Stupid blankets!” He got back up and kicked at them, getting his feet tangled in them and almost falling again.

He grabbed his bag, stuffing his things back into it, no way was he going to stay in this pigsty. His
bag slung over his shoulder, and thumped downstairs, no one here to complain about noise, either!

In the kitchen, he could still hear that dumb walker smacking its head into the glass over and over, growling at him like an idiot.

Chris smirked and walked out the front door to meet the afternoon with all the confidence of a man in a brave new world. He pulled out his camera and pointed it at his face while he walked, “It’s day two and I gotta say, I’m not impressed. I’ve already dealt with my first walker on my own, I didn’t even have my weapons on me.” He pursed his lips, “So bite me, Anya, you and your stupid preparedness crap were a waste of everyone’s time and I’m not even as good as your precious niece.”

He rolled his eyes, “She’s not even related to you genius.” Chris scoffed and caught sight of something interesting, “Oh take a look at this.” He turned the camera around and pointed it at a walker, trapped inside their car, reaching out to him and snarling. “This is the monster everyone’s peeing themselves over.”

Chris tapped the window and recoiled just a bit when it growled and lunged at him. He gave a short laugh to try and prove he wasn’t afraid, “See? It’s not even smart enough to hit the seat belt. I don’t see what the big fuss is all about, they’re just idiots wandering around.”

After a few minutes he got bored taunting the walker and turned the camera back to his own face, “No big deal guys. You’ve got all those walls and elevators and ridiculous pulleys and we could just be using the front door. It’s not like these guys can even work a doorknob.” He shook his head at the others spending so much effort trying to protect themselves from these idiots. “Anyway, I’m going to go find me some lunch.”

He wandered the streets for about an hour before he caught sight of what he wanted. “Jackpot!” He squealed in excitement, running towards the food truck. It was one he recognized from school, they would park just across the street and only the lucky few would be able to get in line early enough for the best nachos you can get your hands on. He pulled the door open, ignoring the scream of metal that had warped. He jumped in the back and began rummaging, looking for anything to eat. He did a little victory dance when he found a bag of chips on the very top of one shelf and a can of nacho cheese slid behind some pots. He struggled a bit with the can opener, his hand and wrist cramping every few twists once he was half-way around. “Dang it,” Chris muttered, sucking on his thumb where it had been cut by the lid as he pulled it. He didn’t wait for it to stop, smearing a bit of blood on the bag of chips as he ripped them open.

It barely registered as something that even happened. As soon as he had chips AND dip, Chris was in heaven. Sure, the salt stung a little bit, but crust it in enough cheese and you won’t feel anything anymore right? Chris dug in, spilling drips of cheese all over the truck and tossing shit everywhere trying to find anymore cans.

Once he’d ransacked the whole truck, Chris was left with two more cans of cheese and another bag of chips that he shoved into his backpack, and a delicate layer of salt and nacho sauce all over his hands and shirt.

He hopped out with his chips and dip and chilled on the fender, eating his fill and trying not to get any more cuts and scrapes from the sharp edges of the can. “Best day ever.” He decided, meandering along when he was done sitting. When the can was empty, well, when it became too much effort to scrape out the remaining bits of cheese, he tossed the can on the street and shoved the leftover chips into his backpack for later.
Chris kept moving, dodging a few walkers who turned towards him as soon as they noticed him. Every so often he’d have a handful following him, but it usually didn’t take long before one or more got stuck, or distracted and the group would get smaller. As long as he kept moving, though they weren’t a real threat.

He pulled out the camera every so often, mostly when he was bored and there wasn’t anything to look at, or anywhere to explore, and filmed his thoughts and what he saw. He commented a few times that the group back at the school were a bunch of paranoid idiots, so scared of what was out there that they couldn’t even function. Chris was well fed, he hadn’t had any issues with people or walkers all day and he wasn’t even really paying attention or trying too hard.

Near dark Chris started looking for a place to crash for the night. It took a while, there hadn’t been any houses for a little while, just small stores and businesses, but he finally came across a small motel. He smashed in a window using a large rock and climbed in through it. “Tsss,” he hissed as a shard of glass cut his leg.

He took a spare minute to wipe the blood away from the cut before he turned his attention to opening another can of nacho cheese. A few more scrapes later and Chris was humming in satisfaction as he chowed down.

The water here didn’t run, and he was officially out in the bottles he had brought with him, but he was tired and Chris didn’t really feel like going in search of water right now. Instead, he curled up on the bed and flipped open the camera.

“This is so much easier than the others said it would be. I haven’t had any problems and really? It’s been a lot of fun. A lot more fun than hanging out with them and all their work and rules. I don’t know why I didn’t take off without them a long time ago, this is so much better, and I don’t need them.” He flipped the camera off and set it beside him.

Without the light of the camera to brighten up the room, he realized that it was a lot darker than he expected. Last night he’d been too tired and angry to notice, but now… Usually, someone was still up or reading by candlelight when he went to bed. Chris squirmed in the bed and punched the pillows a few times, trying to get them to set right but they just wouldn’t. It wasn’t a very good mattress.

He grumbled, shifting positions a few different ways, everything from sprawling across the mattress to curling up, he even tried sleeping upside-down but nothing felt right. “Crappy hotel beds.” He muttered, getting up and pacing a little bit. Maybe if he exercised some more he could go to sleep them.

Chris bounced around the room, going through the wardrobe and the little closet with the hangers, listening to them scrape across the metal bar and tossed them to the floor. “No wonder I couldn’t sleep with that racket.” He kicked them for good measure and checked out the bathroom for anything else that was thwarting his attempts at sleeping.

A shadow moved across the other side of the bathroom and he flinched. The mirror. He laughed, “Just a stupid mirror. There’s no one here.” He grabbed the shower curtains and ripped them down, not like he could shower anyway, but the little plastic things were still there, spinning and rattling. Chris hopped up and yanked the whole thing down, except he didn’t expect it to come away so easy and he landed hard on the tile.

He grimaced, gasping when he stood back up. That’s going to leave a bruise. He growled to himself and picked up one of the little shampoo bottles and chucked it at the mirror. How dare this idiotic room and whatever jerk designed it keep him awake, and not even be decently put together.
What if he’d fallen and tried to catch himself on that curtain? He could have died.

Chris heard the crack of the bottle on the mirror and the outrage went away and replaced itself with a grin. He sat back on the edge of the tub and picked up another bottle, throwing it at the mirror. He tossed everything within reach, even the hairdryer. That’s what finally shattered it, spider-webbing of glass in all kinds of pieces, most of them still on the wall reflecting a broken reality.

His smile faded a little as he looked into it. The darkness was too thick to pick up more than a silhouette but…

Chris backed away from the disturbing image and closed the door to the bathroom. Down the hall, he could hear the groan of a walker. Stupid mirror ruining everything for him.

Chris kicked the door hard enough to punch a hole through the wood and skipped back to fall against his bed. He climbed under the covers and glared at that dark hole in splintered wood until he woke up in the next morning, feeling worn and exhausted.

Everything hurts, not in the fell down fifteen flights of stairs and out the second story bay window kind of hurts, but more of a hiked four miles over the course of the day and holy hell why is PE somehow the only important class now?

He groaned a bit as he pulled himself upright, it felt like his bones were creaking and his muscles had pulled too tight. He shivered as the cold air hit his skin, it hadn’t been particularly warm during the night, maybe that was why he had such a hard time falling asleep, but now it was just cold.

He grabbed some extra clothes and pulled them on, ready to get out of here. Especially to find water, his mouth felt like it was packed with cotton and he was so stinking thirsty. He crunched back into the bathroom and took care of business, he wasn’t going to be sticking around so why did it matter if he used the toilet and couldn’t flush it. He grinned a bit thinking of the others using the smelly and uncomfortable buckets. Who’s the waste of space now?

He walked out the door, dragging his backpack with him and camera in hand. “Words of wisdom to live by, hotel rooms are the worst place to sleep.” He informed the camera, ducking under a counter to avoid the walker that had been wandering through the motel after all the noise he made.

“This guy,” He poked the confused zombie with a broken chair leg, “Was making a racket all night long. I guess crappy neighbors don’t go away at the end of the world.” He joked, “Anyway,” He climbed over the other side of the counter, wincing as his whole body protested and kept walking, “I’m letting you live this time buddy, but keep it down next time.” Chris informed the walker.

Chris rummaged around behind the counter and in the office, but they were both torn apart and had nothing useful.

He walked back out into the parking lot and picked a direction to start walking in, choosing randomly because there really wasn’t anything to recommend one way over another.

“I don’t get why everyone keeps going on about these zombies,” Chris kicked a can as he walked and talked, “It hasn’t been hard to avoid them and they’re just wandering around. With the way the others kept going on about them, you’d think they’re actually smart or that they can go faster than a two-year-old.”

Chris paused for a minute to look in a car that seemed to be loaded down with stuff. The two dead in the front seat kept trying to claw at him but couldn’t get the door open or the window down so it was fine. He yanked open the backseat door and pawed through their things, letting most of them
hit the ground at his feet. Nothing useful, just clothes and photo albums and cat figurines. “People take the stupidest crap with them,” He slammed the door shut and glared at the two used-to-be women. “You couldn’t have died with some water in the car?”

One of them hissed and hit her window hard enough to crack it and Chris stumbled back a step, landing right on his bruised hip. “OW!” He pushed himself up, “Stupid jerk!” He kicked their door and limped away from the car, “This is what happens when you trust people to be smart. They hide in schools, and they get mad at you for wanting some freaking water. And they yell at you for being smart enough to find your own little safe place to be.” Chris snapped the camera shut and kept limping, too mad to talk anymore. He’d start again when he found some damn water.

He didn’t.

Chris went to sleep with a pounding headache, curled up in some backroom cot he’d found in this little mom and pop shop. Waking up every other hour to his leg cramping so hard that his toes curled, and after the first yelp of pain, he’d had to grit his teeth and pant it out because there was a walker meandering right outside the window and he could see them pacing while he tried to get his legs to relax.

It felt like he didn’t wake up so much as he gave up, climbing out of bed on unsteady limbs, feeling them buckle beneath him every time they considered cramping up again.

He limped out of the shop, barely able to move fast enough to avoid the grasping hands that had reached for him. It still got his shirt and tore it, which left him even more pissed off, but he was just too tired to do anything about it.

Chris kept walking, but he paid even less attention to his direction today than yesterday, more focused on staying upright through the dizziness and headache and trying to find water. He broke into every store he came across, but he didn’t find any water and it made his progress ridiculously slow. He could still see the shop he had spent the night in when he tried to eat a few of the chips that were left, but just a few bites in and he gave up. His mouth was just too dry and he could barely swallow the chewed up mess in his mouth.

He kept walking, beginning to give up on looking through every store, just the grocery stores and restaurants now. They had all been emptied, except for the destroyed food littering the floor. Still no water to be found.

Chris finally slumped against a car, he was so dizzy and little black spots were starting to float over his vision. He let his bag drop to the ground with a thump and jangle as stuff collided, but Chris couldn’t really hear it, his hearing fading out at his vision tunneled. He stood up, trying to stave off the spinning, but as he pushed against the car, he felt his brain cave in on itself and then he couldn’t feel anything.

He felt as much as saw the first hands grab onto him, yanking him in circles that just made him want to puke. Like a merry-go-round but the horses are scarier. Kinda melty?

Chris remembered falling over.. Ish, but then someone was yelling. It made his eyeballs feel like they were going to pop out of his head and then his brain would pinch again and under the hurt and the dark was this blinding headache.

A lot of people started running, from what wasn’t clear, and he tried to get up again but it felt like nothing was working and anything that did work was clearly wrong. Someone grabbed him but this time their face wasn’t melting off and he heard the dimmest hint of words, but it sounded more like coins bouncing off a tin roof.
He was sure that if he just focused he could figure out what was going on, but he couldn’t get his brain to work long enough to do that. Chris felt his feet moving beneath him, but it was more like he was watching a movie of someone else dragging him but through mostly closed eyes with a really bad headache.

He doesn’t remember most of it, but someone hauled him up a ladder and into a room. There was yelling to shut the door and hushed whispers. Someone smoothed his hair back, and he felt like he was being petted or something, it was nice in a weird kind of way. It wasn’t necessarily a choice, but he stopped fighting the dark around the edges of his vision and fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

....It had to be done, just remember if you're in pain reading it, I was in agony writing it.
Torture

Chapter Summary

We had to break up the pain somehow, so you'll get a bunch of vignettes in between.

Travis stood at the window, looking out into the morning sunshine. He was tired, exhausted really, he hadn’t gone to bed when everyone else had, or even at all since Anya had finally brought his attention to Chris not being where he should.

“Hey, did you find him?” Madison asked, handing him a cup of coffee. She’d stayed up longer to help, but eventually, she’d given up and gone to bed just like the rest of them.

Travis just shook his head.

“Damn.” She sighed, “Well we can look everywhere again. He’s got to turn up soon.”

“He’s gone. His sleeping bag is missing and I’ve looked everywhere.” Travis grit his teeth, “What happened yesterday to drive him away?”

“Travis,” Madison tried to get him to understand, “Nothing happened. We were all working together until Chris decided he was done and he took off to the AV room.”

“How did you know he was in the AV room?” Travis asked her.

“I sent Nick to find him a little while after he took off,” Madison replied.

Travis set his cup down on the table and turned to find Nick, he tore open the flap on Nick’s tent, ripping it apart. “What did you do to him?” He shouted, hauling Nick up by the front of his shirt, “What did you do?!”

“What?? I didn’t do anything!” His voice cracked and he scrambled to keep his feet, “Get off of me!” He shoved Travis away and his shirt ripped but Nick didn’t care. He scrambled out of the tent, tripping over his own feet to get away from Travis who tore through the tent angrily.

“You had to have said something!” He chased after Nick, standing over him when Nick tripped and sprawled across the floor, “Chris wouldn’t have just left, now what did you say to him?”

“Travis stop!” Madison got between them, holding her arm out to Travis’ chest.

Nick stared up at the man, panting, “Dude I told him to get his shit together. The kid’s been stealing, running off whenever he wants, and he was gonna get someone hurt looking for him. That’s it!”

“You shouldn’t have said that.” Travis pointed at him, “It wasn’t your place to say that to him. He’s MY son.”

“You’ve barely said a word to him in two weeks! You obviously weren’t going to say anything. So I did, maybe you should stop moping and get out of your fucking head.”
“You little..” Travis lunged at him again.

Anya shoved him back with Madison’s help, “Travis enough. Someone had to say it, and you didn’t. Chris is gone and you need to deal with it.”

“No, he-”

“Enough!” Alicia yelled, kneeling next to her brother. “Let it go, none of this will bring him back.”

“It will! It will bring him back I just-” He turned to yell at her and Anya took advantage. The butt of her gun hit his head, and Travis crumpled to the floor.

“Why are you so weak?” Anya asked Elyza after she failed, again, to lift the lower half of a lay-z-boy up the stairs.

“I’m not weak! I’m selectively.. I’m weak okay, you don’t need to run for your life in a tattoo parlor.”

“I’m pretty sure you do now.” Anya retorted.

“Well as we both know, this isn’t actually running for my life either.” Elyza huffed, “This is just torture.”

“You are so damn dramatic, this is nowhere near torture.” Anya waited impatiently for Elyza to move up a few more steps. “We could arrange torture.”

“What are we arranging now?” Octavia popped her head over the stair rail.

“I dunno but it sounds like fun to me.” Raven chuckled.

Anya grinned, freaking the girls out when they saw it, “Oh it will be. For me.” She chuckled just a bit, “Maybe not for you, though.”

“All of a sudden I’m less excited for this.” Raven mumbled, “But also a little turned on.”

Octavia squinted at Anya, “I’m wondering what form this torture is going to take. I’ve experienced my fair share.”

“Your fair share of what?” Bellamy could be heard bellowing down the hall, his voice accompanied by the bleats of the goats.

“Torture from hot chicks.” Raven bellowed back.

“I have seen all the chicks in this place and NONE of them are hot!” Bell snarked back at her.

Raven hustled down the stairs and grabbed a shocked Anya by the hips, “I BEG TO DIFFER!”
Octavia and Elyza were practically rolling on the steps in laughter.

Anya grunted, taking the full weight of the recliner. “Get off and grab the damn chair!”

“Oh cheekbones, I’ve been trying.” Raven just stood there a moment, she huffed and grabbed the other side of the chair when Anya didn’t respond.

Raven helped Anya get the chair to the landing, letting it hit the floor with a bit of a grunt, “Why did this need to come upstairs. Last I checked we all live downstairs.”

“I’m tired of trying to relax while Travis checks to see if he’s finally developed laser vision that can peel the flesh off my body.” Anya shoved the chair a bit further from the stair edge.

“Intense.” Elyza nodded, “Honest but damn.”

Raven nodded her agreement, “Nice. So how are you planning on shoving him up here? We just gonna lock him in every night?”

Elyza laughed, “I vote we just chain him up, put a slot on the door and shove his food through when he gets too bitchy.”

Anya chuckled, “Sadly I think that’d end up with me murdered in my sleep.” She paused and looked at the other girls, “Which we want to avoid.”

“But by who?” Raven raised an eyebrow, “I’m pretty sure even Madison is getting tired of his crap. We can arrange visiting hours.”

Octavia sniggered, “Conjugal visits? Ew.”

Elyza gave a full body shudder, “God no, ugh, I think I’d rather let Anya torture me.”

“I know I would.” Raven snickered.

Anya’s face split into another evil grin, “Heard and witnessed. You’re mine bitches.”

“What exactly does that mean?” Elyza’s voice wavered a bit.

“It means you’d better get ready for a fresh slice of hell.” Anya grabbed Elyza and Raven by the collars before either of them could take off in the only kind of cardio they’d volunteer for, and started walking down the hall. “Mind grabbing the door, Octavia?”

Octavia jogged forward, only half tripping as she got started, to grab the door Anya had nodded to, “Wouldn’t miss this for a thousand bucks. Whatever the hell this is.”

Anya smirked and released the girls once the door was closed, “This is the school gym, and it’s time for a little visit to boot camp. When I’m done with you two, you will beg for a two-mile run.”

“Had a gym?” Octavia walked in behind Anya and started exploring.

“What the fuck, is that my missing generator?” Raven pointed.

Anya grinned, “It’s mine now. And all that gas we scrounged up last week is to keep this puppy going.”

Elyza walked to the iPod and speakers hooked up to the generator, “You better have decent music on this thing. I will bitch at you until your ears bleed if it’s all janky country shit.”
“Hey!” Octavia protested, “Country is truly American music!”

“And why is that an endorsement?” Raven deadpanned.

“Have you ever wondered why everything is made in China? It’s because America sucks, and we know it.” Elyza pointed out, and Anya almost agreed with her, but she wasn’t going to say shit about it.

“China only makes shit.” Raven protested, “I can hardly take anything they make apart and then put it back together again.”

“Not being able to take something apart and then put it back together is not a sign of something being shit, it’s just you not being as good as the Chinese engineers.” Elyza goaded Raven.

Raven gasped, her hand flying to her heart, “You take that back, you bitch. I am the best.”

“You know they’re going off on this tangent to distract you from actually making them do anything, right?” Octavia asked Anya watching as the two started in on each other.

Anya nodded, hands on her hips, “I’m timing it. They’ll spend the same amount of time doing push-ups.” She checked her watch, “That’s six minutes so far ladies.”

Elyza suddenly stopped mid-sentence to look at Anya in horror. “Six minutes of WHAT?”

“Full push-ups. As in, if your nose doesn’t touch the damn floor you start again, and you’d better go all the way back up too, so keep going. I want to see this.” Anya gestured for them to continue their little tangent.

Elyza’s face hardened, going still and cold as marble. She stalked over to Anya and got in her face, yanking Anya’s face towards Elyza’s. No one else could quite hear what she said, but Anya sighed and nodded, “Fine. Fine, you do full from the knee push-ups. But if I think you’re slacking I don’t care what you threaten me with.”

“Lex. What the fuck?” Raven asked, completely confused about Anya’s sudden change of heart. “Are you telling me you had leverage on cheekbones and you didn’t share?”

Elyza rolled her eyes, “Blackmail only goes so far Rae, you’re better off flirting with Baby if that’s your strategy.”

“Alright, that’s seven minutes,” Anya announced, that evil grin back in place.

“...You bitch.” Raven grumbled, dropping down onto the mat. Elyza grimaced and followed suit, both of them assuming the position and waiting for the mark from Anya.

“Well.” Octavia stopped grinning and looked up at Anya, “What?”

“I said ladies, you are a female right?” Anya pointed down to the mat and Octavia paled just a bit. She was fit, but that didn’t mean she was going to enjoy this.

“Seven minutes, starting... Now.”
Chris rolled over onto his side with a groan. His head was throbbing and his eyeballs felt like they were being pierced with a needle.

“Hey, take it easy,” A hand reached under him to help him sit up a bit, “Drink this.” Water began to stream into Chris’ mouth and he swallowed greedily. As things started clearing up he reached up and took the container in his own hand, guzzling the water down as fast as he could now.

“Oh hey no, no-!” She grabbed the trashcan and offered it to him just in time for Chris to vomit most of it right back up. The woman grimaced and rubbed his back, “There you go. Just work it all out.”

Chris coughed up what he could, his throat rasping painfully. “Where am I?”

The woman just tucked the can away, “Let’s work on keeping some of that down first okay?” She gestured to his water bottle, “Small sips.”

He did as he was told, watching her. She just sat back for a few minutes, waiting for him to drink a bit before she said anything. “You’re in the County Hospital.” She told him, “We picked you up just a few miles west of here.” She tilted her head a bit to try and look him in the eye, “Any reason why you were just wandering the streets like that? It’s not safe to be out there alone.”

Chris just shook his head, “Better out there than where I was.” He scoffed harshly. Anything is better than working dawn to dusk and eating nothing but nasty old venison jerky all the time.

She frowned but didn’t push further, “What’s your name?”

“Chris.” He looked up expectantly.

“I’m Amanda.” She put a hand to her chest.

Chris nodded and stood, looking around, while taking more sips of water. He had been laying on a cot, one of a dozen in the room along with piles of fabric, backpacks, and stacks of boxes.

“Where are you from?” Amanda asked, interrupting his inspection.

“Here,” Chris said, “LA” he clarified when he saw her confused look, “Where are you from?”

“Here in LA too, we’ve got some people who aren’t from around here, but most of us are from here too.” Amanda shifted on her feet.

“Are there a lot of you here?” Chris asked, he still hadn’t seen anyone else.

Amanda hesitated, “There’s fifteen of us.” She shifted again, “We’ve been pretty safe here, so we’ve gained a person here and there, but we haven’t lost anyone since before the fires.”

Chris nodded, “That’s cool.”

Amanda looked surprised, “Where have you been staying? This kind of safety is unusual.”

“I was with a group of people, the place we were staying was safe, but they weren’t the kind of people I wanted to stay with.” Chris was kind of wandering around the room now.
“What do you mean? Safety is a big deal with the world like this,” Amanda questioned.

“They had a lot of rules that benefited them and made life harder for everyone else, me especially.” Chris stared at a generic print on the wall, “And their morals sucked, they kept defending a woman who was responsible for my mom’s death.”

“Oh my god..” She recoiled a little bit, “I get that things are a little desperate right now, but wow.”

“Yeah.” He scoffed, “No kidding right? They actually put her in charge after that.”

“That’s not ok,” Amanda shook her head. “We don’t have a lot to offer, but you can stay here with us for a while if you want to.”

“I’d like to stay.” He admitted, “At least until I get better.” He didn’t really want to pass out from dehydration again.

“Are you hurt?” Amanda suddenly looked concerned, “Other than the passing out, I mean.”

Chris chuckled a bit, “Where aren’t I hurt might be a better question.” He lifted his shirt to show off massive black and blue marks and more than a few scrapes and cuts. He also lifted his pant leg to show a long cut running up his shin.

“Oh god,” She got up and put her head out the door, “Can someone get Randall? The boy has some cuts and bruises that need to be taken care of.”

“Sure thing!” Someone called.

“We’re going to get you cleaned up,” Amanda reassured him.

Chris just nodded, then looked around suddenly, “Where’s my bag?”

“It’s in the other room,” She looked a bit wary now, “We weren’t comfortable leaving you with access to weapons until we get to know you.”

Chris pouted a bit, “Can I get my camera?” He asked, eager to have it back, “And maybe a change of clothes,” He tugged at his torn and dirty shirt.

Amanda smiled, “Let’s let Randall look at you and then we can get you some of your things back.

“Cool,” Chris nodded, happy now that he knew he was going to get most of his stuff back. He hadn’t even really needed his weapons while he was out there.

A short black man walked into the room, pushing a large cart in front of him.

“Sit down,” He instructed, pointing to the cot Chris had vacated.

Chris sat down and waited.

“Show me where you’re injured.” He sounded irritated.

Chris huffed a bit before standing back up and pulling his shirt off, he was too banged up to bother with holding the shirt out of the way. He sat back down and lifted his pant leg, showing off the gash.

Randall sighed checking the bruises carefully, “Have these spread at all?” He asked, probing them lightly.
“Ow!” Chris hissed, “No, they started this big.”

“Color changes?” He asked, prodding at another one, earning him a hiss.

“They got darker,” Chris muttered, watching Randall with suspicion.

The man humphed and looked back to his cart, “Let me know if they turn red or start spreading at all.” He started digging through the drawers.

Chris leaned over trying to see what the guy was doing, “Are you some kinda doctor or something? Cus your bedside manner sucks.”

Randall snorted, “Best part of the apocalypse is that I don’t need one of those anymore.” He pulled out a suture kit and some local anesthetic, “I’m going to sew you up so if you have to barf, don’t move too much and don’t do it on me.”

Chris yanked his leg away, “I don’t want some hack sticking a needle in my skin.”

Amanda put her hand on Chris’” shoulder, “Randall is a nurse, he knows what he’s doing Chris.”

Chris still looked doubtful, “Nurses have never done my stitches before, you sure you know what you’re doing?”

“Stupid rules, designed to give Dr.’s all the power and leave those of us that do all the damn work looking like nothing more than janitors,” Randall muttered, “I can do the stitches, or you can take the risk. Take your pick.”

Chris considered him, before moving his leg closer, “Thanks,” He muttered, still uncomfortable with who was doing the stitches.

Randall nodded and got to work. His movements were as brusque as his attitude, but with the numbing agent and his efficient work, he was done pretty quickly. “There. Don’t get it dirty, if it turns colors or swells let me know.” Randall said, packing up all his things.

Randall got up and nodded to Amanda. She gave him a tight-lipped smile as he passed her. “Sorry about him,” She said as soon as Randall was out of the room. “He’s had a hard run of things.”

“We can all say that,” Chris just shrugged, Randall didn’t bother him, he wasn’t really important so what did it matter if he was a jerk. “Now what?” Chris rocked back and forth on his heels.

“We’ll be eating soon. It’s just canned stuff that was here in the hospital, or that people brought with them, but it’s food.” Amanda patted his shoulder, “I’ll go get you a change of clothes and I’ll bring you food in a bit. You should rest.”

Chris sat back on his cot, it was boring but he’d started to get used to that.

A short while later he jerked up at the sound of the door opening. Amanda came in carrying a tray followed by a girl who looked a bit older than Madi. She was carrying a pile of clothes, some books, and

“My video camera!” Chris sprang up, grabbing the camera off the pile and opening it to check that it still worked. He sat back, ignoring the food and clothes for a bit, enthralled in watching what he had filmed. He didn’t remember everything that he had last recorded, plus it was fun to watch something again.
When he finally looked up Amanda had left, but the girl was watching him, “There’s food,” She gestured to the tray, “And these were in your bag,” she held up the bundle of clothes still in her hands.

“Yeah, cool,” Chris got up and grabbed the tray, the soup was nothing great, still mostly cold, and the vegetables were some awful green mash. Yuck. At least at the school, they’d had more appetizing food. Chris ate it anyway, he hadn’t eaten much other than chips and even if it looked disgusting it was edible. Mostly.

“I’m Brenna,” She introduced herself, hands still clutching fabric. She realized that she was still holding the clothes and she put them down hastily, dropping the book on top in the process. She blushed and tucked her hair behind her ears. Picking up the book she offered it to Chris, “I brought this for you. I know it can be really boring stuck in here.”

“How long am I going to be stuck in here?” Chris asked around a mouthful of food.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m just a kid,” She blushed again, “But not long, I’m sure.”

Chris kept eating, scraping the bowl clean when he got to the bottom.

He stood up, “Well I’m not going to sit around doing nothing,” He walked over to the wall of windows, set too high to actually see out of and jumped to see if he could get high enough. After realizing that it’s hard to see while in motion and for only a few seconds, he went back and grabbed a chair that was tucked into a corner, the girl was gone but that didn’t really matter. Chris hauled the chair to the window and then climbed on top of it, he was only barely tall enough on the chair to see out, still had to stand on his tippy-toes, but at least he could get a view.

The lawn outside was..rough. Most of it was scorched, blackened grass tips with just a little bit of green at the bottom, though some spots didn’t have any green at all it just looked dead. Beyond the yard was a line of vehicles, enclosing the once-grassy spot, holding back a large group of the dead. They were continually moving forward, creating a constant wave of motion in the vehicles as they rocked in response.

As Chris watched more dead were drawn into the horde, whether it was the motion or noise Chris couldn't tell, but it was one of the biggest hordes he had seen since this whole thing started.

Chris watched for a little while longer finally giving up when the arches of his feet and his toes started to cramp with violence. He jumped down from the chair, hissing as the jolt made the cramps move up his calves and get worse for a few seconds before they finally stopped.

Still bored, Chris began rummaging through the piles he had seen when he first woke. There was nothing good in the piles, clothes, blankets, a few books, but at least it gave him something to do to pass some time.

When he was done pawing through the piles Chris wandered over to the door, a quick tug on the handle left him irritated, who locked someone into a place with no escape when the dead were around, he could die in here and no one would know. Maybe that was their plan. Chris kicked at the door and shouted a bit, demanding to be let out. He huffed when he didn’t get a response and went back to sit on the cot.

He sat there for a few minutes, bored out of his mind and irritated that he was locked up before his camera caught his eye. He pulled it closer and opened it up, rewatching what he had filmed over the last few days. He decided that most of it was good, but there were a few clips that just weren’t working for him. He went back and deleted those clips before setting the camera up to record.
“It’s been a few days since I left, I’m hanging out with a group at the hospital,” Chris looked around for a name, not seeing one he shrugged and continued, “I don’t know which one, but it doesn’t matter. I guess they helped me out, brought me here.” Chris rolled his eyes, “I’d have been fine if I’d been able to take a bit more water with me, but those stingy jerks probably wouldn’t even care, anyway. I guess I’ll stick around here for a bit. Seems like these people could use some help, they have a whole horde outside, just waiting to get in. Then maybe I’ll move on. It’s not like it’s been as hard as they said it would be. I had no issues with food, these people seem decent and I can just take more water with me next time.” Chris shook his head, “I can’t believe everyone was so freaked out about everything. They are seriously making all of this a lot harder than it had to be. Their rules just made more problems and if they only listened to someone else, anyone else, it’d be so much better for everyone.”

“Who are you talking to in here?”

Chris looked up startled, “Just myself,” He lifted the video camera so it could be seen from the door, “Things have gone crazy out there, this’ll keep me sane.”

The newcomer nodded as he walked into the room, “I don’t know if sane is the best thing to be anymore. Might feel better if you just lost it.”

“Nah, if I lose it then it’ll never get better. Craziness breeds.” Chris shut off the camera, seemed like this new person wanted to talk. Maybe that’d get him out of this room.

“You might just have a point on that one.” The man lowered himself to the floor, folding his legs into a pretzel with more ease than Chris used the camera. “So if your plan isn’t to go crazy, what is it?”

Chris considered him, this guy was tall and lanky, looked like a good wind would knock him over, and he spoke with a lazy drawl that sounded a bit like Madison when she’d had too much to drink, but somehow even softer.

“I don’t really do plans at the moment.” Chris decided to be honest, “The last group I was with only did plans and wouldn’t let go of them for anything. So I’m done with plans, just going to take it one day at a time, do whatever I need to to survive.”

“It’s a fight out there, and plans never last long in battle.” He tilted his head studying Chris with even more intensity. “Since plans never last long anyway I’ll tell you that you’ve got a place with us. For now.” He unfolded himself and stood, “Come on out and meet the others.”

“Do I get to meet you?” Chris couldn’t help the sarcasm.

“I’m Jim.” He kept on walking, not bothering to even look at Chris as he introduced himself, “You’ll come to me if you have any issues or before you leave.”

Chris nodded and followed him out past the doors.
“Seriously? Blood Bath and Beyond?”

“At least it's not curtains and bedding.”

“I don't know, at least those are soft and squishy.”

“Nope, these are better.” There was absolute glee in Anya’s eyes as she looked at the store in front of her.

“It’s kind of scary when you do that,”

“Do what?” Anya didn’t even tear her eyes away.

“Smile.” Nick dodged away as Anya reached over to smack in the back of the head.

“It is kind of scary when you do that,” Octavia agreed, a smirk on her face. She wasn’t worried about retaliation.

“Shall we?” Lincoln dropped slightly into a bow, gesturing the women to lead the way towards the doors.

He followed behind until they actually got to the door when he stepped forward and used his ax to pop the deadbolt out of its spot. He hooked the lower handle in and wedged it in using it to open the door just enough for Nick to get his hand in. They opened the door, stopped by a chain that secured it from the inside.

“Uh..Is that supposed to be there?” Octavia asked looking at the others.

Anya sighed, “No not really, there’s probably a walker or two in there.” She brought her rifle up, still not pointing it at anything, but less of a distance to aim, “Be ready.”

Lincoln and Nick traded places, Nick holding the door open and Lincoln standing in front of the gap. Once the girls had backed up and Nick had the door pulled open wide enough that the chain was taut, he hefted his ax and swung it around striking the chains. The door jerked with the force, but the chains were still there. He did it again and this time individual links went flying.

“Ooof” Nick grunted as the door jerked again, yanking on his hand, “Thanks for not cutting off my fingers.”

Lincoln offered a small smile, “Anytime.”

The door opened fully, swinging open and bouncing slightly against the wall. Anya walked through looking around. It looked like a typical shop, nothing particularly special about it, though
the closed door bumping in its frame was a little out there.

“Grab whatever you can find. Load the truck up, and don’t avoid those bows.” Anya gave instructions, staying focused on the door while the others spread out around her. She walked forward and took aim. “Respond if you can!” Her voice was raised to be heard through the door.

No response other than more bumping. Anya shot through the door, about chest height before reaching for the handle and twisting it open. The smell was awful. Death and sewer. Ick. On the floor was a walker, it’s chest fairly-well blown open. It was struggling to rotate itself and get closer. Anya just stepped forward and used her knife to put it out of its misery. The rest of the room was empty. Well, other than the gun cages. Anya grinned.

She searched through the desk but didn’t find keys. Sighing, she started patting the dead guys’ pockets, finding them in the back pocket. She pulled them out and unlocked each of the cages before returning to the main room. She also unlocked the ammo lockers, giving up another grin when she saw the stacks of boxes.

“Come to Mama.”

“Okay, so carrots over here, and the beets go over by the algae barrel.” Nick directed, crouching over a bag of fresh fertilizer.

“Ew. Why do we have a barrel of algae?” Elyza asked, peering into the barrel in question.

“Because you don’t want to start making better fertilizer.”

“…” Alicia gave him a suspicious look, “Why do I get the feeling that it’s something gross?”

“Because it’s shitting in a bucket and burying it for a few years,” Nick smirked.

“Don’t we have rabbits for that?” Madi asked, her nose wrinkled in disgust.

“Rabbits don’t make great fertilizer, it’s okay, but it’s not great.”

“What about the goats and chickens?”

“Better. But really, you can’t add too much fertilizer, especially since this isn’t the ground. Just whatever we came up with.” Nick said.

“How do you even know all of this stuff?”

“I didn’t fail ALL my classes.” Nick sniffed.

“There was a class on gardening?” Elyza asked, looking miffed, “Why couldn’t we have had a class in gardening?”

“Ehhhh, it was more like a club?”

“More like community service.” Alicia scoffed, “He worked in the community gardens for like three months. The shrinks thought that the plants and fresh air would help even him out.”

“Instead I learned how to grow weed!” Nick beamed, “Useful life skill I might add. Turns out
“Potheads are one of the few addicts with actual money.”

“Pot would be so useful right now,” Elyza sighed.

“I could probably get my hands on a few clippings.” Nick scratched his chin, “I knew a guy.”

“You aren’t serious.” Alicia stared at them, and they stared back.

“Uh, why would pot be useful?” Madi looked between them all.

“Stress relief, relaxation, sleeping aid,”

“Drugging Travis?? Anyone????” Nick threw his arms up in the air.

“I think I already listed that under stress relief, relaxation and sleeping aid.” Elyza smirked, “It wouldn’t be bad for pain relief either.”

“I could use some of that right now.” Nick sighed, “Turns out Dysentery isn’t just the trots.”

“Would the Mom Squad really let you bring pot in?” Madi questioned.

“Let is a strong word.” Elyza smirked, “But I mean, Travis is caught up in his own little world, and I really doubt that Madison knows what it looks like. Nick has the garden handled right? It’s good for him, mellows him out.”

Nick snickered, “For someone who’s only known her for a few months, you really have my mom pegged.”

“Parents aren’t hard.”

“Its the garden, won’t someone notice when they’re up here just trying to get some sun?” Alicia asked.

“Yeah, they might,” Elyza sighed.

“What about a classroom? We’ve got lots of those,” Madi suggested.

Nick and Elyza turned to her.

“Oh no, they’ve corrupted you.” Alicia sighed, “Madi, how could you let them do this to you?”

“Well, my other option was Chris..”

“Ok, so pot, how do we do this,” Alicia jumped into it.

Elyza cackled, “Nick and Madi can set up the room, Nick you wanna show me on a map where your boy kept his grass?”

“Sure, I don’t know if it’s survived any of the fires though, so it’s just a shot in the dark,” Nick warned her.

“You been shooting in anything else recently?” Elyza joked, “Worst case, we go for an afternoon drive.”

Alicia wrinkled her nose, “Is Anya going to give us grief for this?”

“Why does Anya have to know?” Nick asked her.
“You know Anya won’t let any of us leave without her,” Elyza told him, “She’s such a worry-wart.”
“Yo Chris!” A Lanky teen about Chris’ age yelled, “Can we come with you today?” The boy gestured at two other teens.

“Nah man,” Chris shook his head and hefted the crowbar higher in his hand, “You heard what Mandy said, she doesn’t want any of you out in the yard doing clean-up.”

The teens pouted, “It’s boring in here, why do you get to go out?” Brenna whined.

“Oh come on, Chris actually lived out there, we’ve been stuck in this hospital since before things went to hell. The adults just figure we’ll get killed.” A plump girl poked at Brenna’s side.

“Or it’s just because Chris is the favorite.” The lanky teen sulked, leaning against the wall now, “Your mom just thinks he's the best thing since sliced bread Sascha.”

“Mandy’s cool,” Chris protested tying up his shoelaces.

“Only because she’d let you get away with murder, try being her daughter.” Sascha grumped, arms crossed in front of her chest. “And Tyson just wants to get away with murder too.”

“It’s not murder if they’re already dead, and I’m older than Chris is.” Tyson moved away from the wall, “I still don’t get what the big deal is, you go out there and shove your crowbar in their heads and keep the barricade between you the whole time, it’s not like it’s a challenge or even risky.”

“You’re only two months older than I am,” Chris pointed out, “And I’m the one who goes out to do it because I’m the one who pointed out that it was a problem in the first place. And I have actually lived, and survived, out there, like you said, you’ve gotten to chill the whole time. It’s different being face-to-face with those things.”

“Or maybe it has something to do with the whole cancer thing? Maybe Amanda just wants to protect you.” Brenna offered.

“I was pronounced cured before the world went to hell and since Chris is the only one who’s allowed to call her Mandy, I don’t really think it’s a sick kid thing. And how am I supposed to get any experience dealing with them if I’m stuck in here the whole time.” Tyson threw his hands into the air.

“You should be glad you don’t need any experience. We’ve got enough help as it is and you don’t need to be going out and getting any on your own.” A soft elderly woman scolded, “Now Chris, you should be getting out there and getting your work done, I’ll have lunch on soon and it’ll be cold if you sit here jawing away any longer.”

“Yes June,” Chris grinned at the woman who coddled him to no end. June had been horrified to learn that he’d taken off on his own and she felt the need to make up to him everything that had made him leave the other group. Chris offered the group a small salute with his crowbar, careful not to hit himself in the head with it like he did the first time he tried that and walked out the door that separated their living area from the open corridors of the hospital.

The walk wouldn’t have taken very long, but there had been barricades put up, not that they needed them, this floor and one other were completely clear. But there were five stories to this hospital and the other three, all below them, were filled with the dead.
Chris climbed through the hole left by a food cart with all the trays removed, the only real way through this barricade without knocking it down on top of himself. He hissed when he caught his knee on the back corner.

“You alright there?”

Chris’ head whipped up, not expecting to hear anyone on this side of the living space. He relaxed when he saw James, one of the previous residents of the hospital leaning against the wall. “Yeah I’m fine.”

“You going out to the yard?”

“Yep, there’s another dozen out there this morning. They just keep coming.”

James nodded, “Probably all the noise the stiffs make, banging around down there.” James stood upright, “I’ll come with you.”

“You sure that’s a good idea?” Chris asked, eyeing the face mask resting on the windowsill next to James’ elbow.

James followed Chris line of sight, “I’m fine kid, just need my breathing treatment. Not going to turn into a stiff just yet.”

“I’m not a kid.” Chris glowered, his good mood gone.

James just scoffed, “If you’re less than half a century, you’re a kid. Don’t get offended.”

Chris just grunted and started walking. James could keep up, or he could not. Whatever.

Chris slammed the door to the stairwell open and began jogging down the stairs. When he heard it, he ignored the wheezing sound of James following him down. Chris just kept going and didn’t slow down. He pushed the emergency exit door open and squinted into the bright sunlight.

It wasn’t actually all that bright out. Clouds littered the sky, some of them really dark and heavy, but all they had inside the hospital were camp lights and they didn’t use them unless they absolutely had to. Something about not wanting to use the generators or lights unless it was an emergency. It was yet another stupid rule, but the noise was bad enough that Chris didn’t get to sleep in much so he was asleep pretty early.

“You’re going to get yourself killed kid, or someone else.” James huffed and wheezed, “You didn’t even check if some stiffs had gotten into the stairwell.”

“Relax,” Chris refrained from adding old man in his irritation at being called a kid, “I’d have heard them before they got to me.”

“Not if they were right on the other side of the door.” James was finally starting to catch his breathe.

“Well they weren’t and they never are. The stupid things always go down instead of up, it’s not like its a problem.” Chris just rolled his eyes and started towards the barricade.

As Chris approached the dead started pushing harder against the line of cars keeping them out of the yard, “Don’t forget to stay on the path!” Chris called back to James. He gave a little chuckle when he heard the old man cuss a little. “ Wouldn’t want someone to figure out that we’re living in the hospital. You’ll get yourself killed, or someone else.” Chris rubbed it in a little.
When he had first pointed out the issues with the yard there had been a clear path where the charred grass had been stomped on, broken and bent from being walked on, and a line of soot and char streaking across the spot where they climbed over the vehicles when they left. Chris had pointed out how obvious it was and so they had moved some landscaping crap around so it looked like it was just supposed to be decorative.

He had also insisted that they kill the dead that kept shoving at the cars. It had taken almost half a day to get rid of them and drag the bodies away, but at least it didn’t seem like there were so many that the dead would be able to push the cars over or shove them out of the way.

He walked with James to the barricade and began to shove his crowbar into the skulls of the dead. It had been surprisingly difficult the first day, but now it seemed a lot easier. Easy enough that it took less than half an hour to drop the dozen who’d come to play.

Chris wiped some of the spray off his face, he still hadn’t figured out how to do this without getting blood all over him, and sighed. At first it had seemed like it was a brilliant idea to worry about people noticing the hospital, but now that they were putting down the stiffs they had to move the corpses, or else it would be too obvious. That sounded like such an Anya-ish thing to say that he scowled.

“You okay there kid?” James wheezed, sucking air through his little mask with a Darth Vader noise.

“Fine. Just.. Remembering.” He muttered. With Mandy and June, it was the easiest way to blow off their concern. They didn’t want to push him to remember such awful things, living trapped in a place where his choices were to work or die. Did he exaggerate about the school a little? Maybe. Did that god awful place feel like an internment camp? Definitely. And here, Chris had everything he could want and more.

James however, did not seem to think that remembering is a bad thing. “Well don’t let yourself get too lost. Thinking about the past is for the stiffs. We have to make a future for ourselves, as short-lived as it may be.”

“That’s what we’re doing.” Chris rolled his eyes, leave it to grandpa Vader to get all nostalgic over some shitty memories of his bitchy aunt.

“Mhmmn,” James gave that annoying nod of his, “So what’s in your future?”

Chris gave a huff, how was he supposed to know the future? “I don’t know, keep the people here safe.”

“You suddenly planning to stick around? Last I heard from Jim you were only here as long as it served you.” James grunted as he dragged a corpse towards the pile they had started.

“Hasn’t been too bad so far. Doesn’t seem to be much reason to move on.” Chris grimaced at the stench. It had been getting worse with every day that passed, and the wind had started to pick up the last few days. At first, it was nice and blowing away from the hospital, but yesterday the wind had shifted and the reek had been overpowering.

“Yeah I bet kid,” James smiled at him a bit, “Not every place makes sure you get your favorite pudding every day.” He chuckled.

Chris just rolled his eyes, irritated. He had been ragged on by everyone since they noticed that June made sure he got his favorite butterscotch pudding every day. Not like they didn’t get pudding too.
“Let’s just get this done. June said she’d have lunch done soon.” Chris went back to work.

“Chris.” James suddenly hissed. “We’ve got people over there.”

Chris stopped and squatted down, “Where?”

James gestured over to a group wandering down the road leading to the hospital. “We should go inside.”

“Yeah, you should go back in.” Chris waved at James, “I wanna see what they’re doing.” He crept over to the side of one of the cars.

James followed him, trying to wheeze quietly, “This isn’t safe. We should go inside and wait until they leave.”

Chris rolled his eyes, “And then they just break in and leave a way in for the stiff’s. We should know what they’re gonna do.” He peeked around the edge of the car at them.

“Well we should at least get some help, we can’t do anything if it’s just the two of us.” James protested again.

“Shit.” Chris ducked back behind the car, “Back up, back up.” He pointed towards the door. He shooed James back inside, looking over his shoulder and urging the old man to go faster, clenching his jaw when James had to crouch-walk with an arm as well.

“What is it?” James asked when they were safely on the inside the stairwell.

Chris peeked out through a crack in the door, “I don’t think they saw us.” He sagged against the door.

“Who?” James asked again.

“Elyza and Anya.” The names left a bad taste in his mouth.

James just looked at him, “Wait, those people you were with before?” James stood upright, “They are not coming in here.”

“Uh, we might not have a choice.” Chris leaned against the wall, head banging against it slightly. “These aren’t the kind of people who’ll give up because it’s not easy.”

“We need to get the others,” James started up the stairs, not waiting for Chris’ agreement this time. “I don’t care who they think they are, they are not getting anything from us.”

Chris looked at the older man in surprise. He was usually pretty fragile, not being able to breathe made him pretty weak. But right now the old man actually looked a bit intimidating. Maybe those comments about being at war weren’t so far fetched.

They walked up the stairs to their floor and walked through the corridor, walking around and crawling through some of the barricades. Finally, they walked into the clear corridor separating the barricades from their living quarters, where Chris paused. How was this going to go? He shook his head and followed James who hadn’t stopped.

“We have intruders by the west gate,” James said and the response was immediate. All the kids, teens, and the two invalids were all moved into the kitchen behind the thick metal doors and Mandy and a few of the other adults gathered up in the center of their little camp to question James.
Mandy’s original estimation of fifteen people hadn’t been honest, but it was no big. Chris would have lied about it too.

It was organized, and a little confusing. Chris was used to watching them bicker pleasantly and be terrified of every little bump in the night, but these guys looked.. They looked ready. Maybe that’s how they secured so much of the hospital in the first place.

“They’re the same people that had Chris?” Mandy snapped and at the sound of his name, Chris tuned back in. “Do you know what they’re here for?”

Chris shook his head, “There’s no way they know I’m here. It has to be for medicine. Travis was pretty insistent that we come to the hospital for drugs back when we found a girl with a snake bite.”

“They can’t have it,” Mandy informed him.

“Come on, let’s think this through.” Kat interrupted her, “We have a surplus of certain materials, and depending on what they need it could be smart to offer a trade.”

“They won’t trade.” Chris told them, “My family tried to trade with them and we got dragged into their stupid little fortress. I only got out because they underestimated me. You can’t trust them.”

Kat nodded, “Be that as it may, it’s still safer if we hear them out, and respectfully decline. Slamming the doors will instigate a hostile situation. So *if* they make it through the lower levels, then we show them the door.” She looked to Mandy, “Politely. A fight would only drain all our resources.”

“Chris, I want you to go with the others and wait this out,” Mandy told him.

“What? No! I know what they’re like, I can help you!” He protested, “I’m not just some kid.”

“No, but you should be, and I don’t think it’s a good idea to let those people know where you are.”

Chris shook his head, “You don’t know how they think or how they’ll respond to anything. You need me.”

“Sweetie, we just want to make sure you’re safe and that they don’t hurt you.” June patted him on the shoulder.

“I made sure I was safe when I left them and unless you hand me over to them, they won’t hurt me.” Chris assured them, “You need me there to talk to them,” he hesitated, “You don’t understand how to talk to them, but I do. I lived with them, I know what they’re like and what will make them listen.”

“Chris,” Jim began,

“No. I’m going to be there. If you don’t want to just ignore them. If you want to keep them from getting anything, then I’m going to be there.” Chris asserted. They weren’t going to change his mind. These people had no idea about the details of living with those people and he wasn’t going to enlighten them just to convince them that they needed him.

“Are you su..”

“He said he was sure,” A slim young woman interrupted, “If we don’t want them to have any supplies, then we should get to them before they get in the hospital. Chris has said that at least
some of them know what they are doing and so they’ll aim for the stairwells instead of the main entrance. If they open the stairwell doors on any of the lower levels, they’ll let stiffs pour in and that’ll be a mess we don’t want, or they’ll get up here and we won’t be able to prevent them from getting their hands on stuff. We still haven’t gone through all of the rooms and supply cupboards.

“Alright Kat,” Jim just sighed, “What do you want to do then?”

“We need to go down and meet them. I’ll take my gun, whoever else wants to go can bring whatever weapons they’ve got. We’ll leave the vulnerable people up here along with a few others in case these people decide to try and force their way in and they get past us.” Kat walked over to the nurse's station and used a key to open a locked cabinet. On top of syringes and some vials of something was a utility belt filled with whatever and a holster attached.

Jim sighed again, he did whatever he could to avoid violence and this didn’t seem like avoiding it. “You’re the cop.”

“Was.” Kat said shortly while she slung the belt on. “Who’s going and who’s staying?”

“I’ll stay,” Randall didn’t hesitate.

“I’ll stay, can’t imagine this old lady will be much use,” June walked into the back with the others.

“If I stay too then we’ll have four who can use a weapon if we count Harold.” Jim nodded his agreement.

“Then I guess that leaves James and me to go with you,” Amanda started rummaging through the umbrella stand they had been using to store their weapons in. She pulled out another crowbar and a tire iron out, holding the tire iron to James.

James just stared at it for a minute, “Aw shit, I left my other one out in the yard.”

“And you say I’m gonna get people killed,” Chris mumbled under his breath, tightening his grip on the crowbar that hadn’t left his hand since before he left to clean out the yard.

“Let’s go people,” Kat circled her finger in the area, “Before those sons of bitches get into our home.”

“Language,” Amanda scolded, shaking her head when Kat just clicked her tongue.

It took ten minutes for everyone to get through the hallways and down the stairwell, Chris rolling his eyes more than once when someone would ‘hear something’ and make the whole group stop and listen closely. It wasn’t as bad as when they opened the door to the stairwell. That involved Kat pounding on the door with her flashlight as hard as she could and then an interminably long wait so that the stiffs that weren’t on the other side could not make noise. Stupid precautions.

Finally, they were all bunched at the bottom of the stairwell, hovering by the door. Kat had opened the door a sliver, her gun drawn. Chris just rolled his eyes again because the crack was so small there was no way she could see anything. Anya and the others could be on the other side of the door and Kat would have no clue. Chris just huffed and pushed through, shoving the door open.

He ignored the hushed scolding and scanned around him for the others, noticing only the occasional drops of rain hitting his face. There was no way they had left without a carload of stuff so they were here somewhere. He didn’t bother waiting for the others as he began walking toward
the front of the building, they’d catch up, or not.

He turned the corner, the others finally with him, mostly bunched up behind him like underwear two sizes too small. Only Kat was walking around with any sort of ease. Even James, who was the only other one that Chris had seen leave the building in the two weeks he’d been here, looked more freaked out than usual.

They turned the corner and saw the other group standing in front of the doors. Raven and Elyza were with the group so they had no problems figuring out that they were trying to decide if they should find a stairwell or if they should find a service entrance.

“I’m just saying that no one’s going to be hanging out in the laundry room when the world goes to shit!”

“And no one’s going to be hanging out in a stairwell either and oh yeah! Then we can go up the fucking stairs you moron!”

“I am a fucking genius you little shit, don’t you call me a moron.”

“You’re the ‘genius’ who’s arguing with a girl who practically grew up in hospitals about the best way to get in to one.”

“Girls!” Madison yelled.

Anya was just standing there, arms crossed over her chest seemingly relaxed when she suddenly stiffened.

Chris knew that she’d spotted them, even though she didn’t move much more than that. She was way too easy to read sometimes. He walked a bit closer but stopped leaving a large gap between them. It wasn’t enough space that they’d have to yell, but still more than enough distance that no one would be hugging, or punching, him.

Anya put her hand on Raven and Elyza’s shoulders, causing them to immediately shut up, before she turned around to face the Chris and those with him, leading the rest of her group to turn towards them as well.

Chris couldn’t deny the slight thrill of satisfaction that went through him as everyone’s eyes focused on him and widened. They hadn’t expected to see him again, obviously, and now he was standing between them and whatever meds they were after.

“Chris?” Madison started towards him, stopping when the rest of his group closed around him.

“You should leave, there’s nothing for you here.” Chris decided to take charge and get to the point, show them that he wasn’t a nobody here. Here he was someone to pay attention to.

“Chris, have you been here this whole time? We’ve missed you.” Madison tried again, reaching out towards him, but not moving forward.

“You’ve missed me? Bet you really haven’t.” Chris refused to let her make them look good. He felt justified when he saw Raven and Elyza exchange a look and shake their heads minutely, seeming to deny Madison’s statement. Chris smiled when he saw that others in his group had noticed them.

“Chris, you know that’s not true. Your dad has been an absolute mess since you took off.” Madison tried another tactic.
“Oh yeah? Did he take off to look for me?” He let her silence hang in the air for moment, “Did anyone look for me?”

“We didn’t have much choice when you hightailed it out of there without saying shit to anyone,” Raven snapped at him, “We looked half the damn night for you, only to find that you’d left us vulnerable to a fucking attack and taken off.”

“There’s no way a stiff could have gotten into the school from that window, I had to climb on a table to get out of it and practically broke my leg crawling through.” Chris glanced to the side, it wasn’t a casual thing to leave a safe spot open to attack, but he relaxed when he felt a hand on his back supporting him. “And if I’d told anyone I wanted to leave, there’s no way you would have let me.”

“Oh trust us, we’d have let you.” Elyza threw back at him.

“Alright look, you didn’t want to be there, now you’re not and apparently you’re safe. That’s a good thing, right?” Anya jumped in, always pretending to be the peacemaker, not like she made her living off of violence. “We just came here to look for some meds and now we know where you’re at, so that’s a bonus.”

Kat stepped up beside Chris, “Well we don’t have anything for you.”

Eyebrows shot up, “Probably only because the little shit’s here. Sucked you dry like a little fucker.” Raven muttered wincing when Madison’s elbow shot into her side.

“Like I said, we don’t have anything for you here, now get lost,” Kat repeated herself, a bit more of a growl to her tone.

“You sure?” Anya asked again, “We could..”

“No.” Kat barked it this time, her hand moving to her holster.

Anya threw her hands up in the air and took a step back, “Alright, fine. We’ll just be on our way then.”

“Chris, are you sure this is where you want to be? You could come back with us. You know it’s safer.” Madison got a bit closer this time.

“It may have been safe for you,” Chris emphasized, “But it was never safe for me to be there, and neither you nor dad ever cared about that. You didn’t care when she” he jabbed his finger in Anya’s direction, “Killed my mom without even trying to save her first, and you didn’t care that they,” this time he pointed at the two other girls, “Made my life miserable. You didn’t care at all, just so long as you got what you wanted.” He laughed sarcastically, “And you said you would never be the evil step-mom.” Chris enjoyed seeing Madison flinch at the last.

They all stood there for a moment, the rain had intensified now and had begun to drip down Madison’s face making it look like she was crying. “I don’t ever want to see any of you again. I can take care of myself.”

“You ungrateful little shit. Good riddance.” Raven grabbed at Anya, hauling her around leaving Elyza to grab Madison, pulling her towards the road. They didn’t stop or turn around. They didn’t try again. Chris was almost disappointed. They hadn’t tried at all to get him back, they hadn’t apologized, they hadn’t offered anything. Nothing.

He stood there, surrounded by his new group, watching until the quartet was out of sight before he
turned around and began the walk back to their door. The rain was really coming down now, pelting into their skin, and no one said a thing.
Liquor and Drugs

“Why does that smell like ass?” Elyza asked, jerking her head away from the bucket.

“Because it’s not done yet?” Bellamy was fiddling with wires and tubes, checking on the progress.

“Please tell me it’s going to get better. We only have so much tequila left.” She practically begged him.

“Yes it will,” He sighed after a tube came loose, “I’ll be back.”

“How is it going to get better?” She asked Travis this time, he’d surprised them all with knowledge of how to build and work a still.

“This is a trial batch.” He sniffed at the bottom of a huge glass jar with a tube resting in it, before he swapped it with another one, empty this time. “It’s been a while since I made moonshine, and Bellamy wasn’t super sure either, so we wanted to start small. That’s actually how it’s supposed to smell, at least if I’m remembering right.” He rubbed his hand over his face.

“I don’t care how it smells right now, my question is will it taste good?” Octavia jumped in, having been listening to the conversation. She shared a look with Alicia who also wanted to know but wasn’t willing to risk Travis saying something to her mom.

“Peach moonshine? Yeah, it’ll be good.”

“You’re making that peach stuff?” Anya’s head popped up, “That stuff you made your senior year? That was the best stuff ever.”

“Oh really?” Sarcasm was obvious, “And here I thought you hated it, just drank the entire batch to irritate me.”

“Well, that was just a happy little bonus.” Anya jumped up and came over sniffing next to the lid before jerking back. “She’s right that smells like ass, but it’s going to taste like it did last time?”

“As long as we did it right.”

Anya squinted at him, “Practice until you do it right, I’ll happily test it for verification.”

Octavia looked between the two of them, “I know you guys are brother and sister, but seriously, you must have been the weirdest siblings ever.”

“Step.” Travis and Anya both clarified at the same time.

“And we didn’t exactly spend time together,” Anya added.

“Except when you stole my moonshine and I had to keep mom from noticing your drunk ass.” Travis retorted.

“You’d have gotten in more trouble than I would have.”

“True.”
There is only one way to win at life. This is it.

“Dude there’s enough drugs in here to put down a cow!” Raven shouted

“That’s kinda the point genius."

“So we can kill a cow, which is great, but how about we not kill my brother.”

“Well, I’m pretty sure he’s already dead after that one.” Raven snickered.

“Not funny Rae.” Elyza made a face at her. “He’s in bad shape dude.”

Raven looked at her feet, “Sorry, O”

Octavia pushed past her and began yanking open doors, shoving a crowbar under the edges to pry open the locked ones.

Anya started doing the same, using the bolt cutters to crack open the padlocked cage and Elyza dug through the clear vials, “Okay, antibiotics, ketamine, tetanus vaccine, suture stuff, needles, pretty much anything that doesn’t look contaminated.”

Raven grinned from ear to ear, “Okay everybody, just put the drugs in the bag and nobody gets hurt.”

“Oh my God.” Anya rolled her eyes and started packing up the duffel.

“Honestly it’s not her worst.” Elyza pointed out, checking the seals and syringes for any signs of the plastic being broken.

“Can we actually use this stuff?” Octavia asked.

“I mean,” Raven shrugged, “You can get high off of pretty much anything so if sharpies and spray paint can get you high then I’m pretty sure that medical grade cow tranqs can work as a sleep aid.”

Elyza blinked at her, “You are not allowed to use cow tranqs to get to sleep faster. That being said, I might be willing to see what you look like on special K.”

Anya grabbed the bag. “Okay, you two are officially not allowed to hold these.”

“Would a book or two help?” Octavia held up two thick textbooks, one for cows, goats and sheep and the other for smaller pets.

“The cow one yes, but I’m not wasting good drugs on the rabbits.” Elyza nodded.

“Ooo, look at this one!” Raven reached into another cupboard and pulled out Plumb’s Veterinary Drug Handbook. She flipped through a few pages, “So do I look more like a goat or a cougar?”

“I think you’re a little young to be a cougar,” Elyza grabbed the book out of her hands and started
flipping through it herself.

“I thought that was Anya’s job,” Octavia said, almost at the same time.

Anya just glared, “I am not a cougar,”

“Are you sure? What’s the age difference require for you to be a cougar?” Elyza asked, still looking through the book in her hands.

“It’s about twenty years, though the average is around thirty.” Raven replied, “Anya’s still a little young for it to be official, but we can pretend.” She winked.

“Oh my God.”

“Is that what gets your engine revving?” Octavia asked.

“Do you really want to know that, she’ll tell us. All of us.” Elyza stopped reading, trying to glare O into taking her words back.

Raven grinned, “Oh no, the Genie’s already out of the bottle now. I’m gonna have to go with-”

Anya slapped her hand over Raven’s mouth for a solid two minutes of muffled words. Raven looked like she was having the time of her life, and when she was done…

“DIDYOUJUSTLICKME?” Anya scrubbed her hand on her jeans, “Ugh why are you so disgusting?”

“Have you met her?” Elyza asked Anya.

Octavia shook her head, “She could have done so much worse.”
The first few inches were the hardest

Chris stared out the window, watching rivulets of water flow down the window, one stream joining another and another, and sighed. It had been a boring two days. Two days of non-stop rain. Two days since he had since Anya and Madison and Raven and Elyza. Two days since he had decided not to join them. Two days of comforting pats. Two days of intense, questioning looks.

After they had gotten back inside their living quarters Chris had been a bit surprised when Mandy hugged him. He hadn’t been held so tightly since before his mom was killed. She had rubbed his back and reassured him that he was fine and safe and that he had a place with them always. It had been kind of nice, even if it was sort of ruined by his sopping wet clothes.

After that June had been even nicer to him, sneaking him an extra pudding. Even made him hot chocolate that night when he’d been freezing. He figured that Mandy must have told June what happened outside and that she also wanted to make him feel better.

Kat and James had been another story, though. They hadn’t said anything to him, or anyone else that he could tell. They both just spent a lot of time staring at him. A few times Chris had thought that James was going to come over and talk to him, but he never did. Chris just hoped that wasn’t going to be a problem. Though how could it, he reassured himself, they’d been there when Raven had cussed at him. They’d heard the accusations that hadn’t been denied about how his Dad and Madison had treated him. How everyone had treated him.

“This rain’s gonna need to let up soon,” Jim spoke from beside, scaring Chris who hadn’t seen or heard him. “It’s going to start flooding if it doesn’t.”

Chris huffed, “Welcome to California, if it isn’t fire season it’s flood season.”

“Don’t forget earthquake season!” Someone called out in passing.

“Ugh,” Jim shuddered, “That’s why I didn’t live in California.”

“You live here now,” Chris stated, still watching the rain.

“Guess I do.” Jim nodded his agreement and fell silent for a while, sipping on what smelled like coffee, sort of.

They stood in silence together, both watching the rain pouring down.

“You been doing ok?” Jim asked, finally getting to the point of why he was here.

Chris just nodded, refraining from rolling his eyes.

“They are your family. It’s okay if you’re not.” Jim tried again.

“My mom was my family.” Chris shook his head, “They were just the people I was related to.”

“Oh come on now. That’s your dad and Aunt. Your almost step-mom and step-siblings. Didn’t you have more feelings for them than that?” Jim questioned.

“My dad left when he and my mom got divorced. He abandoned us when he met Madison. My Aunt can barely stand me, she likes my step-sister better. And Madison just tried with me because she felt obligated to but only when Nick wasn’t around.” Chris leaned into the wall harder.
“What about your step-siblings?” Jim pushed a little more.

“Nick didn’t care about anything except getting high.” Chris shrugged, “Alicia was ok. At least before everything changed. After she became my Aunt’s minion. Doing whatever she said, whether it was a good idea or not.”

“Maybe she was scared. Not everyone handles fear and the unknown well.” He offered.

Chris nodded and considered it, “You’re probably right, Alicia’s always needed someone around telling her what to do. She’d probably be paralyzed without them.”

Jim smiled a bit, “Well you’ve got us now. We won’t abandon you.”

Chris returned the smile a bit, “Or treat me like a waste of space.”

“That either,” Jim agreed and sipped his coffee, watching the rain roll.

“CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?”

“NOT REALLY!” Chris yelled back, braced against the wind and the water driving into him.

“WE NEED TO GET BACK INSIDE!”

Chris nodded and followed the other hooded figure towards the door. He slipped a few times, banged his shin against something, but finally, they made it back to the door. They both pulled on the door, struggling to pull it wider against the wind. The first few inches were the hardest, but once he was able to get his foot between the door and the jamb Chris was able to angle his body to push instead of pull.

They finally got the door open enough that they could slip in, barely avoiding getting hit with the door as they finally stopped straining against it. They both pulled down their hoods and shook out their hair, the coats hadn’t done much to keep them dry.

“On one hand, I’m glad not to be stuck down there with a broken leg, on the other hand, this is ridiculous!” Harold complained stripping off his coat and the shirt underneath. “I don’t feel like I’m ever going to be dry again.”

“On the upside, that’s the best shower I’ve had in months.” Chris joked, also pulling off his soaked clothes. He ended up in just his jeans. They were soaked through too, but he hadn’t thought to bring up another pair.

Harold laughed as he started down the stairs, water streaming out of his clothes and onto the steps underneath him.

The two boys tromped down the stairs, laughing a bit when they slipped in the water that was pooling on some of the steps.

“It’s a good thing that door is so tight,” Harold said as he pushed into their living quarters, “We’d have water pouring in if it wasn’t.”

Chris nodded his agreement.
“What were you boys able to see?” Jim asked when he noticed them. His question caught the attention of everyone else, crammed into the large room.

“Not much,” Chris replied, “It’s coming down so hard I had a hard time seeing him.” He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the used-to-be college student. “I think some of the cars drifted though.”

Harold nodded, “Yeah they weren’t as bunched together as they used to be, but I couldn’t see the streets or the canal.”

“The water was almost knee high on the roof though,” Chris struggled to peel the legs of his jeans up to show off his purple shin. “Couldn’t see whatever it was that I walked into.”

June and Amanda clucked over the two boys, ushering them into the sleeping area to get dry and changed. When they were done they walked back into the common area, the discussion still going.

“Just because there’s that much water on the roof, doesn’t mean there’s that much water on the ground.” Randall was insisting, “The drainage up there has always been iffy and even the slightest bit of trash getting caught in the drains will have it filling up.”

“OR there could be even more water on the ground,” Kat argued with him.

“But why does that matter?” Brenna asked looking confused, “We’re on the 4th floor. The water can’t get this high, right?”

“Right sweetie, the water won’t get this high. We’re safe here.” Amanda reassured her daughter.

“It’s a problem because there’s already a lot of water out there and if there’s a flash flood, the bottom two floors could be covered,” Kat told Brenna, ignoring the warning look Amanda gave her.

“How is that a problem if we’re four floors up? There’s still a floor between us.” Chris asked, also confused.

“Because 20 feet of water will sweep cars, trucks, buses, hell anything that’s not nailed down into us. Buildings aren’t designed to withstand getting hit by a bus.” Kat tried to explain her concerns.

“Um, actually that’s probably not such a big worry.” Harold raised his hand. When he noticed he pulled it back down quickly and tucked it underneath him.

Everyone turned to look at him and waited, he startled a bit when he saw he was the center of attention, gulped a bit and then took a deep breath.

“So LA has really sandy soil. There’s some clay in there to hold it together, but for the most part, its sand. When you build in LA it’s on top of sand that’s been packed down a lot so it’s not usually a problem, especially when you’ve got earthquake friendly buildings, they’re pretty stable.” Harold paused in his little lesson to see if people were paying attention, seeing irritation he hurried on, “Anyway when sand gets completely saturated and then it’s agitated you get quicksand.” He finished quickly, his words becoming a rushed mess.

At first, there was no response. No one was really sure if they heard correctly, it had gotten hurried at the end.

“So.. You’re saying the building’s going to sink?” Tyson spoke up with the nonchalant disbelief that only a teenager could manage.
Harold nodded, “Yeah. Probably. I mean it’s obvious the ground is saturated already, and then if we had flash flooding that’s going to agitate the ground, which will make the building sink. And I have no idea how much, but depending on what they built on and a bunch of other things we could slide, we could sink, we could do both. It’s kind of dealers choice. If the dealer were a five-hundred-year flash flood.”

“Well, Shitsnacks.”

“I don’t like this room, can we go back to the old one?” A little kid whined. He must have been four or five.

“Hush. We can’t go back and you know it.” Randall didn’t believe in coddling anyone. Even a kid. Brenna walked over and took the little kids hand, offering to read him a story.

Chris shook his head, but he couldn’t blame the kid. The common area they’d had before the flooding got bad had been pretty decent. The chairs weren’t great, and there had only been two stiff sofas, but still decent. This area was more of a hallway, only a few chairs here and there. Even the rooms hadn’t had chairs to sit in. Randall had said something about surgery and ICU, whatever they’d been it meant there were lots of stools and nothing else. They even had the cots lining the hall since they hadn’t had time to roll the beds out of the rooms.

“I’m with the kid. This sucks.” Sascha scuffed her shoe along the floor. “Stupid flooding.”

“At least we had a warning.” Tyson nudged her, trying to offer what little comfort he could.

“Yeah, I know it would have been worse without that, but it’s still hard to see how.” Sascha shifted again.

“Come on, you need to sit down.” Chris tugged her towards a stool and pushed her onto it.

“Why, it’s not going to help.” She twirled herself slowly on the stool. “Pretty soon, I’m going to be a stiff, just like the others.”

“Sascha, you know your mom is working on it.” Tyson tried to soothe her, “She or Jim or Randall will figure something out.”

“Like what,” Sascha gave him a look filled with derision, “They’ll figure out how to put liquid back into a bottle? Oh after they figure out how to fix a shattered bottle, and unmix all the different meds.”

“Oh come on, you keep talking like you’re already dead. You aren’t. Any of us could be dead tomorrow for no damn reason, just like the 6 people that died yesterday, but until you’re dead, you aren’t dead.” Chris was annoyed. Sascha hadn’t stopped focusing on her impending doom since the refrigerator and the box on top of it had fallen over, shattering the vials of insulin inside of them.

“Any of us could be dead tomorrow, but I will be dead next week unless there’s a miraculous supply of insulin up here in the ICU.” Sascha kicked her foot at Chris’ knee.

He hopped out of her way and rolled his eyes, walking away to see if there was something to do. Things had been going pretty well before the flash flood. Even with all the rain and the flooding in
the building, it had been boring but everyone was safe and things were pretty good.

Then the rain had gotten even harder and they decided that it was a good idea to move up a floor. Just to be safe. Just to cater to the paranoia that kept people alive when stiffs started walking.

Turned out it wasn’t really all that paranoid. If they had figured things out earlier, been paranoid earlier things might have turned out better. Instead, two people died while they were running up the stairs. As best they could tell, one had slipped on some water that was puddled on a step and fallen down the steps breaking his neck. The other one had gone to help, the idiot, and all he’d gotten for his effort was nice big bite out of his neck. Another person had to be put down after getting bitten while ‘helping’ Kat and Amanda take out the stiff version of their two companions.

They’d managed to get most of the food and cooking set-up moved upstairs before the flash flood hit. Chris had been half-way up the stairs when the building started to shake and shift. He’d been through more than one earthquake, but this had felt slightly different. A lot more of a sinking sensation than usual, but as he’d run back down the stairs, now thoroughly dry thanks to Harold, he’d hoped he was wrong and his senses were just all over the place because of the shifting.

He’d been dismayed when he’d gotten to the fourth-floor door to find water puddling at his feet, the bodies now floating in the stairwell didn’t really bother him at all, but the water freaked him out. He pushed the door, more water pouring past his feet and ran to help the others.

Everything he passed was tossed on its side, shelves emptied, their contents floating. Cracks were running along the walls leading into now shattered windows, water pouring into them. He had finally reached the rest of the group when the water had pooled to just above his hips.

They were struggling, some still fighting to carry soggy bags and boxes. He’d pushed past them to help Jim who was half carrying, half dragging some guy. They managed to haul him to the stairwell door pretty quickly, surpassing the others trying to carry stuff and were able to hand him off to Kat and Randall who’d been on the floor above. Chris had left them, leaving Randall to mutter about supplies or something, when he’d noticed one get swept into the hallway behind the group, brought by the water still pouring in. He’d yelled, warning them, but there must have been others. Just as he’d finished yelling at them someone in the back of the group had yelled out and lifted his arm, bringing the stiff latched onto his arm with it.

Everyone had dropped what was in their hands, half-swimming half-running away from the stiffs in the water, but one more person got bit before they managed to get through the stairwell door and up the steps. They hadn’t been able to get the fourth-floor door shut, Chris wasn’t quite sure how that was going to work, but they had barricaded the fifth-floor door from the inside, so they were safe for now.

It had taken a while for everyone to recover. Most people hadn’t had to deal with stiffs after the first few days when they’d managed to clear off the fourth floor, but now they had and they started cleaning up glass that had fallen from windows up here, covering them with plastic bags found in the supply closet.

It had been shortly after that, that Mandy and Sascha had freaked out realizing that neither of them had grabbed the insulin that Sascha needed. They’d both been ready to run back downstairs, kill off the dead and swim to the fridge it had been stored in and on when Tyson had spoken up, the fridge had fallen over when the water first hit and everything had shattered.

After that, almost everyone had given up for the night, discouraged or something. Chris hadn’t been too bothered, but he didn’t mind taking the rest of the night off if no one else was going to be working. Even June, who’d made sure there was a hot meal for every dinner previous nights had
just handed out packages of pudding and granola. She hadn’t even said anything when she handed Chris a vanilla pudding.

They had eaten in silence, not even breaking it when Randall walked in covered in blood to announce that the guy he’d helped drag out of the water was dead. He just shrugged and hoped Randall had made sure to stab the guy in the head before he laid back against the wall and fell asleep for the night.

Things weren’t really any better this morning either. Everyone was still quiet, and no one really wanted to work. Chris sighed and shook his head, maybe things would get better if Sascha would just shut up about her own death. She had a week. Lots of things could change in a week, but maybe if he could find some insulin or something everyone would stop moping and get to work.

Turning away from where he’d been standing at the big desk he picked a room to search and got started.
Octavia walked down the hall, humming as she went. The rain outside was still coming down, giving the place a little noise, but it was still creepy as hell to walk around solo.

“Shit!” Bellamy huffed, “How am I supposed to…”

Octavia turned around and walked back, popping her head over the top of the half door that blocked one of the animal rooms. Inside Bellamy was crouching, balancing on the balls of his feet, hauling on one of the goats by its.. udders? And trying to drag it towards him.

The goat protested, bleating and biting at him with every tug, he finally let go of one of the udders and grabbed its front leg instead. Getting him just close enough for the goat to get a solid latch on with its teeth.

“Fuck!” Bellamy fell back, letting the goat go and kicking over a bucket, which was fortunately empty.

Octavia snickered, “Pretty sure that’s not how you grab a titty.” She informed him.

“Fucking goats, why can’t you work with me.” Bellamy ignored her.

The goat bleated angrily from the far corner of the room. “I’m just trying to help!” He snapped, “You’re the one pitching a fit.”

“Oh my god.” Octavia rolled her eyes, “You can’t just haul a girl around by her tits and expect her to cooperate Bells.”

“I’m not.. I wouldn’t,” he trailed off.

“And yet you did, how much experience have you had? Maybe you should ask.. anyone else. I think they’ve all had more experience with tits than you.”

Bellamy made a face, “No, I’ll figure it out.”

“Uh-huh, poor goat.”
“What is all of this?” Madison finally asked. Raven had been carting weird shit into the pool room for three days now and she just had to ask.

Raven paused her mopping of the pool floor, “Well the UV bulbs are for the filtration system, the chain and gears are for setting up the pump, and the rest of it is supposed to be for the filter before it enters into the pool.”

“Say again?” Madison looked around at the mess on the floor.

“Ugh,” Raven climbed out of the slimy mess that was the pool, “The roof has collection drains for rainwater, I’ve plugged up the external drains, and diverted it to right there.” She pointed to a hole in the ceiling. “So when it rains, we collect the water, it’s gonna run through a filter to catch any big shit and then into the pool. The UV will kill any bacteria inside and we can just grab some water whenever we’re thirsty. The whole system will be hooked up to an exercise bike in the gym which happens to be right above us.”

“Wow… You really thought this out.”

“Not particularly, I just don’t like drinking boiled water.” Raven sighed, “Now I’ve got to sanitize this shithole before it rains again.”

“Uh, yeah, you do that.” Madison wasn’t sure she approved of calling their watering hole a shithole, but Raven did have a rather eclectic way of doing things.”
Chris laid back, half propped on his bedding and the wall behind him, watching the antics going on around him. A few of the kids were laying in front of Harold who was reading some book to them. Mandy and Sascha were sitting together, talking. They’d been doing that almost constantly for two days, even when Sascha shook so hard she could barely stay in her seat. Most everyone else was just lounging around. Except for that small group in the back. Chris perked up in curiosity. Jim, Randall, James, Kat, and June were all huddled together, seemingly talking.

Chris got up and walked closer, it had been so boring since everything settled that he was kind of hoping to overhear some sort of drama.

“We aren’t going to be able to put it off much longer.” June sounded insistent, “I’ve got enough for another two days, but then that’ll be it. I can try and stretch it further though.”

“Don’t do that,” James was shaking his head, “People will notice and they’ll freak out.”

“I won’t then. But that means in three days we’ll have 19 very thirsty people.”

Chris stiffened before catching himself. He’d tucked himself behind a rolling cart, but he had to stay hunched over if he didn’t want them to see him with a casual glance.

“Actually it won’t be 19,” Randall this time, “Sascha will be lucky to make it to the end of tomorrow before she goes into a coma. We’ve done everything we can, but she hasn’t reacted well to the oral meds we’ve tried and her glucose levels are off the charts. She’d honestly last longer if she just didn’t eat at this point.”

“Are they taking that as an option?” Jim asked.

“No. They’ve both given up. Actually,” Randall paused, before talking again his voice even quieter making Chris strain to hear, “I’m concerned that Sascha is going to commit suicide. She’s mentioned she doesn’t want Amanda to watch her slip into a coma before dying.”

“That’s unfortunate, yes, but why is that a concern?” James asked, “Whether she dies in 4 days or dies tomorrow she’s still dead. Didn’t take you for a sentimentalist, Randy-boy.”

Chris barely stifled his chuckle in time, James may be irritating, but at least he was irritating to everyone.

“I’m concerned,” Randall emphasized, “because if she doesn’t do it right we’ll have a stiff walking among us with no warning.”

“I’ll keep an eye on her,” Kat spoke for the first time. There was a long silence, Chris couldn’t tell what was happening and desperately want to know. Finally, she spoke again, “If it comes to it, I’ll make sure she goes down properly.”

Another long silence followed, leaving Chris irritated. There had been lots of long silences surrounding talk about Sascha since the flash flood. Everyone was so sad but not sad enough to find her the medicine she needed, and not sad enough to do anything else about it. They just kept focusing on how sad it was. It was sad, sure but after Chris had looked for the insulin she needed and come up with nothing, he’d decided there was no point to being sad. Sascha would die and
there was nothing he or anyone else could do about it. Honestly, he’d kind of struggled a bit at meal times watching her eat, knowing that the food was killing her and that it could have gone to someone else if she was already dead.

Chris gritted his teeth. He’d just realized that not only had she been eating food that could have gone to someone else, but she’d been drinking water. A ton of water ‘due to her diabetes’ and not only could that have been reserved for someone else but they were in seriously short supply. Maybe if Sascha wasn’t so lazy and lost weight she wouldn’t even be in this mess.

“What can we do about the water?” June this time, apparently she was really concerned to be moving on from the dying girl.

“Is there even going to be any options? We’re surrounded by water, there’s still a foot on the street, but it’s filthy and full of shit.” Kat asked this time, seriously the woman couldn’t find a positive in any situation.

“We can always set-up a filtering system, the problem is getting the supplies to do it in the first place.” James offered, giving hope but not at the same time. More silence followed and Chris just couldn’t stand it anymore.

He popped up from behind the cart causing the group to startle a little bit. “I’ve been on tons of supply runs, what do we need to make a water filter?”

“Chris! Have you been listening in on us?” June protested, shocked at his behavior.

“You’ve been over here whispering to each other for a while, if something's going wrong and I can help, then I’m going to.” Chris ignored the implied scolding. “What do we need to make a filter?”

“Well, we have to get out all the big chunks first.” James grimaced a bit, probably thinking about what, or who, some of those ‘big chunks’ were. “Then we need to pour the water through smaller and smaller bits until it’s clear and then we boil it.”

“That water is filthy, it’s probably going to take a lot more than your average school science fair water filter to get it clean, not to mention in large enough quantities to provide for all of us,” Randall added his pessimistic voice.

“Ok. Filter big chunks, can we poke holes in a bucket or find a laundry basket or something?” Chris asked focused on the problem.

“We’ve moved all of those canvas laundry bags around, we could poke some holes in those to filter out the big chunks.” James agreed.

“Poke holes in the laundry bags, then what’s the next step?” Chris asked, prodding them to keep going. These people were slow idiots.

“Then the water will need to go through gravel, sand, and cloth before we boil it.” Finally, James was giving him more than one step at a time.

“Haven’t you ever made a water filter for school?” Kat asked, seeming irritated.

“No. I had better things to do. Anyway, we’ve got gravel on the roof. Do the sheets on the beds work?” Chris was starting to get pissed. Stupid questions and slow answers were not getting them anywhere. And ever since they’d started talking about there not being enough water all Chris could think about was getting a drink of cold water.
“Sheets are perfect.” James nodded, “But we still need sand and we also need containers to hold the water and bits.”

Chris just looked around waiting for someone to come up with something.

“We could use the garbage bins? And the hazardous waste receptacles?” Randall finally offered.

“I don’t think filtering this stuff through something the size of a water pitcher is going to get us anywhere.” Jim was shaking his head.

“No, not the wall receptacles, we’ve got large versions, about the size of a trash can on the street.” Randall paused for a moment, “We’ll probably only have 4 on this floor though. Will that be enough?”

“If we only had half of us, then maybe.” James responded, “So we’ll have to go find more containers. Downstairs or out there,” He gestured towards the broken windows. “And we still need sand.”

“Didn’t Harold say all of this is sand?” June waved her hand around.

“The stuff the hospital is built on, not the landscaped stuff all around us.” Jim shot that idea down.

“So we need to go out looking for containers and sand,” Chris stated, “Find the containers first, then find some empty lot and fill a few with sand. Anything else?”

“Are you good on pots to boil water with?” James asked June.

“I’ve got 2 big soup pots. We’re using the small portable generator to cook with, so fuel might be an issue after a while, but we should be fine for a bit.”

“If you get some extra containers we can put them up on the roof to catch rainwater. That should be pretty safe to drink without boiling.” Jim suggested, “Now who’s going?”

“I am.” Chris jumped on that. He was not getting left behind like a kid. These people actually let him do stuff and listened to him, no way was he going to let that go.

“I’m in,” Kat added after a long pause, probably while they decided whether or not they should argue about him going. Chris resisted the urge to puff up when they didn’t fight him.

“I’d go, but these old lungs won’t be much use.” James shook his head, seeming to wheeze just a bit louder than usual.

“We need at least two more to go.” Jim gave Randall a look.

“I’ll go when you go,” Randall shot him right down. Chris looked between the two men. They were both odd about leaving the hospital, acted like the world would end if they put a foot on the grass. It was weird after being around Anya and the others who didn’t really hesitate to leave their safe place to get whatever they wanted whenever the thought hit them.

Kat glared at the two men, “I’ll ask Tyson and Larry.”

This made Jim sit up straight, “I don’t know how I feel about you bringing a teenager along.”

Kat raised an eyebrow, “Did Chris get a time machine and I missed it?”

Jim jerked a bit then looked down. Chris held his breath, he wasn’t sure what he could do if Jim
suddenly decided that he had to have the same rules for everyone. He could leave, Chris considered. It had been great for the first week he was here, really nothing had started going wrong until he’d seen Anya, Madison, and the others. Figured that they were still ruining things even though he wasn’t living with them. The last ten days had been worse safety and supplies-wise than he’d ever had to deal with when he was at the school. Maybe it would be a good idea to cut and run.

“It’s fine.” Jim’s voice cut into Chris’ thoughts. He shook himself and tabled that line of thought for another time. He could think about it tonight. “Who’s going to keep an eye on Sascha while you’re gone?”

“I can,” James volunteered, standing up and walking away muttering. Chris thought he heard something about Jim being a weak pansy, but wasn’t quite sure. Thinking about it Chris could see where that would be correct. Jim was good at getting everyone organized and figuring out who was good at which thing, but when it came to doing anything Jim didn’t want to get off his butt. And being the one to watch a girl who might commit suicide was not going to happen. Chris just shook his head, it didn’t matter. Maybe he wouldn’t be around for long anyway.

“When do we leave?” He asked Kat, it was still early-ish in the day.

“Let me get Tyson and Larry and I’ll meet you at the stairwell door. Grab weapons for them when you get yours, yeah?” Kat instructed, already walking to the others.

Chris nodded and grabbed his crowbar on the way to the weapons piled onto a bed. He’d decided to keep the crowbar and since he went out on a regular basis, he didn’t really care if anyone minded. He grabbed two bats, struggling to hold them, his crowbar, and backpack. He still carried the pack with him whenever he left their living area. The others gave him grief, but it was just too useful, loaded up with all the necessities, including his neglected video camera.

When the others got to the door Chris handed over the bats to the other two, rolling his eyes when Kat banged on the stairwell door. He was a bit startled when something banged back, but he recovered quickly, hiding the surge of fear. Certainly better and faster than Tyson and Larry. Chris didn’t know Larry, hadn’t really even been sure that this was Larry, but Tyson he knew, and Tyson got squirmy around stiffs. He just couldn’t handle his fear.

Chris swapped spots with Kat, standing behind the door, ready to jerk it open on her signal while Kat stood ready with a knife in one hand and her gun in the other. Chris took a deep breath, and yanked the door open just a bit more than he’d intended, he’d meant to open it only wide enough for an arm to get through, instead, there was a head through, a lot lower than he’d expected though. He just shrugged when Kat glared at him. How could he have known it would be a kid with a kid-sized head on the other side of the door. It’d have been fine if it had been an adult.

Fortunately, the kid was the only one there, though they found another stiff whose legs were stuck in the stair railing that they also dispatched. Kat made Larry put it down. Something about wanting to make sure he could do it before someone’s life was on the line. Chris just grinned when Larry had to stumble off to the side to throw up after bashing the stiffs’ head in with his bat, though the smell made him lose the smile pretty quick. The stiffs didn’t make him want to hurl as much as the smell of vomit.

Once they made it out to the lawn, “Which way?” Chris asked he’d been outside the most in the last two weeks, but he hadn’t actually left the grounds yet.

“I don’t know, not my area.” Kat just shrugged her shoulders, “What’s around here?” She asked looking at the other two.
Larry and Tyson just shrugged, shaking their heads.

“Well then let’s go..that way.” Chris had paused to scan the horizon and pointed towards some buildings.

They all trudged in that direction, sloshing and mucking through wet grass and lower sections that were still sort of flooded. The hospital had been on a bit of a rise that Chris hadn’t noticed until the flooding started to die back. It was nice that most of the water was gone, even if the grass was soaked, there wasn’t water covering the ground like there was on some of the streets.

Kat stopped in front, “Let’s find another way, that’s too deep.” Chris looked past her and saw the street below them still rather flooded, deep enough that they could only see the top of a fire hydrant on the other side of the street. He rolled his eyes, it wasn’t going to go higher than his knees.

The other three were already walking away so Chris sighed and followed.

He followed along, rolling his eyes every time they came across a locked building. Kat refused to actually break into any of the secured businesses they came across. She kept giving them crap about how if the building had been secured that people might still be inside. Kat was just being a pansy, still trying to be a cop in a world where cops didn’t exist.

“Let’s go this way and we can head back down that street while we head back.” Kat had stopped in the middle of the street, more businesses ahead.

“Oooorrrr we could just keep going,” Chris waved his hand further up the street.

“We don’t want to go too far,” Kat just shook her head, “This is about 2 miles from the hospital. This is the turn back point.”

“What.” Chris just couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“We’re turning back,” Kat repeated herself.

“Why? There are all these other places we should check. We still haven’t found any containers or sand,” Chris couldn’t believe this, this was ridiculous.

“If we go too far then we won’t be able to get help if we need it. We go too far and we put both ourselves and the others at risk.” Kat shook her head, “We go back.”

“Seriously! We need those supplies!” Chris almost kept going but stopped when he remembered Tyson and Larry. “We can not go back without those supplies.” He tried to emphasize his point without giving anything away.

“No.” Kat just refused point blank, “We aren’t going further.”

“And what happens if we don’t find what we need?” Chris’s voiced pitched higher, “It’s not like we can do without.”

“You decide to keep going, then don’t bother coming back.” Kat decided to just start walking.

“This is so stupid,” Chris muttered, not really bothering to keep his voice quiet. “Rules that don’t keep us alive are stupid.”

“Well until they kill us they aren’t too stupid.” Kat retorted, not even bothering to turn around.

Tyson and Larry just kept looking between the two, obviously trying to figure out what was going
on, but not really picking it up.

Chris slowly followed, muttering under his breath. He couldn’t believe the stupidity. It’s not like they could do without water. They had to have it, and they only had enough for a few more days. Chris actually paused for a moment. This was stupid and he could just leave. He had all the most important stuff with him already. And he’d survived last time.

“Hey! Hey!” Chris snapped his head around, seeing Kat gesturing and Tyson and Larry hanging back. He jogged up to them, stopping to stand next to Kat. She wouldn’t have gotten so excited if it was a stiff, so obviously not much of a threat.

Chris had to say this dude wasn’t any threat at all. He was tall and it looked like he used to have some muscle on him, but now he was just skeletal. His head was bald and his beard was seriously scraggily, he looked worse than some of the homeless people that had been panhandling near his house. Chris just stood there while Kat got closer, watching.

Kat spoke to him quietly, offering him some of the water she’d brought with her. He gulped down what she gave him and Chris had to resist the urge to snatch the bottle out of her hand. They didn’t have enough to share.

When he was done drinking, Kat started looking him over, his left pant leg was wet. Chris glanced at the right leg and since it was dry he figured the guy was hurt.

“How bad is it?” Kat jerked her chin towards the wet leg.

“Bad,” The guy shifted, obviously keeping the pressure off the leg. He reached down and started to peel the pants leg up. It didn’t get far, but he didn’t need to. The smell was bad enough to actually smack Chris in the face with rot, and Chris didn’t need to have a medical degree to know that body parts should never be green and slightly fuzzy.

Kat put her hand on the guy’s shoulder, “Don’t worry about it, we’re holed up in a hospital and we’ve got a nurse with us who might be able to help.”

“Yeah, that’d be great,” the guy nodded, “I’ll need help to make it though, even before I cut myself this leg was bum. Some crazy ass bitches broke my leg then left me for dead.”

“Up you get,” Kat hauled the guy up, slinging his arm around her shoulder, “Can you guys help him? I want to keep my hands free.”

Chris waited while Tyson and Larry positioned themselves under the guys’ arms taking his weight before he grabbed Kat’s arm, tugging her to the side, “We can’t take him back with us.”

“What do you mean? He’s hurt, he needs help, we can give it.” Kat practically glared at Chris.

“No, we really can’t give help. We are running out of water. Basic human need. We don’t need to add another person who’s going to reduce our resources. Especially not someone who’s going to be as useless as this guy is.” Chris insisted, trying to get Kat to see his point. “If you really want to help him we can just give this guy some first aid and then leave him. He probably won’t even live anyways.”

“We helped you and we didn’t have to. We could have left your sorry ass behind.” Kat was really glaring at him now, “We take him with us.”

Chris just glared back at her. Maybe when they got back to the hospital the others would do the right thing and kick this guys ass out. If not, he could grab a few extra supplies before he took off.
No way was he going to stick around to die of thirst, especially if they were just inviting random people in any way.

Chris walked behind the group, refusing to help. This was the most stupid thing ever. He watched the way the trip stumbled and tripped. Barely able to keep on their feet, the guy..

“What’s your name, anyway?” Chris asked, suddenly realizing he didn’t know.

“Quint.” Came the reply as he stumbled over his feet.

“What?” Chris’ head had snapped up and he moved forward to look the guy in the eye. He forced the others to stop so he could talk to this guy.

“My name’s Quint.” Quint looked past Chris, “There something wrong with this guy?”

“You knew Raven and Elyza?” Chris could not believe this. They said he was long gone.

“Those people who kicked you out of their place?” Tyson asked Chris.

Quint had started to look Chris up and down when he mentioned the girls, but he seemed to relax a bit after he heard what Tyson said, “Those are the crazy ass bitches who left me for dead.” Quint grunted, shifting a bit, “Well them and that psycho-ass bitch that broke my leg and knocked me out.”

Chris shifted trying to think. The girls hadn’t said exactly why they’d left Quint behind. Just that they’d had a ‘disagreement’ and that he wasn’t welcome. Bellamy and Lincoln would just shift like kids being scolded and then they’d look at Octavia who would take off, stomping and cussing every single time the name was mentioned.

Madi had been the most chill about the guy, but even she had just said that Quint wasn’t willing to work with others and that it was probably for the best that he wasn’t around anymore. Chris had thought it was weird because he knew that Quint had brought Madi to the girls, and Madi was usually incredibly chill about everything. He figured that was the only reason she’d survived Raven and Elyza’s insanity.

Kat looked between them, “You two can compare notes on the insanity of your last home when we’re safe for the night.”

Chris nodded stepping forward to grab at one of Quint’s arms, taking over for Larry. “Go help Kat,” He instructed Larry while looping Quint’s arm over his shoulder.

They continued on in silence, now heading directly for the hospital instead of the roundabout way they had been going before. They weren’t even stopping to check out the stores they passed anymore, just going right past them.

“Do you see any fast way past this?” Kat had stopped ahead of them, gesturing at the street in front of her. They had come up a slight hill, and now there was a small river in front of them.

“No. Maybe if we go up a block or two?” Tyson suggested.

“There’s a dry spot up three blocks back the way we came or down eight.” Quint said, sagging a bit, “I thought you knew where you were going.”

“We don’t spend much time wandering around,” Tyson told him.
“We’ll go up back up the way we came, there’s plenty of daylight.” Kat agreed.

“This is ridiculous,” Larry huffed and walked forward, splashing into the water. “It’s dry just across the street and it isn’t even that deep.” He lifted his leg out of the water showing that the wet stain on his leg only went up to just below his knee. “Quint’s already sick, it’s not like going through the water is going to make thingsAAAAHHHHH!”

Chris started forward before catching himself, jerking to a stop. The others did pretty much the same thing, stopping before they got to the water.

“Walk over here,” Kat gestured, reaching towards Larry, holding out her hand while he kicked himself free of whatever had gotten him. Larry limped over, grabbing hold of Kat as soon as he got close enough. She hauled him farther from the water, looking at the water behind her, trying to see what was in the water.

Not seeing anything she shook her head and knelt down, inspecting Larry’s leg through the torn fabric of his pants. There was blood but she couldn’t see anything else through the torn material.

“Woah, what are you doing?” Larry took a step back when he saw Kat pull out her knife, almost falling until Kat caught him.

“I just need to get a better view.” Kat steadied him. When he was steady she cut off his pant leg and used the material to wipe some of the muck off his leg. Kat sighed, sitting back on her heels and shook her head.

“No! NO!” Larry protested, twisting to get a look at the torn muscle of his lower calf, “Maybe it’s not, you can’t tell, it might not be!” He was practically hysterical at this point.

Kat just looked at him, “I’m sure.” She just sat there looking at the now crying man.

“We’ll need to split up.” She spoke through the noise Larry was making. “We won’t be able to get him back before dark if we all wait around.” She jerked her chin at Quint, before looking at Chris.

Chris just looked back at her, “Yeah.” He looked at Larry, “Yeah I’ll wait until he’s ready then take care of it.”

“We could just leave him here to turn, then we don’t have to separate,” Tyson protested.

“No! Don’t leave me to turn! I don’t want to turn,” Larry begged, “You have to finish this before I turn, don’t let me become a stiff.”

“I won’t,” Chris reassured him.

“But that’s dangerous, why don’t we just kill him right now then,” Tyson argued.

“Because I could be wrong,” Kat told him, “Wait until the fever sets in.” Kat handed her backpack to Chris. “Do you want help finding a place to stay?”

“No, I’ve got it.” Chris took the bag and went to stand by Larry, who was finally calming down.

“We’ll see you tomorrow,” Kat and Tyson got Quint situated and started off up the street, leaving Chris to watch.

“Stay here, I’ll be right back.” Chris left both packs with Larry and headed towards a store with a glass front. He peered in, but it was pretty empty. The door was locked so Chris jammed his
crowbar into the front window, enjoying the way the glass shattered, even if he did get a few cuts. He climbed inside and started looking around. Nothing interesting, just an empty barber shop, but it had a back room with a door so Chris went back to grab Larry and their stuff.

He got Larry situated, lying on a mangy short sofa that looked less comfortable than the floor, before he secured the door. It didn’t have a real lock on it, just one of those hand twist things, so he dragged a desk over to stand in front of the door.

“I think we’ll be good here for the night,” Chris told Larry as he looked around a bit more. There were some cupboards that they should go through before they left in the morning.

Larry just nodded his head, still sniffing a bit.

Chris started pawing through the cupboards and shelves. A few tootsie rolls, a pack of gum, and a couple old-fashioned razors were all he found. He’d been hoping to find water, but that was probably too much to ask.

Now that there was nothing left to do Chris slid down the far wall, bored. Larry was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed, sleeping or just pretending to be, Chris wasn’t really sure. He sat there for a while, his eyes growing heavy in boredom, but he didn’t want to sleep. He’d feel really stupid if he fell asleep and woke up to a stiff trying to kill him.

He shifted trying to get more comfortable and wake himself up. It worked for a little while, but as the light from the small back window faded, it got harder to stay awake and Chris found himself jerking awake as his head fell forward.

He stood and stretched, enjoying the satisfying pops in his back before he started to walk around the room. Anything to stay awake.

“I’m scared,” Chris startled a bit at the sudden sound. It’d been so quiet for so long, Larry’s voice seemed stupidly loud.

“Uh, okay.” Chris wasn’t really sure how to respond to a grown man saying he was scared.

“That’s all you have to say? I’m probably turning into a stiff and you’re just going to say okay?” Larry seemed a bit offended.

“Well, what else do you want me to say? I’m sorry? Don’t be scared? Sucks to be you?” Chris asked.

“A little bit of empathy would be nice.” Larry sat up, sitting in the middle of the sofa. “You aren’t just here to kill me.”

“I kind of am,” Chris corrected him, “We both know you’ve been bitten. You’re already starting to sweat and it isn’t that warm in here.”

Larry leaned back, “I’m not ready yet.”

“Are you ever going to be ready?”

“Of course. I don’t want to turn into one of them, I just want to be sure before you end my life.” Larry reassured him. “You don’t want to be a murderer, right?”

The last was said like a joke with a hint of a laugh in his voice, but it hit Chris hard. For a minute all he could see was his mom sitting on a hotel bed, “Right..”
Larry looked down, “I just don’t want to die. You get that don’t you kid?”

Chris stared at his crowbar, “I get that.” He got how his mom must have felt, scared and alone, trying to deal with being stuck like this. All they needed was a little help, what if they found a cure in a few weeks? He couldn’t make the same decision that Anya did. Not even for someone like Larry.

“How are you feeling?” Chris asked him, maybe it really wouldn’t be necessary.

“I’m tired, you?”

Chris nodded, “Yeah, but I can’t sleep until we know.”

“Do we have something you could tie me down with?” Larry asked, looking around.

“Lemme check.” Chris got up, worst case, he would get a walk. He spent about fifteen minutes doing a second check of the place, “All I found were these curtains.”

“Could you tear them skinny enough?” Larry grabbed an end of the fabric and inspected it. It was pretty solid material, but Chris had a knife on him that got them down to size.

Together they tied the strips into a fraying shitty rope, but Larry was more bones than skin these days, it would probably hold him. He helped Chris with the knots, showing him a special one that would get tighter if Larry strained against it, even tied half of them to make sure that if Chris’ didn’t hold, his would.

“Thanks..” Chris mumbled, curling up in a chair.

Larry looked over, his skin already turning grey and clammy. “No reason both our lives should suck.”

Between the pangs of guilt over Larry’s situation and the exertion of their hike, Chris wasn’t long for consciousness. Larry stayed awake to keep watch. It was early the next morning when Larry finally said something. “Kid,” He rasped, “Hey kid.”

Chris shot up, he’d sort of slumped down the wall in his sleep. It took him a minute to figure out what was going on, the hospital wasn’t ever completely quiet so he didn’t usually fall asleep so hard. He wiped the drool off the corner of his mouth.

“What?” His voice was super raspy and rough.

“Wake up, it’s time.” Larry was still lying on the sofa, tied down the way Chris had positioned him the night before.

Chris looked at him, Larry was drenched in sweat, his eyes glassy and a bit unfocused.

“Are you sure?”

“No doubts.” Larry didn’t even hesitate.

Chris took a deep breath and stood up, collecting his things. He pulled the desk out of the way and opened the door, dropping the packs on the other side. Chris pulled out his knife, gripping it tightly and froze.

Larry was just sitting there, sweat pouring down his face, pain obvious in his pinched features. Overlaying the pain, though, was fear.
Chris stood over him, hand clenching around the handle of his knife and he could feel his heart beginning to pound. “Don’t think about it.” Larry told him, “It’s a mercy.” The words would have been more reassuring had they not held so much fear, and had they not reminded him so much of his mother.

“What if we could fix it?” Chris whispered, “What if there was a cure?”

Larry shook his head, “Don’t do this.”

Chris tightened his grip on the knife until it began to shake. “No. I’m not going to kill you.”

“Chris..?” The fear won out over everything else, “Don’t let me die here. Not like this.”

Chris stepped away slowly. “No. You promised.” There was an edge to his voice and it only made Chris back up faster. “CHRIS!” He roared, trying to sit up and straining against the ropes. Larry turned red in the face and the veins on his head and neck throbbed, “You made a promise!”

Chris started and grabbed their packs, “I’ll be back.. I promise.”
“Rae… I think it’s time to make that trip.” Elyza said to her friend, messing with the hem of her shirt a bit.

She glanced up and one look at the expression on Elyza’s face was enough to convince her. “I’ll grab the keys to the truck.” She’d been waiting for this ever since that damn comment in the Walmart.

“I’ll grab the bags,” Elyza turned away.

Raven walked into the kitchen, grabbing the keys out of the bowl they’d designated for the keys.

“Where are you off to?” Anya looked up from her book.

“Errand.” Raven tucked the keys into her pocket. Anya put a ratty strip of leather into her book as a mark and moved to get up. “Not this time cheekbones.”

Anya rolled her eyes, “Ridiculous or not, I’m not going to let you go unprotected.”

“Lyza and I will be just fine on our own.”

“You’ll be even better if I’m with you.”

“I fucking said No.” Raven snapped, “Sit your ass down. We’ll be back in an hour.” She shouldered past a shocked Anya.

“And if you’re not?” Lincoln grabbed her arm before she could storm past him.

Raven glared up at him, “Then you fucking deal with it.”

He dropped his hand, watching her go.

“They’re gonna be okay right?” Alicia asked quietly, Raven was a lot angrier than usual and Elyza… Well, she had been upset all day.

“If they aren’t, then I’m going to kick their asses,” Anya grumped, walking to the window to watch them leave.

“I think you’ll have to get in line.” Octavia murmured, watching the truck rip out of the parking lot and head south.

“So what’s the plan?” Raven asked, white-knuckling the steering wheel.

Elyza looked down at the paper in her hands, “Find your apartment, put this on the door, or the
wall or something. Make sure she hasn’t been there already.” It was the best she could come up with. She’d spent a lot longer than she was willing to admit trying to write a note that conveyed her feeling without giving too much away to any strangers.

“Hmmm,” Raven hummed, this couldn’t end well.

They sat in silence, broken only by the occasional thump as Raven drove over something in her path.

“This is it.” She pulled over at the edge of the parking lot. Chaos zone also worked. Cars on their sides, debris caught up all over the vehicles, the whole area just a total mess. Somehow it still looked a bit like the campus parking lot they’d ripped out of months ago, freaking out over the rioters.

Well… The “rioters”.

Raven slung her bag over her shoulder, letting Elyza carry the one with the note.

“Should we go inside?” Raven looked up at the building. Windows were gone, shattered into trillions of little pieces, with soot streaking across the frames and exterior brick. The building she once called, well not home but lived in, there wasn’t much left of it. The flood trash had moved into the first floor and at least a half dozen trees had taken over the second.

“Is it even safe?” Elyza looked at the building in dismay.

Raven made a face, “Possibly? Probably not any less safe than standing here where walkers can see us.”

“Okay, well let’s work our way to the courtyard, and then see if there’s a way to get up.” She grabbed Rae’s spear from the bed and tossed it over to her.

Raven caught it and led the way through the mess.

“Oh Fuck!” Elyza tripped, sprawling across rubble.

“Shit, you ok?” Raven reached down to help her up, grimacing at the blood streaked across her forearms.

“Ugh..” Elyza looked at her arms, “That’s going to hurt like a bitch tomorrow.”

Raven nodded her agreement, “Anything else bleeding?”

Elyza checked herself over, finding nothing more than the scrapes on her hand, “Nope, I’m good.”

“Kay, let’s keep going, yeah?”

Elyza slung her bag back over her shoulder, “Yeah.”

Raven let out a long sigh and hiked around the parking lot rather than going through that mess, going through the buildings and for once? It was quiet. Weird, but sort of nice. She looked around, trying to find the path of least resistance. Probably get to the side of the building, then walk right next to it. There’d be a lot of glass to walk over, but as long as Elyza didn’t trip again it’d be safer.

Raven tugged her arm, semi-dragging her along. Elyza stumbled along behind her, her hand on the wall to keep her upright. Raven looked back, “Hey, you o-” A pair of arms shot out of the window, catching onto Rae’s hoodie.
“Rae!” Elyza caught her balance, reaching to pull Raven away from the arms clutching her shoulders. The walker, what was left of it, was trying to take a chunk out of her shoulder, mostly inhibited by the hood that was bunched up.

Elyza yanked Rae out of the way and stabbed the walker in the head, watching it slither out of the window the rest of the way to slump onto the grass leaking blood and brains.

“What the fuck.”

“How did that just happen?” Raven asked, panting.

“I dunno,” Elyza tugged her away from the growing puddle at their feet, “But let’s go before more of them show up.”

Raven glanced around feeling uneasy. She had never been surprised by one of those bastards, and now she couldn’t help but worry where the next one was going to come from.

Elyza wasn’t feeling much better, walking with her knife out in front of her, crouched low, “I.. I don’t want to go inside.” She admitted. “Who knows how many more are in there.”

Raven looked at Elyza, she had been really desperate to be here, and she’d obviously been worrying about Mama Lex for a while, “Are you sure? We can probably make it.”

Elyza looked around, “Yeah,” She jerked her chin towards a tree that was still upright. “Could we tack it to that?”

Rae looked it over, “Yeah sure, looks sturdy enough to me.”

Elyza nodded looking a bit relieved. She walked towards it, staying crouched low until she was a good distance away from the building. While Rae got her things out, Elyza tucked her letters into a Ziploc bag, “And you give me grief for carrying these with me.”

“It’s just such a mom thing to do,”

“Yeah well…” Elyza sniffed, “You’re a bitch, and this is helpful.”

“So is this.” Raven pulled a hammer and some nails out of her pack and tacked it to the tree. “Murphy too?”

“Yeah, just in case.” Elyza wiped her hands on her pants and took a step back, “I uh, left one in there for Grandma Reyes too.”

Raven nodded, looking down, “Now who’s the bitch?” She gave a watery smile, “You can’t just make me cry and get away with it you know.”

Elyza hugged her friend, “I know. Let’s go home before Anya freaks.”

“You mean before you become a sobbing mess of melted mascara.” Rae joked, messing up Elyza’s hair.

“Shut up,” She ducked out from under Rae’s hand, shoving her away. “One quick stop though, before we go back.”

“For what?”

“Gotta leave a radio.” Elyza waved it, “In case they come back.”
“You sap.” Raven snorted, “Come on, this place creeps me out.”

“No kidding.”

“This doesn’t look safe,” Madi mumbled, watching Lincoln hop on the roof of the bus experimentally.

Raven slung her arm around the girl’s shoulder, “It’s gonna be fine! I did my calculations right, and he should land on the mattress. Probably.”

“You ready big guy?” Octavia called up, making sure to stand back from the bus.

Lincoln flashed her a toothy grin, “All set, everyone out of the way?” He checked over his shoulder where Elyza and Anya were waiting with a medical kit. Just in case. Octavia gave him the thumbs up and Lincoln grabbed the hooks of rebar and tested the grip. They all watched as Lincoln gave a few experimental tugs and watched the bus tilt back towards the popped tires on Anya and Elyza’s side of things.

He took a deep breath and jumped back, metal groaned and the roof bunched up like crumpled paper. Lincoln hung onto the bars as long as he could, his grip sliding off the rebar as the bus tipped. It hung in the air for a moment before crashing to the ground on its side and sliding towards Lincoln.

He landed on the mattress with a loud crack that was almost swallowed by the crash of the bus as the air mattress popped beneath him. He laid there for a few moments, then waved his hand in the air, “Worth it.”
“Chill out kid, it’s not on you.” James dropped his hand onto Chris’ shoulder. He shook him off, he hated it when people did that, especially his Dad.

“Oh yeah? Not like you’re going to do something about it, or Jim, or Randall. Kat already decided that ‘staying close’ was more important, so who else is going to deal with it?” Chris paced.

“Relax. You’re a kid. Let us figure it out and don’t worry about it.” James tried again but Chris just glared at him.

“When are you going to figure it out? Seems like you’re all too worried about Quint.”

James gave him a look, “I would think you’d be more supportive of someone who was also abandoned and hurt by your last group.”

“I mean if they were actually going to live, sure.” Chris shrugged, “But he’s not, so I don’t really see the point.”

James searched his face, he went to respond but was interrupted. “Leave the kid alone James.” Jim coming to his rescue. Chris rolled his eyes. Jim had barely left him alone since he’d gotten back a few hours ago. “From what Quint says that group is full of insane people with no morals. I can see why he wouldn’t want to talk about it.”

“You’re right, I don’t want to talk about it, but I do want to talk about how we’re going to get water. We didn’t find any supplies and we’ve got a day’s left.” Chris spoke to Jim, ignoring James who’d been telling him to relax all morning.

“Keep your voice down.” Jim chided, without any windows a raised voice up here on the roof could be heard if someone was trying. “The adults are working on it, and you don’t need to worry yourself about all of that. You’re just a kid.”

“I wasn’t a kid when I had to help Larry.” Chris protested, “And what are you working on? All I’ve seen is you all talking to Quint. No ‘secret meetings’, no group conversations, no groups headed out. Doesn’t look to me like you’re doing anything at all. Water isn’t just going to magically appear out of the sky.”

“Well, water does tend to do that,” James laughed but ended up wheezing, taking another deep breath into the oxygen mask in his hand.

“Yeah, and last time half the group died,” Chris muttered, chucking a rock off the roof and smirking when it crashed into something glass.

“I’ll go down and see where things are, maybe we can figure something out tonight.” Jim patted Chris on the shoulder before heading back downstairs.

“Yeah and maybe two more people will die tonight and that’ll make things better for tomorrow,” Chris snarked, throwing another rock. Larry and Sascha were both gone, Quint would go soon..ish, every person gone was one less person who needed water.

James sighed, “You don’t mean that.”

“You don’t know anything about me.” Another rock, another crash.
“Well right now I know you’re acting like a punk-ass kid who’s pissed that Mommy and Daddy told him it’s bedtime.” James retorted

“I haven’t had a bedtime since I was seven.” Chris rolled his eyes, entirely missing the point.

“Right, cause that’s the point,” James wheezed.

“Don’t you get it old man?” Chris chucked a handful of gravel across the yard, “Nothing matters anymore. We’re all just a bunch of stiffs too stupid to figure it out yet.”

“You think you’re hot shit don’t you kid. You know everything and you’ve seen it all haven’t you.” James barely pulled his mask away from his face.

“What kind of dumb question is that? I don’t need to have seen everything to know what that is.” He pointed to the roof, “That is a bunch of delusional idiots pretending that everything’s fine so that no one worries about the fact that we’re all freaking dead! There’s no more water! It’s gone! We wasted it!”

“No use crying over spilled milk, kid. What’s done is done and you aren’t going to be the one that fixes it, so let it go.”

“I could have been.” He snapped, “I’m the only one brave enough to go more than two feet out the front door, instead we got Larry killed and brought in another dead man.” His face twisted in anger and Chris scooped up another handful of gravel to chuck off the roof when James caught his elbow.

“That’s enough.” James didn’t even have the strength to stop him, he genuinely thought that he had some kind of authority over Chris.

The teen jerked his arm away, “Don’t touch me.” He snapped, winding his arm back again.

“Chris!” James huffed, “That’s enough!” He was so light on air that it barely made a sound, and it definitely didn’t carry even a fraction of the ‘authority’ of Travis’ voice. Chris’ face twisted in rage at the reminder of another parent gone to that bitch. She didn’t just settle for his mom, but she just had to take his dad too.

“I said don’t touch me!” Chris grabbed James and twisted to throw him off… Crunch.

Chris stumbled back from the edge of the roof. “I didn’t mean to…”

“Chris?” Jim came running up the stairs with June and Mandy close behind.

“We heard yelling, what happened?” Mandy caught Chris in her arms.

“Where’s James?” Jim stopped just shy of the edge of the roof. “.Oh my god.”

Chris shrunk into Mandy’s side, “I tried to catch him.” He mumbled.

“What happened?” Jim demanded, trying to be understanding, but someone was dead.

Chris shook his head, “I-we were talking and..”

Mandy held him close, she’d gotten even more protective after what happened to Sascha. “It wasn’t his fault Jim, accidents happen. I told you we shouldn’t let people come up here, it’s too
dangerous.”

Jim looked between Chris and the edge of the roof, before nodding his head, “Let’s go in then before anyone else gets hurt.”

They walked down the stairs in silence, it was so heavy that it felt like it was suffocating. Chris still couldn’t believe that he had..that James was. Why? Why did James grab at him? If he hadn’t then Chris wouldn’t have pushed him off. If he had just kept his hands to himself, then James might still be alive. Always touching him. Never willing to just leave him alone.

They pushed through the door, almost smacking Randall in the face with it.

“If you want to talk to Quint get it done,” Randall didn’t spare a glance for Chris or Mandy.

“He’s that close?” Jim asked.

“Gangrene and sepsis don’t make for a long life span.”

Jim gave a sigh and nodded, putting his hand on Randall’s shoulder and mumbled something to him that made the male nurse pale. “I’ll go deal with Quint.”

“Yeah.” Randall nodded, moving off.

Jim led the way to Quint’s room, a little off the side of the main living area.

“Come to see the dead still talking?” Quint asked from his spot on the hospital bed.

“Randall’s kept you pretty busy, just wanted to talk to you a bit.” Jim pulled a rolling stool over and sat next to the bed.

“Talk away, I’m a captive audience.”

Jim chuckled a bit, “Is there anything you can think of that we might need to know? Groups of people or groups of stiffs wandering around?”

“Stiff’s your word for the dead? Haven’t seen many. Same for people.” Quint jerked his chin at his leg, “This has kept me from going too far. I think I’m only a few miles from where Elyza and Raven left me.” Quint sighed, looking down at his lap and fidgeting, “Took my girl with them too.”

“Your girl?” Jim asked.

“Madi.” Chris stated, “She was doing pretty good last time I saw her.”

“Yeah? Was she happy?” Quint asked, eyes glued to Chris’ face.

“Seemed to be,” Chris glanced at Jim and Mandy, “She didn’t spend much time away from Raven and Elyza though.”

“Probably keeping her close so she couldn’t take off after me.” Quint was glaring at the bed now. “Guess I won’t be able to help her now.”

Jim and Mandy shifted, “Have you come across any stores of food or clean water? Any camps where people are gathering?” Jim questioned.

“No, nothing. There were a few places to get clean water before the flooding, but that ruined all of that. I ran out of water yesterday, didn’t have any ideas for getting more either.”
Jim just nodded and sighed, and turned to Chris, “Why don’t you go get some food.”

Chris looked between their faces, debating whether or not to leave. It wasn’t hard to figure that they wanted to question Quint about the others. Chris shrugged and took off, maybe June had some pudding.

“Can you pass the salt?” Chris startled, grabbing the salt and handing it to the person beside him, not actually sure who asked for the salt in the first place.

“Have you figured anything out?” He asked Kat who was sitting across from him at the table.

She glanced up and down the table, “No, we haven’t and this isn’t the place to talk about this.”

“You need to let this go,” Jim leaned over, his voice lowered.

“Really? Cause last I checked we all have to deal with this tomorrow.” Chris hissed at him across the table.

“There’s no point in worrying about it until we have an answer,” Jim tried again.

“What about the school,” It popped out of Chris’ mouth before he could stop it, but once it was out he had to keep going. “They have all sorts of supplies and the school is a lot more put together than this place is.”

“You don’t know that. We were great until the flooding happened, they could be in the exact same boat.” Kat said between bites, “And you’ve already said they aren’t the kind of people willing to do a trade.”

Chris slumped and propped his chin on his hand, “Didn’t say anything about a trade, did I?” He muttered.

Both Kat and Jim gave him a sharp look. It was clear they weren’t interested in hearing about the school and they really weren’t interested in talking about their water issue. Chris got up and dropped his plate off in the bucket that June kept for the dirty dishes. He walked to the far corner, away from where everyone else slept and curled up with his blankets. If he couldn’t do anything useful until tomorrow it would be better to sleep.

Chris woke, his heart racing. Almost drowning out the noise thundering around him. He threw the blanket away from him and tried to get to his feet, making it for only a second before the roiling ground took him back down.

He scrambled for his bag, grabbing it as it slid past him, following the new slope to the floor. A quick yank had the flashlight out of its side pocket and turned it on, not that it did much good. The air was thick with dust and the hall in front of him was no longer a clear expanse. Instead, the floor was covered with furniture and junk falling from the ceiling.

Chris stumbled to his feet, making it this time and slung his pack on. He walked towards the noise, different now than when he had woken up. It had changed from deep rumbling and cracking to people noises. Crying and screaming, mostly. Chris peered through the dusty darkness, only able to catch glimpses of people moving. He took a few steps forward, almost tripping on some rubble.
When he looked down to catch his balance, it threw him off even more. There was now a gaping hole in the floor. Chris moved his flashlight along the hole, finding that it went all the way to the side of the building and ran down towards the corner. The corner where most people slept.

Chris heard the sounds of stiffs, their usual groaning almost drowned out by the chaos on the other side of the hole in the floor. Chris brought the beam of light closer, looking to see if anywhere near him. He didn’t see anything but the groaning was getting louder, and some of the screams on the other side were starting to get hysterical.

Chris turned and booked it towards the stairs, not bothering to check if there was something on the other side. He got half a flight down before he realized that there was a group of stiffs shambling their way up. Between him and the exit. He turned and hightailed it back up, running past the door he’d entered the stairwell in and ran right up to the roof.

No one was up here yet, but Chris could see chunks of the roof were gone, some spots had just dropped, straight down it looked like, others had slid proving a possible way down. He picked his way to the closest slope and started climbing down. The rubble made it a challenge, some of it slide underneath his weight creating a sort of landslide that took him with it.

He made it to the ground, banged up, cuts bleeding everywhere, but still able to move. He waved the flashlight around looking for someone, anyone. There were some figures moving in the darkness, but most of them were moving away from the crumbling building quickly. A few were headed towards it, but their pace was too slow for them to be anything but dead.

“Over here! And turn off that damn light!” Chris turned towards the sound of Kat’s voice.

There was a small group, huddled together and they all shielded their eyes from the light. Chris clicked off the light and jogged over to them, more relieved than he was willing to let on that he wasn’t the only one still here.

They stood there for a while longer, Chris wasn’t sure how long, just watching, but after a while, no one could be seen moving on the lawn. Just a few arms waving and heads sticking out windows as the stiffs tried to get free.

“Where do we go now?” Brenna asked dirt and blood streaked across her face. She was shivering even though she was huddled between Tyson and Mandy for warmth.

“I know a place,” Kat looked around, like she was trying to find just one more person, “It won’t be fun, but it’ll keep the stiffs out.”

“Lead the way.”
“Go! Go! Go!” Lincoln yelled.

“Not that way!” Anya gestured.

“Stop telling me what to do woman!” Octavia took off running.

Raven jumped in the way, “You wouldn’t run over a cripple would you?”

In her moment of hesitation, Elyza stole the ball, “Thank you!” She called, launching the ball across the field straight for Madi’s net.

“Shi-Fuck!” Madi lunged across the net and slid on the astroturf just for the ball to go flying past her.

“Damnit!” Anya flung her hand in the air, “What was that??”

“FOOD!” Travis yelled, interrupting the game.

“I think you mean GOAL!” Raven snapped back.

“I can’t believe I lost to a cripple.” Octavia sighed.

Travis rolled his eyes and walked onto the turf field, “No, Food. It’s ready.”

“We got that the first time dumbo.” Raven sighed.

Elyza caught up to her, “I never did get why you call him that.” She murmured.

“It’s because he’s tragic. Like a baby elephant with no mother.” Raven grumbled.

“Ouch.”

“That’s kind of harsh,” Madi slung her arm around Raven’s waist.

“No harsh and tragic is losing to a cripple,” Bellamy slung his arm around Octavia’s shoulders, giving her a noogie.

Octavia grumbled, stepping a leg behind her brother and flipping him onto the ground with a thud.

“Harsh is being put on the ground by your little sister,” She smirked at him.

“If you’all don’t get over here now so we can eat I’m not saving any for you!” Madison yelled from her spot by the table.

Everyone moved over to the table, grabbing a chair and arguing over who got to sit under the umbrella.

Anya rolled her eyes and just threw herself into one of the seats. “Hey, that’s cheating!” Raven yelled, “We haven’t finished our debate of appropriate sitting arrangements.”

“Well, I’ve finished my debate,” Anya replied.
“Fine.” Raven tossed herself onto Anya’s lap, “I found my chair.”

Anya rolled her eyes, and just rested her hand on Raven’s hip, “You’re getting me food then, or I’m gonna toss you on your ass.”

“I accept these terms.” She sniffed.

Elyza grinned over at Alycia, “Wanna make a deal shorty?”

“My ass is too bony, you’d tap out in two minutes flat,” Alycia replied, stealing a chair.

“I’d happily tap something.”

Alycia snickered. Madison stopped with a plate of venison burgers. “I.. Do I want to know?”

“No.” The chorus was unanimous.

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Madi slumped against the table, chin resting on her hand as she stirred her oatmeal, trying to work up the energy to eat. It was a long, slow process, only made to feel longer by almost everyone else eating and moving to their duties for the day. Almost everyone of course, because there were only two people who slept as poorly as she did, and for very different reasons.

Raven stepped out of Anya’s tent and stretched luxuriously while Madi glared at her. She walked over in a pair of loose shorts and one of Anya’s shirts, mussing Madi’s hair, “What’s got you all cranky kid? Mattress deflating again?”

Madi gave her a dirty look, “Unexpected homework.”

Raven frowned, “Homework?”

“Yeah, how many times can Anya make you scream.” She shoved Raven a little piece of paper with tally’s on it. “Next time, for the love of god, get a room.”

Raven blushed. “Uh, yeah..”
This is your idea?

“This was your idea?” Chris wrinkled his nose at the building in front of him, he wasn’t sure what it had been. But it didn’t look at all inviting, just a solid concrete building, with few windows and large metal double doors. The side of the building was so plain that it looked seriously odd. “What even is this place?”

“For tonight it’s home.” Kat held up a key and started towards the double doors.

“How do you know it isn’t full of stiffs?” Tyson asked, shifting nervously.

“I can’t be sure,” Kat was sticking the key in the lock, “But not many people had a key to this place and it was built to be hard to break into.”

“Is that why it looks like a prison?” Brenna asked, almost under her breath.

“Not a prison,” Kat wrenched the door open, wincing a bit as the metal squealed and scraped. “An evidence management facility.”

“A what now?” Jim asked, following immediately behind Kat. Chris shook his head and rolled his eyes. Jim couldn’t even wait for Brenna to go first. Chicken.

Chris urged the others in, taking the back of the line. Not that he could do anything, his crowbar had been lost in the collapse and he hadn’t been able to find his knife in his bag. Kat had been the only one who’d had a weapon during the long walk to her safe spot.

“It’s where we kept all the evidence.” Kat walked past the desks, tugging on the handle of another set of double doors, “There’s all sorts of stuff back there,” She gestured beyond the doors before going to the other door and pulling it open. She did a quick check in that room before coming back, her posture finally relaxed. “We’re clear.”

Chris looked around. The room wasn’t big, enough room for two desks, some chairs across the from them and a wide-ish walkway leaving a clear path from one set of doors to the other.

“How do we want to do this?” Amanda was also looking around, though slowly as though she just wanted to give up.

“We can push the desks up against the wall and then crash on the floor in here. It’ll be safest.” Kat started shoving desks, causing everyone to flinch at the scraping noise. Chris moved over and helped, while Harold and Tyson moved the other one over.

“But what will we sleep on?” Amanda looked completely appalled.

“The ground.”

“But blankets, sleeping bags, pillows!” Amanda just couldn’t seem to grasp the idea of sleeping on the floor. “The floor will be so uncomfortable!”

“Safety is more important than comfort,” Jim patted her on the shoulder. “We can come up with something better after some sleep.”

Amanda huffed and stood there staring as everyone else found a spot on the floor and tried to get comfortable. It wasn’t great, concrete was really hard, but Chris at least had his bag to use as a
pillow. Mandy finally huffed again, before dropping to sit on the ground cross-legged.

“Let’s not do that again,” Brenna whined, twisting and stretching trying to loosen the kinks.

Chris didn’t say anything but he agreed. He hadn’t thought it would be too bad, they’d been sleeping on thin hospital mattresses, sleeping bags, and blankets for the last few weeks. Before that, it had just been sleeping bags on the gym floor. But those were positively cushy compared to the cold concrete floor.

“At least it was safe,” Kat huffed, though her wince as her back popped weakened her defense. “Now that we’ve all had some rest, we can figure out where to go.”

“Rest? Did any of you sleep?” Tyson was still sprawled on the floor.

“We can sleep when we’re dead?” Harold didn’t sound sure.

“So where do we go from here?” Chris asked, yes they were all miserable, but that wasn’t going to change unless they moved on. “Anyone have any suggestions?”

“We can stay here, make this place another home,” Jim suggested, earning him eyerolls and scoffs from pretty much everyone else.

“That is a horrible idea!” Mandy practically yelled, looking sheepish when she registered her volume, “We need someplace with windows, maybe some furniture. Certainly more than concrete walls and metal desks.”

“Or at least a view of outside so we aren’t opening the door into a bunch of stiffs,” Kat added.

“Well, where else could we possibly go? Everything was damaged by the flooding or the fires.” Jim argued, “This may not be ideal, but like Kat said, it’s safe.”

“It’s safe for a night, maybe two.” Kat shook her head, “There’s no way to store water, cook food, or deal with...waste.”

Everyone wrinkled their noses, they’d all found a spot to ‘go’ at one point or another on the walk here, but nothing since. Chris wasn’t looking forward to that, the building was surrounded by scrub and parking lot.

“Did you find anywhere that might work when you were looking for water?” Mandy asked Kat and the boys.

They all shook their heads, “Most places were either badly damaged or unsecured, or both.”

“Mostly both,” Chris piped in.

“So now what? We can’t just sit here,” Kat asked.

“I know lots of people were going to head south or east. Somewhere away from large populations and where water was more plentiful.” Mandy suggested.

“Speaking of, anyone grab any water, I’m dying,” Harold asked. The adults and Chris looked at each other, even if they had been able to grab something in the collapse, there hadn’t been any water to grab.
“No, there’s no water.” Kat just shook her head, breaking the silence.

“So that should be our first job right?”

More looks were exchanged, but no one was willing to break the news.

Chris sighed, “There is no water. We looked the other day, that was what we were doing, and we found nothing.”

“Why were you looking for water two days ago? We were still in the hospital.” Harold looked between Chris, Kat, and Jim.

“I thought we were looking for barrels and sand? Construction type stuff.” Tyson had his hands up in front of him, asking for a time-out.

“We needed those things to hopefully set-up a water filtration system.” Kat shook her head and sighed, “We were also hoping to find some bottled water to help get us through setting it up, but we found nothing.”

“What about vending machines? Or stores? There must be something left.” Tyson suggested.

Chris shook his head, “Not after my last group moved in, they wiped out every store in driving distance.”

“Well can’t we go ask them for some? You said they’re well set-up so they probably aren’t hurting for water.” Harold asked.

“No. No way, they don’t share.” Chris leaned against a desk, “And even if we had something to trade with, why would they do a trade when they could just take it?”

“Seriously?” Tyson asked in disbelief, “They’d just let us die so they don’t have to share something they have plenty of?”

“We don’t know that they have plenty of anything. We were fine until the flooding happened. They could be in the exact same situation.” Jim tried.

“Doubtful.” Chris stated, “Anya was super paranoid and would have made sure they were collecting water on the roof, even if the pool was full. And Raven was already working on some sort of water thing before I left. I didn’t understand it since she couldn’t be bothered to explain anything to me or anyone else.”

“There’s a pool?” Tyson asked.

“Yeah,” Chris confirmed.

“What else is there?” Mandy asked.

“It’s a high school. Classrooms, cafeteria, gym, pool.” Chris shrugged, “They raided a lot of places to add stuff so it was pretty comfortable too. Didn’t get to sleep on a bed for too many nights before I couldn’t stay anymore, but they were working on making it nice. Setting up for the long-term.”

“Maybe we should try.” Jim suggested, “I know you say they aren’t willing to trade or work with anyone, but if they’re that well set-up maybe they could help us get set-up so we can travel east.”

“There is no way we are going to be better off moving all the time than in one spot.” Kat disagreed,
“Chris’ last group has the right idea, fortify and set-up for long term self-sufficiency. That was the goal at the hospital.”

“Yeah but a goal we can no longer reach. We just don’t have the structure to build around anymore. And none of us have the skills needed to start from scratch.” Mandy shook her head.

“I know you were miserable, but would they accept us?” Jim asked Chris.

“No. No way, you’ve heard Chris tell us what they’re like. I’m not taking orders from people like that, and from what he says we wouldn’t have any other choice.” Mandy flat-out refused.

Chris looked at everyone, there were 7 of them.

“We could..” Chris hesitated, he didn’t want to seem like an asshole,

“We could what?” Kat asked, searching Chris' face.

He sighed, “We could take over the school.”

“What!”

“Yes!”

“A absolutely not!”

A sharp whistle pierced the noise, “Enough. What do you mean, take over the school Chris? What exactly do you mean?” Kat asked

Chris paused and gathered his thoughts, “Most of the people at the school are ok. It’s just the ones in charge, Anya, Raven, and Elyza. They’re the ones who make all the decisions and they are the problems.” Chris paused and thought for a moment, how to do this? “My Dad, his girlfriend, and her kids would all be glad to have me back. Bellamy is a friend of mine, he wouldn’t be willing to fight me and his sister will do what he says. Lincoln wants Octavia so he wouldn’t do anything either.”

“What do you mean, fight you?” Jim interrupted, looking concerned.

“Well, they aren’t just going to let us in and hand over leadership.” Chris rolled his eyes. “That would leave Anya, Raven, Elyza, and Madi. They’re the only ones who’d fight us coming in and taking over.”

There was silence for a few minutes, everyone thinking and trying to figure out what everyone else was thinking.

“7 against 4, I like those numbers,” Harold broke the silence.

“What about defenses?” Kat asked.

Chris shrugged, “A couple of guns, the biggest one is hooked to Anya’s car. Wouldn’t be hard to make use of it ourselves. Other than that, they just have a bunch of junk turning the school into a maze.”

“And more than likely they’ve used more than a few rounds in the last three weeks. They might be mostly out.” Kat said.

“Even a few rounds is more than we have.” Jim shook his head, “We shouldn’t do this.”
Kat offered a grin, “We have all the rounds confiscated and stored in this warehouse.” She stood up and pulled a key out of a drawer.

She walked over to the doors leading into the inner warehouse, unlocking it and propping it open. Kat gestured to the others and led the way to a large caged area. Unlocking it, she gestured at the large guns leaning against the walls in racks. “These are the big ones, handguns will be in with the boxes.” Kat used another key and opened a metal locker, stepping aside to reveal boxes of ammo. “And we have more than enough here to let us practice, too.”

“You can’t be serious,” Jim protested, “We can’t just take over their home, they’re the ones who’ve done all the work, that would be wrong.”

“If I have the choice of being wrong or alive, I’ll choose alive.” Harold walked over looking at the guns but not touching.

“How can you be ok with this? They’re your family?” Jim asked Chris.

“My family won’t raise a weapon to me, and if they do, then they aren’t my family.”
“Dammit, Raven!”

Raven startled and dropped the shovel in her hands.

“Argh!” She screeched in surprise.

Anya chuckled, watching as Raven rested her hands on her thighs, trying to calm her heartbeat. “Serves you right,” She sipped her mug, eyeing Raven’s sweaty form, “What are you doing out here? I wanted to have some fun this morning,” Anya practically whined the last.

Raven made a face, “The one time you’re horny in the morning.” She shook her head at Anya’s smug face, “Stop drinking your stupid tea, you lecher. I’m digging a sewer trench.”

Anya blinked, “I know you’re into some weird stuff, but… Wow.”

Raven chucked a handful of dirt at Anya, missing her by a few feet.

“Good throw,” Anya snarked.

“Thanks, I pictured your face,” Raven stuck her tongue out. “It’s so we don’t have to keep shitting in buckets and port-a-johns. This way we can lay a pipe to the pit over yonder, and live like people again.”

“Yonder? What are you?”

Raven looked down at herself, “I’m gonna go with sexy crippled Latina, but you can feel free to add more to that descriptor.”

She just rolled her eyes and sipped her tea, “If you didn’t look like a muddy coal miner rolled in Rhino shit, I might have kissed you good morning. As it is…” She turned and started walking back to the school.

“TEASE!” Raven hollered, pouting as she went back to her digging. “Stupid excavator with its stupid short arm, and its stupid windowless cage thingy. This sucks.”

Anya walked into the kitchen for an apple, only to interrupt Travis and Madison’s conversation. “Uh, sorry.” She grabbed her apple and went to leave.

“Wait, we actually would like to talk to you,” Madison said, reaching out towards her.

Anya paused and turned around, feeling like she should have just bolted, “Sure, what’s going on?” She looked between Madison and Travis. The mom squad was suffocating, to say the least.

Madison glanced at Travis, “Well we’ve been concerned about…”

“It’s about you and Raven.” Travis huffed, “I don’t know what you think you’re doing but it needs to stop.”
Anya’s eyes went cold and she cleaned her apple off on her shirt to keep from snapping. “Is that so?” The words were polite but she was feeling anything but polite.

“She’s a child.”

“She’s twenty-one. Last I checked the age of consent is eighteen.” Anya took a bite from her apple.

Madison shook her head, “I’ve worked with a hundred kids like her Anya, she’s just looking to rebel-”

“Rebel from what? Look, I don’t know what you think you know, but Raven is a big girl, and so am I. So you can keep your opinions to yourselves.” Anya shook her head at them, “Ridiculous.” She muttered and stalked out.

“Raven?” Madison had chosen to have this particular conversation without Travis. He’d been… On edge since Chris left.

Raven didn’t bother looking up from her project. It was delicate and required more focus than talking to Madison. “Yeah.”

Madison sat down a little bit away from Raven to avoid bumping her, “I just wanted to ask you about your uh, your relationship with Anya.”

Raven glanced up for a second and shrugged, “What about it?”

“I’m just curious as to… What led you down this path.” She phrased it carefully.

Raven put down her tools and snorted, “This path? What you worried that daddy touched me and now I’m afraid of penises? No, maybe that’s someone else but that isn’t me dude. And if you think she intimidated me into this then you have another thing coming. I was the one that bugged her about it.” She’d been waiting for this ever since Anya mentioned the kitchen incident.

Madison sighed, “I didn’t mean it like that, I just.. She’s much older than you, and I don’t think you realize what you’re getting yourself into.”

Raven blinked, “Okay. Lemme put it this way. I raised myself. My drunk off her ass mother was about as useful as concrete slippers at swimming lessons. So I ran away to live with my grandma from the age of seven. Then Elyza’s mom took me in too. But don’t fool yourself into thinking I’ve ever been a child, or ever had the luxury of making stupid ass decisions.”

Madison raised her hands, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-”

“You didn’t mean to tell me how to live my life within a society that hasn’t given a fuck about me since birth? Or are you talking about how it’s wrong to date a woman a few years older than me because she makes me happy?” Raven stood up, “Let’s be real here Madison, at best, you’re a nebby old broad. At worst, you’re angry because I didn’t pick the right genitalia for my partner. God, grow up.” Raven shook her head, “I’ve got important shit to do.”
“This is really nice,” Alicia smiled, “Thank you for this.”

“I was more than happy to do it,” Elyza smiled back at her. Sipping from her mug before turning back to look at the sunset before them.

“So how’d you get my mom to leave us alone tonight?”

“Raven owes me, which means Anya owes me.” Elyza smirked, “And I may have promised to run interference so they could have a night to themselves.”

“Are they still on about that? I swear you’d think they’ve never met a lesbian couple in their life.” Alicia sighed.

“I’m not sure that it’s about them being girls, so much as it’s about the age difference.” Elyza shrugged, “There is a big gap.”

“Or maybe..” Alicia trailed off, pulling the blanket higher up around her.

“What?” Elyza turned to face her a little more, keeping her part of the blanket high so Alicia didn’t get cold.

“Maybe it’s that this isn’t a good time to start a relationship,” Alicia mumbled, her voice so quiet that Elyza almost couldn’t hear her.

Elyza froze a bit, breath catching, “Is that what you think?” She almost didn’t want the answer.

“I don’t know,” Alicia shook her head, looking down at the mug in her hand. “I just..I already lost- I’ve already lost someone and I don’t want to lose you too.”

Elyza set her hot chocolate down before reaching for Alicia’s hand. When Alicia took it, she tucked their hands under the blanket to them warm. “Is it going to be any better if we don’t do this?” She lifted their joined hands up just a bit. “Will it be easier?”

Alicia’s head jerked up, her eyes locking onto Elyza’s. “No.” It was barely a whisper. Alicia leaned forward, her lips meeting Elyza’s for their first kiss. It was soft and short, but oh-so-perfect. They pulled back just slightly, letting their foreheads meet.

“Oh for Christ’s sake!”

They jumped back, startled at the sudden noise.

“I swear living here is just like high school! Hormones everywhere!” Travis turned around and stomped back down the stairs, leaving them to their roof.

“He does know we live in a high school, right?” Alicia asked, giggling slightly.
Elyza shrugged, “Not my problem,” She whispered, leaning closer, “Just as long as he’s gone.”

“Finally some fresh air!” Raven took a deep breath and stabbed the nearest zombo through the skull, “The sand may be gross but damn does it feel good.”

Alicia shook her head, “Has anyone ever told you that you’re crazy?”

“Yes on a good day.” Raven winked.

Elyza rolled her eyes and helped Alicia out of the bed of the truck, “Don’t listen to her. I swear the affection is getting to her head.” Alicia gave her a little grin and nodded her agreement.

Anya slapped Raven upside the head, “We aren’t here for a beach day. Take this.” She shoved a cooler into Raven’s hands and grabbed the pile of fishing rods from the truck bed. “Pier, let’s go.”

Raven pouted and rubbed her head, “Why are you so much meaner now?”

“Part of my charm.” Anya smirked, “Now move your ass.”

Elyza snickered and grabbed the second cooler with their lunch in it, smiling when Alicia took the other end, “Thanks.”

“No problem, just don’t smack me around.” Alicia joked.

Elyza waved a hand at her, “Not unless you ask for it.” Alicia blushed and Elyza looked pleased with herself. They set themselves up at the edge of the pier after clearing it of undesirables like walkers and Anya walked them through how to hook the bait, and cast it.

“Alright, so you flip this over, let the tip of the rod dangle behind you, make sure it doesn’t catch anything, and just flick your wrist to let it go,” Anya instructed, demonstrating for them.

It took a few tries before they got the hang of it, but by the end of the day, they had a cooler full of fish… Mostly Anya’s fish, but Alicia caught two. She threw one back accidentally when it flailed in her hand but the other one was perfectly fine.

“Stupid fish.” Raven huffed, throwing herself in the truck.

“Sorry Rae, I guess being stubborn and annoying isn’t really the way to a fish’s heart.” Elyza teased through the back window, happily letting a tired Alicia lean on her.

“Laugh it up chucklehead, my girlfriend is still way better at catching dinner than yours.” Raven taunted.

Elyza grinned down at her sleepy Alicia, “I think I’m okay with that.”

Anya glanced through the rear mirror at them. They were kinda cute.
Welp this is it. Its been a blast and we're already looking forward to doing a part two. Shoot us ideas for what you want to see, we might use it, we might nix, who knows. Anywho y'all are the best..Enjoy!

“I’m still not sure about this.” Jim looked down at the gun in his hands.

Chris pulled the slide on his pistol to check for ammo in the barrel and then turned on the safety. “Living? Because I’m pretty sure that if we wait any longer, we won’t be anymore.” He tucked it into the back of his jeans.

Jim shook his head, “Taking lives to perpetuate ours doesn’t feel right.”

Kat scoffed, “How about everyone who’s died for us to be here? Those soldiers guarding the hospital, the police in the streets trying to keep things safe. If you want to give up here, then they died for you. In vain. Because you aren’t willing to fight for your life.” She slung a trio of extra assault rifles in the duffel bag. “And we aren’t killing anyone unless we have to.”

“You’re-” Chris started.

“Enough.” Kat shot him a look, “Stubborn or not, we will offer a trade first. If they don’t take it, then and ONLY then, will we fight.”

Chris shook his head but stayed quiet. He would bank on Anya’s paranoia to keep the trade from happening. Not even guns and ammo would tempt Anya to accept the kind of deal that involved anyone stepping out into the open to get shot just to feed the enemy.

“Sounds good to me,” Harold agreed, “If they want to live, they won’t fight. If the fight is worth more than their life, we’ll give it to them.”

“How can I help?” Brenna asked, looking at the others, “I really suck at these.” She gestured to the weapons around her.

“You are too young to fight, you’ll just follow behind us.” Mandy patted her shoulder. “And they won’t fight us, look at how well armed we are.”

Chris looked around and agreed, everyone had two weapons, lots of ammo and Kat had a bag of spares. There was no way that the others would be able to fight. Even if they wanted to, it would be a losing battle. Chris chuckled to himself.

“What do we do if they don’t agree to trade? After we take over, I mean?” Harold asked.

“I plan on guzzling a gallon of water,” Tyson joked, they’d all been thirsty and were really starting to feel it.

Harold rolled his eyes, “I mean with the leaders. The ones who’ve been running things.”
“Lock them up, kick them out, whatever needs to happen.” Kat replied, “I’d prefer not to have to hurt anyone, but they seem more than capable of surviving out here.”

Chris nodded his agreement, it was probably the most sensible thing Kat had ever said. He wouldn’t mind ‘accidentally’ putting a bullet in Anya though. After what she did to his mother, she deserved it.

“Oh did their successful and safe place give you the idea that they could survive? Of course, they can’t be too good at surviving if a small group of untrained people can take over, right?” Jim snarked, the first time Chris has heard him speak so sarcastically.

“There’s a difference between surviving and fighting, we should know that best.” Mandy chided him.

“I’m just saying, you keep claiming that these people are good at surviving but at the same time you’re assuming that’ll it be easy to take over. Survivors are always the ones to come out on top.” Jim argued again.

Kat took a deep breath, “Jim, back off. No one is forcing you to do this. If you can’t handle this, then you can stay and protect Brenna while we deal with the school and try to work something out. Nobody wants this to be a fight, but I need everyone to be ready for it if it goes that way. If you can’t handle that, I want you here.”

“What? No!” Chris protested, “There’s only 7 of us and 10 of them. Only 4 of them will fight us, but if it’s 5 to 4 they will absolutely fight.”

“He’s right, we need all of us.” Harold agreed, “If we can avoid an actual fight, that’ll be worth all of us going.”

“Whatever your choice, I need you to choose now Jim.” Kat tossed the duffel of guns over her shoulder. “Because right now is the moment where you pick what’s more important to you, your moral compass or your life.”

“You’re a police officer!” He snapped, “How can you condone this?”

She scoffed, “Was. There’s no more government, no more police force, hell even the military is gone. What I am now, is a trained survivor and I’m not arguing with you anymore.”

Jim sighed and scrubbed his face, “I’m not going to step on others to keep myself alive. I’m not so proud as to believe that I’m worth more than them.”

“Fine. We’ll see you back here when it’s all over, and if not, you leave.”

“No,” Jim shook his head, “Harold is right, maybe more of us being there will keep them from fighting us. If not, then I can take Brenna and we can leave, come back here for a bit.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.” Harold smiled, “Best of both options. If we’re not back in 24 hours then you know you have to go.”

Kat looked for anymore disagreement and when she saw none, she hauled the doors open, “Alright everybody, let’s move.”
“This is it,” Chris stopped at the edge of the soccer field, still across the parking lot from the school. He looked around, it didn’t look too bad. A few more windows gone, more junk on the ground and a few trashed cars tipped on their sides or backs like stranded turtles.

“Are you sure? Place looks empty.” Harold shaded his eyes with a hand.

“That was kind of the point,” Chris rolled his eyes, then pointed to the first-floor windows, “How many schools blackout their windows like that? You can’t see in there and that’s the point.”

“Hey, check out the field,” Tyson pointed to the baseball field. There was a group of stiffs all shambling and shoving themselves into a corner.

“Should we go help?” Jim asked, gripping his gun.

“There’s no one to help,” Chris shook his head, it was too far to hear the music, but it was pretty obviously playing if the stiffs were pushing forward like that. “That’s the set-up to keep the stiffs over there instead of wandering through the parking lot or getting into the school.”

“Damn,” Kat was impressed, “That’s really smart. How is it powered?”

“Uh, I don’t know?” Chris shifted, he’d never taken a shift clearing the field. “Batteries of some sort.”

“We can worry about that later,” Mandy shifted her attention back to the school. “What’s the plan?”

“Should we try to get their attention before we go in? Or do we just walk in and ask to trade once we’re inside?” Harold asked.

They looked to each other and Jim rolled his eyes, “Thank god I came with you.” He grabbed a pipe off the ground and tied a white-ish cloth onto the end and shoved it into Harold’s hands, “Hold that.” He stomped his way across the field, pausing to gesture for them to follow. “Come on.” He snapped.

Jim told them to stop at the edge of the grass and the school lot and walked over to one of the buses in a huff, climbed in and gave three toots of the horn. Gave it a second, then hopped back down to rejoin the group. “Guns down please, I’d like to keep things pleasant.”

They pointed the ends of the guns towards the ground, still keeping a firm grip on them. They shifted, waiting impatiently for someone, anyone to show up.

Chris was starting to get annoyed, it was taking forever. He’d almost had something to do, a few of the stiffs had started to walk towards them after Jim had honked the horn, but when there hadn’t been anything to distract from the music they had gone back.

“Up there!” Brenna pointed to the roof. Not where they’d been expecting someone to show up.

“You rang?” Raven called down, just her head appearing over the edge, “Chris? What the fuck do you guys want?”

Any gra...
she meant is good afternoon.” She shot a glare over her shoulder.

“NO, SHE MEANT GO THE FUCK AWAY!” Raven yelled from..wherever she was on the roof.

Anya just turned her back on the newcomers and gestured violently, and then inappropriately, then turned back. “You were saying?”

Jim cleared his throat. “My name is Jim, you already know Chris, and I believe you met Kat and Mandy as well. The hospital collapsed a few days ago and we’ve been struggling to find any food or clean water since the flooding destroyed everything.”

“I’m afraid we aren’t interested in charity,” Anya called down.

“I’m not suggesting any kind of charity ma’am, we’re looking to trade. Chris has informed us that you’re well stocked, but I imagine someone, as prepared as yourself, understands the value of a few spare weapons.” He gestured to Kat and took the duffel bag from her, opening it up to show the trio of assault rifles and a half dozen submachine guns. “We’re willing to trade these for any food and water you’d be willing to spare.”

“Just a minute,” Anya ducked away from the edge of the roof, probably talking to Raven and anyone else on the roof. She came back a few minutes later, “We’re not interested. We’ll send down a case of water and some travel food since my nephew is with you, but we want you gone.”

“That is a more than generous offer, thank you-”

“Are you nuts?! That water isn’t enough to catch us up, let alone get us anywhere.” Mandy jerked on his shoulder twisting him towards them. “They just want to keep everything for themselves, selfish assholes.”

“She’s right.” Chris hissed, looking up to his aunt, “She knows they can’t take us in a fair fight. She’s trying to get rid of us before we have time to think about what she’s really doing.”

“Hey, maybe they really don’t have anything to spare,” Harold shifted uncomfortably, looking up at the roof.

“Last time I was there, the cafeteria kitchen was so full we couldn’t walk without tripping over something. Dried food, cans, soups, even coffee, and chocolate.” Chris tugged Harold back to focus on the group, “Even if they ate constantly the whole time I was gone, they’d still have months more waiting for them. They cleared out two full Walmarts.”

Tyson whistled, “That’s a lot. Even if we just knocked them out and took enough to keep ourselves comfy, and took one of their cars, that’ll set us up until we can find our own place. It wouldn’t even put a dent in their supplies.”

“So do we have a deal?” Anya called down, assuming they’d had more than enough time.

Jim shifted on his feet, fidgeting like a kid about to be scolded, “Um, well, uh..”

“Don’t be a bitch, we know you have supplies to go around. Now let us in.” Chris interrupted him.

“Let you in?” Anya mused, “I think you know how to let yourself out, so you can go the way you came.” She flapped her hand at him, “You aren’t worth my time.”

“We’ll die if we don’t get water!” Tyson yelled this time.
“I offered you water and food.” She replied, “You threatened me. We’re done here.”

“We are not!” Chris refused to just let it go, “I worked my ass off for that stuff, I want my share!”

Anya stood up and walked away. A few minutes later a snack sized bag of Cheetos was chucked off the roof, “Your wages slave!” Raven shouted, “Now fuck off!”

Chris watched Raven disappear from the edge to be replaced with Elyza and Madi, watching them, but obviously not into talking anymore.

“I told you they weren’t going to be willing to negotiate.” Chris snapped at Jim.

“Well yes, it could have gone better, but did you have to antagonize them?”

“I didn’t antagonize anyone.”

“Are you sticking around?” Kat interrupted their snapping. “We need to get started now if we want this done before dark.”

“No. I still think taking what they’ve worked for is a terrible idea.” Jim shook his head, “Are you coming or staying Brenna?”

“She’s going with you,” Mandy didn’t even give the girl a chance to respond. “We’ll see you two tomorrow afternoon. We’ll come with water and food for you before we come back.”

Jim shook his head and gestured for Brenna to follow him. He didn’t expect much. “Don’t forget, twenty-four hours.” He tapped his watch at them.

They weren’t paying much attention to the roof, but when Jim tapped his watch, Madi ran off.

“How do we get in, Chris?” Kat turned away from the retreating figures.

He frowned, “The elevator shaft is going to be too hard to climb..” He pursed his lips, “Come on.” Chris led them around the building to the library window he’d broken only to find it was all the same color again. He knocked and it didn’t budge. “Well there’s a few more doors, we usually used the service entrance.” He stood and led the way around.

That door was firmly secured, as well.

“Alright.” Kat shook her head, “This isn’t working, let’s just test every door, circle the building and if we can’t find one, we’ll break a window.”

They walked around trying more doors, the first three were locked and firmly secured, Heck one didn’t have a handle and was just a mess of melted metal where the handle should have been.

“This one is chained,” Tyson tugged on the chains, stumbling back when the chains gave, sliding out of position until they were only held up by his hand. He let go and the dropped to the ground, letting the door swing open slightly.

“That’ll work.” Kat took point, “Keep an eye out.”

The door swung open to reveal the open white-tiled hallway, and a musty smell smacked them in the face.

“What is this, stinks like sweaty gym socks.” Tyson wrinkled his nose.
“Locker rooms,” Kat had popped her head into one of the rooms off the hallway, “Sewer backed up in there,” She gagged and started a chain reaction. Whether it was because of her gagging or the addition of sewer smell, Chris wasn’t really sure.

They took a few moments to stop gagging, though Harold actually stumbled back outside to throw up before they continued on.

Kat kept her pistol drawn, letting her weapon be the first thing through any door, she moved quickly to clear the locker rooms they passed. At the end of the hall, she rested her palm on the door with a glance to the others to make sure they were ready to follow her in. She pushed the door open and stepped through, only to stop in her tracks.

The others watched as surprise and then horror overtook them. A mechanism swung down from above the door, impaling Kat on a half dozen spikes leaking bodily fluids slowly.

“Holy shit,” Tyson whispered, eyes glued to the blood dribbling down Kat’s face, leaking out beside the rebar spike piercing between her eyebrows.

Chris stepped forward and pushed on the spikes. They moved up away from the door and he shoved it open ducking down to look past it. “It’s clear.” He gestured for the others to duck below Kat’s body, now hovering a few feet in the air, still trapped by the spikes.

“Oh god..” Harold covered his mouth, “We aren’t still going right?”

Mandy grit her teeth, “Of course we are.” She followed Chris through the doorway, “Let’s go.”

Chris held the trap up until the others were through, letting it slam down behind him after he’d ducked through. She looked around, “I imagine the rest of this place is booby-trapped just as ruthlessly. We need a way to get upstairs.”

“The stairs were blocked off first thing.”

“But you said they’ve been using elevator shafts. Maybe we can climb up the handicap elevator by the stairs. All multi-level schools have to have them.” She went to the nearest school map and pointed, “Okay, we’re right here, so the elevators should be… That way.” She pointed to a wall of rubble. “We’ll have to work our way around it.”

Chris started forward and hopped onto some of the rubble, it wasn’t quite stacked to the ceiling so he was able to poke his head through, “Ugh, it’s still flooded in there.” He pulled his head back out, “But I don’t see anything.” He handed his rifle over to Harold and climbed through the hole, reaching back to grab the rifle.

“Do you think we can shimmy through?” Harold asked, “It wasn’t too tight right?” He passed the rifle back.

“Should be ok, might get a little scraped up, but you’ll make it.” Chris’s voice sounded a bit distance, he wasn’t waiting around while the others crawled through.

He went down the hallway far enough to pass 5 classroom doors before turning back, sloshing through mucky water that covered the floor, and got back just as Mandy was bringing up the rear.

“Seems clear so far, which way?” He asked.

Mandy pointed, “Left, it should be around that corner.”
Harold led the way this time, turning the corner and stopping in front of the elevator doors. He gestured to Tyson and the two of them wedged their fingers in the gap and hauled it open, using a pipe to prop it open.

Mandy stepped forward and looked up, “The elevator is up top, we’ll have to climb,” She slid her foot forward feeling for where the ground was, she found it and took a step in, just barely in the elevator shaft. She saw the cable on the far side of the wall and slung her rifle onto her back, taking the next step forward. She shrieked and tipped forward, vanishing into the black water with a splash, the water continuing to roil.

“Mandy!”

“Amanda!”

The boys all stepped forward, though keeping firmly out of the shaft. They looked, trying to pierce the darkness and motion of the water to see her. She finally surfaced, but there was an arm slung across her chest that didn’t belong to her.

The boys jerked back, Amanda was still covered to her upper thighs, and they didn’t want something else to grab at them.

“Help me!” Amanda screamed reaching forward and grabbing the bar that propped the doors open. She tried to use it to haul herself out, water and blood streaking down her arms and hands making her grip slippery. She tried again but the bar slipped, her weight causing it to dislodge.

A stiff climbing Mandy’s front was the last thing they saw before the doors closed.

Harold sprang up, “We have to help her!” He started clawing at the door seam, “Help me get this open!”

Chris grabbed his shoulder, pulling him away from the doors, “She’s gone. There’s nothing we can do now.”

“Son of a Bitch!” Tyson yelled, kicking at the wall. “What now?”

“We keep going, we don’t have any other choice.”

“What? We’ll just die!” Harold protested.

“We need to go back.” Tyson grabbed Chris and Harold by the backs of their shirts and started dragging them back the way they’d come. “Wait..” He looked around, “Where’d the crawlspace go?” He scrambled up the pile of rubble, “We came through right here didn’t we?” He tried shoving at the tightly wedged rock and rebar, “What happened?”

“They must have closed it behind us!” Tyson kicked at the rubble, hopping a bit when his foot was hurt. “What do they want with us.”

“Let us go! We will just leave!” Harold yelled to the empty hallway.

“Don’t bother,” Chris looked around, “We can still do this, we just need to take out Anya, Raven, and Elyza, we’ve still got this.”

“No, we don’t.” Tyson snapped, “We’re going to find a way out of here.” He slogged through the dirty water, going in the direction he hoped would lead them out of this hellhole.
“No! We can’t just go back,” Chris reluctantly followed behind, “We need to do this.”

“No, we don’t. We need to not die and that’s all we’re going to do here.” Harold kept going.

“We never should have turned down their offer,” Tyson muttered, kicking a door open and stepping back in case there were more spike traps. He poked his head inside, “Look, we can break that window and get the hell out of here.” He pointed, striding into the room. He stumbled over a bit of string and they were knocked back into the walls from the force of the explosion.

Chris woke up with his head pounding.

“Oh lookie, the little turd is awake.” Octavia kicked at Chris’ foot before stepping away. “Couldn’t hack it out there could you?”

“I hate it when people say ‘I told you so’,,” Nick looked down at him, “But really, we ALL told you so.”

“Stop it. Leave him alone.” Travis shoved Nick away from Chris and reached down towards him.

“Touch those ropes and you’ll be the next one tied up.” Anya interrupted him before he could even touch the bindings on Chris’ wrists.

“No, please. Mess with the ropes.” Elyza muttered, not quite quietly enough.

Anya gave her and Raven both Looks. They’d said quite enough about their feelings on Chris and Travis. “Alright, that’s enough. Travis, you wanted to say your piece, so we’ll leave you alone.” She herded the girls back to the school steps before they could further aggravate the situation.

Chris sat up and looked for Harold and Tyson. Tyson was nowhere to be seen, but Harold was tied up on the grass a few feet away, passed out on the grass. “What happened?”

“Your friend ran into one of Raven’s bombs.” Travis shot her a dirty look, “You’re lucky you didn’t suffer permanent damage.”

“Where’s Tyson?” Chris asked.

“He was killed by the blast.” Travis rubbed his face, “It was quick though, and he didn’t turn.”

“Murderers!” Chris yanked and tugged at the bindings on his wrists, trying to break free.

“Now that’s enough.” Travis snapped, “Your friend made his choice when he stepped foot onto our property.”

“It’s not yours! It’s a school! It’s everyone’s!” Chris argued

Travis sighed, “Christopher, I understand that you’ve had problems while we’ve lived at the school, but trying to go to war with your own family isn’t the way to make things right.”

“Why not? All they’ve done is take what doesn’t belong to them and kill whoever they want,” Chris kicked at the ground, looking like a child throwing a tantrum.

“And what have you been doing?” He asked, “Chris, you’ve been treated poorly, and I’m going to make sure that changes around here, but first you need to stop behaving like a child. I need you to apologize for the way you’ve behaved.”
“I’m not going to apologize for anything!” Chris yelled, ignoring any risk from stiffs. “And I took care of it, I’m not treated like garbage anymore, that’s not anything you did, I did that.”

“Chris I’m offering you a chance to come home. You won’t be expected to do any more menial work, I understand that you were treated badly and I’m going to change that. Now stop acting like a child.” Travis huffed.

“I’m not the child here, you’re the one pretending you have any say.”

He shook his head, “Son, you’ve been gone for a while, things change.” Travis stood and beckoned to the others to come closer. “Chris is willing to apologize for what he’s done. Then we can all go back inside.” Travis reached down and helped Chris to stand and maintain his balance, the ties still around his ankles.

“I’m not apologizing for anything while I’m tied up like an animal.” He snapped, “If anything you should be apologizing for how you treated me!”

“Chris.” Travis chided, “This is your home.”

“No, it isn’t! This is just the first place you and your coward of a sister felt safe hiding out, and now you won’t even help people who need it! You’re a bunch of selfish jerks in your stupid little tower and you deserve everything you get.”

“You little shit!” Raven started forward, only stopped by Anya’s arm around her waist, holding her back.

“Chris you don’t know what you’re talking about.” Travis put a hand on his shoulder.

Chris shook it off, almost falling over, “Yes I do! People died! My mother died, and it shouldn’t have been her, it should have been you!” He snarled, “You don’t deserve to be alive.”

“Grow the fuck up you little sack of shit. No one deserves anything, especially not in this world.” Elyza scoffed

Travis shook his head, “And we don’t get to decide who lives and who dies.”

“But you did.” Chris spat, “You decided that she needed to die, all because of a stupid little scratch.”

Elyza laughed, “Get them out of here, he’s delusional and that isn’t going to change.”

“No, my son is coming in with us, he’s coming home.”

“No I’m not, not yet, but I sure as hell will once I get more help. I’m going to come back here and make you all pay. For killing my mom and all the other people you’ve killed because you’re too selfish to help.”

Anya lifted her rifle to point at Chris.

“Anya, No.” Raven put her hand on the barrel, Anya wouldn’t risk hurting her.

Travis glanced at her and stood between them, “Stop it both of you. Chris you are going to come inside and-”

BANG.
Chris fell to the ground in a heap.

Travis, Anya, and Raven turned to see Elyza, hand now lowering towards the ground. “Clean up this mess.” She turned around and walked inside, hands shaking.

“Chris…” Travis sank to his knees, punching the ground. He jumped to his feet, “I’m going to kill that bitch! She killed my son!”

Anya swung the rifle she’d lowered back up to point at Travis now, “Not a chance.”

“You either get over it or you leave, I’m not going to risk another fucking traitor at the breakfast table.” Raven drew her own gun. Anya shouldn’t have to kill her brother. Step-brother who was a fucking waste of space, but still.

Travis kept walking, murder in his eyes.

Anya put a bullet in his leg. “I said no.”

Travis dropped to a knee, gritting his teeth in pain, “That bitch killed my son.”

“Travis.” Anya warned, “I do not want to put you down, but I will if I have to.”

Raven looked to Anya, “No, babe-”

Anya ignored her, staring Travis down. He looked down to the ground, “Then pull the damn trigger because I’m not going to stop.” He got back up.

Raven sighed, it was time. She raised her gun and pulled the trigger.

Finite Incantatem

End Notes

I would apologize for all the things I mangled in that intro if it weren't so much fun. Kudos to you if you read the entire intro -BW743

Please comment, subscribe etc. and let us know how you feel in the most brutal detail. We live on the emotions you feed us, and as such have a tendency to be starving artists.

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