Summary

For years, the Baudelaire family has lived alone, with the oldest two siblings attempting to hide mysterious marks that their parents won't explain. But after their home is set on fire and their parents are murdered, the Baudelaire children find themselves separated; Violet is kidnapped and experimented on inside a Laboratory, while Klaus and Sunny, refusing to believe she's dead, are transferred to a foster home in Hawkins, Indiana. While Violet struggles to survive and discover why she's been brought to the Lab, Klaus and Sunny ally
themselves with two triplets, who also have a missing sibling and several secrets to hide.

The VFD Kids in a Stranger Things AU, rated Teen and Up for violent scenes, kids with no swear filter, and looots of angst, warning you right now.

Part Two: https://archiveofourown.org/works/17408771/chapters/40977590
Chapter Notes

I am... way more excited for this than I probably should be.

Special shoutout to asoue-sideblog on tumblr, who has been enabling me and helping me with planning out the plot: you're literally the best! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER ONE

Prologue - The Gate Opens

The boy rocked back-and-forth, staring at the wall.

This wasn’t good, it couldn’t be good. They’d left him alone all day, and he knew what had happened yesterday, no matter how much they told him it was all planned. He’d surprised them, he’d surprised everyone, and he’d scared everyone. If they hadn’t been so scared they might’ve punished him for what had happened.

God, he was so stupid. He’d played along for so long, but somehow he always knew, he always knew they hated him, if they gave a shit about him at all. They’d said he was helping, he was being good, he was doing good, and he’d played along because he was scared, he was so scared, and lost, and confused, and cold, and he couldn’t fucking take it anymore.

The door opened, and he leapt to his feet, hoping to God they didn’t notice him shaking, shaking from the cold and from the terror gripping him, even worse than he’d felt the last few weeks.

Two of the guards came in, one grabbing his arm. “Alright, kid, let’s get moving.”

“Wh-where are we going?” the boy asked, staring up at him.

“Don’t ask questions.” was his only response, and the other guard grabbed his other arm and gave him a push. The boy started walking, putting his head down and staring at his bare feet- they hadn’t seen fit to give him shoes, even though the floor was cold. It was so cold.

They went down the hallway, down the stairs, through more halls... he lost track of how many turns they took and how many rooms they passed, and that was impressive for him; he usually remembered his surroundings a lot better, mapping everything in his mind. Then again, his head was somewhere else at the moment, and he wasn’t sure he was quite alright at the moment. He didn’t think he was sick- the food they gave him, he’d been told, was full of whatever vitamins were needed to keep him as healthy as possible. But it wasn’t as if he was in his best mental place.

However, he figured out very quickly where they were going when one of the guards opened a door and took them into the elevator- they’d only used that once, when they were going to... when they were going to...
“No.” he said, paling as the doors shut, and the room was suddenly too small, and he could feel fingers digging into his skin, and could hear the guards sighing and see them rolling their eyes and feel the cold, cold ground underneath his feet. “No, no, no…”

“Shut up, kid.”

“No, no, no, no…” he tried to back up, his back hitting the wall of the elevator, and he could feel the cold from through his hospital gown. “No, no, no… please, no, take me somewhere else…”

“God, shut up.”

He was visibly shaking now, and he could tell he was going to cry. He didn’t want to cry, he’d cried enough the last few weeks. Stop crying, stop crying… “Please, please, do anything else. Take me anywhere else, please!”

The doors opened, and the guards simply dragged him out; they were stronger than him, and much taller, and even as he kicked and screamed they just kept moving forward, muttering something indistinct and giving him glares as they walked down the halls to the Basement.

To the fucking Basement.

He’d only been there once. He’d only been there yesterday.

“Let me go! Let me go!”

The doors opened, and he could see them all staring at him. He could see the large, white room ahead of him, he could feel the cold. And all the guards and doctors were staring at him. They wouldn’t stop staring at him. It would be one thing if he knew they’d do something, calm him down, take him somewhere safe, but he knew they were just staring at him because he was interesting, or annoying, or difficult. He was their stupid little experiment and he was a disappointment, he needed to stop being a disappointment, he couldn’t be like her.

The guards finally shoved him forwards, and he felt more hands grab him, pulling him into a smaller room, shoving him into a wetsuit, ignoring his screaming and crying and punching and kicking, acting as if he were a stubborn toddler who didn’t want to go outside. They barely even glanced at him, didn’t even think to talk to him as he screamed and sobbed.

And when he was dragged out again, dragged into the large room, still crying and shaking and pleading for them to please let him go, when he was shoved towards the stairs, when he shut his eyes, thinking, maybe I can disappear now, maybe I can just get away… that’s when he felt those hands on his shoulder.

He turned, slowly, tears still flowing down his face, staring up into the cold, shiny eyes.

“Please…” he said, his voice choked up. “Please, I can’t do that again… it’ll kill me, that thing’ll kill me, please…”

“Now, now, don’t be like that.” the man said darkly. “You did some amazing work yesterday, we just need you to do it again. We’d like to see exactly what you found. You’ll be prepared this time.”

“No, no, it’ll kill me, whatever that- that thing is, it’ll kill me, do any other tests, do anything else, drug me up again, I don’t-”

“Would you rather be put into Solitary again?”
The boy froze, eyes wide. Then he was sobbing harder, shaking his head. He didn’t know if he could handle that room again, that small, cramped room, barely big enough for him to move in, so dark he couldn’t see anything, left in there until they remembered to get him out again. But he didn’t want to go back there either.

“Then you won’t mind another test in the bath, will you?”

“Please…”

“Come along, Ten. You have a job to do, don’t you?”

The boy kept sobbing, but he followed as the man moved his hand to his arm and dragged him up the stairs. They put something on his head, and then put on a helmet and strapped him in, and the shiny-eyed man just told him, “Do what you did yesterday, alright?”

The boy nodded. He couldn’t do anything else.

Maybe getting killed wouldn’t be so bad.

He was lowered into the water, then, and it was cold, it was so cold…

And then there was nothing.

He shut his eyes, feeling the helmet and the wires and the wetsuit and thinking, Take me away. Take me away.

He had assumed he wouldn't be able to do it in the Bath. They’d figured out he couldn’t do it if he was strapped to something, if he was too distracted. But he was just as scared as he had been the day before, when they’d hurt him too much for not being able to do things, when the Bath had made him too claustrophobic, when he was just so tired and scared and cold…

And the fear built up the power inside him.

And it was breaking the barrier.

The wall started cracking again, just slightly.

He shut his eyes, and when he opened them, he could see the world change before him. Instead of the water, he could see the dark, cold, blue room ahead of him. It was the same room, but this time he could see out of the walls of the Bath, see what looked like broken glass, and roots (or vines?), and mold growing all around. He could see the wall to the right, the one where the crack had been, but this one had some kind of growth spreading the more he watched. He was reaching to somewhere he hadn’t seen- which was the problem, they’d wanted him to do that, and he’d just ended up here…

He heard the growl before he saw the thing.

He shook, wishing they would just pull him out, surely they had whatever it was they needed already. But, instead, he found himself trapped, only able to move a few inches, still strapped to the Bath. So he stayed in one place, shaking, struggling not to cry again, as the Monster entered the room.

It crept forwards, its eyeless face turning to stare at him, closed for now. It walked on all fours, but he’d seen it moving on two before. He could see its claws as it creeped closer towards him, closer and closer as if it knew he was there.
But I’m not there. I can only see there, I can’t be... I’m not there. I’m not there. I’m not here. I’m not here.

It came closer, so close he could start to see all the blemishes in its skin... or scales... or whatever it had. It got close, and then it opened its face, it opened its face, and he could see all the teeth, and down its throat, and it roared...

I’m not here. I’m not here. I’m not here!

He knew what he should do. He stared ahead, raising his hand. He’d just touch the walls. He knew that. He’d touch the wall of the Bath just like he did yesterday, and he’d be forced to remember he wasn’t here. And he could prove to himself he was safe, and he could shut his eyes and beg for them to pull him out of the water, and there would be nothing different but another crack in the wall. And then they’d stop asking him to do this, they’d stop making him do things, maybe they’d let him go...

He reached out his hand, to touch the glass, as the monster closed its face and crept closer.

His hand went through the glass, and touched the monster’s face.

He retracted his hand, and he screamed, and the monster screamed.

And then he was back in the Bath, the dark water around him, and he was still screaming, and he was lifted out and he suddenly heard alarms blaring, and people shouting, and there was too much noise, and too much light, and too much everything.

And then the wall burst open.

The cracks had built up, more cracks than should have appeared, spreading as fast as he’d ever seen. And they broke open the wall, and there were blue and red strands of light bursting through, goop he couldn’t identify spreading everywhere, and then...

And then the Monster burst out.

It leapt through the wall, letting out that inhuman screech. The people yelled, and the boy heard guns going off, but it didn’t seem to affect the Monster, who rushed at one of the nearby doctors, pouncing. The boy turned away, feeling one of the guards grab his arm, dragging him down the stairs.

They didn’t make it far.

At the bottom of the stairs, the Monster ran forwards, and the boy broke free from the guard’s grip, rushing away, hiding behind the staircase, breathing deeply and moving his hands to his ears to block out the screaming and the alarms and the yelling and all the noise and all the cold.

He ran towards the room he’d been changed in- an old storage closet, maybe?- and he rushed inside and shut the door. Everything was suddenly muted, everything but the cold. The cold got worse.

He was dripping water onto the floor. He wasn’t sure why his attention was drawn to that above all else, but it was bothering him, it was bothering him so much, and it just made him feel colder. It was such a small thing, but maybe that’s why he focused on it. If he had one thing he could fix, he just needed to fix one thing, and maybe he’d be able to figure something out, he’d be able to get himself somewhere safe...

He saw his hospital gown thrown over a chair in the corner, and he took off his wetsuit, throwing
the gown back over his head. It didn’t help; instead, now the gown was wet. Wet and cold. Everything was colder than he remembered, even colder than before.

The shouting and yelling was still happening, and he could hear the monster roar. He crept to the edge of the closet door, listening, wondering how far away it was.

That was a mistake.

He moved away from the door just in time, hearing the footsteps drawing close. He was up against the cold wall when the door was broken down, and the Monster stared at him— even without eyes, he knew what it was staring at, what it was looking for.

The boy screamed and dropped down just as the Monster leapt at him, barely avoiding its claws. He rolled and pulled himself to his feet and took off running as the Monster regained itself and turned around, only looking behind him to see how much of a head start he had.

He didn’t have much.

The Monster was right on his heels, roaring as he ran. The Guards were still shooting at it, still yelling, and the alarms were going on and on and on and they wouldn’t stop.

He had to get away.

He didn’t mean to disappear. He really didn’t. He still couldn’t quite control himself when he was emotional, when he was scared. Scared out of his goddamn mind.

But he shut his eyes, and he thought of the room, the room that was the same as this one but darker and bluer and empty.

He’d been there, and now that the wall was open, it wasn’t far.

He felt himself pulled, pulled into the air, disappearing into the black. He held there for a second, the shouts and alarms and screams dying away, leaving him in an empty nothingness.

And then he felt the cold.

He collapsed to the floor, feeling something slimy and wet underneath his fingers. He sat up, rubbing his eyes and staring into the dark, blue room.

And he’d thought the Lab was cold. This… this was intolerable. How was it so freezing?

He stood up, turning around. He could see the cracks in the wall this time, opening up that blue-and-red door… was it a door? A portal? A gateway?

He stumbled backwards, not sure where he was suddenly. What was happening? Did he just…

But he couldn’t go through that gate. He couldn’t go back to that place, that horrible place full of horrible people and horrible tests and horrible punishments, and a Monster. The Monster was there.

That’s when he realized something.

If that was a Gate, it would be able to work both ways. The Monster would be able to come back.

He turned around and ran, ran to the elevator doors, sliding to a stop when he saw them already open, some kind of vines holding it in place. Shit, he wouldn’t be able to go out that way. There had to be emergency stairs, but how long would it take him to find them?
He shut his eyes, and tried to bring all that fear to the surface. He needed to use his fear now, use it like he just did.

*The ground floor.* He remembered walking on the ground floor, remembered the halls. He could go there, he knew where it was. It might be back on the Other Side, but it was close to the doors, and nobody would expect him to be there, he might be able to make it out a window.

He shut his eyes, and felt the nothing once more.

And then he felt the same cold. The same cold he’d just escaped.

He opened his eyes. He was on the ground floor, yes. But it was blue, and covered in vines and mold and *cold*.

He was still in the wrong place.

He stumbled forwards, confused. Why was he still here? He wanted to go to the other side, he wanted to…

He thought he heard another roar, and he stopped thinking so much.

He started running again, running down the halls. He found the doors within a few minutes and, heart pounding, he raced out of them, sliding to a stop once he reached the outside, shocked.

The sky was a dark blue, a dark blue he’d never seen the sky turn before. The stars were all gone, the moon was gone, and the ground under his feet was just as slimy and gross as the ground inside the building. The fence that had surrounded the building was broken, shattered, with more vines and mold growing on it. Beyond that, there was a murky, dark forest, one that looked as cold and lifeless as it had been inside the building.

He only stopped and stared for a second, and then he kept running. He had no choice. He had to hide. *He had to hide.*

He ran into the woods, leaping over roots and vines and trying not to cry. He was cold, and alone, and he’d never seen anything like this place before. He was once again scared and lost and confused and cold, only this time it was so much worse.

He finally found a tree with a large hole at the bottom, as if some animal had made a burrow. He slid towards it and then climbed into it, finding a damp spot to curl up in, hoping that the dark could hide him, that the awful discomfort would be worth it.

He started shaking, then, pulling the hospital gown down in an effort to cover himself more. It was *so cold*, and *so dark*, and he was somewhere… somewhere *wrong*, it just felt *so wrong*…

He was crying again, as he curled up into a ball, wondering why he couldn’t hear any wind, whether the Monster could get to him if he fell asleep, whether he was really awake or if he was just having a horrid, horrid nightmare. He’d been having a nightmare since the car crash, really. A horrible nightmare.

He was sobbing, trying desperately not to scream. And he couldn’t stop, he couldn’t *stop*.

And then he was crying out, not caring if the Monster heard him. Maybe someone else would hear him, take him somewhere safe, take him *home*.

“*Mother!*” he was calling, remembering her telling him it was alright just before the other car hit.
“Mother! Father!”

Nobody came.

And he still called out. Maybe they couldn’t hear him. Maybe they really were gone for good. But maybe the rest of his family could find him, wherever he was.

“Duncan! Isadora!”

In the Other World, several other children felt very, very wrong.

In Hawkins, two triplets sat up- one in a bed, the other on a pile of blankets on the floor- suddenly feeling terrified, though they couldn’t explain why. Maybe a nightmare? The girl suddenly felt an inexplicable panic, curling up as the terror almost enveloped her, while the boy suddenly felt horrible thoughts, awful thoughts, pounding in his mind, and he buried his head in his pillow, hoping the noise would stop.

On the road, a girl shook slightly, staring out the window the bus. She was suddenly very cold, and she leaned up against the wall, hugging her legs, hoping that feeling would go away.

And, in a house in the middle of nowhere, while their baby sister slept on, a brother and sister shot awake. The boy stared at the wall for a moment, before slowly getting up to grab a book, rubbing his eyes and hoping the fear he felt was just from an already-forgotten nightmare, and the girl sat up and tied back her hair, trying to figure out why she was feeling so awful.

They all felt awful, and didn’t know why.

Chapter End Notes

Some important notes:

- This is based on the gifset I made back in April 2018 ([https://whencartoonsruletheworld.tumblr.com/post/173329725932](https://whencartoonsruletheworld.tumblr.com/post/173329725932)), however, a few minor details have been changed since then.

- Unlike the other fics I made based on gifs, this is a full Stranger Things AU, not just taking place in the world of the show. While the plot isn't exactly the same, it's a lot more similar than Fanning the Flames/Melting the Chains, and the Stranger Things characters will not be appearing. (Though some ATWQ characters might be...)

- VFD does not exist in this universe; the Lab is the main driving force of the plot.

- Unlike ASOUE, this definitely has a set time period, that being the 1980s. You will notice that once I get to describing Carmelita's fashion choices.

- This is going to be a full-on Angst Train and I hope you are prepared.

- However, should note that the "Graphic Depictions of Violence" tag will be for scenes of violence, not any actual gore- I suck at writing that anyway lol. There will, however, be an unexpected drug trip at some point, and that may be a bit disturbing so
long as I wrote it right.

- Thank you for reading! :D

~ Midas
An Accident in the City

Chapter Notes

Ah, the chapter where I get to both write a happy Baudelaire family and also make jokes about Homeschooler Culture (aka the dumbass questions everyone asks). It all goes downhill from here. :D

CHAPTER TWO

An Accident in the City

Violet Baudelaire was bored again.

She’d run out of screws, which she’d definitely need the next time she needed to invent something, and her Father said he’d take her out to get more, which was exciting in of itself. She loved going into town, spying on the other kids, maybe playing in the fountain if her parents let her. Even though she’d be under constant supervision, she’d still be able to go somewhere outside the house.

But why did her father have to take so long?

He was upstairs on a call to whatever business he worked for- she’d given up trying to understand whenever he tried to explain, preferring to keep taking apart the toaster and sticking it into the Grandfather Clock- and he hadn’t come downstairs yet. It had to have been hours.

Violet wandered over to her mother’s office, peering in the doorway. “Mother? Can we go yet?”

Beatrice Baudelaire looked over her book, pushing a strand of dark hair behind her ear and then re-adjusting her reading gloves. “Is your father ready?”

“Can’t we go without him?”

“No. We’re going to the bookstore after we go to get your supplies, so Klaus is coming, and he’s bringing Sunny, and both of us need to be there if all three of you are out. You know that.”

“I’m fourteen.” Violet said quickly. “I can watch Klaus and Sunny, please?”

“Wait for your father.”

Violet groaned and walked out, rolling her eyes the second she turned around. She heard Beatrice let out a sigh as she walked away, clearly disappointed at how impatient her eldest daughter was being.

She went up the stairs to the next floor, going to the third door on the right and knocking twice. “Klaus? Are you two ready?”

“Are we going?”
“Not until Father’s done.”

She heard her brother’s groan from behind the door, but he did say, “Yes, we’re ready.”

Violet opened the door, walking in and sitting on her brother’s desk chair, spinning around and throwing her head back. “He’s taking so long.”

Klaus was sitting on his bed, furiously cleaning his glasses with a cloth. “That’s what adults do on the phone, they take as long as they want.”

“As if I’d know, I never use the phone.” Violet said regretfully, thinking of all the times her parents had told her that no, she wasn’t allowed to take it apart to see how it worked.

“Who would you call anyway?” Klaus asked, glancing up towards her.

“Shut up.” Violet said, spinning around towards the pile of blankets in the corner. “Sunny? You ready to go see the city?”

After a second, a pile of blankets in the corner moved, and their baby sister popped her head out, glancing up at her. “Jerdan.” she said, which probably meant, “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“You’ll love it. It’s a lot cooler in the afternoon.” Violet promised. “You just didn’t like it last time because it was super early and you missed naptime in order to pick up Mother’s order. It’s nicer, there are more people, and if Mother lets us, we can play in the fountain again, and there won’t be any school groups to splash us.”

“That was pretty annoying last time.” Klaus shrugged, finally placing his glasses back on his face. “You have your ribbon?”

“In case we need an emergency invention.” Violet giggled, briefly pulling a black ribbon out of her pocket before putting it back. “Which books are you planning on getting?”

Klaus shrugged again. “I just like to look. We’ll probably find something interesting. Maybe you can get more inventing books.”

“And you can find Sunny some picture books to help her learn to read.” Violet suggested, glancing at her sister. “Wouldn’t you like that?”

“Meh.” Sunny said.

“Reading is a very useful skill to have.” Klaus said.

“Meh.” Sunny repeated.

“I think,” Violet glanced towards Klaus, “She means she prefers to bite the books, rather than read them.”

“Heresy.” Klaus joked, and Violet burst out laughing.

The door swung open again, and Violet jumped to her feet as Bertrand Baudelaire peered in, smiling slightly. “So, who wants to go to the city?”

“Us!” Violet said, running to pick up Sunny from the corner.

She and Klaus raced past their father, running down the stairs towards the door. She couldn’t wait to sit in the car, staring out the window and watching the fields pass by. They were only about a
five minute drive from the city, but it felt like so much longer as she watched the grass flow beside
them.

She’d reached the door, hand on the doorknob, before Beatrice called out, “Hey, wait a minute!”

Violet and Klaus both groaned as their parents caught up to them. Violet reluctantly handed over
Sunny to Bertrand, and the two older children looked up at their parents, disinterest clearly
showing in their eyes.

“Now,” Beatrice said, “Klaus, you have your bag?”

“Of course.” Klaus gestured to the bag at his side. “For the books.”

“And your coats?”

“They’re still in the car from the last trip.” Violet said. “It’s not that cold anyway.”

“And?” Beatrice looked very seriously at them. “Your marks?”

“Crap!” Klaus said, slapping his forehead, and Violet said, “Seriously, Mother? Nobody’s going to
care!”

“Kids.” Beatrice said sternly. Then, after a second, “If you don’t want to put on the makeup…”

Klaus sighed and reached into the front pocket of his bag, finding two bracelets- their normal ones
were probably still in their rooms somewhere, but they had emergency ones in basically every bag
and jacket, and they didn’t care to go all the way back upstairs. Violet hesitantly rolled back her
sweater sleeve, holding out her wrist. On the inside of her arm, they could clearly see her mark-
what might either be a 007 or ∠00; it wasn’t as if they knew which side was right-side up. Klaus
fumbled a bit with the bracelet, but eventually managed to clamp it firmly around her mark. Violet
flinched; she hated the bracelet; the metal was too cold against her skin, and once it was strapped
on, it took two hands to get it off, so she wouldn’t be able to do it herself. Klaus pulled back his
own sweater, and Violet put a bracelet over his 110 or 011.

“How come Sunny doesn’t need to do this?” Klaus asked, running a finger over the edge of his
bracelet.

“She doesn’t have a mark.” Bertrand reminded them. Violet glanced at Sunny and felt a bit of red
come to her face; her baby sister was watching her, confused and curious. Sunny knew even less
than Violet and Klaus about their marks, and still couldn’t quite comprehend that they had to be
hidden. Violet and Klaus, meanwhile, had been stressed for as long as they could remember that
their marks were not to be seen by anyone under any circumstances, and they were not to ask why;
the less they knew, Mother always said, the easier it was to stay hidden.

They never quite understood how that worked.

“Can we go now?” Violet asked impatiently, glaring as she pushed her sweater sleeve back over
the bracelet, hiding even that from view.

Beatrice smiled slightly. “Yes. Now we can go.”

Klaus and Violet instantly brightened, with Violet throwing open the door and Klaus pushing past
her, yelling, “Last one to the car has to hold Sunny!” (Violet laughed at this, knowing full well that
Klaus loved being able to carry his baby sister around.)
They raced out, rejoicing at feeling the wind on their faces, hearing the crunch of the grass under their shoes, seeing the bright blue sky above them. Even Sunny brightened up as Bertrand carried her outside and down the deck stairs. She reached up towards the sky, as if she thought she could grab the clouds.

“Father! Unlock the car!” Violet called, as her and Klaus were both pulling on the handle of the door.

Bertrand glanced at his wife, a bit of worry on his face, as if asking, are we sure? Beatrice nodded, and he ran to catch up to his older children.

“Nothing will go wrong.” Beatrice muttered, as soon as Sunny was out of earshot. She re-adjusted the edge of her black glove. “Nothing’s ever gone wrong. Just go.”

“Why is this taking so long?” Violet asked.

Her and Klaus had slid to the floor, Sunny on Klaus’s lap, as their parents had a polite discussion with the worker behind the counter at the bookstore, which turned into an annoyed discussion as the worker struggled to find the package with the books they’d ordered for schooling that semester.

“What school do they go to?” the worker asked, and the children all instantly rolled their eyes.

“We homeschool.” Beatrice said tiredly, having had to tell every person in town that at some point.

“Oh? Really? Well, I could never do that.”

“It’s not as difficult as you’d think.” Bertrand said.

“Well, don’t they have any friends?”

“They have just as many friends as they’d like.” Beatrice said.

Klaus and Violet glanced at each other and giggled slightly.

“Well, I can’t seem to find your package here. I can check in the back.”

“Please do.”

As the worker left, Violet perked up, noticing a stand leaning against the wall. “Mother, look at those!” She stood up, gesturing. As her mother turned, she said, “Those ribbons in the corner! Can I go look? Please?”

“Can I go, too?” Klaus asked, jumping up and shouldering Sunny. “It’s much better than sitting here.”

“Only if your Father goes, too.” Beatrice said.

“It’s literally just a few feet away.” Violet said.

“Violet.”

“Okay.” Violet rolled her eyes. “Come on!”

They walked over to the ribbons, and Klaus moved over a few feet to look at a stand of brightly-
colored rocks, which Sunny instantly stuck her hand into.

“They’ve got designs on them.” Violet said, fascinated. She picked up a spool of one, with red and white stripes. “Do you think this would be good to tie up my hair with?”

“I’m not sure.” Bertrand said honestly. “Let me see your normal ribbon.”

Violet pulled her black ribbon out of her pocket, and Bertrand held it to the red ribbon, comparing it. “The red one looks like a different fabric.”

“Could we get a couple?” Violet pleaded. “I can test them out and find out which one works best! It’ll give me something to do, please?”

Bertrand considered. “Alright, I don’t see why not. If it’s for the purposes of science.”

Violet laughed slightly, grabbing the red-and-white, as well as a green one with raindrops and a yellow one with swirls. “These are pretty,” she admitted. “And the yellow one would match my winter jacket perfectly, wouldn’t it?”

“I didn’t know you cared about that sort of thing.” Father said.

“I don’t, but I’m not going to pass up a matching ribbon if it’s right here.” Violet shrugged. “Hey, maybe we can get a few for Sunny.” she reached forwards, grabbing a blue ribbon with some kind of flower design. “This one looks like her dress, actually! Don’t you-”

She turned to look at Klaus and Sunny, and froze. Bertrand turned, and also stopped for a second. Klaus and Sunny weren’t there.

“Klaus?” Violet called.

Beatrice, who’d been reading the headlines on a newspaper, turned, and instantly paled. “Klaus?” she called as well.

Klaus liked to wander, sure, and a lot of the time when he had his head in the clouds he’d forget basic things, but he’d never been out of their sight before. Violet glanced between her parents. “I- I can check the bathroom.”

“No, no!” Beatrice ran over, grabbing her husband’s hand. “Bertrand, go look for them. I’ll stay here with Violet.”

“I can help!” Violet said. “We can split up, it’ll be quicker-”

“No!” Beatrice said, and Violet was surprised to see she looked a bit frightened. “No, no, you’re staying where I can see you. Stay here, your father will take care of it.”

“I’m sure he just went to find more books on wolves.” Bertrand said. “I’ll go there.”

He gave his wife’s hand a reassuring squeeze and then raced off. “Mother?” Violet asked worriedly.

“It’ll be okay.” Beatrice said quickly. “Here, put your ribbons on the counter, we can buy them with the other things.”

Violet hesitantly moved to the counter, putting her ribbons up, except for her black one, which she used to tie back her hair, thinking. Where might Klaus have gone? He was indeed currently
interested in wolves, yes, but he wouldn’t just run off for those when they’d been told to stay put. He’d never run off before, especially not with Sunny.

With Sunny!

She turned around as the worker came back, a package in his hands. As he and Beatrice started chatting, Beatrice doing her best to hide her shock, Violet slowly crept out of line, glancing towards the children’s section; it was only a few feet away, decorated by an archway.

If Sunny was bored, Klaus would want to excite her; bored Sunny was upset Sunny, and upset Sunny didn’t care how many glares they got when she cried in public. So he’d definitely take her towards the children’s books to pick one out… and it was pretty far away from the books on wolves, meaning it might take Bertrand a while to figure this out, too.

Violet glanced over her shoulder, towards Beatrice and the worker. Mother would be upset with her if she ran off… but then again, she would be happy if she found Klaus and Sunny and brought them back.

Quietly, she moved behind a shelf, out of sight of her mother, and then started walking as fast as she could, pulling the ribbon back out of her hair and stuffing it into her pocket.

As she moved past the archway, beyond which were shelves of pretty picture books and toys for sale, she glanced around, trying to spot her siblings. She walked past a metal board with alphabet letters stuck on with magnets, several toy trucks on the rug, and a dollhouse, complete with beds and bookshelves. Violet crept in farther, avoiding other little kids running around, trying to ignore the curious glances of parents. Sunny liked that animal book they’d gotten her, so Klaus might take her towards books on animals, maybe? Violet walked over towards the animal picture books, and only saw a bored six-year-old searching the shelves. Damn. What else did Sunny like?

She’d been fascinated when Violet fixed the Blender last week, and she’d wanted to stay and help crack eggs for the meal Violet and Bertrand had prepared. She might be interested in the cookbooks- the children’s section only had a few of those, all character-themed, but it was better than nothing.

Violet walked three aisles, and then turned, and then grinned.

“Klaus!”

Klaus turned, and Violet froze when she saw a brief flash of some strange emotion on his face, and it took her a second to realize it was a plea for help.

He was still holding Sunny, who didn’t look nervous, but the two of them were facing a tall man, dressed in dark clothes.

Violet stared at him for a moment, and then forced a smile onto her face, running forwards to put a hand on Klaus’s shoulder. “You shouldn’t have wandered off, Mother and Father are worried.”

“I-I’m sorry, I just… thought we could find some books for Sunny.” Klaus said nervously. “Um, sorry, sir, we should go…”

“Oh, you must be Violet.” the man said.

Violet hesitated, smiling slightly. “Um, yes. I don’t believe we’ve met.”

“Oh, I met you when you were a toddler. I’m an old school friend of your parents.”
“Oh?” This was a strange fact. Their parents had friends from town or work over sometimes, and their parents let them stay at the table so long as they cleaned up afterwards, and she’d never seen this man before. In fact, she’d never met any of her parents’ friends that didn’t live in town.

“I was just telling Klaus about how your sister might like some books in the historical section; I can take you there, if you don’t know where it is. History’s fascinating, isn’t it?”

“Um, it is.” Violet nodded. She could see why Klaus was nervous; this man didn’t seem to care that they didn’t know him, and was offering to take them somewhere else; in the back of her mind, she remembered that the history section was near an emergency exit, though she wasn’t sure why she thought of that in the moment. “I don’t mean to be rude, but our parents are looking for us, and they’ll be very upset if we don’t get back soon.”

“Are you sure?” the man said. “It’ll be quick, and then I can walk you back.”

“Oh, we know the way.” Violet grabbed Klaus’s arm, dragging him back. “Thank you, though, and it was nice to meet you.”

She glanced behind them, and her mind made another quick note- across from them, in another aisle, were two more people, dressed in the same dark clothes as the man.

*It’s nothing. Just keep moving. He’s probably just bad at reading people, like Klaus and I are.*

She dragged Klaus out of the aisle, and the two people turned to watch them. Violet started walking faster, though she felt a prick of fear, and she whispered, “Klaus, go fast.”

Klaus obeyed, even as Sunny made some kind of noise of protest, and they ducked out of the aisle, slipping past the two people, who started to walk towards them. Violet and Klaus walked back through the aisles, and, after a moment, Violet glanced behind them.

The two strangers and the man who’d been talking to them were following.

“Klaus, run.” Violet said, releasing his arm and pushing him ahead of her.

The two of them took off, and they could hear the strangers running after them. Violet kept pushing Klaus ahead of her, knowing he couldn’t run as fast, and also knowing he was carrying Sunny, who was starting to realize that she should be a bit nervous. They managed to turn the bend, about to exit the Children’s Section, when Violet felt a rough hand grab onto her arm.

She let out a gasp, whipping around to stare at the stranger who had her arm. “Violet!” Klaus called, stopping and turning.

“Let go of me!” Violet kept yelling, trying to wrestle her grip away. She turned, yelling, “Klaus, go! Get Mother!”

Klaus turned to run, only to be grabbed by the stranger. Sunny started to cry, and Klaus started yelling, “Help! These aren’t our parents!”

One of the other adults in the section, after pushing her kids back a little, walked forwards, saying,
“Hey! Let go of the kids-”

The man who’d been talking to them turned and very calmly pulled out a gun.

Everyone froze for a second, and then parents rushed to grab their kids, pushing them behind them or hiding them behind shelves, as the man said, “We were going to make this quiet, but unfortunately, you two had to run.”

“Let me go!” Violet yelled again, the grip on her wrist starting to hurt.

The man roughly pushed her to the side, pulling up her sleeve. She let out another scream, as Sunny kept sobbing louder. “Fucking hell.” the man said, upon seeing the bracelet clamped on her wrist. “Someone get this off.”

“No! No!” Violet yelled. “Let go of me! Let go of me! Mother! Father!”

The man walked over, still holding the gun in case someone tried to come near them. “Alright, Seven, I’m going to ask you to calm down, or I’m going to start shooting.”

“Get away from me!” Violet yelled, trying to pull herself back.

The man sighed, and then turned, pointing the gun straight at Klaus and Sunny. “If you don’t shut up, we’ll make the kid stop crying, alright?”

“What?” Klaus continued trying to get away, suddenly looking much more frantic. Sunny kept sobbing, though she wasn’t sure what exactly was being threatened. “Let go!”

“Don’t hurt them!” Violet yelled. She glanced around at the other parents, who were trying to calm and hide their own children; surely someone must’ve slipped away to get security, right?

“We don’t need the baby.” the man said. “Or even the boy, really. We were sent for two of you, so we only need two of you. So stay still, and let us take this stupid bracelet off, so we know you’re who we think you are.”

“No! Get away from us!” Violet yelled.

The man sighed, once again pointing the gun at her siblings, aiming mainly for Sunny. “I’ll give you to the count of three.”

“No!” Klaus yelled, starting to cry.

“One.”

“Let us go!” Violet yelled, still trying to wrestle her arm away. “Let us go!”

“Two.”

“Kids!” Violet thought she heard her mother’s call in the distance, but she wasn’t quite sure.

“Thr-”

“Let us GO!”

Violet let out a scream she didn’t know herself capable of making, a loud scream that seemed to echo across the room.
And then the gun flew out of the man’s hands.

There was only a half-second to process the confusion on everyone’s faces as the gun flew away, because a half-second after that, while Violet was still screaming, something strange happened.

The toy trucks threw themselves into the air.

They weren’t the only things—parts of the dollhouse, the metal board, some action figures, and a few activity books all tossed themselves up, as if thrown by some kind of invisible blast. Several kids started screaming and crying, and parents yelled in confusion.

Violet stopped screaming for a second, bewilderment momentarily zapping away her fear. She barely even noticed her bracelet tingle at her wrist, as if it wanted to fly, too.

And then the woman holding Klaus yelled, and Violet whipped around just in time to see her mother release her grip on the stranger, her gloves surprisingly gone for the moment. For some reason, her touch had made the woman yell and release Klaus in surprise. Beatrice pushed Klaus behind her, and before Violet knew what was happening, Bertrand ran out and threw something into the side of the man holding her, causing him to double over. Violet finally broke out of his grip, running towards her brother, and turning to see, in shock, that her father thrown a knife into his side.

“Violet, run!” Beatrice said, grabbing her shoulder and pushing her towards Klaus, her hands feeling much warmer than those of the men who’d grabbed her. “Bertrand, get them out!”

Bertrand nodded, breaking away as Beatrice tackled the man who’d had the gun, and he grabbed his children by their arms, dragging them out of the room as fast as he could. Violet glanced over her shoulder, only managing to see the man scream as Beatrice grabbed onto him before Bertrand dragged them down an aisle.

They ran out the door, not even grabbing the books they came for, and he rushed them straight to the car, almost shoving them in the back. Sunny was still crying, and Klaus had started, too.

“What just happened?” Violet asked, terrified. “Father, what—”

Bertrand got into the front seat, and then turned. “Are you alright?”

“I…” Violet glanced towards Klaus and Sunny; they were both still crying, but looked generally unharmed. Her arm ached slightly where she’d been grabbed, but other than that, she didn’t think she was physically hurt. “Yes-”

“You’re bleeding!” Klaus suddenly said, and Violet glanced into the rearview mirror, realizing that there was, indeed, blood coming from her nose. Had someone struck her face? She didn’t think anything had hit her…

“What were you thinking?” Bertrand turned to Klaus, and the children were shocked to see he looked angry. “Why would you run off?”

“I… I just wanted to get Sunny a book.” Klaus said, through his tears.

“We’ve told you over and over not to leave our sight—”

“Who were they?” Violet asked. “What did they want? What was that… that thing, where stuff started flying? What happened?”
They were interrupted by the side door flying open, and Beatrice rushed in, shoving her gloves back over her hands; Violet thought she saw a flash of blood on her sleeve, but she might’ve been wrong. “Step on it.” she said to Bertrand, slamming the door shut behind her.

“What happened?” Violet asked, noticing she was starting to cry, too. “Who were they?”

Their parents didn’t answer, just staring at each other before they started to drive.
Their parents were silent the entire drive home, and the Baudelaire siblings sat in the back of the car, crying and waiting for some kind of explanation to be given to them. Sunny didn’t stop sobbing until they were already home, burying her head in Klaus’s shirt as they drove faster than might be legal. Violet and Klaus themselves cried for a while, but calmed down after a bit and simply curled up, feeling the weight of what had just happened pressing against them. And they all had a dark, heavy feeling in their stomach that told them that they were going to get yelled at, on top of everything else.

They got to the house, and Beatrice quietly opened the car door, gesturing for them all to get out and get into the house. Violet instantly obeyed, rushing out of the car, through the yard, and back into the familiar foyer, crumpling onto the bottom step of the staircase that would lead to the next floor. She curled up, hugging her knees and rocking back-and-forth. Klaus ran in next, settling Sunny inbetween them before doing the same. Sunny still sniffled slightly, and she leaned up against Violet, gripping onto the edge of her sister’s shirt.

It took a moment, but eventually their parents came inside, shutting the door and locking it quickly. “I don’t think we were followed.” Mother said quickly. “But just in case, you stay down here tonight, I’ll check the shed-”

“What the hell just happened?” Violet asked, glaring up at her parents.

They slowly turned, and Beatrice said, “Violet. I asked you not to leave.”

“Yes, and if I hadn’t, they might’ve taken Klaus and Sunny.” Violet said, her fear turning into anger as she slowly stood up, lifting Sunny with her. Sunny made a small noise of protest but didn’t do much else. “Who were those people? What did they want with us?”

“None of you should’ve wandered off.” Beatrice said angrily, gesturing to all three of her children. “We’ve told you again and again to stay within our sight.”

“And not once have you told us why!” Violet yelled, barely noticing Klaus jump beside her, realizing that an argument had broken out. “Those men tried to kidnap us for… for some reason, and… what did you do to them?”

“There are things we can’t tell you-”

“Why the fuck not?”

“Violet!” Beatrice looked shocked. “Language.”

“Fuck that!”
“Violet, please.” Bertrand said, coming forwards a bit. “Calm down a moment. We’ve all been through a terrible ordeal, and we just need to-”

“We need to know what’s going on.” Violet said sternly. “Those people, are they why we can’t go into town? Are they why we’re not allowed to leave the house? Do they have something to do with these?”

She held her arm out, gesturing to the bracelet she had on, all of them knowing what was under it. Beatrice stared for a second, and then said again, “There are some things we can’t tell you.”

“For the love of fuck!” Violet yelled.

“Violet!” Klaus yelled, too, slowly standing up.

“We’re stuck here every day and can’t go anywhere!” Violet yelled, “We can’t do shit! We don’t talk to anyone, we don’t go outside, and for what? For us to be lied to?”

“Violet, you’re scaring Sunny.” Klaus said quietly, and Violet picked up very fast what he was also trying to say: Violet, you’re scaring me.

“What is up with these?” Violet gestured to her bracelet again. “Why do we have these marks, and why do we have to hide them?”

“Violet.” Beatrice said, very sternly. “We can talk about it-”

“When? When can we talk about this?” Violet yelled. “‘When we’re older?’ We’re old enough to get kidnapped out of the bookstore, we’re old enough to know why!”

“Violet!”

“What is going on?” As Violet yelled, she felt some kind of pull, the same pull she’d felt in the bookstore.

And her and Klaus’s bracelets broke off.

It took her a second to realize this, even as she heard the metal clatter to the ground and felt the weight lift off her arm. It took her a second because that wasn’t supposed to happen, the bracelets couldn’t come off. Not without two hands, not without lots of pressure and complaining and shared glares between siblings about how much they hated covering up their marks every time they so much as went outside to get the newspaper.

But once the second passed, everyone froze up, staring in horror. Violet slowly looked down at her arm. She could see the 007 on her wrist, still held out towards her Mother. She carefully looked down farther, then, seeing the bracelet on the ground, split open as if she’d just pulled it off. She turned her head slightly, seeing Klaus’s bracelet also on the floor, and her brother backing up, staring at it as if it might explode. She looked at Sunny, who was the least upset of everyone at the moment; her baby sister was glancing around in confusion, wondering why everyone looked so shocked. And then, slowly, Violet looked towards her parents, scanning their faces for whatever emotion they were feeling. They looked… shocked. And resigned. And… scared.

Violet bit her lip, stepping backwards, and then she turned and raced up the stairs.

“Violet!” Klaus called after her, but she kept running, clutching Sunny to her chest as she went up, not wanting to look back and see that fear on her parents’ faces again.
Klaus knocked on the trapdoor that led to the attic, saying, “It’s just me. Can I come in?” He heard a muffled, “Hmm,” and reached up, opening the trapdoor and hoisting himself up.

The attic had never had much inside it; their parents didn’t really save anything from their own childhoods, and most of Violet and Klaus’s old stuff was shoved in their own closets. So when Violet and Klaus were about eight and six, they successfully convinced their parents to let the attic be Their Place - no adults allowed, just the Baudelaire children and whatever stuff they wanted. It was mostly scattered books and inventions Violet was tinkering with, but there were some other toys lining the floor, extra blankets piled in the corner, some of Sunny’s teething rings (which had been moved up so she could make the attic her own, too), and a drawing all three of them had been working on to give to their parents for next Chanukah, laying against the wall.

Violet was curled up in the corner, sitting on one of the blankets, with Sunny sitting beside her. Sunny looked up as Klaus entered, brightening a little and waving. Violet didn’t even look up, instead burying her head farther into her knees.

Klaus walked up, sitting beside her, fidgeting awkwardly for a moment, before saying, “Shutdown?”

She nodded.

“That’s okay, I think I went into one on the drive home.” Klaus admitted. After another pause, he said, “You know, Mother and Father aren’t mad.” He hesitated, and then said, “After you left, they… they just took the bracelets and asked me to make sure you were okay. They were gonna go check something.”

“Hmm.”

Klaus sighed, rocking back and forth a little, before saying, “I… I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have wandered off.”

“Yoult.” Sunny said, which probably meant, “I’m sorry, too. It’s kind of my fault, I wanted to be entertained immediately.”

“I just…” Violet looked up, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. “I just don’t understand. I don’t understand anything. And Mother and Father won’t tell us… won’t tell us shit.”

“I… I’m sure they want to.” Klaus said hesitantly. “They just want us to be safe, and they don’t want us to worry about anything.”

“But we’d be safer if we knew what was going on.” Violet slammed her hand to the ground in frustration, causing Sunny to jump. “Why did those men want to… to take us away?” She turned to Klaus, wiping her eyes quickly again. “What did he say to you?”

“He just… cornered us in the aisle, I guess.” Klaus paused, shutting his eyes. He and Sunny had just been looking for the children’s cookbooks, and then the man had appeared at the end of the aisle and started talking. “Said he recognized me, knew Mother and Father. Didn’t give a name. Asked how old Sunny was and if she could walk yet. Recommended the historical books. That’s when you came in.”

“Falo.” Sunny said, which meant, “That man creeped me out, even before he threatened me.”

“What… what do you think Mother did to them?” Violet asked, sitting up slightly and looking at
her brother. “She seemed to just touch them and they flipped.”

“She’s a good fighter.” Klaus said quietly. “Maybe she knows special moves.”

“You’d think she’d have shown us, then.” Violet said.

“And when did Father get a pocketknife?” Klaus asked. “He stabbed a guy.”

Violet paused, raising her wrist so she could stare at her mark. “That guy, the one who was talking to us. He called me something, something other than my name… it kind of sounded like ‘Seven.’”

“I must’ve missed that.” Klaus admitted, glancing towards Sunny, who was busy peering at her sister’s mark. “I was… a bit distracted.”

Violet nodded, looking down at her wrist. “Didn’t we think it might be a seven? Zero-Zero-Seven?”

“You think he was calling you after your mark?” Klaus asked, his gaze also flickering to the numbers. “How would he? Mother said that we’re the only ones who know what our marks look like. You never… you never showed anyone, right?”

“How could I? I don’t have anyone I could show even if I could get the bracelet off.” Violet said sulkily. She paused, and then shut her eyes tight. “I… I don’t know why those came off, but I… do you think I did it?”

“How could you?” Klaus asked skeptically.

“I… I think I moved that stuff in the bookstore, too.”

“No, no, it was probably just some… some weird thing that happens in the city.” Klaus said. “People don’t move things with their minds, unless it’s Carrie or something. The bracelets probably just broke or something. There’ll be a reasonable explanation, maybe Mother will tell us.”

“Mother’s not going to tell us anything, Klaus.” Violet said, leaning her head against the wall. “The sooner you figure that out, the better.”

Klaus hesitated, and then glanced over at Sunny. “Sunny, do you… you must’ve been terrified, I’m sorry. That sort of stuff doesn’t… it’s never happened before, I swear.”

“Bipithe.” Sunny muttered, which meant, “I don’t think I like the city very much.”

“He’s right, Sunny, it’s always been nice when we’ve been there before.” Violet said. “The kidnappers are new. Do you think they were…” she hesitated. “They wanted to take our bracelets off, I think they wanted to see our marks. Do you think they were after us because of them?”

“It would explain why Mother didn’t want us to show anyone.” Klaus said, glancing at his mark. He paused, and then said, “If your mark is a Seven, does that make me Eleven?”

Violet smirked slightly. “You don’t look like an Eleven.”

“Excuse you,” Klaus laughed back, “Elevens can come in all shapes and sizes.”

Sunny edged a bit closer, saying, “Etous!” which meant, “When does my mark show up?”

Violet and Klaus fell silent, turning to each other. Then, quietly, Violet turned to her. “Um, we
“I just assumed we were born with them.” Klaus shrugged. “When you didn’t have one, I…” He glanced down at Sunny. “I guess I was just relieved, you know? You don’t have to hide anything.”

“I really doubt they’re birthmarks, Klaus. They look more like tattoos,” Violet said, running a finger over hers, “Looks a lot more like ink than a discoloration.”

“Taem.” Sunny asked, which was, “Do Mother and Father have them?”

Violet and Klaus shook their heads. (Though now that Violet thought about it, she didn’t think she’d ever seen her parents in short sleeves.)

“Ogtitel?” that meant, “Then why does Mother wear gloves?”

Klaus and Violet both flinched. Klaus finally said, “She, um… she’s got burns on her hands.”

“She showed us once,” Violet said, remembering a time when they were ten and eight, “Because she caught me and Klaus playing with candles.” She flinched. “It looked… bad.”

“Hmm?”

“Very bad.” Klaus nodded. “Part of her palms was darker and splotchy, and they looked painful. She said that for some reason they won’t go away.”

“Agni.” Sunny said. “Scary.”

“Yeah.” Violet said.

They stared at each other, and then Violet said, “Klaus, I… I don’t wanna go down. Not for a bit. Can we just… stay up here? We’ve still got sleeping bags in the chest somewhere. We can pile up some blankets for Sunny.”

“Yeah. I can smuggle food up.” Klaus smirked. “We can camp out.”

“Yeah, and just… forget about everything for a bit.” Violet sighed. “I’ll… I just can’t talk to Mother and Father right now.”

“It’s okay.” Klaus said, putting a hand over hers. “I get it. I’ll get us some dinner in an hour or so, yeah?”

“Sounds good.” Violet said. “What do you say, Sunny? Want to have a sleepover?”

Sunny giggled and clapped, and Violet grabbed a book from the floor to read to her, and for just a few minutes, they forgot what had happened that day.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, if y'all like this story consider paying me in comments. Even if it's just a keysmash or a "wtf how dare you" I'd love that. Or even if you wanna tell me all the things I did wrong lol.
Klaus snuck into the kitchen to grab food after a while, taking a small cardboard box with him. As he piled some snacks into it, he heard a door slam in the next room. He hesitated for a second, and then moved to the doorway, listening.

“Shed’s still locked.” Beatrice said, her voice only slightly muffled, not enough that he couldn’t hear anything.

“I tried to call the others, but nobody answered.” Bertrand said. “You don’t think they got caught?”

“No, no.” Beatrice said, a tinge of fear in her voice. “No, I’m sure they’re just busy.”

“I don’t know, you know Widdershins got caught—”

“Yeah, ten years ago. Before we even- that shouldn’t be a problem today.” Beatrice sighed, and Klaus heard a squeak as she plopped down in a chair. “Maybe we should take the kids somewhere else. They must know we’re close.”

“They’ll be waiting for us to leave the house, you know that.”

“They’ll know we’re here!”

“We can protect them here. And we can get them into the tunnels, if we need to; if we leave, we’re on our own. We can’t be too careful.” Oh, Klaus definitely must have misheard that; he and Violet had explored every inch of their house, there were definitely no tunnels.

“Are you sure?”

“Everything’s gonna be okay.”

Beatrice took a deep breath. “We should… maybe we should tell them some things. I didn’t want to… I don’t want them to think differently of us, but if they’re going to hate us anyway…”

“They don’t hate us, Bea. They’re just frustrated.”

“I just want them to be safe.”

“They will be. We can protect them.”
“The bracelets, and the things in the Bookstore… do you think that was…?”

Klaus perked up, stiffening as he waited for her to finish her sentence.

“Could be.” Bertrand said. “But don’t you think she’d be… like you?”

“Not necessarily. We don’t really know what… what could happen…” Beatrice sighed, and then after a second, she said, “It isn’t fair to them.”

“Life isn’t fair to any of us, darling.”

“I feel like we cursed them.”

“They’re not cursed. They’re just… different.”

Beatrice sighed again. “Maybe we should take them somewhere tomorrow, figure out what to do, see if we can get away for a bit and regroup. We can send them ahead to the beach in the morning, they might like that. If they’re anything like you, they’ll love the sea.”

Klaus paused, and then crept away from the doorway, grabbing the box and hurrying back up the stairs.

He stopped just below the attic, wondering what he should tell Violet. How was he going to phrase what he heard? There was some kind of tunnel, some family named… what was it? Witterwin? They were… different?

He took a breath, staring down at the box, and then opened the trapdoor. As he peered through, he saw Violet and Sunny pouring over a book- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, one of their favorites.

They didn’t need interrupted with more worrying and conspiracies now. They could talk about it in the morning.

They’d have time.

Violet woke up first, sitting up and rubbing her eyes. It was very dark, and she could hear Sunny and Klaus sleeping beside her. She crept out of the sleeping bag, wondering why she was awake; it didn’t feel like morning.

It took her almost a minute, while she was rubbing her eyes and yawning and scanning the room for a clock.

That’s when she smelled it, and immediately felt a flare of panic in her chest.

She ran to Klaus, shaking him awake. He groaned and sat up, running a hand through his messy hair and reaching around the floor to find his glasses. “Whaaaat?”

“Do you smell that?” Violet asked, terrified.

“Smell what?” Klaus asked, still grumpy for being woken up in the middle of the night.

Violet took in a quick, scared breath, and then said, “Smoke.”

Klaus froze, thinking. He sniffed, and then turned to Violet, terrified. “M-maybe Father or Mother
“They don’t smoke, remember? Mother doesn’t like any kind of fire, and Father made us watch all those anti-smoking things.”

“It…” Klaus hesitated. “I’ll grab Sunny. You get our jackets? We’ll go downstairs and see what the trouble is.”

Violet nodded hesitantly, getting up to dig their spare jackets out from under the pile of blankets. Klaus lifted Sunny, unintentionally awakening her. She let out a small cry, and he quickly shushed her. “This is important, Sunny.” he said. “We need you to be quiet, we’re going to figure something out.”

“Throw this over her onesie.” Violet said, tossing a smaller blanket at Klaus. “Like a shawl. Just in case we have to go outside.”

Klaus nodded as she also threw him his jacket. They both got them on before opening the trapdoor and descending, Klaus still carrying Sunny. Violet grabbed his free hand once they landed, saying, “It smells like it’s coming from… downstairs?”

“I think it’s to the right.” Klaus said, a bit drearily. “But I’m not sure.”

“We can check there first.” Violet said, lowering her voice to a whisper, feeling a bit of foreboding. “But stay close.”

They crept forwards, the older two still holding hands, and Sunny leaning against Klaus’s shoulder, only occasionally opening her eyes to peer ahead.

They turned a bend, still seeing nothing really out of the ordinary. Sunny looked about ready to fall asleep again, and Violet and Klaus just kept following the smell of smoke, which was indeed a lot closer than Violet had thought.

Then they turned the other corner, and saw the smoke.

Violet and Klaus both stopped dead in their tracks, staring for a moment and feeling a sudden fear in their chests. Even Sunny, who glanced up to see what was going on, felt a bit scared, though she was a bit too young to figure out what the smoke might imply.

“Maybe… maybe it’s just burnt food.” Violet said. “Remember that time we tried to make Mother and Father breakfast and burnt the toast?”

“That’s not the kitchen.” Klaus said.

“Maybe it’s the clock?”

“Clock’s on the other side of the house.”

They glanced at each other, both scared, and Violet said, “Let’s go see what’s wrong.”

“I don’t want to.”

“It’s better than not knowing. We’ll either go outside for no reason, or go upstairs when there could be danger.”

“Bongra?” Sunny asked, meaning, “What would the danger be?”
Instead of responding, Violet and Klaus walked forwards, Klaus gripping Violet’s hand harder with every step they took. They turned yet another bend, seeing more smoke coming closer towards them. But this time, they could hear something. They could hear the sounds of a fire.

“Violet, let’s go.” Klaus said nervously. “We need to go.”

“No, I wanna see.” Violet said, stepping closer and releasing Klaus’s hand as she did.

She didn’t know why she wanted to see, why she couldn’t just trust her senses and turn and go. Finally she had an excuse to leave the house without permission, and yet she wanted to push forwards, to make sure.

Or maybe she just wanted to see something burning.

For whatever reason.

“Violet!” Klaus called, as Violet made it to the end of the hallway. She turned, seeing that the smoke was coming from one of the rooms, with the door loosely hanging open. She vaguely recalled that was one of the Libraries, the one where they kept all the schoolbooks. They’d been putting together a puzzle in there just three days before, and Sunny had eaten two pieces while they were distracted by a bug that had gotten in through the window, which burst open whenever a gust of wind hit it.

“Violet, come on!” Klaus was coming closer now, even as Sunny started shaking her head, muttering something translating to wanting to go back upstairs. “Violet!”

Violet approached the room and peered inside.

And then she screamed.

“Violet!” Klaus ran forwards, and he and Sunny screamed, too, as they looked inside the room.

The entire room was engulfed in flames, spilling over the piles of books on the floor and running across the rug. The shelves had all but fallen, and any decorations were long gone. It was almost unrecognizable.

“Violet, run!” Klaus grabbed her hand and dragged her back down the hall, and finally Violet relented, following him down the hall as the smoke billowed after them. Klaus and Violet both ducked as it followed them, hoping they didn’t breathe too much in, desperately trying to make their way to the staircase.

“Wait!” Klaus said, stopping after a few turns.

“What?”

“Mother and Father! Where are they?”

Violet paled. “You don’t think they’re still asleep, do you?”

“Lillik!” Sunny yelled, meaning, “Let’s go! We have to make sure they get out, too! The fire doesn’t seem like it’s spread very far, anyway.”

“They’re just one floor up.” Violet said. “We just need to go down one more hall and run up, and we can check their room. If they’re not there…” What would they do if they weren’t there? “We’ll figure something out.”
They kept walking, much quicker now, and Violet asked, “Klaus, how fast can fire spread?”

“Um, at the point the fire was at when we got there,” Klaus said, as they started to run, “It was probably started only a few minutes ago. We’re lucky we didn’t go in the room; by now it’ll be over the heat that we’d be able to survive. The smoke’ll move much faster, though, so we’re going to have to hurry; we’ll only have a few minutes before escape’ll be impossible.”

“Comforting.”

They reached the staircase and raced up, and then ran down the halls, yelling for their parents. They didn’t hear any response, and Violet quickly ran up ahead, finding their parents’ door and trying to open it, shocked to realize it was locked- they never locked any doors in the house. “Mother! Father!” she called. No answer.

“They’re not there?” Klaus ran up behind her, having to raise his voice because Sunny had started crying.

“We just have to get the door open.” Violet said. “They might be stuck.”

“Violet, we don’t have time.”

“No, no, we can get it, I just need a pin.” Violet dug her hands into her jacket pockets. There was a spare bracelet and a ribbon, but no pin.

“Violet, I’m sure-”

“What if they’re trapped, or looking for us?” Violet asked.

“What if they expected us to already be outside?”

“We can’t just leave-”

Klaus suddenly screamed, jumping back. Violet was confused for a second, until she realized his gaze was not at her, but at something over her shoulder. She whipped around, and saw what he did; someone was standing at the other end of the hall, and it wasn’t someone they recognized.

“Run!” Violet and Klaus both said, and Sunny yelled, “Vireo!” and they turned around and took off.

They only made it down another hall before Violet felt someone grab her arm and yank her back, and she lost her grip on Klaus’s hand. She let out a scream as the hand on her arm tightened, all too similar to the hand on her arm from earlier that day. (Or yesterday? She had no clue what time it was.)

“Violet!” Klaus yelled, whipping around as soon as she let go of his hand, and then immediately stiffening as he saw the man who’d grabbed her. Sunny started crying harder and buried her face into Klaus’s shirt, not wanting to see what was happening and trying to pretend she wasn’t there.

“Let go!” Violet yelled, trying to kick whoever was behind her. “Klaus, run!”

“Let go of her!” Klaus yelled, running forwards, probably to help her attack the man; unfortunately, someone else ran up down the hall, grabbing him and pulling him away. “Violet!”

Violet shut her eyes, trying to focus. How did one get out of a hold on their arm? She couldn’t remember. Maybe whatever happened in the Bookstore… if that was her, maybe she could do it
again.

“Violet!”

Violet opened her eyes, turning to see that more adults had arrived, and one of them was trying to take Sunny away, who was gripping to Klaus as hard as she could and screaming.

“Leave them alone!” Violet yelled. “What do you want?”

She felt another hand on her arm, yanking her sleeve back. She let out another shocked scream, but could hear someone yell, “Alright, it’s her! Get them outside!”

“No! No!” Violet yelled. “No! Mother! Father!”

“Shit, just tranquilize the kids.” said some woman behind them that Violet couldn’t see. “Shut em up.”

“Don’t wanna waste the tranqs, we don’t want to run out on the drive over.”

“What the hell do we do with the baby?” asked someone, who was still trying to get Sunny and Klaus to release each other.

“Bring her along if she doesn’t cause trouble-”

“Mother! Father!” Violet kept screaming, and she started kicking and fighting again. “Help! Help!”

“Set another fire up here, then get us out.” someone said, and an adult came forwards and started pouring something onto the ground.

“No! No!” Klaus yelled, as an adult finally managed to rip Sunny away from him. Sunny kept kicking and screaming, and leaned over in an attempt to bite the person holding her. “Give her back! That’s my sister, give her back!”

“Let them go!” Violet yelled, tears springing to her eyes. Whatever she’d done in the Bookstore, she needed to do it now.

She jumped as she felt a flash of heat, and she looked up to see that the man had lit the liquid on the floor, and it had just burst into flame. Klaus and Sunny screamed, but Violet just fell silent, staring in horror at the burning floor ahead of her.

“Alright, move out!” the man holding Violet said, starting to drag her back.

“No! Stop it! Stop it!” Violet screamed. “Stop it! Mother! Father! Mother!”

“Let go of them!”

The children all froze when they heard her voice, and when they squinted, they could see the blurry image of their Mother, running in from the other end of the hall, barely seen behind the fire and smoke.

“Mother!” Violet and Klaus yelled.

“Mater!” Sunny screamed.

“Aww, shit!” one of their attackers said, and they started moving faster.
But they didn’t turn the children around fast enough to keep them from seeing Beatrice rush forwards and leap through the fire.

Violet and Klaus gaped as their mother raced forwards, not even bothered by the intense flames she’d just jumped right through. They only had a split second to realize her gloves were also gone before she managed to reach the closest intruder, and she simply threw her palm out and slammed it against his shirt. He let out a yell as she kicked him into the wall.

“Fuck!” said the man holding Violet, and he dragged her backwards down another bend in the hall, followed by several more of the intruders.

Before they all could disappear, Beatrice managed to reach the person who was holding Klaus. She grabbed him by the shoulders, and once again he screamed and released her son. Klaus didn’t even hesitate, instantly running towards the woman holding Sunny and stomping on her foot, which didn’t do much, but effectively distracted her while Beatrice rushed forwards and put a hand on her arm. The woman screamed and almost dropped Sunny, but Beatrice caught her and shoved her into Klaus’s hands. She grabbed him and turned him around, and Klaus was very thankful that whatever touch-thing she was doing didn’t seem to affect him.

“Klaus, Sunny, run! Your Father’s outside!”

“What-”

“Go!”

Klaus and Sunny hesitated and then turned and ran down the hall, as Beatrice turned her attention towards the people she’d just hurt.

Klaus glanced over his shoulder, seeing his mother disappear in the smoke.

He didn’t realize that would be the last time he’d see her before he lost her.

“Mother!” Violet screamed, only for a hand to clamp over her mouth.

“We lost Eleven and the baby.” said a woman up ahead, glancing behind them. “I thought we were taking care of her.”

“She must’ve gotten away from whoever was sent after her. Don’t worry, the others’ll deal with it.” the man holding Violet said, as she failed to bite his hand to get him to retract it. “Come on, we have to hurry, the smoke’s starting to spread.”

“We’ve still got a rope from the windows.”

“We just need to- aah!”

Violet felt the grip on her arms slacken, and she ripped herself away, whipping around to see her mother had gripped onto his shoulders. She finally pulled her hands away, and Violet saw dark hand-shaped burns on his skin, the clothing singed away. What the-

“Get the hell away from my daughter!” Beatrice yelled, and she pushed Violet behind her before running towards the other intruders.

Instead of just touching them, or fighting, Beatrice did something that made Violet freeze in place
for a second, paralyzed by complete and utter shock, and then scream at the top of her lungs.

She held out her hands, and fire burst forth.

Violet screamed, backing up against the wall, unable to rip her eyes away as the fire hit the people who’d just tried to take her away. Her hands shot up to her ears as they screamed, but within a few seconds her mother grabbed her, turning her around and running her down the hall, ducking her down to avoid the smoke.

“Keep running!” Beatrice yelled, pushing her daughter ahead of her and then throwing out a hand, shooting more flames behind them. “We have to get out of here!”

“What the fuck-” Violet began.

“Go!”

The two of them ran, and eventually reached a bend in the hall filled with fire. Before Violet could even scream, Beatrice waved a hand, and the fire parted enough for them to run through, and then she grabbed Violet’s hand and dragged her along.

Violet jolted up, which was a mistake, as she immediately breathed in smoke and started coughing, ducking down and shutting her eyes, which felt way too hot.

“Violet, stay calm, okay?” Beatrice said, as they turned a bend; at least, Violet assumed they did, she had her eyes shut and was still coughing. “We’re getting out of here, we’re almost to the stairs. Oh, baby, just keep going, okay?”

She was crying now, she knew it. “Mom?”

“Just keep going, we’re almost to the stairs. Can you see?”

Violet blinked her eyes open, seeing they were indeed almost to the stairs, and she could see her mother ahead of her, glancing behind and scanning her, terror in her eyes. She nodded hesitantly, and Beatrice turned back around, dragging her down another bend.

Klaus skidded to a stop right at the bottom of the stairs, freezing in a sudden panic.

The door was open, which normally wouldn’t worry him, considering that Father was supposed to be outside. But at the same time… if there were people trying to kidnap them inside the house, there might be people outside, too.

Klaus gripped onto Sunny and then ran to one of the windows, peering through. When he didn’t see anyone immediately, he pushed it open and climbed out, sliding into the bushes underneath. He took a second to catch his breath, then peered through the leaves and broke into a run, rushing into the tall grass and kneeling down, keeping himself adequately hidden. Sunny let out a cough, and Klaus placed her down in front of him.

“Alright, look at me. Are you okay?”

Sunny nodded, tears still streaming down her face. Klaus checked her over, still, saying, “Can you breathe? Do you need to cough a lot? How are your eyes? Do you have a headache?”

Sunny didn’t respond vocally, still crying, but, in order, nodded, shook her head, shrugged, and
once again shook. Klaus sighed, and then hugged her close, near tears. He lifted her up and peered out towards the house again, and then instantly paled.

Three cars were parked outside the house, and as he watched, several people ran out from other sides of the house, all dressed in dark clothing and yelling to each other. Klaus immediately let out a “shh,” and Sunny tried her best to quiet her tears. They stared as the adults ran around, and Klaus whispered, “Sunny, who are they? What do they- where’s Father? Mother said he was outside, she said-”

He stopped talking, then, because he saw something, something that shook him to his core.

Several people were lifting a body onto a stretcher, just outside the house.

“Sunny, don’t look!” Klaus said, immediately turning her so she was facing his chest. He himself shut his eyes, breathing far too quickly, as if if he didn’t look, it wasn’t real. It couldn’t be real.

When he did open his eyes, he fixed them completely on the door.

Where are Mother and Violet?

The two of them ran, the smoke still following them, and Beatrice rushed her daughter towards the door, which was swinging wide open. Violet slowed a bit, saying, “Mother-”

“Just keep going, Vi! We’re almost there!”

“Mother, what if they’re outside?”

“I’ll take care of them, just-”

Violet had to stop, suddenly overcome by a bout of coughing. She doubled over, and Beatrice stopped, turning around and ducking down to get eye-level with her. “Vi? Violet, oh God, what’s wrong?”

“I… I can’t…” Violet began, struggling to breathe through her coughing. Her feet felt like lead, she felt hotter than she’d ever felt in her life… shit, she was going to die here. She was going to die, and she hadn’t even been outside of the city, she didn’t know where Klaus and Sunny were…

“There’s too much smoke in here. I’m so sorry, I can’t take care of the smoke, but if we get out, it should dissipate. We need to move, okay? Find your siblings and your Father. Please, Vi, keep going.”

Violet slowly nodded, and Beatrice grabbed her wrist and dragged her along, the two of them racing out the door.

The second they were outside, hell broke loose.

They managed to make it off the porch and into the yard before Beatrice skidded to a stop, shoving Violet behind her and raising her arms to block her. Violet managed to squint open her eyes, seeing adults running towards them, weapons raised- fuck, they had guns.

“Mama-” Violet began, her voice shaky.

“Stay away from her!” Beatrice yelled, whipping around, glaring daggers at everyone approaching. After a second, she flicked her hand, and flames shot up around the feet of several people to the
left. They yelled, and Beatrice grabbed Violet again, dragging her towards the cars, yelling, “Keep running! Go-”

That’s when someone shot.

Violet heard the shot before she could process what it meant, her head still swimming with everything that was happening, a little affected by whatever smoke she’d inhaled, refusing to believe that anything bad could happen to her Mother.

But after a few seconds, in which her head buzzed, almost not accepting any sounds after the initial gunshot, Violet suddenly got hit with everything.

She glanced down, seeing the blood on her mother’s shirt. Beatrice looked down at the wound, too, almost as if surprised to see it there.

Then more shots rang out, and within a few seconds, Beatrice’s hand went limp and slipped out of Violet’s, and she fell to the ground.

Violet was paralyzed for what felt like hours, staring, waiting for her mother to stand up, to get up, to grab her hand and take her somewhere safe.

And then Violet realized what had just happened, and let out a scream.

And the cars lifted into the air for a good few seconds, rising as if something had tossed them, and then fell right back down.

The alarms went off, and she heard people scream, she thought, but she wasn’t sure, because she wasn’t thinking.

“Mother!” she screamed, starting forwards, dropping down, staring at Beatrice’s body. “Mom! Mommy, please, Mom!”

Her mother didn’t move, but the men around her did. Someone grabbed her from behind again, pulling her arms back and slamming something around her wrists. She started screaming again, kicking, sobbing, but she could do nothing as they started dragging her away. She turned around, trying to get sight of her attacker, but only managed to spot the house, burning behind her, and some people had stopped to stare at them, carrying a body on a stretcher towards the cars-

“Dad!” she screamed, the tears coming harder. “Dad!”

He didn’t get up, either.

She looked around wildly, terrified, as more people approached her, someone shoving something into her arm- a needle? She could barely tell, she was coughing and sobbing and screaming and…

She turned her head towards the grass, and she saw a flash off of a pair of glasses. When she squinted, she could see Klaus, holding Sunny to his chest, watching from behind some grass. He looked just as bad as she felt, with red eyes and heavy breathing and terror radiating off of him.

Violet shut her eyes, and then looked ahead, staring at her Mother’s body, still lying on the ground. “Run!” she screamed, at the top of her lungs, louder than she’d ever screamed before, refusing to look towards her brother, to give these people a hint as to where he was. “Go! Run! RUN!”

When she glanced towards the grass again, she couldn’t see either of her siblings. Which was better than seeing them on the ground, not getting up.
She stared at Beatrice as her vision started to blur, and they were bringing her closer to the cars, which were probably still intact, or maybe they weren’t, maybe she wasn’t even sure what she was seeing, maybe the world was upside-down…

But she kept her eyes on her Mother, and her eyes fell on her arms, her sleeves pushed up a bit.

And, maybe she was just hallucinating right before the darkness overwhelmed her and she found herself passing out in the back of a dark van, but she thought she saw a 003 on her Mother’s wrist.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, if you like this, consider paying me in comments! :D
Klaus is stuck in the Denial Stage

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

CHAPTER FIVE

Klaus is stuck in the Denial Stage

Klaus could only barely remember getting into town.

He’d run, run faster than he ever had before, following the road that led to the city, pushing grass away from his face, still carrying a screaming and sobbing Sunny. He was crying, too, but he had to keep going, had to keep running, or they’d take them, too, take them into the vans like they’d taken Violet, or shoot them like they’d…

Like they’d…

He’d made it into town, stumbling into the streets. It was pitch black, and he only saw a few cars going down the street. He stumbled, realizing vaguely that he and Sunny were barefoot, in pajamas, their only protection against the cold being a jacket around him and a blanket wrapped around Sunny’s shoulders like a cape.

He wandered the streets, not as familiar with it as he was his home; he knew it well enough, though, so he knew where he was supposed to go, but it still felt… surreal. Nobody was walking the streets, and everything looked so different in the dark. Klaus went down several roads before he finally spotted the police station. He stumbled up the steps, keeping his eyes focused on the door so he didn’t think about anything else. Just think about the task at hand, and then you won’t think about what just happened.

Right before he walked in, though, he paused, suddenly feeling very cold. He sat down for a second, slowly pulling an emergency bracelet out of his jacket pocket. He stared for a second, and then slowly pushed his sleeve back, clamping it around his wrist. He didn’t even think about it, really; it was almost instinctual, and he did it while still kind of staring into nothing, barely even thinking. Sunny didn’t say anything as he did, or as he stood up and kept going.

He opened the door, holding Sunny a bit closer, and he saw a woman behind a desk, shuffling papers and muttering. She looked up, and confusion spread across her face. Klaus walked up, still holding Sunny close, and then he said, in a cracked, quiet voice, “S-someone killed my parents.”

And then he started bawling, and he couldn’t stop.

He slid to the floor, hugging Sunny as the two of them sobbed, and he could barely hear the woman’s questions. After a minute, two officers came out, kneeling down and speaking in low tones, asking what had happened, and it was several more minutes before Klaus finally gave his name and address, not even able to articulate anything else. He could barely remember what happened after that, only that he somehow ended up in another room, and he and Sunny were on a couch with blankets, and someone tried to give them hot chocolate but he shook his head cause it had peppermint in it and also he wasn’t thirsty, and he wasn’t sure when exactly he stopped crying and went into shock, but he did remember the Doctors coming and taking them to an ambulance, and taking them to a Hospital, and checking them over, asking over and over what had happened
and what his symptoms were and can we please remove the bracelet and getting upset when Klaus barely answered anything, refused to let them take the bracelet off (it’s from my Mother, don’t make me remove it), and refused to let Sunny out of his sight.

He slept for only a few hours, and then woke up, drearily, in a hospital bed, still in his jacket and nightgown, Sunny in a crib that had been placed close to him. He sat up and found his glasses on a sidetable, and wondered where he was until the events of the night came back to him, and then he was crying again, and he picked up the sleeping Sunny and hugged her as tight as he could without waking her up.

The doctors came in and checked him over again, and asked him questions about how he felt, and he responded numbly, refusing to let go of his sister, and it was a few minutes later when an officer came in, saying, “Okay, kid, can you answer a few questions for us?”

Klaus nodded hesitantly, still carrying his sleeping sister into another room, where he sat at a table and two people asked him if he was sure he was alright. When he said that yes, he was, they started the questions.

“Now, kid, what happened?” one officer asked.

Klaus shut his eyes, trying to avoid dissolving into tears again. “My sisters and I- Violet’s missing, have you-”

“Please, kid, tell us what happened first.”

“We were having a- a sleepover in the attic. Violet woke me up, she smelled smoke, we went downstairs, and then tried to f-find our parents, cause we saw a room on fire, but there were… there were people there, they tried to take us away, but Mother showed up and fought them and… and told us to run, she and Violet got separated, we went outside to find Father and he… he was dead, and we went into the grass, and then Mother and Violet came out and they killed Mother and they took Violet and… they had cars, black cars, a lot of them, they… Violet, she…”

He clutched Sunny closer, struggling not to cry.

The officers looked at each other, they ducked into the hall for a bit, leaving Klaus in the cold silence, rocking Sunny back and forth for a few minutes. He could hear them talking to each other mutely, but he didn’t process much of what they were saying. They sounded confused, upset. He wondered what was going on. Were they arguing about something? Had he said something wrong?

They returned shortly, looking grim, and one of them asked, “Now… Klaus, is it? Are you sure that’s what happened?”

“Y-yeah, of course.” he said.

They glanced at each other, and then the officer said, “I’m very sorry to tell you this, but I think you may have… hallucinated parts of this. You may have inhaled smoke-”

“I didn’t hallucinate this.” Klaus said. “Why would I hallucinate this?”

“You just went through a very traumatic event.” said an officer. “But we’re afraid it can’t have happened that way. The official fire department reached your house, and they believe the fire was an accident. They didn’t see any signs of intruders, or other vehicles, and…”

“And?” Klaus asked, wondering why they were hesitating.
“They, um, found the bodies.”

Klaus choked back another sob, and then said, “Well, if you… if you found the bodies, you’d see they were shot. They were…”

He was shocked to see one officer look very sad, while the other shook his head. “We’re afraid they were burned, Klaus. They died in the fire.”

“No. No, they got out and got shot, and Violet…”

“We’re afraid… we’re afraid that can’t have happened like you said, either.”

There was a dark feeling spreading over Klaus, and he really hated having to ask, “Why?”

“Her body was… uncovered under the house.”

No.

“She was burned, too. She’s…”

“No.” Klaus said, shaking his head. “No, they took her, they took her, they-”

“Klaus-”

“You’re lying. You’re lying, you’re lying, you’re-”

He started to cry again, and Sunny woke up, and looked around, confused at her environment, and then she cried, too, and Klaus really wished that he could be anywhere else.

He was picked up from the hospital that afternoon.

The doctors provided him and Sunny with new clothes, and their parents’ old friend, Mr Poe, helped them get into the car, and then said, “I am the executor of your parents’ estate, Klaus, so I’ll be taking care of you and Sunny until we can find you a suitable guardian.”

Klaus didn’t respond, simply staring out the window. Sunny gripped onto his arm and stared ahead, blankly.

“You’re parents left you behind financial security, which will be accessed when… when you come of age.”

He still didn’t respond.

“You’ll be staying with me and my family until we can contact your guardian.”

No response.

“It shouldn’t be long.”

Who cared?

Sunny looked up at Klaus, still a little tired and scared, and said, “Crewe?” “When are Mom and Dad coming back?”

Klaus stared at her for a minute, as it hit him exactly what she was asking. She didn’t know… she
didn’t understand yet. She’d never seen anyone die, she didn’t get that they… She’d been upset, of course, because she’d been waved around and hurt and threatened with pain and seen her family scared and hurt and seen her home burned, but she didn’t understand …

“They… I’m sorry, Sun, they’re not.” Sunny stared at him in confusion, and he said, “I… they died, Sunny. We said that. That means they’re… they can’t come back.”

She stared, almost confused. He continued, “They… it means we won’t see them again. I’m sorry, I…” Fuck, he was crying again. And then Sunny was crying again, and Klaus really wished they could just go home.

Klaus and Sunny both sat on the edge of the couch, staring ahead numbly as the Poes had an argument. Well, Mr Poe and his sons, Edgar and Albert, were arguing. Ms Poe wasn’t back from work yet, insisting that she was working on a “very special article” that Klaus was sure meant she was writing a lot about the very terrible fire that had killed a good chunk of the Baudelaire family, just so that Klaus and Sunny’s trauma could be explained to everyone in town, regardless of whether or not they wanted it to be.

“We don’t want to share a room with them!” Edgar was saying, shooting a glare at the Baudelaires.

“Yeah, we’re not gonna have any space to do anything,” Albert said. “Not if we have to fit a mattress in there.”

“It will only be for a day or two,” said Poe tiredly. “I’ve tried all afternoon to call the people their parents wanted them given to, but there was no answer. I’ll hopefully find them a suitable guardian tomorrow and take them there the day after.”

“But it’s our room.”

“We can sleep on the couch.” Klaus muttered, but nobody bothered to listen to him.

“Children, just let them sleep over for a bit, like Albert’s last birthday.”

“But those were friends. We don’t know these kids!”

“Boys, please just be nice to them. They just lost their parents and their sister.”

“We didn’t lose Violet.” Klaus raised his voice, finally attracting attention. He shot them a glare, and said, “She’s still alive.”

Poe sighed and whispered something to his children, and Klaus was sure he was saying something about how they were in denial or delusional or something. But he wasn’t- he couldn’t be, he wouldn’t just imagine something so horrible.

He looked down at Sunny, and whispered, “Sun, how… how much did you see?”

Sunny paused, and then said, very quietly, “Sumuvvet,” which meant, “I looked away when you told me to, but I turned around when I heard Violet scream. I think I saw the cars fall, and I saw them take her away. We can’t both have imagined it, right?”

Klaus sighed with relief. “Thank God. I’m not crazy. Neither of us are crazy. Someone must’ve… must’ve messed with the bodies. But… why would there be a body? She couldn’t have… they wouldn’t have kidnapped her just to… just to…”
He glanced up at the Poes, noticing that that Edgar and Albert were probably going to concede soon. He looked back down at Sunny, and said, “They were after us, too.”

“Nolly.” Sunny said, which meant, “They were more after you. They seemed to think I wasn’t as important.”

“That’s good, it means you’re safer.” Klaus said, holding back more tears. “If they come back… I’ll protect you, okay? But it means we can’t… can’t trust anyone, okay? We don’t know who’s after us and who’s not.”

Sunny paused, and then said, “Corpus?” “Where is Violet’s body?”

“It can’t be her, I-”

Sunny gave him a look, a look that was not normally found on an infant of her age. A look that said I know what I’m doing.

Klaus stared at her, and then, when Poe walked over to tell them that they would indeed be sleeping on a mattress in Edgar and Albert’s room, he said, “Can I see her?”

“Who?”

“Violet. I want to… make sure she’s…”

Poe looked at him sympathetically, and then said, “Are you sure? You’re quite young to want to see the body of a family member.”

I already saw two last night. “I’m sure. If I don’t see it, I might… If I don’t see it, how do I know she’s not still alive?”

Klaus hated lying, but Sunny squeezed his hand, assuring him that it was for a good cause. He thought he knew what she was doing; if they could prove the body wasn’t hers, someone would have to listen to them… but how exactly would they do that?

Edgar and Albert were very cross with Klaus and Sunny for having to sleep in their room, which Klaus was fine with; it meant they wouldn’t try to talk to him. He and Sunny were up pretty late, staring at the ceiling and wishing they were anywhere else, and woke up pretty late the next morning, not having slept very well at all, and by that point the brothers had gone to school and their parents had gone to work, so the two Baudelaires just sat in the living room and tried to think of something to do. Klaus found a piano and played a few tunes, but that just ended up making him feel sad, remembering Violet teaching him how to play, having learned herself from Father. Sunny tried to play a bit, too, but it ended up sounding like she was just smashing the keys with her hands—which she was doing, to be fair.

“Are you going to tell me your plan?” Klaus asked finally, after an hour or so of this.

Sunny shrugged, choosing instead to tap the C key on repeat, to the tune of one of the few songs she knew, Row Row Row Your Boat. Klaus frowned, remembering how much Violet hated that song. “Can you play something else?”

“Magellanic?” Sunny said, meaning, “How about Twinkle Little Star?”

“Yeah, that sounds alright.” Klaus shrugged.
Sunny paused, before looking up at Klaus, and asking, “Burnett?” which meant, “Are you sure Mother and Father can’t come back?”

Klaus stared down at the piano. “I mean… I saw Mother get… get shot. I think that… I mean, we only saw Father’s… it could’ve been fake, maybe they have him, too? Do you think whoever took Violet might have him, too?”

Sunny considered, before shrugging.

“Well, we’ll just have to find out.” Klaus said. “Once we find Violet. And we can do that once we prove that her body is fake. You do have a plan for that, don’t you?”

Sunny sighed and went back to the piano.

“You don’t have a plan, do you?”

“Pla.” Sunny said, which meant, “Since when do I need a plan?”

“Damnit, Sunny!”

Poe came back around the afternoon to drive them over to the morgue, asking once again if Klaus was sure that he, as such a young child, wanted to see such a “distressing sight.” Klaus kept assuring him that he did, and that Sunny would be fine, as “She’s a baby and won’t understand.” Sunny pinched him for that, but he gave her a look asking her to play along.

On the drive over, Poe said, “Now, I was unable to contact the Guardians your parents requested, so you’ll be sent to your next-of-kin, at least until they call me back, but I will say, it is highly irresponsible of them-”

“Next-of-kin?” Klaus asked.

“Oh, ‘next-of-kin’ is your closest living relative-”

“I know what ‘next-of-kin’ means, I just… didn’t realize we had any family.”

“Well, of course you do! In face, your next-of-kin called my office this morning to let me know she’d be alright taking you in; she’d heard about the fire and wanted to know if you needed a place to stay. Very charming lady. Her name is Esme Squalor, and while she lives pretty far, all the way in Hawkins, Indiana; I haven’t been able to contact anybody else, so you’ll probably be sent to her.”

Klaus sighed, glancing down at Sunny. “What do you think, Sun? Want to live in… where?”

“Hawkins.”

“Hawkins?”

“Thlosi.” Sunny muttered, which meant something like, “I’d rather be home.”

“Me, too.” Klaus whispered to her. ”But home's gone, now.”

The Morgue was just as dreary as Klaus expected it to be. It was all so… cold and white and with a
sick feeling in the air. Klaus had to explain to Sunny quietly that this was where they took dead bodies while Mr Poe had a conversation with a skeptical secretary who shared his belief that this was a sight Klaus and Sunny shouldn’t see, and is the boy sure he wouldn’t like to identify her via photograph? But Klaus insisted again, and they were led down a hallway by some doctor or guard or something, Klaus didn’t bother to check, instead feeling very, very tense as they walked down the hall. Sunny didn’t seem to be, instead glancing between the two adults, thinking hard.

When they turned into a room with a glass window, Klaus felt his breath catch in his throat, and suddenly doubts started to fill him. What if he was wrong? What if he had hallucinated everything, and he was about to see his sister’s dead, burned body? What if he dragged Sunny into this, what if…

Sunny pinched him again, and he glanced down to see she was studying him, having noticed his fear. He took a deep breath and carried her up to the window, stopping just short of it, to take a second. It wasn’t her, it couldn’t be her, but… still…

“Klaus, are you-” Poe began, staring at him.

Pushing past his fear, Klaus walked up to the window and looked through. A doctor was standing over a table, where the body was mostly covered by a white sheet, the head and arms the only things exposed.

Klaus expected to be scared and horrified, even though he knew, deep inside, that he wasn’t really seeing Violet.

He didn’t expect Sunny to scream.

She screeched and shut her eyes, turning her head away, shocked by the image. It was… well, it looked exactly like Violet, yes, but if her face and neck were covered in burns, barely concealed by minimal makeup. Sunny obviously had not prepared herself at all for this site, and hadn’t expected to see something so close to her sister looking so horrible.

“Sunny, are you okay?” Klaus asked quickly, and Sunny hesitantly nodded and turned back around, and the two of them stared at the body, and to Klaus’s disdain, he couldn’t find anything immediately wrong.

“Well, are you ready to go?” Poe asked, staring down at his handkerchief instead of looking at the body.

Klaus glanced down at Sunny. What if… what if that was Violet? And they were wrong?

Sunny stared at him, slowly recovering from her initial shock. Then, slowly, she moved her hand, grabbing onto his bracelet. She stared at him for a moment, and then winked.

Then she started crying; Klaus knew her well enough to know she was clearly faking it, but Poe said, “Oh, now, see, Klaus. You’ve upset your sister.”

Klaus slowly realized what she wanted him to do, and took a deep breath. “I don’t think it’s Violet, I think she wants someone else to hold her.”

“Oh, well-”

Klaus quickly passed her off to Poe, who almost instantly passed her to the guard next to him, who seemed very confused. “Wait, I can’t hold her!”
“Then put her down somewhere.” Klaus said, backing up slowly, spotting quickly the door that led into the room out of the corner of his eye. He glanced down at his bracelet, too, before taking a deep breath.

“There’s a bench back there, we-”

Klaus turned and ran while they were distracted enough, pushing open the door and racing in before Poe could even yell out for him to stop. He definitely heard the yelling from Poe, the guard with them, and the doctor in the room, who ran forwards to try and stop him. Klaus ducked under his arm, sliding across the room and making it to the side of the table, grabbing Violet’s arm—fuck, wrong one. He ran to the other side of the table, ignoring the three adults yelling at him and the sound of Sunny still fake-crying, flailing around and trying to be a good distraction, and he grabbed Violet’s arm, hesitating for just a moment, wondering what would happen if…

He flipped her wrist, and then stared in shock, and then beamed, sighing with relief.

“It’s not her.” he whispered, not audible to any of the yelling adults.

Her wrist was blank. They hadn’t put her mark on. This body had to be fake, she was still out there, she was still alive…

The doctor grabbed him and pushed him away, and Klaus suddenly got a flash, memories throwing itself to the forefront of his mind, memories of other people he didn’t know grabbing his arms, holding him back, ripping his sisters away from him…

He froze up for an instant, and the guard came in, dragging him back out the door, telling him that he shouldn’t have gone in the room and what was he thinking?

But once was out of the room, he found his voice again, and he started saying louder, “It’s not her! She’s not dead! Sunny, she’s not dead!”

“Klaus,” Poe said, sounding very disappointed in him, “I thought we were over this-”

“She’s not dead! It’s not her! It’s not her, she doesn’t have her-” he paused for a second. Nobody knew she had her mark. Nobody had seen it… except him and Sunny.

But… no. They had to believe him. It was his sister.

“It’s not her!” he pleaded. “I swear, it’s not her!”

The guard sighed. “Kid, this was a bad idea. We’re going out, okay?”

“No! No, please, just listen! It’s not her! It’s fake! They took her somewhere, it’s not her!”

Poe just looked at him with that same disappointment, and Sunny stared at him from the spot on the floor she’d been placed on. Then Klaus was being dragged away again, dragged into the hall, followed by Poe, who finally lifted Sunny and followed.

“No!” Klaus said, trying to go back to the room; maybe he could do something, maybe the body wasn’t even a human body and he could cut it open and find it empty, maybe her eyes were the wrong color, maybe he could find a fault in the paint, maybe they could re-do a DNA test, maybe…

“It’s not her!” he said, even in the hall. “Stop it! It’s not her! They took her somewhere! Someone kidnapped her and she’s all alone and nobody’s looking for her! She’s not dead! She’s not dead!”
Nobody listened.

Chapter End Notes

I LOVE ALL UR COMMENTS AND I LOVE ALL OF YOU

which is why this fic is going to be Maximum Pain get ready
Violet woke up a couple times over the next few days.

She lost track of time very quickly, and could only recall a few instances of consciousness.

She thought she remembered the van walls, dark and blank and cold, and she remembered seeing people beside her, guns out, staring at her like she was… like she was something disgusting. Like they’d just picked up a leech out of the lake and were guarding that now, instead of a girl they’d just orphaned and kidnapped. But she hadn’t felt awake enough to even be scared at that point, she’d just drowsily watched them until they sedated her again.

She remembered a hospital room. Someone had changed her clothes, she thought, and she didn’t notice by sight- her vision was blurry and it was hard to look down at herself- but she noticed because her arms were cold. Cold and light, because she was in short sleeves, she’d never worn short sleeves as long as she could remember. There was something attached to her mouth, some kind of mask, and people were talking over her. She only caught a few words- *could have gotten serious smoke inhalation, be more careful, lost the other one?*- but she saw the same dark look from the people who passed her. She had looked at the room instead, staring at the white walls and white floor and white doors and the blinding white of everything else, and she was sedated again, and she looked down at her arms, seeing they had been strapped to whatever table she was on, but said straps were just above her mark, and she could see it, she could see the dark 007, facing up so everyone could see it. *Mother’s going to kill me,* she’d thought, forgetting for that moment that Mother was gone.

She remembered another room, where she was strapped to another table, but she didn’t have anything on her face this time. People were drawing blood from her arm, but she was too delirious to even feel the pain, instead just watching the syringe fill with blood with a vague interest, her head automatically thinking back to that book she’d read on vaccines and syringes and how they worked and wondering if she could ask the doctors if she could read their test results when they were done with their checkup, and when was Father going to pick her up, they could go out for ice cream like he said, he said they could go if she was nice to the doctors and they got out of there as fast as possible, except she thought he’d covered her mark that morning? Or was that last week? Had she been in the hospital that long? Where was Klaus, he was here too? Wasn’t Father supposed to be with her, where was he? She didn’t see him…

She was knocked out again soon after that, still wondering where her brother and Father went.

She remembered wires on her head, people still whispering as she woke up. Still glaring. What was that look? Why did they look like they hated her? Where was Mother, they’d just gone to bed? Why were the walls white, her walls were painted brown? Wasn’t she watching Sunny tonight, because she was sick? She’d volunteered to watch her tonight so that Mother and Father could actually sleep. Where was Sunny? Did someone take her? Was Klaus watching her? She said she
was doing it tonight. Why were there wires on her head? Did she fall asleep testing an invention? Which one had wires on it? On her head? She wanted it off her head, she hated things on her head that weren’t her ribbon. She didn’t want her hair up, did someone tie her hair up? Yeah, someone had pinned her hair up. She wanted it down, she didn’t need to think right now, she wanted the wires off her head. She tried to move her arms, but they wouldn’t move, almost as if she had bracelets holding her down. Bracelets tied to the chair? Why would she tie her bracelets to the chair? Why did she feel a prick on her arm? Why was she getting tired again? Why couldn’t she move? She wanted this thing off her head. She wanted to go. She wanted to go, she wanted…

She thought she saw someone watching her, from the doorway. That wasn’t her doorway, was it? Her door didn’t look like that. Her family didn’t look like that. She didn’t know the man in the door. He was watching her, with shiny eyes. Shiny. He didn’t look nice. She didn’t want him in her house. She didn’t like him. She wanted him out. She wanted out. She wanted out. She wanted out.

_Get out, Violet. Get out, get out, get out…_

That was funny. She had a song stuck in her head. She hated that song, when was the last time she’d had _Row Your Boat_ in her head?

She was asleep again within a few seconds.

Violet woke up, finally, in a bed.

She sat up, her head aching like she’d banged it into the wall. She rubbed it, shutting her eyes and trying to remember what was happening. She glanced around after a second, seeing she was in a dimly-lit, small room, with only a small sidetable next to her and two large, green-ish doors on the wall to her right. There was a lamp on the table, and nothing else. Everything was either white or that same pale green-ish. She glanced down at her nightgown, confused to see that the sleeves were short, and there was a different design… and color… and length… what the…

Everything came to her almost in a flash. The Bookstore. The Fire. The gunshots. The bodies. Klaus running. Hands on her, something in her arm, flashes of more… shit, she could barely remember anything after the fire, everything was so blurry and unfocused and _dark_…

She slowly got to her feet, shaking slightly and having to grip the table to keep balance. _Come on, Vi, you can do this. You can stand up. You need to get out._

She’d been kidnapped. Someone had kidnapped her and murdered her parents and Klaus and Sunny were somewhere, they could be lost, they could be kidnapped, too, they could be…

_Get out. Figure out a way to get out._

She reached down, as if to find a pocket, only to hit the fabric of her… was this a hospital gown? Who had changed her into a hospital gown? Well, it didn’t matter, what mattered was that her ribbon was gone. She couldn’t tie it up, she couldn’t _think_, and she could tell she was starting to panic. She’d been _kidnapped_, her house was _burned_, her parents were…

Mother had been _right_ in front of her. Right there. She was taking her away, she was making sure she was safe. She was just trying to keep her safe, like she always had. And they’d shot her. They’d killed her. They’d killed her and she’d… shit, she’d screamed and then… had the cars floated? Yes, she’d screamed and the cars lifted and dropped…

It had to be her, then. The Bookstore, the Bracelets, the Cars… she made those things happen.
When she was frustrated, and when she was scared.

Well, hopefully she could make something float now, because she was fucking terrified.

Violet grabbed the lamp on the sidetable, trying to pick it up; maybe she could use it as a weapon? No, it wouldn’t move; must be attached to the table. She opened the drawers, finding only a small stuffed whale- not very useful if someone tried to attack her again.

As she closed the drawers, she processed something again. Her sleeves, they were short, they were so short, only reaching past her shoulders. And she didn’t have a bracelet, either. Slowly, she flipped over her arm, seeing her mark, plain as day, completely visible. Anyone could just… walk in and see it. She could see it. It wasn’t even hidden.

She slowly stumbled backwards, sitting down on the bed, holding her arm and staring at the mark. She shouldn’t be this fascinated, really, she’d seen it her whole life, but… she’d always been told it was a secret. Always, always. And now there was no way to hide it. She couldn’t hide it, and she couldn’t choose who got to see it. It was just… there.

Suddenly, the door opened, and Violet instantly flinched back, grabbing onto the first thing she could, which happened to be a pillow- great, nice weapon there, Vi, great thinking. She glanced up, seeing a tall man dressed in a white coat come a few steps in, looking at her blankly, barely glancing at the pillow she’d grabbed.

“Hello. Are you alright?”

“Who the hell are you?” Violet asked, telling herself not to drop her guard just because he was nice to her. Her parents always told her that nice people weren’t always kind, and if he was with the men who’d dragged her away from her burning home and shot her Mother, he was clearly not nice.

“Alright, now, stay calm. We’re just trying to help you.”

“Doesn’t seem like it.” Violet said, glancing towards the door, judging how risky it would be to make a break for it. “You killed my parents.”

“This may be hard to hear, but your parents were wrong in keeping you away from us. They agreed to-”

“Who the hell are you?” Violet asked again, her voice breaking slightly. “Where the fuck am I?”

“Who taught you that language?”

“It doesn’t fucking matter, where am I?”

The man suddenly realized something, and he took a moment to stare at her, before saying, “They never told you about us.”

“No shit.” Violet glared at him. “Look, I don’t care what weird shit you all are doing here, I just want to go. What do you even want me for, anyway?”

“This is a bit of a surprise,” the man said distantly, clearly not listening. “We didn’t expect them to talk us up, but considering your Mother, we did expect them to tell you a little-”

“I don’t know shit, if that’s what I’m here for.” Violet said quickly. Maybe this was just some kind of coverup? That wouldn’t quite explain their fascination with her mark, but… she could play along for a bit, and then spill what had happened the second she was sure Klaus and Sunny were
safe. “Look, if you want me to be quiet about something, I won’t even tell anyone about this, just drop me in the woods and I’ll say the fire was an accident, just leave my siblings and I alone-”

The man sighed. “Well, it looks like we’ll just have to explain things- again. We assumed that Three would… well, someone will come for you shortly.”

“Someone will…” fuck, no. “No, no, don’t leave me here, let me go!”

The man didn’t listen, instead instantly turning and leaving. Violet leapt to her feet, but didn’t make it to the door before it slammed shut. She heard the click of a lock, and she started banging on the door, screaming, “Hey! Hey, asshole! Don’t leave me here!”

She heard the man’s muffled voice on the other side, speaking into a radio, she guessed. “She knows even less than Ten, and she’s a lot more pissed. You better get someone to calm her down before we start the testing.”

“Let me out!” Violet yelled, kicking the door in frustration. “Hey! Let me out!” When she didn’t hear anything outside the door, she groaned and turned around, sitting back on the bed and crossing her arms.

She waited another moment, and then looked around again, once again taking in what she had in her room. One table, one lamp she couldn’t move, a stuffed whale, and a pillow. There was a blanket under her, too, but it was very thin. So, thin, in fact…

Violet grabbed the edge of the blanket, fiddling with the edges, until she finally gripped the edge and pulled it back, succeeding in getting a small rip on the end. She kept pulling, until she had a nice, thin strip off the top of the blanket. She got it to a decent length and then pulled up, making a decent replacement for a ribbon.

She kept glancing around the room as she tied her hair back, and suddenly more observations came to her. In the corner behind her, there was a small box-shaped thing with a green light in the corner, most likely a camera, unless whoever lived in this hospital had some weird decorating ideas. There was a handle on the drawer to the sidetable, which she imagined could be taken off with a bit of pressure, but she might need something to break it off with, and what would she use that for, anyway? She jumped off the bed and knelt down to look under it, a bit upset to see that there wasn’t anything on the floor, but she didn’t give up immediately, instead sliding a bit under it to see if there was anything stuck to it. Huh, nope. Okay, well, maybe she could find something under the mattress.

She carefully lifted up part of the mattress, and, look at that, nothing. She groaned and dropped the mattress, sitting back down on the bed. In all those old movies she’d watched with Father, the prisoners always found something they could use as a lockpick or weapon, and she couldn’t find anything she could even use as a projectile.

She shut her eyes, then, curling up slightly. God, she was never gonna watch old movies with Father again, was she? He’d wanted to watch Dawn Patrol again that weekend, Klaus and Sunny hadn’t seen it yet and they wanted to watch it with them while Mother went at got them new clothes for winter. Now they never would. They’d been so excited, it was the only thing on their minds up until Violet needed those screws from town…

How long was she going to be stuck here? How long before she could get out and find her siblings? What if she never got out, and they killed her in here? What if she never got to see Sunny walking and talking and she never got to have another conversation with Klaus or ask him for information he’d read up on or get him to help her test an invention or…
She shut her eyes. Don’t think like that, Violet. You’ll see them again. What would you ask Klaus now? I’d ask him if he’d read any books on prison breaks. And what would he say? He’d infodump on some book he’d read and give me advice. But he’s not here now, and the last book I read on a prison break isn’t helpful to the situation. What would Sunny do? She’d bite the first person to get close to her, but my teeth aren’t as sharp as hers.

Maybe… maybe she could try lifting something again? If she’d managed to freak out and move things with her… with her mind, maybe she could lift the sidetable and slam it into someone? That would be a decent weapon, and she could definitely find something else to throw in the hall. She might’ve knocked a gun out of someone’s hands, she could… well, she knew how to use a gun, but would she…?

*If it means getting to Klaus and Sunny, you can do anything.*

She turned towards the table, staring at it, boring her eyes into it, just thinking, *Lift. Lift. Lift.*

Nothing happened, even as she sat for several minutes.

The door suddenly swung open, and Violet jumped, instinctively grabbing the ribbon and ripping it out of her hair, dumping it onto the bed before looking up at the doorway. She could see two men standing just outside, barely moving, as a woman came in. Violet got to her feet, clenching her fists and glaring.

“Alright,” the woman said, very formally, “We’re going to go somewhere.”

Violet peered around her towards the men in the hall. “Where are we going?”

“Just another room, and you’ll receive a bit of an explanation before we begin testing.”

“Before we- what testing? What are you talking about?”

“Just come with us.”

“Why should I trust you?” Violet asked, backing up slightly. “You killed my fucking parents. I’m not going anywhere with-”

“For fuck’s sake, kid.” The woman reached forwards, grabbed her shoulder and pushed her towards the door; when Violet stumbled forwards, she continued, “Just get to this, we’re not gonna spend all day coddling a kid again, we’re gonna need to speed this up.”

When Violet turned around to yell at her, the woman just grabbed her by the arm and dragged her out of the room, tossing her towards one of the men; guards, Violet figured out quickly, as they each grabbed one of her arms and started following the woman down the hall.

Fear gripped Violet incredibly quickly, the hands on her arms a very unwelcome contact. Her immediate instinct was to push them back, but she figured out very quickly she wouldn’t be able to throw them off of her, so instead she started nervously inspecting the halls, eyes darting from place to place. It did seem a bit like a normal hospital, only she didn’t see any other patients; hell, as they went down the bends of the halls, she only saw two other people who might be doctors, not even sparing her a glance. In one hall, though, she passed several more guards, who were muttering something about the Elevator.

They dragged her down a staircase, where she had to keep her focus entirely on the steps so she didn’t fall at the speed they were going. When they left that, she kept trying to look out the windows and judge where they were and how high up, but they ended up keeping her father down
the hall, so she couldn’t quite see out; she could, however, tell from the lighting that it had to be late afternoon, maybe even evening.

She was so focused on the windows that she didn’t notice when the woman ducked into a room ahead of them until the guards almost shoved her to the right, and she stumbled into a room, just as blindingly white as everything else, empty except for a table placed under what she assumed was a one-way mirror and two metal chairs on either end. Violet found herself dragged to the chair farther from the door and sat down, and before she could even react, her arms were pulled back and handcuffed.

“Standard precaution.” the woman said as Violet tried to stand up. “Can’t have you running off on us.”

Violet couldn’t think of anything to say, instead staring at the adults then left her in the room, alone. The door shut, and everything suddenly felt very cold, and the room felt very, very small, and very, very dark.

Violet glanced around, still struggling a bit in the chair. Shit, she thought she’d learned how to get out of handcuffs. She and Klaus had gotten bored and read up on how to… if he was here, he’d probably remember what it said.

She shut her eyes, and muttered, almost sarcastically, “Well, Klaus, how do you get out of handcuffs?”

God, she couldn’t think of anything. Maybe she should’ve left the ribbon in her hair, they wouldn’t have been too mad about that, would they? She’d be able to think better. She could never think when she had her hair in her face…

The door opened, and Violet kept her eyes shut for a second, almost as if if she didn’t look, nothing would happen. That was clearly a bad strategy to live by, and after a few seconds, she sighed and looked up.

A man came forwards, sitting on the other side of the table, staring at her. She examined him for a second; she noticed his eyes quickly, underneath his one eyebrow- they were very, very shiny, and something about them was… familiar. Not in a good way, but she couldn’t quite place where she’d seen them before.

They stared for a second, and Violet said, rather curtly, “Well. How do you do?”

The man gave her a look, and then said, “Polite.”

“Yes, well, my parents raised me to be nice.” Violet said back, starting to glare. “Before you killed them.”

“I’m afraid that was necessary. They were trying to keep you from us.”

“For a good reason, I’m sure.” Violet said, glancing away.

“Not quite.” the man waited until Violet looked back up at him, and then said, “You’re… special, Violet. Surely you know that.”

She thought back to the floating cars. “Maybe.”

“You were born special.” he said. “But you would’ve discovered your… abilities much sooner if your parents hadn’t taken you away.”
Violet paused. Whoever these people were, they’d clearly sent people to kidnap her and her siblings and kill their parents. Not people she wanted to believe instantly. Maybe she could play dumb for a bit.

“Abilities?” she asked, looking up, making her eyes as wide and innocent as possible.

The man’s expression didn’t change, but the look in his eyes did; he looked almost annoyed. Good. “Surely you’re aware of the things you can do.”

“I can invent things.” Violet said, smiling a little at the frustration behind his eyes. “I’m very good at that. And fixing things.”

“You didn’t notice when you made the items fly in the bookshop? Or made things go haywire after the fire?”

Violet took in a deep breath. “That wasn’t me. I can’t do things like that. That’s impossible.”

“Well, it was either you or your brother.” the man said, and Violet instantly stiffened. “One of you awakened your powers. If it wasn’t you, perhaps we should bring your brother in instead.”

No.

“He’s not here.” Violet said, without thinking. “He ran, you can’t get to him.”

“Oh, he may have run away from the extraction team, but make no mistake: we know exactly where he is. We only haven’t taken him because we don’t want to cause problems before absolutely necessary. Unless, of course, he was the one to do all those things…”

Fuck. Violet glared daggers at him, wishing she could kill people with her mind, too. “Maybe it was me.” she said. “It would make sense. Especially since Klaus hasn’t done anything like… but I can’t do it again. I’ve tried. I don’t know how it works.”

The man stared at her. “And your parents never did anything about that?”

“Of course not.” Violet said. “It didn’t even happen until you assholes tried to kill my sister.”

“Interesting.” the man said, narrowing his eyes.

Violet didn’t like that at all. She sat up as straight as possible, glaring. “Don’t you dare touch them.” she said darkly. “Don’t you fucking dare.”

“Well,” the man said, “That’s not up to you, is it?” As Violet kept glaring, he said, “I’m sure you know what your numbers mean.”

“Numbers?” It took Violet a second. “The… the mark?”

To her surprise, the man let out a groan that seemed almost annoyed, and he rolled his eyes. “Are you telling me that your parents didn’t even tell you that?”

What the fuck does any of this MEAN?

“Fuck it!” Violet screamed, pushing a bit, banging her hands against the handcuffs. “Fuck this! I don’t give a shit what this is or what you think I can do, I just want you to let me go.”

“I’m afraid we can’t do that.” the man said, very coldly.
He stood up, then, walking closer to her, and Violet instinctively flinched back, pushing herself towards the wall. She wasn’t able to move more than a few inches. The man moved behind her and put a cold hand on her wrist; she didn’t have to be able to see to know he was touching her mark.

“This,” he said in that cold voice, “Is your number. It means that you belong to us, and you have belonged to us since the day you were born.”

“Don’t touch me!” Violet yelled, still struggling with the cuffs.

The man moved, looking Violet in the eyes as she kept trying to back up. “You have always been part of us, and you were never supposed to leave. All we’ve done is fix your parents’ mistake. The only reason your siblings aren’t here too is because we don’t want to cause more problems, but make no mistake, they will return very soon. We’ve already lost more of you than we’d’ve preferred to, and we’re not going to spend another few days coddling you to get you to do what you should’ve been doing for the last ten years.”

“Who the fuck are you?” Violet asked, desperately trying not to cry, not to show this man any kind of weakness.

The man gave her a very dark look, and then said, “We’re your family, Seven.” She took in a short breath, and then he said, “We call ourselves the Department of Energy, and we study different ways we can affect the human mind. You were supposed to be helping us, given your natural abilities, but your parents decided to take you away before that could happen.”

Violet wasn’t sure what to say, so she kept glaring and trying to keep herself from crying.

“So. I want you to tell me right now. What can you do?”

Violet stared him dead in the eyes, still holding back tears, and then said, “I don’t know. I can’t control it.”

The man watched her for a second, as if to determine if she was lying. Then, he said, “You’re as stubborn as your Mother, you know that?”

The door opened, then, and someone looked in, saying, “Olaf, there’s a problem with the Gate-”

“I’ll be right there!” the man snapped, and then he said, “Tell the guards to take Seven back to her room; once we’ve dealt with this, we’ll start with the trips. If that doesn’t get her to start making things float, nothing will.”

“The what?” Violet asked, confused and starting to feel terrified. “What are you going to do to me?”

“And figure out how to get her to shut up.”

The man- Olaf?- left, then, and the guards came back in.

“No! Hey! Come back! What are you going to-”

The man didn’t come back, and Violet’s hands were freed, only for her arms to be grabbed by the guards again; she was dragged into the hall, and she started thrashing, kicking, trying to get away. She didn’t know what she’d do if she did, but she was feeling angry again, and she didn’t want to be held like that. “Let me go!” she yelled. “Hey! Fuck off! Let go of me!”
One of the guards finally snapped, and Violet realized this when he turned and punched her.

It took her a good five seconds to realize what had happened, and then she lost it, and finally started to cry.

The guards just kept dragging her off.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I know the last six chapters have been basically nonstop angst, but I promise next chapter is A BIT of a break, mainly because we get to meet our favorite set of triplets and our least favorite adorable girl.
Klaus and Sunny had one suitcase of clothes Ms Poe had bought for them to carry into the car the next day, when Mr Poe said he’d been given a day off to drive them to their new guardian, tough he looked about as pleased about this as he would if he’d been told he’d been fired. They woke up earlier than Edgar and Albert that day, and dragged the suitcase into the backseat while Poe said goodbye to his wife.

They sat in silence for a bit. Then, Klaus looked down at Sunny and said, “It wasn’t her.”

Sunny nodded, smiling slightly. They’d both been scolded for the rest of the day after the “stunt” they’d pulled in the morgue, and absolutely nobody had listened when Klaus said it couldn’t have been Violet, to his endless frustration.

“She didn’t have her mark.” Klaus repeated, as if him not saying it repeatedly would make it stop being true. “She didn’t have it. It wasn’t her. It was fake.”

Sunny paused, and then said, “Sirev?” which probably meant, “If Violet’s body was fake, could Mother’s and Father’s be, too?”

Klaus wilted slightly. “No, I’m afraid not. I mean… I saw Mother… I saw her get shot, she probably didn’t survive that. I guess… I guess they could’ve taken Father, but they seemed… they seemed to be after us, me and Violet. I don’t see why…”

Sunny bit her lip, and then asked, “Emown?” which probably meant, “Are we leaving Violet here?”

“No.” Klaus said, shaking his head. “No, we are not leaving her. While we’re with our new Guardian, we’ll try to find out more about the people who kidnapped her, and… and we’ll prepare for when they find us.” He put an arm over Sunny, and said, “Don’t worry. I’m not letting them take you away, too.”

The front car door opened, and Klaus and Sunny both jumped, surprised. Mr Poe got into the driver’s seat, and then said, “Alright, Baudelaires, I’ll be driving you to Hawkins now. Please don’t misbehave too much around your new guardian; I don’t want to have to come get you and take you somewhere else.”

“We won’t.” Klaus said blankly; he knew that it was sometimes unlikely for siblings to stay together in the foster system, and if this guardian gave them up… he wasn’t about to lose Sunny. “What’s her name again?”

As Poe started driving down the road, he said, “Esme Squalor. She’s the sixth most important financial advisor in her district.”

“And how is she related to us?”

“She is a distant cousin of your Father.” Poe said. “And she was quite willing to take you in. She
must love children; she has three foster kids already.”

“Tres?” Sunny asked.

“My sister just asked,” Klaus said, “If you said that right; she has three foster children?”

“Yes, so you and Sunny will make five. Once again, I expect you to behave; it’ll be difficult for her handling five children at once, so you’ll have to take some responsibility you may not have had at home.”

“Actually, Violet and I often did work around the house,” Klaus said. “So we definitely know how to help with some things.”

“And I won’t be able to reach you easily,” Poe said, completely ignoring him, “As it takes several hours to drive there, so you’ll have to ask your Guardian if you have any problems.”

“Great.” Klaus said, looking down at Sunny. “Ready for a several-hour drive?”

Sunny rolled her eyes and then leaned into his side to fall back to sleep.

“You’ll be contacted when funeral arrangements have been made.” Poe continued. “Which may take awhile, as Ms Squalor doesn’t want anything to do with it and all your other relatives refuse to answer their phones. But until then, your Guardian has enrolled you in a private school! Isn’t that fun?”

“We’ve never been to any school.” Klaus said. “I wouldn’t know if it’s fun.”

“I always wanted to go to a private school. You’ll get to wear a uniform!”


The second they left town, Klaus felt very wrong.

He couldn’t figure out why at first; he just assumed maybe it was nerves from everything that had happened, everything he’d found out, everything he still didn’t know. They probably just kicked in in a delayed reaction or something.

But as he looked out the window, seeing the buildings and cars race by, and his stomach kept dropping and his leg kept bouncing and he started breathing quickly, he realized what it was.

He’d never been outside of town before.

He didn’t have town memorized, of course, he hadn’t been outside the house enough, but he knew everything very well. He knew basically every part of their hometown, and he and Violet used to pour over maps, at her insistence, in case they got lost. He knew all the roads, all the main buildings, the general area they were all at.

But he didn’t know anything here. He was in uncharted territory, at least in his mind.

And the worst part was he couldn’t go back.

Sure, he could go back to town on occasion, he’d probably get dragged back there for the funeral for his parents and for his sister who wasn’t even dead. But his house was gone. The place he knew like the back of his hand, the place he could recite from memory, all his favorite rooms and
favorite books and the long halls he and Violet used to run down, and the windows they used to
draw on whenever enough mist built up. All of their clothes, all of their books, everything they ever
knew…

And their parents were gone, too. He’d never see them again. His Father wouldn’t ever smile as he
gave him new books, or listen to his infodumps on everything he’d just learned, or let him run
around the backyard and try to break into the old tool shed just because he’d done well in school
that day, and his Mother wouldn’t ever help him in the garden or calm him down during storms
and he wouldn’t see them smile ever again, or hear them laugh, or…

“Kla?” Sunny asked, putting a hand on his arm and looking up, blinking back sleep.

Klaus glanced down at her, realizing very quickly that he wasn’t going to calm down. He glanced
at Mr Poe, who was focusing so much on the road that he had no doubt he wouldn’t pay attention
to anything in the backseat. As Klaus paused, he started noticing more things; the sound of the cars
moving outside the window, the buzz of the radio, trying to reach a station, the sound of the
suitcase thumping against the seat. Everything sounded louder than it probably was, and it was just
getting louder and he was feeling so confused and lost and Klaus could feel tears springing to his
eyes.

“Sunny,” he said quietly, “We’re out of the city.” She nodded, not understanding, and he said, his
voice starting to break, “I don’t… Okay, Sunny, you know how I sometimes freak out when things
get too loud or too much stuff is going on?”

Sunny nodded. “Nicanor,” she said, which meant, “You called them shutdowns, right? Mother said
it gives you anxiety.”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded. “I… I think I’m having a shutdown.”

“Pleh?” Sunny asked, meaning, “Do you need any help?”

“I… I’ll be fine in a little while.” Klaus promised her. “I’m just not gonna feel good for a bit. Can
you just… stay here with me? I mean, it’s- i-i-it’s not like you can go anywhere, I guess, but just…
just…”

He was crying now, and he felt so bad. Violet wouldn’t cry, she’d stay here, she’d stay strong, she
wouldn’t make Sunny feel worse, she wouldn’t…

Sunny leaned up against him and put her hand on his, humming some nursery rhyme. Klaus shut
his eyes and held her hand, trying to slow his breathing. He sat there for some time, willing himself
not to look out the windows and remind himself he was so far from everything he’d ever known.
He just had to think about… about finding Violet, about getting her back to safety, about taking
care of Sunny, about the little girl next to him who just wanted him to feel better…

“Sunny?” Klaus said quietly.

“Hmm?”

“Thank you.”

“Hmm.”

It was late afternoon when they finally arrived in Hawkins.
Sunny and Klaus had both fallen asleep at different intervals; thankfully, Klaus calmed down a little after a bit of driving, and actually found that he enjoyed staring out the windows when they drove by woods or fields.

But when they pulled into Hawkins, Poe started talking again. “Now, this isn’t as large a town as ours is; it’s much more suburban, so you won’t have to deal with so much noise.”

“We used to live far enough from town that the noise didn’t bother us.” Klaus said, not that Mr Poe would listen.

“Your Guardian assured me she has a very large house, though, so you should each have your own rooms.”

“I’d… prefer to stay with Sunny.” Klaus said, gripping his sister’s small hand.

“Well, you’ll have to ask your Guardian about that.” Poe said, driving past several stores. “We won’t be passing your school on the way there, Klaus, so you might not be shown where it is and you’ll have to walk with your new foster siblings on your first day.”

“What about Sunny?”

“Well, I assume she’ll stay at home.”

“But…”

“Ah, here we are!”

Klaus and Sunny both looked out the window, surprised to see a large building to their right, painted silver, white curtains covering each window. It was numbered 667, and as Klaus got out of the car, carrying Sunny in one hand and their light suitcase in the other, he muttered, “Something doesn’t feel right about this place.”

“Futa.” Sunny said, meaning, “I agree.”

“It’s probably just… new for us.” Klaus said, though he had a sinking feeling in his stomach.

Poe got out of the car and walked up to the door, Klaus and Sunny following quickly. He rang the doorbell, and waited for a minute before ringing again.

The door opened, and a tall woman peered out, looking very uninterested. Klaus and Sunny both immediately noticed her outfit; it was an elaborate gray dress, looking more like a dressy gown than normal everyday wear.

“Good evening,” Poe grinned, “I am Arthur Poe, from Mulctuary Money Management, and these are-”

“Ah, the Baudelaires!” the woman said, a brilliant smile suddenly emerging on her face. “I am your new guardian, Esme Gigi Genevieve Squalor, the area’s sixth most important financial advisor.” She stepped aside to let them in, and said, “Do be careful, if you get mud on the carpet I will have to ground you.”

Klaus quickly wiped his feet on the doormat, even though he didn’t think he’d stepped in anything, and walked inside.

The foyer was huge, bigger than the one in their old home. It was painted in silver, with a gray
carpet spread over black-and-white checkered flooring. A large staircase was at the other end, with doors spread across the walls.

“Your room is on the third floor, the door with the red paint on it.” Esme said quickly. “Klaus, you’ll have Sunny with you, so you’ll be in charge of her when she wakes up in the middle of the night. You can place your things there, and we will discuss matters over dinner. I am very pleased to have you here, I was very close with your parents.”

“They never mentioned you.” Klaus said honestly.

“Of course they didn’t, adults don’t talk about silly things like friends around children.” Esme said quickly, before turning to the man in the doorway. “You must be Mr Poe; why don’t we finish everything we need to while they put their belongings away.”

“Oh, I just needed to make sure they arrived safely.” Poe said. “I should really be getting back to the bank. Children, if you need me, you can call.”

“We will.” Klaus lied.

“Yeet.” Sunny said, which, in this instance, meant, “Goodbye and good riddance.”

“Well, I’ll be in my room.” Esme told the children, as Poe started to leave. “I’ve got to change for dinner; we’ll be going out to a nice restaurant. Have you ever been outside?”

“Of… course?” Klaus said. “We were homeschooled, not imprisoned.”

“Oh, you were homeschooled.” Esme said sweetly. “So you’ll need to learn how to talk to people; just ask the other children, they just got back from school so they’ll be running around somewhere.”

“We actually have-” Klaus began.

“We’re leaving at five-thirty, be here by then or we’re leaving without you.” Esme said. She smiled again, and then said, “Good to have you here.”

Klaus glanced at Sunny, who shrugged, and then he started up the stairs.

They made it up to the third floor and found the room with the red door. Inside was a bed much too large for one twelve-year-old, with a small side-table to the right, and a rickety crib in the corner, as well as a room divider in the corner for clothes changing and a closet door on the opposite wall, and a window just on the other side of the bed; other than that, it was completely empty. Klaus put Sunny down on the bed, the two of them giggling slightly as she sunk into the blankets, and then he took the suitcase to the closet. It already had a few clothes in it, which looked like fancy suits; Klaus wondered if he’d be expected to dress up all the time.

He left the suitcase in the closet and then sat next to Sunny, saying, “You can probably just sleep in the bed, Sunny. There’s more than enough room, and the crib looks a bit dangerous.”

“Wryb.” Sunny said. “That’s true.”

“I wonder if we have schoolbooks.” Klaus said. “I’d love to read over those; I’m sure we have a lot to catch up on.”
He glanced down at his sister, and then said, “After school tomorrow, we’ll go to the Library; there should be one nearby. We’ll see if we can find out anything about the men who tried to… I mean, we have nothing to go on, but maybe we can look up kidnappings around our area, or… or our parents, if Esme’s related to Father he might’ve lived here, maybe there’s information on them…”

He fell silent. Crap, they really did have nothing to go on. Maybe they should’ve tried to stay in the city, tried to stay nearby where they could find clues, or maybe the kidnappers would be close and they could find them, or…

“So. You must be the new cakesniffers, huh?”

Klaus and Sunny jumped, turning to the door. A girl with bright red hair was leaning against the doorframe, dressed in bright, loud-looking clothes, a jacket tied around her waist and a bow tied around her head, her hair pulled into two pigtails.

“Uh, hello.” Klaus said. “What does ‘cakesniffer’ mean?”

“It means you’re stupid cakesniffers,” the girl said, smiling brightly and strolling inside, looking around the room with disdain, “And I’m the most special girl in the whole town. You’re the new kids?”

Klaus glanced at Sunny. If he wasn’t mistaken, this was one of the other foster kids, and he was not looking forward to having her living in the same house as him. “Yes. I’m Klaus Baudelaire, and this is my sister Sunny. What’s your name?”

“What’s my name?” the girl asked, refusing to drop her smile even though her eyes betrayed annoyance. “Everyone here knows that I’m Carmelita Spats, the most wonderful girl in the world. Is it true that your home was destroyed in a fire?”

Klaus paused for a second, staring at her, surprised by her forwardness. “Uh… yes.”

“Wow. That’s stupid.” Carmelita said, sitting on the bed beside him and pulling up a legwarmer that had fallen.

Klaus stared. “I’m sorry?”

“You should be.” Carmelita giggled. “Anyway, I’m Esme’s favorite, because I’ve been here the longest, so you have to do anything I say or I’ll cry and she’ll ground you from… whatever it is you do.”

“That doesn’t sound very fair.” Klaus said.

“Life isn’t fair.” she smirked. “But you should know that, shouldn’t you, orphan?” She leaned forwards, almost conspiratorially. “Is it true your sister died, too?”

“Durva!” Sunny said, which meant, “What a rude girl! I don’t like her one bit.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Carmelita asked, still laughing a bit. “Can’t your sister talk?”

“She’s a baby,” Klaus said, “And I don’t want to talk about my family right now.”

“You’re such a boring cakesniffer.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “Come on, it’ll be fun. I wanna hear about everything. Did you get to watch all your stuff burn? Did you get to see someone die?”
Before Klaus could let out another protest, he heard another voice from the doorway.

“For the love of God, Carmelita! Can’t you leave the kids alone?”

Klaus and Sunny looked towards the door, to see two kids who looked very similar to each other, and not at all similar to Carmelita. They were both wearing matching sweaters and matching pants, the only difference being that the girl wore black flats and the boy had converse; they also had different notebooks sticking out of their bags, the boy’s being green and the girl’s being black.

“Aw, so the cakesniffers just flock together, don’t they?” Carmelita mocked. “You want to replace your brother with this kid?”

“We’re not replacing Quigley,” the girl said sharply, “Because he’s not dead.”

“You’re crazy.” Carmelita said in a sing-song voice.

“Oh, piss off,” said the boy, who’d been speaking earlier, as he and his sister walked into the room. “Leave the kids alone to get changed.”

“Fine, but only because I need to fix my hair.” the girl said, jumping up. She glanced towards Klaus and Sunny, saying, “See you around, cakesniffers!” before she ran off.

The new girl closed the door behind her, before turning back. “Sorry about Carmelita. You get used to avoiding her after a while.”

“I’m Duncan Quagmire,” said the boy, hesitantly sitting beside Klaus and smiling at him. “And this is my sister, Isadora.”

“I’m Klaus Baudelaire, and this is my sister, Sunny.” Klaus said, smiling slightly, even though he suddenly felt a little nervous as Duncan moved a bit closer. “You seem a lot nicer than her.”

“Yes, well, a lot of people are nicer than Carmelita.” Isadora said, sitting beside Sunny. “And have better fashion sense.”

“Either that, or our fashion sense sucks, which is possible.” Duncan said. “And Esme doesn’t seem to mind her.”

“Esme thinks Carmelita is the Innest thing in the world.” Isadora rolled her eyes. “Wonder where she got that impression.”

“How long have you been here?” Klaus asked, as Sunny grabbed the edge of Isadora’s sweater to play with, which Isadora thankfully didn’t seem to mind.

“Only a few months.” Duncan shrugged. “Maybe two or three? We arrived during Summer, anyway, so we’ve had to deal with bullshit from Carmelita, Esme and Prufrock for a while.”

“Prufrock?”

“Prufrock Preparatory School.” Isadora said. “That’s where you’ll be going, and, heads up, you’re gonna hate it.”

“I was hoping I’d like school.” Klaus said. “I was homeschooled before, so-”

“Oh! So were we!” Duncan said, perking up. “We can tell you all the things not to do.”

“For starters, you have to ask to use the bathroom.” Isadora said. “I learned that when I got in
trouble for just standing up and walking out.”

“And you can’t double up lessons, at all.” Duncan said.

“Lunch tastes awful.” Isadora said.

“And all the tests are more based on memorization than anything else.” Duncan said. “Just memorize the facts they want you to, and then go read whatever you want.”

“Is there a Library?” Klaus asked excitedly.

“The one in school sucks, but there’s one in town.” Isadora nodded. “Duncan and I spend most of our time there, we can show you where it is!”

“Good!” Klaus said. Then, he paused and said, “Uh, what will Sunny do while we’re at school?”

“Guess that’s up to Esme.” Duncan shrugged, leaning over to look at Sunny.

“I… don’t know if I want to leave her alone.” Klaus said hesitantly. He wasn’t sure he wanted to say people are trying to kidnap us just yet; he didn’t want to freak out the only kids who’d ever been nice to him.

Duncan and Isadora both nodded knowingly. “We were like that, too.” Duncan said sympathetically. “When Isadora and I were first separated for class, I spent the entire day unable to pay attention, just preparing to run and find her at a moment’s notice.”

“I still sleep on the floor in his room.” Isadora admitted. “I technically have my own, but we used to share at our old house.”

“Well, people do usually put twins in the same room.” Klaus said. “Actually, I read a study once that said that kids often have an easier time falling asleep when someone else is in the room.”

Duncan and Isadora’s faces fell, and they glanced away. Instantly, Klaus felt horrible. “I’m sorry, did I… say something wrong?”

“Twins.” Isadora said quietly.

“I’m sorry, I just assumed… you look the same age.” Klaus said.

“It’s not that.” Duncan said. “We’re triplets.”

“Aren’t…” Klaus paused, glancing at Sunny, “Aren’t triplets usually three children born at the same time?”

“They are.” Isadora said. “We…” she took a deep breath. “Duncan?”

“Our… our parents died in a car accident.” Duncan said. “Someone drove them off the road, they think; the police told us it was a hit-and-run, probably an accident or a drunk driver. They were going to pick up Quigley from the theater, he used to do classes there…”

“He was in the car with them.” Isadora finished, not meeting Klaus’s eye.

“That’s terrible.” Klaus said. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not like you could’ve known.” Duncan shrugged. “Nobody knows, and it’s almost like nobody listens when we tell them-”
“We’re missing a sibling, too.” Klaus said. He didn’t mean to interrupt, but it almost spilled out.

Isadora and Duncan turned to stare at him. “What?” Isadora asked.

“Vi.” Sunny said quietly.

“Our older sister, Violet.” Klaus said quietly. “They…” he took a deep breath. He glanced at Sunny, asking with his eyes, and she nodded; they should tell them. If they were going to be living with them, they should know. “They said she died in the fire, but we were there, we saw… they think we hallucinated.”

Isadora and Duncan both suddenly looked very interested. “Hallucinated what?” Duncan asked, breathlessly.

Klaus took a deep breath. “Her body was fake. We saw her body; it was faked, she didn’t have…” well, they didn’t need to know about the marks. “But they didn’t believe us. But we know, she was kidnapped. We saw these… these people set our house on fire, they…” his voice broke slightly. “They killed our parents. And they took Violet, we saw them drag her off before we ran… I swear, I swear we’re not lying, and we’re not crazy, we’re not, someone kidnapped our sister and nobody’s listening to us.”

“Mills!” Sunny said, which meant, “I can confirm, she was kidnapped, and Klaus isn’t lying.”

There was a bit of silence, as Duncan and Isadora stared at each other. Then, Isadora said something very unexpected. “This is great!”

Klaus froze for a second, and then said, “What?”

“No! No, sorry, I-” Isadora sat up, laughing slightly, looking relieved.

Duncan looked the same. “Klaus, she said that because…”

“Because we don’t think Quigley’s dead, either.” Isadora said.

Klaus stared at them. “What do you mean?”

“We think,” Duncan nodded, “Our brother was kidnapped, too.”
Before they could say more, they heard a clock chime, and Isadora said, “Shit! We have to go to dinner.”

“Maybe we can stay behind.” Duncan suggested. “If Klaus’s sibling-”

“And face Esme and Carmelita?” Isadora gave him a look. “Not today, I had to deal with enough shit at school. Klaus, Sunny, we’ll find you a decent outfit, and then we can talk more later, alright?”

“This isn’t really a ‘later’ discussion.” Klaus protested.

“It is when Esme wants us to do something.” Isadora said seriously. “She doesn’t like when we don’t follow orders.”

“Orders?” Klaus asked, as Duncan stood up and grabbed his hand to pull him off the bed. “She’s our Foster Parent, not a Military Instructor.”

“Oh, boy, we have a lot to teach you.” Isadora said.

They went into the closet then, and Isadora showed him some drawers on the side that held casual outfits. He picked a red sweater with a white undershirt, and Isadora managed to find him some pants. While Klaus got changed behind the dividers, Isadora and Duncan found baby clothes for Sunny, and once Klaus was done he helped her get changed, too.

“You’re lucky,” Isadora said, once Klaus zipped Sunny’s dress up. “Esme got me and Duncan matching outfits cause she thinks it’s cute to have ‘matching twins’, and if we wear anything else she gets upset.”

“She didn’t seem particularly interested in us.” Klaus shrugged.

“She’s not, so long as we don’t embarrass her.” Duncan said. “I think she only fosters kids cause the government pays her to.”

“She’ll probably give you the spiel while at dinner,” Isadora said, “And we can fill you in on everything she forgot.”

“How long has Carmelita been here?” Klaus asked, picking up Sunny as Duncan went to open the door.

“Oh, way longer than us.” Isadora said. “She calls Esme ‘Mom’ sometimes, I sometimes wonder if she’s actually her daughter.”

“It would make sense,” Duncan said, holding open the door for the others. “They’re equally rude.”
“I just assumed they made bad first impressions.” Klaus said.

“Nope.” Isadora and Duncan both said.

They managed to reach the foyer by five-thirty, when Carmelita ran down, her hair now in a high ponytail. “Hello, cakesniffers.” she said, scanning them. “You all look like shit.”

“So do you.” Duncan said, without even thinking.

Carmelita stuck her tongue out at him, and Esme entered from another room, now dressed in what looked like a fusion of a turtleneck sweater and a jumpsuit, colored bright purple.

“Ah, good, you all look presentable.” Esme said. “Now, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but there are quite a lot of you now. So we’ll all have to stick together, or I’ll have CPS yelling at me again.”

“I can just trip them up on the way in.” Carmelita suggested, playing with a loose strand of hair.

“Thank you, darling, but unfortunately that looks bad to them.” Esme said. “Everyone walk to the car, and Carmelita will pick the restaurant again.”

Duncan and Isadora shared an annoyed glance, while Carmelita grinned. “Well, it’s the new kids’ first day,” she said sweetly, “So we’ll just take them to Cafe Salmonella.”

“Cafe what?” Klaus asked.

“Excellent!” Esme said, leading the way out. “Salmon is very In!”

“Very what?”

“Oh, you poor boy.” Duncan sighed.

“For starters,” Esme said across the table, “There are certain things that are ‘In’, and certain things that are ‘Out.’”

The restaurant was much fancier than Klaus had anticipated, and he kept glancing around, wondering if people were staring at him, if he was underdressed or overdressed, or if people were wondering who the new kids with Esme were.

Duncan and Isadora both picked out a soup very quickly, and Klaus just followed their lead, not understanding a lot of the words on the menu. When the dishes were delivered, he just requested a small side-cup and poured some of his soup in for Sunny. She didn’t seem very interested, though, instead spending her time ripping napkins apart. Carmelita and Esme had ordered the same dish as each other, and Carmelita was currently staring at her foster parent with a bright smile on her face, eagerly anticipating the next conversation.

“In and Out?” Klaus asked.

“For example,” Esme said, “At the moment, salmon is In, herring is Out.”

“Slap bracelets are In,” Carmelita said, gesturing to the five on her arm, “And those dumb after-school specials are Out.”
“Pinstripe suits are In,” Esme added, “Which is what’s in your closet, for when we go somewhere fancier. And at your school, Uniforms are In.”

“There are only a few non-uniform things you’re allowed to wear.” Isadora said. “You can wear, uh, headbands, and legwarmers, if they’re not too bright—”

“And slap bracelets!” Carmelita added, waving her arm again.

Klaus looked at the slap bracelets. They didn’t look very secure, but they might blend in more than his bracelet, which was still on his wrist; he hadn’t figured out how to take it off alone even if he wanted to. “Interesting.” he said.

“Ah, you’ve got it.” Esme said. She had a drink in her hand that Klaus really hoped wasn’t alcoholic. “Alright, some more things about living in my house. Just because I’m your new parent and I care about you doesn’t mean that I want to see you all the time. So I don’t want to hear about any problems you might have unless it effects me.”

Klaus stared for a second, shocked by her forwardness. “Uh… okay.”

“I am very busy at work,” Esme said, “So most of the time I won’t even be able to see you. Just don’t die and don’t be too rude to the staff that comes around to clean.”

“I’d like to not be rude—”

“And, if you need anything, Carmelita’s in charge.” Esme said.

“That’s right, cakesniffers.” Carmelita laid back in her chair, putting her feet up on the table.

Duncan and Isadora both gave Klaus a can you believe this? look. He simply glanced at Sunny, who said, “Jillson.” “Brat.”

“Oh, what else?” Esme asked, pausing. “Oh! You better be dressing well at all times, you don’t want to embarrass me in public.”

“We’ll make sure he only has appropriate outfits.” Duncan said, sounding like he’d rather be doing anything else.

“And I don’t really think there’s a way to dress a baby badly.” Isadora said.

“Well, you clearly have never seen any of those babies on television.” Esme laughed slightly. “You’ll go to school in the mornings, and then if I get off early we’ll have dinner somewhere; otherwise, there are leftovers all over the house, I’m sure you can dig something out. Or you can order a pizza.”

“I can try and cook if you want.” Klaus suggested.

“Mm, no.” Esme said. “Anyone want dessert?”

“It’s salmon themed.” Duncan warned.

“Oh, we are definitely having dessert.” Carmelita said, leaning back a bit more in her chair.

Klaus glanced at the triplets, who looked like they were dying inside.
Esme disappeared into one of the rooms once they got home, and Klaus said, “Is there anything else we should know?” He adjusted his hold on Sunny, who’d fallen asleep on the car ride back.

“I’m in charge.” Carmelita said.

“Yes, he heard that.” Duncan rolled his eyes. “Um, don’t talk back unless you want screamed at.”

“Try not to mention anything upsetting.” Isadora added. “Like, you know, conspiracies and shit.”

“Get her cool presents every now and again, especially if you think you’ve pissed her off.”

“But that probably won’t happen, because she’s barely here.”

“Oh.” Duncan hesitated. “And, uh, there is… one more thing.” He and Isadora shared a hesitant glance.

“What?” Klaus asked, glancing between them.

“Um…” Isadora said. “Sometimes Esme’s… boyfriend comes over. And, uh, if he… stays the night… we kinda get locked out of the house.”

“Really?” Klaus asked, mortified.

“It’s not that bad!” Dustin said. “There’s a shed in the back, it’s warm enough and big enough we can all sleep in there.”

“You just have to listen to Carmelita.” Isadora said.

“As if that’s a problem.” Carmelita huffed. “I have the best ideas.”

“Not while we’re trying to sleep.” Isadora retorted.

“Speaking of which,” Carmelita said, turning around with a smirk on her face, “Shouldn’t you be getting to bed?”

Hesitantly, Isadora and Duncan looked towards Klaus. “We were hoping to finish helping Klaus set up.” Duncan said.

“Oh, no, you know how Esme gets about sleep schedules. If we stay up too late or make too much noise we’ll distract her or keep her awake, which she doesn’t like, or we’ll be super tired and fall asleep during school,” Carmelita ranted, “And they’ll call her into the office and she’ll have to come in, or if we’re all awake too late she thinks we might climb out a window and run into the street or something and then CPS will have to come in…”

“Oh, okay, we get it!” Duncan said. He turned towards Klaus, and said, “Maybe we can… talk in the morning? About the… thing? Before school, or at lunch?”

“Uh, yeah. Sure.” Klaus said, shouldering Sunny. “Are you sure we can’t… talk about… stuff?”

“We will.” Isadora promised. “We really do need to talk.”

“About what? You two going on a date or something?” Carmelita glared.

Isadora rolled her eyes. “As if.” Duncan looked very amused at that.

“Come on, we’ll see you in the morning.” Duncan smiled at Sunny, and then at Klaus. “Make sure
you figure out what you’re doing with Sunny in the morning.”

“Yeah.” Klaus sighed, looking down at his sister. “Yeah. See you soon.”

Isadora closed the door, and then turned towards Duncan. “We were right.”

“Now, Isa,” Duncan said, running to shut the curtains, “We shouldn’t get our hopes up. Just because he also has a sibling who disappeared suspiciously and had their death faked—”

“There’s no way that body was Quigley. You know it.” Isadora said. “You know it. It wasn’t him, it couldn’t be—”

“I’m not saying that.” Duncan said. “I know that body was fake. But it might not be the same people—”

“You think two different groups of people,” Isadora glared at him, “Are running around killing parents, kidnapping their children and dropping fake bodies?”

“We don’t know.” Duncan shrugged. “Maybe their parents pissed somebody off, and Violet was kidnapped for vengeance reasons? Maybe whoever killed our parents is trying to steal our money. We’ve got that as a possibility, right?”

“We’ve got the sapphires written down, yeah.” Isadora said, sitting on the bed and pushing a strand of hair behind her ear. “You think they’d… hold Quigley until he hits eighteen and steal our money? If they were planning on that, you’d think they’d take you, you’re the oldest.”

“By seven minutes!” Duncan said, moving to sit beside her. “It doesn’t matter, the money’ll get split between all of us. And we don’t know if they picked Quigley, it was probably whoever was closest.”

“Or maybe our parents pissed somebody off.” Isadora pulled her notebook out of her pocket, flipping through pages of poems and notes on books from the library. “We wrote that down, right? Now that we know other families are being affected, we can rule out Quigley being kidnapped randomly.”

“I still don’t think they’d have enemies.” Duncan sat next to her, pulling out his own notebook. “Father and Mother mostly just controlled the business and went to fancy parties. It’d have to be fortune-related- and we don’t know it’s connected, if you’re bringing that girl’s disappearance into this again—”

“Or…” Isadora glanced towards Duncan. “It could be the Other Thing.”

Duncan stared at her, and then said, “Nobody knows about that.”

“You know why we… Mother said people tried to take us away as babies. Maybe they tried again.”

“Father said they couldn’t find us. They wouldn’t be able to find us.” Duncan said.

“Maybe he was wrong!”

“He can’t have been. He can’t have… it wouldn’t have… nobody knows. Nobody knows, Isa.”

“Well, Quigley’s kidnappers definitely know by now.” Isadora glared at him. “You think they
wouldn’t-”

“I’d like,” Duncan said, “To not think about it.”

“We have to! If we’re going to find Quigley-”

“We’ll find out who has him first!” Duncan snapped, turning towards Isadora. “And then we’ll worry about everything else!” She flinched a bit, hurt, and he sighed. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have… It’s just unfair.”

“Everything’s unfair.” Isadora said. “We’ve been here for weeks, and we can’t find shit in the Library, and we haven’t found any clues- at least that you’ll acknowledge.”

“Those missing people,” Duncan said, “Can’t be connected to this. They disappeared in incredibly different circumstances, the official report says that- what’s her name? Martha? She probably ran away and the other guy probably fell into some hole in the woods-”

“You think that a bunch of disappearances, only a few months after we arrived, is a coincidence?”

“Yes. If it was the people who took Quigley, you’d think they’d be after us, not some random people-”

“Yeah,” Isadora bit her lip, glaring at the wall, “The kidnappers haven’t even come after us. We’ve gone months without news of them, so you’d think that… I sometimes wish they would come.”

“Isadora!”

“Then we’d at least be with him!” Isadora said, gripping the edge of the bed. “And he wouldn’t- he wouldn’t be alone, and we wouldn’t be wondering where he is or what they’re doing to him, or…”

Duncan leaned over and grabbed her hand. “Hey. Hey. It’s okay. We’ll find him.”

Isadora couldn’t hold back her tears anymore; starting to sob, she said, “What are they doing to him? What do they want him for? Duncan, do you know how many… how many terrible things people would do to… I don’t want to think about it, but he’s alone out there and nobody can protect him and…”

“We’ll find him.” Duncan said. “We’ll find him and we’ll get him out. Then we’ll bring him back here, we’ll all be together. You’ll see.”

Isadora hesitantly wiped her eyes with her sleeve. “You think Esme would adopt him, too?”

“She might not want six children.” Duncan said, then paused. “Seven, if we find Klaus’s sister, if she’s connected to this, too. But then we’ll just leave. I’m not letting us get split up. I can probably get a writing job somewhere.”

He paused, and then leaned over, hugging her. Isadora hugged him back, tightly. “We won’t let them keep him away from us.” he said solemnly. “We’ll figure it out.”

Then, slowly, Isadora said, “You don’t think that.”

Duncan paused. “What?”

“You’re scared, too.”
Duncan pulled away, staring at her, trying to hide his shock. “Why would you say that?”

Isadora looked at him, then glanced down at the bed, looking suddenly blank. “Dunno. Guess it’s a triplet thing, right?”

Duncan bit his lip. “You’re just worried. It’s okay. I swear, we’ll figure it out, I’m not lying.”

“I hope we find Klaus’s sister, too.” Isadora said. “And we can all be together. And… I hope Klaus has stuff to tell us. He said that he saw his sister get kidnapped, right? Maybe he can help us.”

“Yeah. It’s nice to have a lead.” Duncan said.

“Yeah.” Isadora smiled slightly.

Duncan paused, staring at her, and then said, “Isa? You’ve got another nosebleed.”

Isadora narrowed her eyes, confused, and then turned towards the mirror hanging on the wall; shit, he was right. She moved to the desk, looking for the tissue box. “Are you okay?” Duncan asked.

“Yeah. Probably just…” Isadora shrugged. “Maybe that’s a triplet thing too, huh?”

“Mine aren’t that random, you know that.”

Isadora grabbed a tissue, and flinched as her sleeve rolled up, and she could see the 009, obvious against her skin. Shit, they should probably raid Carmelita’s makeup again; the long sleeves wouldn’t hide them forever.

“Do you really think it wasn’t the numbers?” she asked, turning around. “And the people who gave them to us?”

Duncan glanced down at his own wrist- 008 - and said, “They wouldn’t find us. And nobody else knows.”

Isadora hesitantly nodded, and as she turned and walked away from the desk, she managed to miss the lamp starting to flash.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is heavy angst and me having lots of anxiety so hope you all are gonna have fun with that
Violet didn’t know how she managed to fall asleep, but she couldn’t remember her dreams once she woke up. She’d be surprised if she slept more than a few hours; after that man- Olaf?- had run off, she’d been shoved into her room and left there, alone. She hadn’t found anything useful her second time searching the room, nor her third or fourth, and no matter how many times she pounded on the door, nobody answered. So, she may have crashed on the bed for a bit. Shit, had she been crying? It was a bit hard to remember… everything was kind of a blur.

Violet sat up, sighing and staring around the room. Last week, she’d awoken to the sound of Sunny crying because Klaus had tripped in the hallway, spilling books on the floor and waking her up; Sunny would wake up from the smallest of noises. Klaus had come running to hide with Violet, not wanting to get yelled at for waking the baby.

“Well, Klaus…” Violet muttered, staring into space, “Mother and Father can’t yell at you anymore. It’s just us, and I know you didn’t mean to wake Sunny up. Hopefully Sunny’s asleep right now.” She curled up, pulling her hospital gown down as far as it would go.

She used to drag Klaus into her room when she was working on an invention or experiment or repair, when she had a problem and needed to talk through it. He always listened, sitting on her bed and trying to offer advice, even when he had no idea what she was talking about. It always helped her work through her issue when she had someone to talk it out with.

Well, he wasn’t here now, but she could pretend he was, and maybe she could still talk her way out.

“Hopefully you two are safe. Maybe Olaf was bluffing when he said he could take you at any time. He just wants me to cooperate. But if I do, who knows what they could make me do? And if I don’t… what if he thinks I’m lying, and he takes you instead?”
She started crying, and she said, “Klaus, what… what am I?”

She could throw things with her mind, and she’d been kidnapped because of that. Her Mother could summon fire out of her hands - shit, is that why she wore the gloves? How did she get her burns- she’d jumped through fire fine, she couldn’t imagine she wasn’t immune to it.

Had she actually seen a mark on her Mother’s arm, or was that a last hallucination before getting knocked out? Why wouldn’t her Mother tell her she had a mark? She could’ve used that to make her and Klaus feel better, show them that it wasn’t just them, that she had to hide it, too. Why didn’t she show them that she could summon fire? Why didn’t…

“What didn’t Mother tell us anything?” Violet asked aloud. “Or Father? He had to know… he had to know some of it… did he have a mark, too?”

She suddenly turned, punching her pillow. “Why didn’t they tell us shit? If they had, maybe we could’ve known what we were up against! We could’ve known that this… this place thinks we’re their property! We could’ve known that we might be able to do insane, impossible things! That people would try to kidnap or kill us! If they’d have told us, maybe they’d still be alive!”

She froze for a moment, realizing what she’d said. Then she burst into sobs, hugging her knees and rolling back, falling onto the bed and curling up, not caring who might be watching her from the security camera or how weak she must look. She just couldn’t understand what was happening, and she couldn’t understand why she’d never been warned, why her parents had been so secretive. Did they think she wouldn’t get it? Did her parents think she’d run off to find these people for some reason, or that she’d just go paranoid? What about this could possibly be worth hiding?

And now she was in danger, and so were Klaus and Sunny.

“How could they?” she cried into the blanket. “How could they put you through this? You and Sunny didn’t do anything wrong. You don’t… you can’t do anything like me. You’re not like me and Mother. And you had to watch her die.”

She had to watch that, too. And that was the worst thing she’d ever seen.

“Did you see Father die, too? Or did they kill him before you got out? How long was he dead for? Did they leave him and Mother there, on the ground? Does anyone even know we’re gone?”

God, she wished Klaus was actually able to talk to her. She wanted to know he was safe, wanted to know he was far away where these people couldn’t get to him, and then she could figure out what to do for herself.

“I’m not going to abandon you.” Violet said, still sobbing. “I’m going to protect you. I don’t care what they do to me. I’m not going to let them take you, too.”

She cried for a lot longer, and she lost track of the time; it wasn’t like she had a clock or anything. But when she’d calmed down, and was just lying, numbly, on the sheets, staring at the wall for what had to be several minutes, she heard footsteps approach, and the door opened.

Violet sat up, glaring at the woman who came in. She scanned her quickly; same coat as the other doctors, hair all pinned up… she was carrying a glass of water for some reason. The woman stopped in front of the bed, and then said, “How are you feeling?”

“Like shit.” Violet said harshly.

“I’m afraid that’s to be expected.” the woman said. “You unfortunately were given a lot of
sedatives before you arrived.” She passed the glass to Violet, and once she took it, she said, “Drink this, it’ll help with the headache.”

Violet hadn’t even noticed she had one. Great. She shot the woman another glare, and then said, “I’m not drinking this.”

“Why not?”

“It could be poisoned.” Violet said. “You could’ve decided I’m useless and decided to kill me to cover your tracks.”

The woman said, in a scarily nonchalant manner, “If we wanted you dead, we wouldn’t resort to forcing you to kill yourself.”

“It’d look like an accident or suicide.” Violet replied. “Then nobody could trace it to you, or try to find the murderer.”

“We could do anything we want.” the woman snapped. “Mostly because everyone already thinks you’re dead.”

Violet froze. “What?”

The woman sighed. “We created a fake corpse for you once we found out where you were, and simply planted it among the debris. You’re already dead, Seven, so nobody would go looking for your body anyway.”

Violet started shaking, holding back even more tears. No, no, they couldn’t have… they had to be bluffing. If everyone thought she was dead… if Klaus and Sunny thought she was dead…

No, no. They saw her getting kidnapped, they saw her… right?

The woman pushed a bit on the cup in her hands. “Drink it.”

Violet shut her eyes, and drank the water.

She almost immediately started gagging. “Fuck, it’s…” It was only very, very mild, but it tasted almost bitter. So mild she might not have noticed it if she wasn’t actively paying attention, to see if the water tasted wrong.

“Well, we put some medication in there. For the headaches.”

“Why?”

“We can’t have our girl feeling bad during her first tests, can we?”

Violet huffed and finished the glass of water, before moving to put it on her bedside table; instead, the woman took it. Shit, she was hoping she’d be able to leave that there, maybe break the glass and make something out of it later. She thought the makeshift ribbon was still in the drawer with the stuffed whale, but she hadn’t looked since she placed it there after her fifth checkthrough of the room; for all she knew, they’d confiscated that while she was asleep.

“Come along, we have a room for you.” the woman said.

“This is my room.”

“For testing.”
“I’m not doing your sick tests.” Violet spat.

“Well, we need to know your powers are functioning.”

“They’re not, I can’t make them work.”

“We can change that. Come on, let’s take just a little trip.”

Violet paused as she stood up, letting the woman lead her into the hall, where the guards grabbed her arms again to lead her somewhere. A little trip- Olaf had said that, right before she was dragged out again; “Once we’ve dealt with this, we’ll start the trips.”

Where exactly were they taking her? Maybe they had different hospitals, different... labs? Maybe they had rooms they rarely used. Maybe they were going to torture her. She flinched at the thought as the guards dragged her down another hall, struggling to keep up with them. What would she do if they just started torturing her? What if they tried to get information out of her, on her parents or siblings? Well, in that case, they’d have to kill her, because she didn’t know shit. Maybe that’s why her parents never told her anything, so they couldn’t get any information out of her.

It took them almost five minutes (and two flights of stairs) to reach the new room, and when the woman opened the door, one of the guards pushed Violet in, and then shut and locked the door.

Violet paused, then scanned the room, using one hand to hold her hair back so she could take in more of it. There was one meral table in the middle of the room, and two chairs on either end, made of the same material. There were some items on top, but even as she approached, picking each one up in turn and investigating it, she didn’t find anything remotely similar; there was an empty cereal box, a dented red bucket, a torn paperback copy of The Haunting of Hill House- something she’d read quite a few times- a hairbrush, and a pair of broken plastic sunglasses. It looked like someone had dumped a trashcan onto the table and called it a day.

She looked around more; aside from the locked door, one wall held a mirror that she was certain was a one-way. There was no way they’d leave her in here without being able to observe her.

How exactly was this going to work? Violet sat down, staring at the items. Maybe they were going to do some kind of mental test, make her choose between them? Maybe they’d see which ones she could throw with her mind, and push her until she actually made something fly. Maybe she could make the door throw itself open. Maybe she could make herself fly, and she could leave.

She noticed another camera in the corner. Maybe they were recording this, too? Maybe people who weren’t on the other side of the mirror wanted to watch this, too. What on Earth could they be doing in here?

She picked up the book, flipping to the first page. She could re-read a bit while she was waiting; what else could she do? Sit and worry and wonder if Klaus and Sunny thought she was dead? She could at least do something different, something to distract her from whatever was about to happen.

A lot of the words were faded, and it was almost a slog to get through the first few pages over the next several minutes; she had to strain to pick up on certain words, and had to fill in some blanks with her memory of the first chapter. This book couldn’t be that old; from what she remembered, it was about... twenty years old? Not old enough to be this faded and broken, unless it was either well-loved or completely hated.

Still, everything seemed... not alright, but passably tense... until she got to page ten.

She noticed first that the page number was circled in a dark color, darker than the rest of the text;
someone had marked it with a pen. Violet glanced down at the page, remembering the scene of Eleanor running into an old woman, and helping her pick up her packages before paying for her taxi; the woman had been surprised at Eleanor’s willingness to help. A bit of an odd scene, and Klaus had ranted to her for a bit about what it could symbolize, before she’d thrown a pillow at his head and told him it was probably just filler. He’d gotten mad at her for that; to think, they’d thought that was something to be upset over.

Violet frowned, staring at the page again. A letter was darker than the others; a D from the “Damn you damn you!” the woman had said when Eleanor had first run into her. Almost as if the pen that had circled the number had filled that in.

“D.” Violet muttered, staring at the page. There- an n was darkened, from another damn you. Wait… there was an o inbetween the D and n, from a close. She scanned the page, seeing a t from bent.

Don’t. Off to a great start- oh, and whoever had highlighted even darkened an apostrophe from I’m. Don’t. Grammatically correct, at least.

The next letter she saw was an r, from her. Then an entire in, and a k from pocketbook. Don’t rink? What could…

Well, fuck.

Violet realized that, above the r, a d had been darkened, down.

She didn’t have to look for the other darkened letters to realize she’d fucked up.

Don’t drink.

There were other letters, and she guessed they probably said something like Don’t drink the water. It didn’t matter; she’d already fucked up in that regard and-

Something was wrong.

Violet stared down at the book, confused. She felt… almost a buzzing. She was buzzing?

She threw the book onto the table, staggering out of the chair and against the wall. She’d been right, she shouldn’t have drunk the water. What would they have done if she’d just poured it on the ground? They might’ve just grabbed another glass and forced her to drink it. But had they actually poisoned her? Maybe they were bluffing, they didn’t have a fake body, they were going to make it look like a suicide…

Oh, fuck.

She’d been thinking of the wrong definition of the word trip.

Normally, the word trip was a word that simply referred to a journey to a different place.

Unless you were referring to drugs.

“What the fuck did you do?” Violet muttered, staring at the ground.

Gradually, as she stared at the ground, she felt like she could see too much. The floor was shiny, she could see all the specks, she could see the lights from above shining off of it. The chairs and table were the same metal as each other, and the gray suddenly looked so bright. She could
smell… something? What was she smelling? Was it from the bucket? It didn’t smell like the bucket. Maybe it was that cereal- didn’t smell like cereal. What was…

“What the fuck did you do?” Violet yelled, and suddenly she felt a very bad burst inside, as if all her energy had just thrown itself at her. She yelled, rushing to the door, trying the handle; it was locked, she knew that, she had to know that.

Something was wrong, something was so wrong. It felt like something was… morphing. The table, the chairs, the trash… she reached forwards, almost as if she could touch them from there… she almost felt like she could, she could touch the gray and the red and the black of the sunglasses and the yellow of the box…

What drugs could do this? She hadn’t read up on drugs much, but she and Klaus had seen some anti-drug PSAs during the rare occasion they turned on the TV. They didn’t tell you what they did, really, just that it “felt good” and then made you feel worse later.

Well, they were a bit wrong. Because she felt awful.

Fear was building in her chest, along with that burst of energy, and for several minutes, she just stood in place, breathing hard, eyes wide. She was muttering… something? But she didn’t hear it. She thought she heard music- fuck, it was *Row Your Boat*. She couldn’t hallucinate another song, really? Couldn’t she change it? Couldn’t she change anything? She couldn’t change anything, she couldn’t make anything better, she couldn’t fix it, she couldn’t think of anything, her ribbon was gone, she couldn’t… could she invent something? To stop this?

She stumbled towards the table, and it took her a minute to get there and start sorting through items. There were so many colors- she hadn’t seen all the blues and yellows on the table before. And they seemed to blinding- too bright, too big. She didn’t like this, she didn’t like it at all. Almost as if the colors themselves could jump out and hurt her. They might, maybe, they might…

The bucket was too red. She picked it up and hurled it, stepping back a bit. It felt wrong. It was wrong. Everything was wrong. Things needed to stop being wrong. Everything needed to be okay again. She needed to… she couldn’t make everything okay again. The book was face-down on the table from where she’d thrown it. The pages were torn. She’d killed them, she’d killed the pages… the one who’d darkened the letters hadn’t killed the pages but she had, who had darkened the letters?

Too much was happening. Too much was happening and she was thinking too much and the room was shrinking, it was shrinking and the mirror was too bright and the bucket was too bright and the book and sunglasses and box were too bright and the table was too bright and she was being crushed, crushed by everything, and she was crying? Was she crying? How long was she crying? Two seconds? Two minutes? Two hours? She stood there and cried and she didn’t even know how long. She didn’t know how long anything is, everything was too long. It was too long, too long, too long.

She finally ran to the mirror, her legs feeling numb, pounding on it, even as the sound made her shut her eyes. “Stop it!” she yelled. “Stop it, make it stop! Make it stop, make it stop, make it stop!”

Nobody was going to help her. Nobody could help her. They were all evil, they’d done this to her, she was on her own, but even she couldn’t help herself, she couldn’t fix it like she’d fixed things before, everything she’d fixed before had burned up, it had set on fire, she hadn’t fixed anything after all. What was the point? What was the *point*?
“Make it stop!” she screamed again, but she moved away from the mirror, putting her hands over her ears, because everything was too loud.

She was shaking, she thought. Shaking and crying and she felt hot, she felt so hot, it was so hot, they’d set her on fire, she was on fire, she couldn’t see the fire but she felt it, and she was in the corner now, crying and shaking and she might’ve thrown up, she didn’t know how long she was there, shaking and crying, and everything was too hot and too scary and too big and too small and too pressuring and too loud and too loud and too loud and too loud and too loud and too loud and too loud…

She let out a piercing shriek.

The table, the chairs, and the bucket threw themselves into the air; the box, sunglasses and the book clattered to the ground, lifeless. They were flying, and she was still screaming, and she might be bleeding, and the door was… the door had flown off its hinges, and she could see people rush in, and voices were coming from everywhere, and she was hearing things and seeing things and too much was happening and the world was too loud and too big and something was happening to her, they’d drugged her and... and so much was happening... and those things were still floating, but now they hit the men, they hit the men who ran in and she was still screaming, and she shut her eyes to stop hearing things, but that didn’t seem right but it didn’t matter, and she stood up and ran, and her feet were hot, she was barefoot, she could feel everything on the ground, every little thing, it was too hot, too loud, too much, too much…

Someone stuck something in her arm. Or her leg? She screamed again, and she saw another door flying, or maybe she was imagining- no, no, the door broke the windows. She ran, because something hit whoever grabbed her arm, and she was free for just a moment, she pulled something out of her arm, she could see out the window, there was a forest and it was too green and a fence that was too bright and…

And…

Something had been in her arm. Something was…

She was so tired.

She thought she heard a “Very good.” A “Well done.” A “We think we know what you can do now.” A “We’ll wake you when the LSD is out of your system.”

But she might’ve imagined that.

She fell on the ground, and it was too hot, and she thought… she thought she saw a monster in front of her. But that might just be the guards.

She shut her eyes, and blacked out.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's Chapter: We run into a few kiddos who haven't had POVs in a while...
The boy curled up in the hole, and talked through his sobs.

“My name is Quigley Quagmire.”

“My name is Quigley Quagmire.”

He was still in the dark, but he was farther from the Lab now. He’d wandered through the woods for who knew how long - the sky never changed, so he didn’t even know how many days it had been. Everything was so cold and wrong, and all he could do was curl up under trees whenever he heard roars or suspicious noises, and whisper to himself, remind himself who he was.

“My name is Quigley Quagmire.” he said again. “Not Ten. I’m not Ten. I’m Quigley Quagmire. Duncan and Isadora are still out there. My parents are… my parents are probably dead. Those people killed them to kidnap me.”

He didn’t really know that, to be honest; his powers kicked in the second the black car had rammed into theirs, sending them off the road; he’d been terrified, because it had been following them for a while, and it almost seemed like it’d been trying to hit them for several minutes. His parents had been trying to calm him down, telling him they’d take care of it, everything would be okay, but his seatbelt was broken, and he didn’t tell them cause he knew they’d panic, too, but the seatbelt was coming off, and… and then the cars collided, and he had felt more scared than he’d ever been in his life, and he’d… disappeared. The seatbelt came off, and he just… opened his eyes in the woods, watching the car fall. Then someone had knocked him out, he thought, it all got very blurry…

He was Ten to them, and he knew a little bit about them. His parents had told him and his siblings very little, saying that they didn’t want their children to be worried all the time, but they’d told them that they got their numbers from bad people who tried to take them away, thought they never said why, and they had to stay as far away from other people as possible to keep them from being found again. But they’d never told them about the powers, about the fact the people who took them could have found them no matter how isolated they were, what to do if they were captured, what to do if they were left alone…

“My name is Quigley Quagmire.” he said again. “They drugged me. They made me test my powers until I knocked myself out. They hurt me, they shocked me, they threw me into isolation whenever I said ‘no.’ They didn’t think I was human. But I am. I’m a human being, my name is
Quigley Quagmire, and I need to get out of here and find my siblings."

*Oh, and there’s a monster after me, too.*

Quigley had no idea where he was, which was a feeling he didn’t experience all that often; even when they traveled, he made a point to find maps beforehand of the places they might be going to. He was lost in what might be an alternate dimension, and even if he wasn’t, he was in the middle of the woods, alone, with no idea where on Earth he was; they could’ve taken him out of the country for all he knew.

He’d wandered through the woods for a while, but he thought he might be almost out. He’d been hiding in a hole in the ground for a while, having fallen asleep there. He’d gone in because he thought he heard screaming, and no matter how much he wanted to see another human being, he’d rather see one alive.

He felt horrible about that as he walked through the woods. Maybe he should have gone after the person. Maybe the Monster was attacking them, and he could teleport them somewhere. Maybe he could’ve saved someone. Maybe he’d just *let someone die.*

Or maybe he’d saved himself. There was no way he could face that Monster. He couldn’t fight it, he just had to *keep going.*

He stumbled out of the trees, and it took him a few steps to realize he had made it out of the woods; everything was covered in slime and vines and mold and was all in shades of blue. But when Quigley looked around, he noticed buildings under the vines, and broken roads under his feet instead of damp grass.

“Well, here’s something.” he muttered, hugging himself as he walked. It was still freezing, but he was hoping he was getting more used to it. He wondered how he’d feel once he got back home; would everything feel really hot? That might be nice. Anything would be nice right about now.

He wandered through the streets for a bit, not sure exactly what he was doing. Maybe he should go back to the woods. He was too open here; if the Monster was nearby, it should be able to see him here. But… it was something different. Something new.

And he felt like he should be here.

He couldn’t explain it, but while wandering through the town, he felt a sort of… pang. Like a sadness, but… not his. He’d been feeling plenty sad, but this felt different. And he felt his feet carrying him across the street, down several roads, down a couple bends. He was following a feeling, going by instinct, and after a few turns, he started running, scared he might lose this. He’d spent his entire time in this strange place in complete confusion, feeling so lost and scared, and now he felt he had *something,* something to find.

He finally skidded to a stop outside one of the houses, the place just feeling *right.* It was tall, and he had to push aside a root in order to get through the broken door, but it didn’t matter, he was filthy anyway. He wandered up a large staircase, jumping over holes and gripping the railing for dear life in case one of the steps broke underneath him. He probably shouldn’t be doing this, these buildings all looked incredibly unstable, he should just…

He wandered up a few floors, before stopping outside a room, pushing open a loosely-hanging door and wandering in. Once again, he felt that pang, and stared around; it looked like it used to be a room, with a bed, and a blanket and pillow on the floor, covered by those vines. There was an empty bookshelf, some kind of temporary wall shoved into the corner, half-collapsed, and a filthy
mirror on the wall.

“Where…?” Quigley muttered, and then he felt almost… a burst. He staggered back, and then turned towards the bed, and suddenly he knew what was going on.

“Isadora?”

He couldn’t see her, but he could… he could feel her.

No, no, that couldn’t be possible. Why would she be… well, if he couldn’t see her, she must be in the Other World- the Right World. But still, she shouldn’t be so close, right? This wasn’t their house… wait, shit, if their parents were… but still, Isadora shouldn’t be so close…

He thought he heard a whisper, and Quigley jumped, turning around. The whispers were coming from the bed, too… Duncan. Duncan was here, he was sure of it. They were here, and… and they couldn’t see him. He couldn’t see them, and they couldn’t…

Isadora moved- or, well, the feeling that she was there moved, closer to a table. Quigley followed, standing next to where he thought she might be. He wanted to touch her, to tell her everything was okay, that he was there, that he was trying to get home, maybe he could try to teleport there… but he’d only been able to teleport to places he’d seen before, and he’d only seen this place in this world…

He leaned back, and his hand hit a lamp on the desk.

And the lamp lit up.

Quigley leapt back, rubbing his eyes; the sudden light seemed almost blinding. He stood for a second, breathing hard and keeping his eyes shut. Then he opened them again; Isadora had moved, and the light had gone out. He turned, and he could still hear the whispers from the bed, and Isadora’s… spirit? Well, that was on the floor, with the blankets.

Slowly, Quigley reached for the lamp again. The second he touched it, it lit again. He pulled his hand away, and it darkened.

Huh.

He glanced towards the other side of the room.

Well, if nothing else, he could try to get some attention.

He moved his hand back and forth, lighting the lamp on and off. He kept turning back towards the bed, waiting for them to move.

That’s when he heard it- a distant voice, almost an echo.

“The hell’s wrong with the lamp?”

Duncan. It was Duncan. He was here.

“Just unplug it.” Isadora’s voice sounded, too, very quiet. “We don’t need it.”

“Guys!” Quigley yelled, stepping back. “Guys, it’s me! It’s Quigley!”

He heard the whispering get closer, the words still a bit inaudible… and then it passed him.

“There, that should work.” Duncan said.
“I’m here!” Quigley yelled, as he passed him again. “I’m here! I’m coming home, okay? I’m…”

He doubled over, suddenly overcome by a bit of coughing. He stumbled backwards, and his arm hit the lamp, which lit up and then toppled over, crashing on the ground, part of it shattering.

“No!” Quigley dropped down, trying to pick up the pieces. “No, no, no…”

“What the fuck?” came Isadora’s voice.

“Holy shit!” came Duncan’s.

Since when did they start swearing?

“I can fix it, and you’ll…” Quigley began, knowing full well they couldn’t hear him. “I can fix it, and you’ll see it flashing again, and you’ll know I’m here, and I…”

“I’ll get it.” he heard Isadora say. “Shit, Esme’ll kill us.”

“She won’t notice, she hasn’t even been here.”

“I can fix it.” Quigley said again. “I can-”

He felt something warm, then, and froze. He hadn’t felt something warm in forever, it almost scared him.

There was a shimmer, and then he looked up, and saw Isadora.

She didn’t see him; she was moving around the ground, as if picking up pieces; the lamp must have fallen over where she could see it. And she was almost transparent, glowing a bit. But he could see her; she was dressed in a sweater he’d never seen her wear before, and she was staring at the ground, looking very annoyed.

“Isa?” Quigley’s voice broke.

“I think I got it.” she said, moving to stand up.

Without thinking, Quigley threw his hand out, as if to grab hers; his hand passed right through, but something did happen. She stopped for a moment.

Quigley didn’t know why, but he could almost feel her confusion radiating off of her. He reached out again as she stood up, his hand right where hers was. She stared into a space near him, confused.

“Is something wrong?” came Duncan’s voice.

“It’s cold.” Isadora said.

She paused for a moment, and then turned around, heading back towards the blankets. Quigley watched as she curled up under them, and Duncan said, “Better?”

“Yeah.”

Quigley moved towards the distant whispers on the bed, and waved his hand around, hoping to there! Slowly, his brother appeared, somehow even harder to see than Isadora. He sat up, saying, “Shit, you’re right, it’s freezing.”
“Maybe there’s a draft?” Isadora said, not even turning around.

Quigley bit his lip and sunk to the floor, looking between his siblings, leaning against something that used to be a table.

After a second, Duncan turned around, facing away. Quigley bit his lip, and then said, “Goodnight, guys.”

He curled up on the floor inbetween them, and shut his eyes.

The gas station was busy, which was probably very good. Made it easier to blend into the crowd.

The girl bounced on her heels waiting in line at the counter, glancing around at the people coming through. There were only a few people in line ahead of her, but she’d much rather be outside. She didn’t like hanging around people much. She spotted a Mother dragging her children away from the snack aisle, reminding them that they had food in the car, and two old ladies by the magazines, chatting amiably. There was a guy in the corner of the store who was staring at her, and she scanned him briefly; no, no, he wasn’t a threat. Probably just liked her outfit or something.

She got to the front of the line, and put down several bills, as well as a handful of snacks she’d grabbed and a newspaper off the stand. “And a slushie.” she said.

The man at the counter nodded, barely sparing her a second glance. Once he counted out her change, she shoved it into her pockets, shove the snacks into her bag, and went over to the drinks machine, glancing worriedly at the TV.

They were reporting on a recent crime; a man at the nearby car rental had been found dead; traces of cyanide had been found in his coffee, a good chunk of the money in the place had been stolen, and three of the cars had disappeared. As the girl watched the news, filling up her slushie cup, she wondered how long it would take before two of the cars were found, parked in the middle of the woods and unharmed, after being wiped for prints. She wondered if they’d report on the man himself, and how he really wasn’t worth mourning, anyway. If she had to guess, he’d been smuggling money for a while, and he was a bit of a creeper, too.

“Can’t you just go away?”

Fucking hell, speak of demons like that.

The girl turned, seeing the man who’d been staring at her before, talking to a girl maybe her age. She stared for a moment, watching as the guy said, “Come on, sweetheart, can’t you smile a bit more?”

She capped off her drink, watching the young girl try to pull away. “I’m not alone, my brother’s in the car.”

“Oh, sure.” he didn’t believe her. She was lying, true, but it would probably be better if the man couldn’t tell that. “Come on-”

The girl sighed, putting a lid on her drink, grabbing a handful of straws and shoving them into her bag, before walking over, placing herself inbetween the man and the other girl. “Hey, you wanna leave my friend alone?” she said.

The man gave her a glare, and she felt the young girl relax behind her. “Who the hell are you?”
“I’m her best friend, and we need to be going.”

The man looked her over, and the girl responded in turn; he was in his twenties, maybe, too old to be hitting on girls their age. Dressed well, so he was probably one of those people who could buy off police, or claim innocence very well. Yeah, she knew his type.

“Well, aren’t you a pretty thi-“

“We’ve got to go, Samuel’s waiting for us.” the girl said, grabbing the other girl’s arm with her free hand and walking out with her.

The second they were out the door, the young girl said, “Thank you so much.”

“It’s no problem. I’ve had to deal with creeps before.” she glanced over her shoulder. “I usually deal with them a… different way, but I don’t wanna cause a scene. Has he bothered you before?”

The young girl hesitated. “Um, yes. He… he keeps showing up at work.”

The girl glanced back into the store. “Do you have a ride home?”

“Uh, I’m taking the bus.”

“I’ll wait with you.”

“Oh, no, I don’t wanna keep you up-”

“It’s no trouble. I haven’t go anywhere to be.”

She did wait, actually; five minutes later, when the bus stopped, she watched as the young girl got on, and waved when she saw her in the window.

And when the bus pulled away, she went to her car, put her stuff away, and then went right back into the gas station store.

She spotted the man in the back by the magazines. He spotted her, too, as she walked in, and she walked right up to him, stopping just a few feet away. “So.” she said darkly. “Why do you think it’s okay to harass her?”

“Aw, come on, girlie.” the man said, looking almost smug. “We’re just having a bit of fun.”

“She didn’t seem to be having fun.”

The man then made the unfortunate mistake of grabbing her wrist.

“You don’t have to be jealous, you’re pretty, too.”

The girl glared at him, venom in her eyes. “Let go of me, now.”

“You don’t have to be like that. Don’t be a bitch.”

The girl took a glance around the room; nobody even stopped to look at them. Nobody was paying attention to the man grabbing a teenage girl.

Which meant they wouldn’t pay attention if anything happened to him.

“Come on, now-”
She turned, giving him a glare, and flicked her other wrist slightly.

He froze for a second, confusion suddenly spreading across his face. She ripped her arm away from him, analyzing his reactions. As his face changed, looking suddenly horrified, she smirked.

Then, she said quietly, “Yeah. That’s the feeling of your blood turning to Batrachotoxin. Attacks the nerves, causes paralysis, eventually just shuts down your entire body. Really hard to come in contact with, unless you’re me. And impossible to cure, unless you’re me.” She glanced towards the man on the counter; kinda sucked for him he’d have to report this mess. “If some miracle happens and you survive that,” she said one last time, “Maybe stop hitting on underage girls, yeah?”

She strolled out, then, wiping her bloody nose with her sleeve, and managed to get out of the building before someone noticed the man on the ground.

The girl sat in the driver’s seat, looking over the newspaper.

She’d driven a few miles away before pulling over, eating a bit and flipping through articles. Nothing really caught her eye at first, and she just let the radio announcements play out as she read, trying to make sure nobody interesting was nearby.

It was normal routine as always, until she got to one page, and she caught a name, and completely froze over.

The headline was simple: *Orphans Adopted by Important Financial Advisor.*

But the first line read: *Recently orphaned children, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire, were recently transferred to Hawkins, under the care of Esme Gigi Genevieve Squalor.*

The girl sighed, and then read aloud, “Baudelaire. Hawkins.”

She kept reading, though, fear prickling under her skin. *After their parents and sister died in an accidental housefire, the troubled orphans were put under the custody of their distant relative. “I am always welcome to the children of my good friends,” said Squalor. Indeed, Squalor has taken in three other children: Carmelita Spats, and the other recently orphaned twins, Duncan and Isadora Quagmire.*

“Oh, Goddamnit.” the girl said. She groaned, and repeated, “Baudelaire, Hawkins, Quagmire. Three strikes and you’re out.”

She shoved the newspaper onto the seat next to her, and then pulled her mapbook out of the glove compartment.

“How far am I from Hawkins?” she muttered, scanning the maps until she finally spotted the town; small, pretty far away, not very obvious. Perfect place to hide some immoral experiments. She knew that full well.

She should probably just go in the opposite direction, then. They’d be on their guard there, now they had new kids to play with, and they’d spot her quickly; even her gloves couldn’t hide the 006 forever.

But there were kids there, kids who were targets- at least four, it looked like, maybe even that other foster girl, though she couldn’t remember hearing the name Spats before. Those kids were in
trouble. She couldn’t, in good conscience, abandon them there.

“Well,” the girl sighed, putting the map beside her and starting up the car again, “She who hesitates is lost.”

She hit the gas, and then said to herself, “Alright, Fiona, let’s go fuck with the Department of Energy again.”
Sunny woke up before Klaus, and spent some time staring at the ceiling, humming to herself and glancing around the room. She’d ended up sleeping at the edge of the bed, on an extra pillow Duncan had dug out of a closet. She hadn’t slept great, she kept having this dumb dream where she was falling and couldn’t stop, but she was awake now, and they’d figure out what she was going to do…

“No…”

Sunny sat up, rubbing her eyes. Klaus had muttered something. Was he trying to talk to her? Had she zoned out again?

“No, stop it…”

No, he wasn’t awake yet. Funny, she didn’t know Klaus talked in his sleep. It didn’t sound like a nice conversation, though. Sunny crawled next to him, and once she sat down, she noticed he was starting to move; he kept rolling over, and it looked like he was kicking the sheets.

“Stop it, stop it…”

He must be having a nightmare. That was okay, they’d all had nightmares before. Sunny leaned forwards, poking him. She could just wake him up, then he’d be fine.

“Don’t touch me, let go…”

He sounded so sad. He just needed to wake up, though.

“Let her go…”

Sunny paused. What kind of nightmare was he having?

“Stop it! Stop it!”

Well, it didn’t matter. Sunny poked him again, and yelled indistinctly.

As soon as she shouted, Klaus bolted upright, breathing hard. Sunny suddenly felt very bad; he was pale, he immediately reached to grab onto the sheets, desperate to hold something, and he looked absolutely terrified.

“Sunny?” he said, in a cracked voice.

“Kla?” Sunny asked, moving forwards and sitting beside him.

Klaus turned to her, trying to slow his breathing, rubbing his eyes. “Hey. Hey, I… sorry, I must’ve… must’ve had a… can you get my glasses?”

Sunny nodded, crawling towards the edge of the bed and reaching onto the sidetable, grabbing the
glasses and handing them to her brother. Klaus put them on, saying, “I’m sorry, I… I don’t know what…” Sunny put a hand over his, and he said, “I just… I don’t know, I don’t…”

“Jusatho.” Sunny said, which meant, in this instance, “It’s alright.”

Klaus bit his lip and nodded, before lifting Sunny up. “Come on, let’s figure out what’s up with this whole ‘school’ thing.”

“I would just like to make sure Sunny will be safe.” Klaus said.

He’d managed to catch Esme in the morning, after he’d struggled to tie a tie for almost a half an hour, and was holding Sunny closely, who was still in her nightgown and very concerned about what she was going to be doing.

“Of course she will, she can just stay in your room all day, and I’ll send up some food around lunch.” Esme waved a hand. She had a cup of something in her hand, and looked very annoyed.

“I just… I really don’t want her to get hurt.” Klaus said. “If there’s trouble… can’t I just take her with me?”

“No, they won’t allow you to carry a baby around all day.” Esme sighed.

“Just-”

“Look, she’ll be fine. I’m sure she can watch herself for the day.”

Klaus sighed and watched as Esme left the room, muttering something. He looked down at Sunny, and said, “If there’s any trouble, you find a way to hide until I get home, okay?”

“No.” Sunny yawned, which meant, in this case, “I’m sure there won’t be any trouble, but if there is, I can always bite someone.”

“I can’t lose you, too, okay?” Klaus whispered, slowly placing her on the ground. “You can still go up and down stairs, right?”

“Yes.” Sunny said, which probably meant, “Yes, and I can also find my own food, because I’m sure Esme will forget. I’m not as helpless as you think.”

“I don’t think you’re helpless. I’ve seen the stuff you can do.” Klaus smirked, kneeling down to get eye-level with Sunny. “I just… oh, God, Sunny, please stay safe.”

Sunny smiled at him and nodded. “No.” she repeated.

“Come on, cakesniffer!” Klaus heard Carmelita call from the hall. “If you don’t leave now, I’m going without you!”

Klaus gave Sunny one more, very tight, hug, and then walked off.

“We got the school’s note about you this morning.” Isadora said, flipping over said paper in her hands as they walked down the street. “You’re in most of my classes, so that’s nice. I was worried you’d be a grade lower due to your age but they seem to think this is a decent spot for you. Your schedule’s here, but you can just follow me for today, stick close so you don’t lose me in the
“How loud is it?” Klaus asked worriedly.

Duncan spared him a sympathetic glance. “Pretty loud.”

“Oh, shut up, it’s fine.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. She was skipping ahead of them, but occasionally glanced back to make sure they hadn’t ditched her before she could ditch them.

“Uh, would we have time to talk about… things?” Klaus asked, glancing between the triplets; he’d been up pretty late, wondering if he could risk sneaking out of his room to talk to them at night.

Isadora and Duncan both gave pointed looks towards Carmelita, and then Duncan said, “We can talk at lunch.”

“Yeah, hope you don’t expect me to sit with you.” Carmelita said, glancing at them again. “Because I have actual friends.”

“We are aware.” Duncan rolled his eyes. He glanced towards Klaus apologetically, and said, “We have the same lunch period. See you then?”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded. “Yeah, that’d be… good.”

By the time Klaus sat down at the lunch table, he said, “I hate school.”

The teachers kept staring at him, either as if he was an anomaly or in that sympathetic way, wondering how traumatized this poor child must be. The kids, if they bothered to look at him at all, looked at him as if he was some annoying bug. And the classes were so dull. With the exception of the times Isadora turned in her desk to pull a face at him, he was bored out of his mind, and the fact each class involved them sitting at a desk listening to a useless lecture for an hour drove him insane, or listening to boring stories or working on the stupid measuring system. Not to mention everything felt so… small. So cramped.

“Oh, that was my reaction, too.” said Duncan, as Isadora and Klaus sat down at the corner table, which was empty except for them.

“School is awfully dull and tiring.” Isadora rhymed, almost absent-mindedly. “We find the classes uninspiring.”

“Is it too loud?” Duncan asked sympathetically.

“Yeah, especially now.”

“Klaus got lost on the way to the bathroom in second period.” Isadora said, picking at her food.

“Yeah, well, this place is too big, and I’ve never been here, and everything looks the same.” Klaus said, though he smiled a little. “Not my fault.”

“Did you already have Ms Bass’s math class?” Duncan asked.

“Ugh, yeah.” Klaus said. Then, after a second, he said, “So… are we gonna…”

Isadora and Duncan glanced around; everyone else had sat down and were talking with their own friends, not caring about the three orphans in the corner of the lunchroom. Slowly, they nodded, as
Isadora said, “Keep it quiet.”

“So… you think your brother was kidnapped, too?”

“Yes.” Duncan nodded. “We… have reason to believe someone might try to take him.”

Isadora hesitated. “Um, our Mother told us that when we were babies, someone tried to kidnap us from the hospital, and they never really figured out why.”

“At least they never gave us an explanation.” Duncan said.

“So you think it’s them?” Klaus asked, slightly disappointed. “Is that… all you have to go on?”

The triplets glanced at each other, before Isadora said, “There’s a bit more.”

“The day before… the accident,” Duncan admitted, “We were buying clothes. And, um, we thought people might be following us. But we weren’t sure.”

“Were they wearing dark clothes?” Klaus asked.

“Yes!” Isadora nodded.

“Were they the ones who took your sister?” Duncan asked, pulling a notebook out of his pocket to write things down.

“Yes.” Klaus said. “We were… we were followed while we were out, too. They tried to take all of us, but Mother stopped them. Well…” he hesitated. “I think they were… they didn’t seem to care about Sunny, and that… that scared me. They would’ve killed her if she bothered them too much, she’s just a baby… maybe I should go back to the house and check on her—”

“Oh, no, you’ll miss the next class.” Isadora said sympathetically. “You don’t wanna get in trouble like that.”

“I just…” Klaus glanced towards the door, still feeling very nervous. “Don’t want her to get hurt.”

Duncan leaned over, putting a hand over Klaus’s. “Hey, don’t worry.” he said comfortingly. “It’ll be okay. We’ll make sure nobody hurts her. Or you.”

Klaus had no idea why he suddenly felt very warm and very embarrassed. “Um… thanks.” he said, glancing down at Duncan’s hand on his. “Thanks.” He glanced back up, and said, “I… do you have any idea what they could’ve gone after you for?”

Duncan and Isadora shared a look, a look where they were silently deciding what to say. Then, Duncan slowly pulled his hand back, playing with the edge of his sleeve, and said, “No.”

Klaus glanced down at his arm; his sleeve covered the bracelet very well. “I don’t, either. My parents never said anything about it.”

“Maybe our parents pissed someone off but didn’t think they could find them.” Isadora suggested.

Klaus hesitated, and then said, “Did, uh, did you guys get a fake body? For your brother.”

Duncan and Isadora nodded. “But it wasn’t him.” Duncan said. “We…”

“He was missing a birthmark.” Isadora said quickly.
“Same with Violet.” Klaus said. “Guess whoever made the bodies didn’t think anyone would notice.”

“Did anyone believe you when you told them the body was fake?” Isadora asked quietly.

Klaus shook his head. “But, hey, once we can prove something weird’s going on, someone will listen to us, right?”

Duncan and Isadora didn’t look so optimistic, but they nodded.

After a hesitant second, Duncan glanced at him, a little hopeful, and said, “Do you think your parents’ bodies may have been faked, too?”

Klaus hesitated. “Why?”

“We couldn’t… ours looked real.” Duncan said. “But if Quigley was fake…”

Klaus took a deep breath. “No. No, I mean, our Father, maybe, but I don’t think so. I… I saw my Mother, when she… when they got her. She’s…” he bit back a sob, refusing to look at the Quagmires; he knew they’d just be disappointed.

“Well.” Duncan said hesitantly. “I guess… I mean, we kind of expected that was what happened.”

“We just didn’t want to…” Isadora paused. “Let go of the possibility.”

“I’m sorry-”

“It’s not your fault.” Duncan said quickly.

Isadora paused, glancing between them, and then said, “And… that’s not all.”

Duncan sighed. “Isadora, no…”

“What?” Klaus asked.

“It’s not connected-”

“It could be!”

“It’s not!”

“Just listen to me for a bit, okay, Duncan?”

“What?” Klaus asked, a bit louder.

Isadora turned towards him. “Did you notice there’s an empty seat in our classes?”

Klaus thought back. “Uh, yeah, I guess.”

“There’s supposed to be a girl there, Martha. She went missing just a few days ago, and one of the old guys who worked at the general store disappeared, too, just yesterday; Carmelita made us stop in for candy on the way home from school and he hadn’t checked in.”

“He probably just went hunting and got lost.” Duncan said. “I wouldn’t get your hopes up.”

“Are you saying you think the kidnappers took these people?” Klaus asked.
“Why would they take an adult?” Duncan asked, turning to Isadora with a we talked about this look. “If they wanted adults, they would’ve taken our parents, and… apparently those bodies were real.”

“Maybe the guy saw an abduction and got buried in the woods.” Isadora waved her hand. “I’ve mentioned that before, Duncan, pay attention.”

“Wow.” Klaus said, surprised at just how nonchalant she sounded about that. “When did you say that girl went missing again?”

“A few days ago, maybe three?”

“That’s around the same time my sister disappeared.” Klaus said.

“These disappearances are all connected.” Isadora insisted. “There’s something similar between all of us.”

“Well, I mean, we both had parents who sheltered us, and then…” Klaus paused. “And then died, and we have a missing sibling.”

“I don’t think Martha’s parents were very sheltering.” Duncan said. “Didn’t you say she used to throw rocks at birds on the lake every night?”

“Maybe that just made her easier to grab.” Isadora said. “Maybe her parents didn’t know-”

“Isadora, she probably just ran off.” Duncan said. “I don’t see why it’d be the same people.”

“What, you think a kid just happens to disappear around us?” Isadora glared at him.

Klaus scooted back a bit; he didn’t want to get in the middle of a sibling fight.

“I think we need to be careful, and focus on things we know can help.” Duncan said. “We don’t want to run off chasing red herrings when our brother’s at stake.”

“But if we don’t investigate it, how do we know it’s a red herring?”

“We should just stick to the library records, we can find something there-”

“What if that’s the red herring, huh?”

“Sorry,” Klaus interrupted, feeling very awkward, “Did you say library records?”

Duncan and Isadora glanced towards him, both suddenly realizing he was still there. “Um, yeah.” Duncan said. “We were looking up known child abductions across the country, but I’ve also been looking into local crimes. The librarian lets me go through old newspapers and articles, and Isadora’s been tackling the history books. That’s… that’s the best we can do at the moment, until the police start listening to us.”

“Sunny and I can help with that.” Klaus said. “She can’t quite read yet, but I’m sure she’ll find something to do.” he paused. “Maybe I should look into more local… things.”

“Local things?” Isadora asked.

“Well,” Klaus said, “Our backgrounds are… very similar. In an almost uncanny way. And yet… we’re all in the same place. We can’t have just… happened to find each other.”
Isadora and Duncan stared at him for a second, and then Isadora said, “Oh. Oh, yeah. I just didn’t think… I assumed it was more coincidence that you were here, but…”

“You, uh… think that…” Duncan looked very concerned. “We’re here for some specific reason?”

“It would make sense,” Isadora said. “Maybe someone’s going after people close to Esme?”

“Esme doesn’t give a shit about anyone but herself.” Duncan said. “And then why would they kidnap Quigley?”

Klaus paused. “Why exactly did she adopt you?”

“She used to be friends with our Mother in College.” Isadora said. “That’s what she said, anyway, and she was in the Will… I mean, I think she was, that’s what the executor of our estate said.”

“She’s apparently a cousin of my Father,” Klaus said, “But he never mentioned her. And now that I think of it, I think Father said he was adopted as a child, I don’t know which family Esme’s from… but, well, the point is, there’s got to be a reason we’re in the same place.”

“Do you think,” Isadora whispered, “Our… the people who took our siblings wanted us together? Do you think they… do you think they want us together so they can take all of us?”

“They’d have to get past Esme.” Duncan said quickly, sounding like he was trying to calm them down. “And even though she hates us, she wouldn’t want to get into legal trouble if she lost us. And if she gets hurt, the press’ll jump on that, nothing interesting ever happens here, so the sixth most important financial advisor… hell, even if we just disappear, that’s big news. We’re probably safe.”

“Unless Esme’s in on it.” Isadora said.

“There’s no way she’s smart enough for that.” Duncan said. “She didn’t know what coffee was until you asked for some. And we’re stuck with Carmelita, too, and Carmelita’s parents ditched her when she was a toddler, so-”

“Did they?” Klaus asked.

“That’s what the kid in my science class says.” Duncan shrugged.

“Is this the kid who tries to sell you cigarettes?” Isadora asked. “He doesn’t sound like a reliable source of information.”

“Can’t you let me have friends?”

“Neither of us have friends, Duncan.”

Duncan glanced at Klaus, smiling slightly. “We’ve got him now.”

Klaus brightened a bit, sitting up. “Oh. Are we friends?”

“We better be.” Isadora smirked a little. “Don’t think we can go investigating kidnappings with a total stranger, can we?”

Klaus smiled back. “Oh. Cool.”
Sunny was bored again.

She’d spent the last several hours wandering the house, trying to avoid anyone who might come and go- occasionally Esme showed up to pick something up to bring to work, sometimes a housecleaner would pass by- and trying to find something of interest.

The house was very large, and very, very boring for such a young baby. So after a few minutes of sitting in her and Klaus’s room, digging through clothes to try and find decent fabric to bite, Sunny managed to poke the door open and crawl out. She wandered down the halls, which were much longer for her than for her older brother and their fellow orphans. She got even more bored about halfway down and sat down to chew on the rug. That didn’t keep her entertained long, so she kept going, poking on doors to see which ones were unlocked. One of them was a storage room, which she turned and left alone; gray walls and tall boxes were among the most boring sights for an infant. She found two empty bedrooms- very bland and boring- and an empty library.

She went down the stairs, sitting down and sliding down each step, glancing around at the walls, and wandered through the first floor. She found a very large kitchen, which was a bit interesting, but she couldn’t quite reach the shelves yet; still, she spent a bit of time sitting and staring at the hanging pots and pretty sink. It wasn’t as if she had somewhere to be; Duncan said they’d be gone for eight hours, which, even as someone who knew very little about time, meant she’d be alone for quite a while.

She found another library, this time with several actual books. She wandered in and climbed onto one of the chairs, but she couldn’t reach any of the shelves. She guessed it didn’t matter; she couldn’t read much, anyway. She could read her name, so she guessed she knew those letters- what were they? S, U, N, Y, B, A, D, E, L, I, R. She still wasn’t quite sure what order they were supposed to go in the actual alphabet, even though Violet had been teaching her a song to remember. Maybe she could get Klaus to teach her, and once they got Violet back, she could surprise her. Or maybe she could figure out how to read by then, and read something to her to cheer her up; Violet would probably be upset once they got her back, she might not know that their parents were gone.

It was strange, thinking about what Klaus had said. Their parents weren’t coming back. It was a bit hard to wrap her head around; sometimes, he’d said at night at Poe’s house, after Edgar and Albert had gone to sleep, bad things happened, and your body got too hurt and you couldn’t live anymore. And that didn’t mean that Mother and Father didn’t love them, it just meant that they couldn’t come back, and he didn’t know where they were now, but he hoped they were somewhere happy. The worst part of it, he said, was living on after they’d gone, because you would never see them again.

But it would be okay, Sunny thought. Sure, she’d miss seeing Mother and Father, but she had Klaus and Violet. They could still be there. And she could make sure they were safe; she could protect them, she’d be prepared this time. She could bite anyone who came near them. Maybe she should bite Carmelita. That would be entertaining, her voice got annoying after a while, it hurt her head. Although she quite liked those things she had on her legs…

Sunny eventually slid off of the chair, giggling, and crawled her way back to the staircase, hoisting herself up on each step. She had to go up a few floors, which took quite a long time, as climbing was a bit hard, and she took a few breaks to gnaw on the railings. But she eventually made it to the floor they were sleeping in, and wandered down the halls, poking doors again. She wandered farther than she had before, going down away from the staircase. She managed to get one door open, peering in to see if it looked like Carmelita’s bedroom; she imagined it would be brightly colored, with lots of things.
This room looked a lot like hers and Klaus’s, but there was a pile of blankets on the floor, with one pillow. Sunny wandered over there, flopping onto the pillow, burying her face in it and quite forgetting about her original plan to steal some of Carmelita’s leg warmers. The pillow was very fluffy and very comfortable, and she wouldn’t mind just falling asleep on it.

She laid there for a bit, until she felt something a bit strange.

She sat up, rubbing her eyes and looking around. Something was strange. She glanced around the room, spotting something… something weird from behind the closet doors. She crawled towards it, realizing that, yes, something was flashing. She managed to get a tiny hand in between the door and the frame, and she pushed it open. It took a second to spot what was moving; a flashlight was on the floor, turning itself on and off. She didn’t think the ones they’d had at home could do that. She crawled forwards and sat, picking it up. It felt a bit cold; she felt a bit cold. Maybe the closet was cold. She waved the flashlight, giggling when it lit up again. It went dark, and she turned it towards her face. That was a mistake; when it lit again, it shined into her eyes. She shut them quickly, and then moved the flashlight and peered through. It kept turning off-and-on, off-and-on. It was pretty, sort of.

She thought she heard a door slam in the hall, and she glanced up, not noticing the flashlight going wild. Had someone come up the steps? She hoped she wouldn’t be in any trouble…

“Just get changed, and then we can go to the Library.” came Isadora’s voice from the hallway. “Carmelita, fuck off somewhere.”

“You’re just jealous cause I have actual friends to hang out with, instead of books.”

“Piss off!”

Oh! They were back from school. Sunny dropped the flashlight, crawling back towards the room, still oblivious to the flashing, now getting more urgent. She opened the closet door again, brightening when Isadora and Duncan walked in, both complaining to themselves.

“It’s a ten minute walk but it feels like an hour.”

“If we don’t walk with Carmelita,” Duncan replied, “She’ll wander off and we’ll get blamed for it.”

“Can’t we just let her run off? We won’t have to talk to her again.” Isadora suddenly noticed Sunny, who had started crawling towards her. “Sunny? What are you doing in here?”

“Derob.” Sunny shrugged, meaning, “I was bored and didn’t realize this was your room. Your flashlight is pretty!”

Isadora and Duncan glanced at each other, and then Isadora shrugged and knelt down, picking up Sunny, while Duncan moved to the door, calling, “Klaus! Your sister’s in here!”

“Did you get bored?” Isadora asked, bouncing her a little as she moved towards the closet, pulling some clothes out of a drawer with her free hand and not even glancing towards the flashlight. “You think our room was more fun?”

“Alry!” Sunny said, which meant, “Yes, you have fluffy pillows and a flashing light!”

“That’s nice.” Isadora said carefully.

They heard the door open, and Isadora left the closet, noticing Klaus running in, looking relieved.
“Kla!” Sunny cheered, raising her arms so that he could hold her.

He moved over and took her from Isadora, saying, “Holy shit, Sun, if you’re gonna wander off, at least be back in the room when I get back, okay?” She stared at him in confusion, as he said, “I mean, I had about five seconds of absolute panic when I realized you weren’t there.”

“Maly.” Sunny shrugged, which meant, “I’m not sure when you get home, though, and I get bored!”

“Well,” Klaus glanced around, before pointing to a clock. “We’ve got one of those in our room, too, you see? The clock?” Sunny nodded. “When it says… 3:15, that’s when we get home.”

Sunny nodded seriously.

“Oh, well, get some decent clothes on.” Isadora said, tossing Duncan one pair of the clothes she’d grabbed. “These uniforms suck, and we’ve gotta get to the library if we want to get some research done.”

“I’ll catch Sunny up.” Klaus nodded, turning to leave.

Sunny waved a temporary goodbye to Isadora and Duncan, and then, giggling, she waved towards the closet, where she thought she could see the flashlight still blinking.
CHAPTER TWELVE

Violet woke up in her bed again, but this time, the events came back even slower.

She remembered the fear almost instantly; she woke up terrified, and sat up as fast as she could, which was a bit of a mistake; she definitely noticed the headache this time. She flinched and sat back, shutting her eyes and trying to remember what was happening, why she was so scared.

It came very slowly, and very blurry. She remembered the water first, wondering why she hated herself so much for taking it. And then she recalled the book, and the note, the 10 circled on the top to signal a message. And then… it was a blur, just odd memories of flashing and colors and paranoia and depression and screaming and hopelessness…

She was crying again. She curled up, the fear coming right back up to the surface of her mind. She was shaking, and sobbing, and she couldn’t stop it. She grabbed the thin blanket, pulling it over her head like she was a kid, hiding under the minimal warmth and holding herself and trying to make herself stop weeping. She couldn’t even think straight, just remembering the complete panic she’d felt. She didn’t even sit up to talk things out to herself or talk to her imaginary brother or just tie her hair back and try to get out again.

I’m going to die here, she thought, feeling that certainty once again. They’re going to do something like that again and kill me. And they’re not going to care. I’m going to die and I’m never going to see my siblings again.

It’s my fault. I fucked up, I should’ve stayed with Mother. But then they would’ve just taken Klaus and Sunny, and they’d be going through this instead of her. We should’ve just gotten out of the house, instead of going to find the fire and then looking for our parents. They were outside the house. They would’ve all been captured. Whatever I did in the bookstore, I shouldn’t have done it. That’s how they knew I had… abilities. Then they would’ve killed Sunny or Klaus. There has to have been something I did wrong. Something that could’ve happened differently, to stop this. It doesn’t matter anymore. You’re here, and you can’t change the past. Deal with it now.

I’m going to die here.

Don’t accept that.

She still had her siblings. They still needed her. Mother and Father were gone. Klaus and Sunny, wherever they were, were all alone. And they probably thought they’d lost her, too.

I can’t die here.

I can’t just leave them alone.

She slowly moved out from under the covers and sat still against the bed, still crying, but much more quietly, and trying to push back her fear. Just breathe, Violet; breathe, and figure out what to do. She gripped onto the edge of the sheets, just trying to steady herself. Just breathe, stop thinking about the trip, and find a way to survive.
She sat there for a bit, still gripping onto the blanket, until she finally stopped crying, and the panic was dying down slightly. She pushed her hair back out of her face, wondering how long it had been since it had been washed; she didn’t know how long she’d been here. How long had Klaus and Sunny been alone?

The door opened again, and Violet shot up, turning to stare at the man who came in.

“What the *fuck* do you want?” she spat, panic once again rising.

The man gave her a reproachful look, as if she’d done something entirely unreasonable. “We have a new test for you.”

Violet shook her head, backing up a bit. “No, no, no-”

“Relax, we won’t have to do the LSD again. We think we have your abilities figured out from that first trip. Consider yourself lucky, we had to dose the last kid three times before he started showing his-”

The man trailed off, and Violet knew right then to file that information somewhere important. “Last kid?” she asked, still shaking slightly.

“It doesn’t matter. Come on, we have work to do.”

LSD… she didn’t remember reading up on that. Well, at least she knew what drug they’d given her. And she knew that she hated it.

“Come *on*, get moving.” the man reached out and grabbed her arm, yanking her to her feet.

“No,” Violet said, instinctively trying to push herself away. “No, I can’t do that again-”

“We’re not doing anything to you,” the man rolled his eyes, “Unless you misbehave.”

“I can’t *know* that!” Violet protested. “You drugged me for your sick experiments!”

“For fuck’s sake, get a move on or we’ll have to do something worse than that.”

Violet glared at him, letting out a long breath. Then she once again tried to pull her arm back, saying, “I can walk by myself.”

“Absolutely not.” he said. “We’re not that stupid.”

Violet bit her lip and followed him out of the room, shooting glares at the guards who were there to escort her wherever as they took hold of her arms again.

They took her to a new room, so at least she knew they were probably honest about not drugging her again. The problem was that now she had no idea what they were going to do to her.

She was led into a room on the same floor she’d been on, so at least she didn’t have to go up or down any stairs; this room was a lot smaller than the last one. She glanced around briefly once she was in, spotting a chair and wooden table in the center, and pushed into the corner was a metal rolling table, some machine on it with wires extending towards some headset. She didn’t get a good look, though, before she was moved to the chair and sat down, and she realized too late that they were stretching out her arms onto the armrests; she looked down, seeing them clamp her wrists to the chair.
“Hey!” she shouted, suddenly terrified again. “Hey, what the fuck are you doing?”

“Just shut up.” one of the guards said. “This is standard.”

“Fuck off! Get these off of me!” Violet yelled, starting to kick her legs as they walked off. “Hey! Get these off, please! Get back here! Take them off!”

She was feeling that panic in her chest again, that one that was begging her to get up and run, just find a way out by any way necessary, just run and don’t look back and scream until someone saves you…

“Let me out! Let me OUT!”

She didn’t expect them to do anything, really. She just needed to scream something, to make herself heard.

Violet was there for a few minutes, just breathing hard and staring at the false mirror on the other side of the wall; aside from the tables and chair, that was the only thing in the room. Nothing for her to float. Maybe this was an escape room, and they wanted her to find a way out herself, use her powers to break the clamps like she’d broken the bracelets. Not that they could know about the bracelets, could they?

She tried pulling her arms up, but the clamps held tight. So she sat and breathed for a bit, trying to pull herself together.

“Oh, Klaus, how do you get out of clamps?”

He’d know something. Had he ever infodumped to her on hand clamps like this? She tried to remember that book on prison breaks… hell, had they ever read anything on escaping from a hospital? That seemed to be where she was…

If he didn’t know, he’d suggest something similar, or she’d tie up her hair and figure a way out herself… but she didn’t have a ribbon, nor the use of her hands. Sunny would just bite through the clamps, but Sunny wasn’t here, and Violet’s teeth weren’t sharp enough to pierce metal.

She was stuck.

The door opened, and Violet jumped, turning to see that first doctor walk in- Olaf, she thought his name was. She bit her lip, glaring at him as he approached, saying, “Apologies for being late. We had some problems with the basement, but now we can begin our first tests.”

“You fucking bastard.” Violet said immediately.

Olaf raised his eyebrow. “Well. That’s quite vulgar.”

“You drugged me.” Violet said.

“That was necessary.” he responded, waving a hand. “Many of our mental experiments opened up new channels of the mind, and we found that exposure to LSD tended to work the best. Since your powers had already awakened, you only needed to be dosed once.”

“I shouldn’t have been dosed at all.” Violet said. “And I shouldn’t be strapped to a chair for whatever fucking reason.”
“I don’t think,” Olaf said, moving around so that he was across the table from her, still standing and glaring, “That you quite understand the experiments we’re doing here. That would be your parents’ doing, they also clearly didn’t understand what we were trying to do.”

“Don’t talk about them like that.” Violet said, her voice breaking slightly. “They probably just didn’t want me to get drugged and tested on.”

“It’s all for a good cause, I assure you.”

“And what the hell is that?”

He paused, before saying, “Children like you wouldn’t understand. I’m here to begin your first testing, as we finally believe we know what your abilities are. We thought you would have the same powers as your Mother, but you seem to be very unique so far. But we do have to do a few more tests, just to be certain.”

“How many tests am I gonna have to go through?” Violet asked.

Olaf ignored that question. “We’re going to have to pin your hair back in order to attach the headset. Of course, if you’d like to fight some more, we could just cut it all off. It would be much easier.”

“Don’t you fucking dare.” Violet said, suddenly feeling a pang of fear.

“Then you won’t have any problem behaving, will you?”

Violet glared at him, really wishing she could move her hands enough to flip him off. “No.” she finally said.

He left for a moment, then came back with some doctors who pinned her hair up behind her head. She gripped the edges of the armrests, shutting her eyes as hands tugged at her hair, struggling not to scream. She always hated having other people touch her hair, and she remembered Sunny was the same way; even the gentle touches felt like her hair was being pulled out. She used to scream when her Mother tried to brush her hair because she used to suck at doing it herself, and Beatrice had never quite understood why she was so fussy about it… but this was so much worse, and she could feel every second of their rough hands pinning up her hair, and then they were strapping something on top of her head, and she tried to stop herself from shaking and tried to hold the tears back as she something felt so strange on her head, and she couldn’t move it, she couldn’t even lift her arms…

It took a few silent, increasingly uncomfortable minutes before they finished, and then Olaf moved back towards the table, placing something in front of her, saying, “You know, it would go a lot faster if we cut your hair.”

Violet looked down at the item on the table, narrowing her eyes. It was just a simple metal box.

“What’s in that?”

“Nothing.” Olaf said. “It’s just an empty box we pulled out of storage.”

“Then why is it here?”

“We want you,” Olaf said, “To lift it.” Violet was silent, and he continued, “Like you did everything else.”

“I didn’t lift everything.” Violet said. She didn’t quite remember the exact details of the trip, but
she remembered some stuff falling, and she remembered only a few things flying in the bookstore, too.

“Oh, we know that. We just want you to lift this.”

Violet glanced down at her hands, then back up at him. “I don’t know how it works.” she reminded him.

“The LSD should have made that a bit easier for you.” Olaf said. “Of course, if these tests keep falling, we can always try the drugs again-”

“No!” Violet instantly regretted her shout, her momentary lapse of guard. She especially didn’t like how pleased Olaf looked about her outburst. She immediately shrunk back, glaring again, trying to take back the fear she’d let slip.

“Then you’ll have no problem channeling your abilities again.” Olaf said, simply pushing the box to the middle of the table. “We’ll be watching from outside the room.”

He turned to leave, but paused beside her. Violet forced herself to stare ahead as he put a cold hand on her shoulder, gripping too tight. “For your sake, don’t fuck this up,” he said, quietly, before turning to leave. Violet very much wanted to cry.

The second the door slammed, she turned her attention to the box. She had to make that thing move, she had to make it fly, do whatever they wanted, and they wouldn’t dose her again, they wouldn’t drug her again. She couldn’t let them do that to her again, she couldn’t survive that again.

Lift. Lift. Lift.

It didn’t even move.

Come on, she found herself pleading. Come on, lift. Save me, please.

She’d felt scared when she lifted everything else, but she was scared now and nothing was happening. She was shaking again as she tried to keep herself from crying, kept staring at the box, boring her eyes into it. Lift. Lift. Lift. Please.

She was going to get drugged again. She was going to get drugged and she was going to die, and Klaus and Sunny were going to be alone. No, worse. They’d bring them in. They said they would, they might not have been bluffing. They’d bring Klaus him and drug him up until he started doing insane things. She wondered if they’d go so far as to drug Sunny. She was just a baby, there was no way she could deal with that at all.

They were going to hurt her siblings, she knew it. And there was nothing she could do to stop them.

LIFT!

The box flew off the table, and hit the mirror. It didn’t shatter, but it did make a loud noise before falling to the ground, clanging as it landed.

Violet stared, and for a few frozen seconds, she couldn’t believe what she’d done. The box must’ve been hit by something, it must’ve been… something else must have done that. She couldn’t have…

She did that. She made it move.
She stared at it again, barely seeing it over the table, trying to latch onto that feeling again. That feeling of helplessness, of anger, of despair.

And, slowly, it lifted again.

She gasped, and it clattered to the ground again, the sound hurting her ears. She shut her eyes, breathing hard, struggling to keep herself from shouting.

She just… she just lifted something. With her mind.

Now that she looked at the box again, there was a sort of… tingle. No, a ping. Like the feeling she’d get when there was something chilly on the other side of the room, and she could feel it even while everything else was warm, or like a squirt of cold water to the side of her face, only without the actual water. There it was, a slight ping, coming from the box. If she concentrated, she could feel the same ping on the chair she was sitting in, from the table behind her she could only barely see out of the corner of her eye, the machine on it, which was now printing some kind of paper with lines on it, and a bit on the door. Just a bit, and only if she focused.

She felt something wet on her face, but it wasn’t tears. She was bleeding. She had a nosebleed, and she couldn’t lift her hands to even wipe it away. She struggled for a second, staring at the mirror, wondering if there was more they wanted her to do. She didn’t want to lift the box again, she’d barely done it before…

Another doctor walked in, this time one she didn’t recognize. She picked up the box, and then placed something new on the table- some kind of a frying pan.

"Lift this." she said simply, before leaving.

Violet watched her leave, disbelief radiating off of her. She just lifted a box with her mind, wasn’t that enough?

She turned back to the pot, feeling that ping again. She gripped the edge of the chair, and then thought back to Klaus and Sunny. *This is for them. Just do what they want for now until you can find a way out, find a way to save them.*

It lifted much more slowly, and her eyes suddenly felt heavy- only a little bit, but it was noticeable. She levitated it for a few seconds, watching intently, wondering how long it could fly, wondering if she hit the mirror with it hard enough, if it would shatter and the glass would pierce anyone watching from the other side…

After a minute, she let it drop onto the table, wondering why she didn’t feel the ping from the table. She felt it from the chair, so it wasn’t a matter of size…

Another doctor came in, dropping a soda can in front of her as he picked up the pan.

“*You want me to lift that?*” Violet surprised herself with how tired she sounded.

“No.” the doctor said, barely glancing at her.

“What do you want me to do, then?” As if she’d be able to guess.

“Crush it.”

She blinked. “Sorry?”
“Crush the can.”

For some reason, that simple request was causing that panic to come back. Well, she could use that. Fear seemed to activate whatever it was that gave her powers.

She waited until he left, and then she stared at the can, feeling almost a pang of sadness as she did. She never liked destroying things; she could repair almost anything, or use it in a new invention. Destroying something just meant it was completely useless.

She stared at the can, trying to put pressure into her gaze, trying to focus her energy on destroying it.

It suddenly crumpled, and then toppled over.

She didn’t know why, but she felt sick.

Her nosebleed had gotten worse; the blood was in her mouth now. And she was feeling tired again. Another doctor came in, bringing some metal silverware, asking her to crumple one and throw the other into the wall, and she did. They put a figurine in front of her, asked her to turn the head around, and she did.

They kept going, and she kept getting more tired, and kept tasting more blood, and they didn’t seem to be stopping.

They finally put another thing in front of her - a wrench, it looked like - and she snapped.

“When is this going to end?” she asked the doctor who put it on the table.

“When we say it does,” the woman said. “Throw that.”

The woman turned to go, and Violet, exhausted and scared and pissed, suddenly decided, *Fuck it.*

*I don’t want to play along anymore.*

She lifted the wrench, and, with a tilt of her head, tossed it at the back of the woman’s head.

She couldn’t see the impact, but she heard the thud, and felt an instinctual flare of regret. Shit, she’d just *hurt* someone; what if that had seriously hurt her? What if she’d just…

*Stop it! She’s one of them.*

“What the *hell*?” she heard the woman shout, and Violet silently said *fuck it* again.

She shut her eyes, connecting to the ping she felt from the clamps on her wrists, and thought, *alright, open up.*

The clamps came undone, and she stumbled to her feet, turning around. She glanced up, spotting the shocked doctor before she tried to move forwards; unfortunately, she was feeling exhausted, and she only succeeded in taking a few steps before guards had run in, grabbing her arms again. She didn’t even have the strength to scream at them, instead shutting her eyes and feeling the pings again, from all around the room; the door, the chair, the clamps, the wrench, the guards’ belts, their weapons, parts of the hall…

*It’s all metal.*
She probably should have realized it before, but she was tired and scared and thus wasn’t thinking straight. But it suddenly hit her then, as one of the guards pulled the wire-thing off her head and dragged her into the hall.

*I can’t just make anything move.*

*I can move metal.*

“What the fuck was that?” one of the guards said.

Violet finally opened her eyes, glaring up at him, finally able to reach up and wipe the blood on her sleeve.

“Fuck you.” she spat.

Apparently that was a mistake.

A guard took something from his belt, and pressed it against her, and…

Violet let out a gasp, and then a shriek. At the place the thing made contact, she felt a *burning*, a sudden, piercing feeling, that started spreading throughout her body. Every muscle tensed up, every part of her suddenly felt like it was screaming.

And then, just as suddenly, it stopped, and she was doubled over, gasping and holding back tears, barely managing to stay standing upright.

She heard some conversation behind her, as a guard grabbed her arms again. “What do we do with her?”

“Solitary for a bit. Then back to testing.”

Violet didn’t even have the energy to curse them out as they dragged her down the hall. She was taken down several bends, before a door was opened and she was tossed inside. She turned, just in time to see the door slam shut, and then she was in complete darkness.

She stumbled, feeling the walls. The room was small, barely wide enough for her to take a few steps. And she couldn’t see anything, not even a sliver of light from under the door; somehow there wasn’t one of those. It was as if she’d been thrown into some kind of void.

“Hey!” she called, her voice hoarse and choked up. She banged on the door only twice, before she dropped to the ground, pulling herself into a corner and hugging her knees, feeling exhausted and cramped and hurt and angry and terrified.

She felt a ping from the door, but she was too tired to do anything about that.

Slowly, she fell onto her side, and started crying.
“That’s our Library!” Isadora called, smiling as she gestured ahead.

Klaus looked up, brightening a bit as he saw the large building. Isadora and Duncan had led him and Sunny down the streets, occasionally waving at adults or taking a different route because they saw some of Carmelita’s friends running down the road and would they’d rather not have an altercation at the moment.

Klaus and Sunny, for the most part, did not feel very comfortable on the walk over. Not only were they going down the street of a town without an adult, they had no idea what the city’s layout was, or what could be around the next road. Sunny was even more uncomfortable, occasionally leaning over to ask Klaus what that building was, or if they were close, or if he was sure they were safe outside. But, finally, they were at the Library, and Klaus stopped a second to survey the area around it.

The Library was right by itself, the street wrapping around it, and Klaus could see the movie theater behind it and a general store to the left. As they crossed the road, Klaus grinned and said, “Sunny, I know you haven’t been in a library before, but it’s like a bookstore, but you can’t buy the books, you can just borrow them.”

Sunny flinched a bit. “Bornes?” she asked, which meant, “Bookstore?”

Klaus bit his lip. “It won’t be like that, Sun, I promise,” he said, even though he didn’t really know. “You’ll be with Isadora while me and Duncan go look for the newspapers, just make sure you don’t eat anything that’s not yours.”

“Oh!” Sunny protested quietly, which meant, “I don’t want to split up!”

Klaus sighed, glancing to make sure Isadora and Duncan weren’t listening, before saying, “Sunny, you’ll… probably be safer if we do. They wanted me, not you.”

“No.” Sunny said, meaning, “I don’t care. I don’t want to leave you alone.”

Klaus stared at her for a moment, before saying quietly, “It’ll be only for a little bit, Sun. Don’t worry. You can have some fun with Isadora.”

“Oh.” Sunny glanced sadly at the ground.

Duncan held open the door for them as they walked in, and he waved to the Librarian at the desk.

“Hello, Quagmires!” the woman waved.

“Hello, Ms Caliban!” Isadora said. She gestured to Klaus and Sunny. “These are our new roommates, Klaus and Sunny. Klaus, Sunny, this is Ms Caliban, the Librarian.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” Klaus said.
“It’s nice to meet you, too.”

“We’ll just be in our regular spots.” Duncan said. “Klaus, we’re going upstairs to the right; Sunny, you’ll be going with Isadora through that door on the left.”

Sunny hesitantly nodded, and Klaus passed her over to Isadora. “You’ll watch her?” he asked carefully.

“Of course.” Isadora said. “She can help me pour through my research books.”

“Maybe you can help her learn how to read.” Klaus suggested.

“Meh.” Sunny said.

Hesitantly, Klaus waved at her, and then at the Librarian, and then he followed Duncan up the stairs.

“Alright, Sunny.” Isadora said, carrying her into the next room, “We’re going to be reading books on child abductions, but we’re also taking some books on town history. Mind if I read some of it to you? It might help me focus.”

Sunny smiled slightly, and Isadora said, “Alright! Let’s go.”

“I love old newspapers.” Duncan said, as he walked with Klaus towards some computers, a few files in his hands that he’d grabbed from some drawers, one stack in each hand. “And old articles. Nobody ever comes up here, too, so it’s usually just me. I’d be in Heaven if these weren’t such pressing circumstances.”

“I do love research papers and history.” Klaus said, before pointing to the files. “What are those?”

“The articles.” Duncan said, as he placed them down on the table by the computers. “They’re organized by year, paper and topic, and we just need to find the corresponding microfiche in here.”

“Okay.” Klaus said. “What’s that?”

Duncan smiled; he enjoyed being able to explain something. “It’s a bit of microfilm that has the articles we want, we just put it in the computer and we can read it. And then when we’ve done with this, we have more recent newspapers in the storage room we can go through! It’ll be harder since we’ll have to go through all the articles, not just the ones we want.”

“That’s fine.” Klaus said.

“Um, usually I go over kidnappings,” Duncan said, “But, well, you made a good point at school today, so I got some of Hawkins’ History, maybe we can find out if our families have some kind of connection to here; these only go back to the 1930s, but if we start there, in a couple days we should get through all of these.”

“A couple days?”

“The Library closes at…” Duncan paused to consider what day it was. “Five, so we only have two hours.”

“Why?”
'I don’t know, I didn’t make the decision.'

“Well,” Klaus said, “We better get started, then.”

“Yeah. You take this stack, I’ll take the other.”

“Uh, how do we-”

“I’ll show you, don’t worry, it’s real easy.”

“Thanks.” Klaus smiled. “My siblings and I… well, we didn’t get out much.”

“I know the feeling.” Duncan shrugged. “Here, we’ll start with this-”

The two of them poured through articles as the hours went by, occasionally chatting over something they came across. Duncan was taking a lot of notes in his green commonplace book, while Klaus just wrote anything suspicious in the notebook he was supposed to have used for school. He was getting a bit frustrated, to be honest; he didn’t expect them to find anything instantly, but none of the town’s early history seemed to have anything to do with them.

“I’m sorry.” he finally said, noticing the clock was nearing 5:00. “This is a waste of time.”

“No, it’s not. We’re covering all our bases.” Duncan said.

Klaus paused, before daring himself to say, “Well, uh, wouldn’t covering our bases also include the… the missing people?” Duncan didn’t respond, and Klaus felt a flash of panic, wondering if he crossed a line. “I’m sorry-”

“I just don’t think it’s connected.” Duncan said hesitantly. “It doesn’t make sense. Whoever took Quigley, they killed our parents, too, and made it look like an accident, made it look like he was dead. Martha, and the guy from the store, they just vanished. The kidnappers didn’t even fake a death. And if you’re right, and they killed our parents to get us to Hawkins… why would they take other people? Why not take us, while we’re here?”

“It would attract attention.” Klaus shrugged. “I mean, your parents and brother mysteriously die, you’re both insistent that Quigley’s alive, and then you disappear. That’s suspicious, and the police wouldn’t be able to ignore that.”

“You’d be surprised what they can ignore.” Duncan sighed. “I just… I feel concerned about the missing people, too, of course, but we’ve got to focus on Quigley. Isadora thinks every little thing’s connected to us, but… sometimes things just happen, you know? We can’t go chasing every crime in the city when our brother needs us.”

Klaus nodded a bit, then said, “I’m sorry we didn’t find anything useful today.”

Duncan glanced at the clock and said, “It’s okay, we normally don’t. Let’s get Isadora and Sunny, maybe they found something.”

“Or maybe Sunny bit her way through a table.” Klaus giggled.

“Can she do that?” Duncan asked.

“She’s bitten her way through a lot of things.” Klaus said. “Becomes a bit of a problem when she keeps biting through chair legs.”
The two of them gathered their things and then went back down the stairs, passing Ms Caliban at the desk and wandering into a room full of books. Klaus hesitated before going in, hoping Duncan didn’t notice him stalling. But… well, seeing the shelves of books, all lined up in a very similar way to the store… wasn’t comforting. He hoped Sunny hadn’t felt this way…

He almost jumped out of his skin when he heard shouting. He turned, seeing a group of five girls around a table, which he remembered from Duncan and Isadora’s hurry to dodge them across the street as some of Carmelita’s friends. Two of them were having an argument, trying to grab a book from each other. The other three quickly picked sides, and soon all of them were screaming at each other. A librarian rushed over to calm them down, only succeeding in making the noise louder.

“Uh, we should move.” Klaus said awkwardly. “We should probably- Duncan?”

He felt suddenly terrified when he turned and saw Duncan completely frozen in place, eyes wide and fearful. “Duncan?” Klaus moved forwards, grabbing his arm, suddenly imagining every horrible thing that could have happened.

Almost the second he touched him, Duncan flinched away, shaking his head, moving his hands to his ears. “Stop it.” he said, in a whisper so low Klaus could barely hear him. “Stop it, stop it.”

“Duncan?”

Duncan had tears in his eyes. He backed inbetween two shelves, sinking to the ground. “Get Isadora.” he muttered, shutting his eyes and pushing his hands farther onto his ears.

“Duncan!” Klaus sat in front of him. “Duncan, what’s wrong? What’s going on?”

“Get Isa, please.” Duncan pleaded.

Klaus hesitated for a second, really not wanting to leave him alone. Then, finally, he got up and ran, rushing through the shelves, eyes darting around, trying to spot Isadora or Sunny, trying to remember what route he was taking so he could get back.

He finally saw them at a table, a pile of books between them. Sunny was sitting on top of a dictionary, chewing on a chocolate wrapper, while Isadora poured over a history book, looking very bored.

Klaus ran up, and Isadora looked up, panic entering her eyes. “Where’s Duncan?” she asked, jumping to her feet.

“He… I don’t know, he just… he just froze up, and told me to get you-”

“Oh, fuck.” Isadora muttered, lifting up Sunny. “Where is he?”

“Right at the entrance-”

“Come on.” she said, shoving two books into her bag. “Take me to him.”

Klaus led Isadora down the aisles again, hearing Sunny ask a few worried questions but not stopping to answer. When they reached the aisle Duncan was sitting in, Isadora rushed forwards, dropping Sunny on the ground and kneeling in front of her brother, who looked… shit, he looked awful.

Duncan had his hands pressed over his ears, and tears were streaming down his face as he struggled to breathe. His nose was bleeding a little, too, as he muttered to himself and rocked back-
“Duncan, I’m here. I’m here.” Isadora said. “What…” she paused, suddenly processing the yelling still going on a few feet away. “Shit, that’s loud. Okay, remember what Father said? Breathe. Count to four and hold your breath, okay?”

“Make them stop yelling.” Duncan muttered. “Make them stop! Isa-“

“Hold your breath.” Isadora said. “Okay? One, two, three, four.”

Duncan hesitated, and then held his breath, as Isadora counted again, “One, two, three, four.” Then he breathed out, as she counted again. She kept doing that, for a minute or two, as the shouting girls eventually quieted enough that the Librarian could get them to leave the room.

After a moment, she reached out, touching his hand. “Better?”

He nodded, wiping his face with his sleeve. “I’m sorry.” he whispered.

“Hey, it’s okay.” she said, helping him to his feet. “It’s fine. We’ll go back to the house, okay? You can relax a bit, and I’ll keep Carmelita from yelling at you. You can listen to music and I’ll get some more reading done in the study, okay?“

Duncan nodded, glancing hesitantly at Klaus for an instant before fixing his gaze on the ground, not wanting to meet his eyes. Klaus slowly picked up Sunny, before turning back to Duncan, opening his mouth to say something. Duncan just moved past him, saying, “Let’s go.”

“I want to try and talk to him.” Klaus said.

He and Sunny were sitting on their bedroom floor, while Klaus breezed through the homework and Sunny bit into a fork he’d grabbed for her. She glanced up at him, and said, “Wime?” which probably meant, “Do you want me to come, too?”

“Yeah, I don’t like leaving you alone for long.” Klaus said. He picked her up and went out the door; Sunny still gnawed on the fork as they walked down the hall. Klaus found what he remembered to be the triplets’ door, and knocked. He bounced on his heels, waiting for a response, and after a moment, Sunny leaned forwards and pushed the door open anyway.

“Sunny!” Klaus muttered, but he did peer in, saying, “Hey? Can I come in?”

Duncan was curled up on the bed, with a record playing some old song beside him. He shrugged, and Klaus walked in, kicking the door shut and moving to sit on the edge of the bed, placing Sunny down beside him.

“Hey, look-” Klaus began.

“I’m sorry.” Duncan said, his voice numb.

“What?”

“I knew that could happen, I just thought… I’m usually fine at the library, I didn’t expect people to be shouting…”

“Duncan-”
“I just get… overstimulated sometimes.” Duncan said. “Especially when I’m nervous, and when people are being loud, sometimes it almost feels like I can hear more things than are actually there, I definitely hear too much, and it gets too loud and I just can’t function—”

“I get it.” Klaus said.

Duncan froze for a second, obviously disbelieving at first. Then, he sat up slightly, a faint hope in his eyes. “Really?”

“I get like that sometimes.” Klaus admitted, turning a bit so he could face his friend. “Overstimulated. Violet did, too, and we think that’s why Sunny doesn’t like rattles and noisemakers, but we’re not sure. But it happens to me most, when I’m uncomfortable and there’s too much noise. I kind of shut down, and feel a lot of… anxiety.”

“Yeah?” Duncan sat straight up, smiling a bit. “Yeah, that’s it.”

“So, uh, it’s not just you.” Klaus said.

Duncan grinned. “Oh, thank God. I thought that there was… something wrong with me, even though Father said there wasn’t, it’s just that, Isadora and Quigley never felt as bad as I did when they were uncomfortable. I mean, they sometimes… but never that bad.”

“Violet’s different than me, too.” Klaus said. “She doesn’t get really anxious, she just kinda… disassociates.”

“Huh?” Sunny said.

“ ‘Disassociates' means that she kind of goes into her own mind, daydreaming about new inventions or interesting books instead of focusing on reality.” Klaus explained. “But I don’t do that, I just get upset.”

“I just shut down.” Duncan said, playing with the edge of his sweater. “I can’t think, I can’t move much, there’s just so much noise in my head, it’s like I…” he trailed off, then shook his head. “It’s exhausting.”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded.

“And it… it’s been happening as long as…” Duncan curled up slightly. “It’s always been bad, but not this bad, it’s been getting worse since… right before the accident. Maybe a few weeks before? We went to the movies and we were trying to leave but a school group showed up and…” he laughed slightly. “They were singing a bunch of songs, and Isadora kept joking they were off-key, and Quigley reminded her that they were, like, six, and I wanted to laugh but… I don’t know, it was… they were singing nursery rhymes and the employees were popping popcorn and every other person was having their own conversations and it just kept getting louder and… it was probably worse than I’d felt before, everything just got so loud. Mother had to carry me outside, I… I’d never gotten so overstimulated I couldn’t move before, that’s never been how it worked, I could always get myself somewhere, take care of everything myself, but… I don’t know, since then I’ve been almost… helpless. And I hate it.”

“That sounds awful.” Klaus said.

Duncan shrugged. “Isadora thinks that it’s been getting worse since… the accident, since Mother and Father aren’t… and she’s not… wrong, I guess, I’ve been…” he took a deep breath. “It’s nothing, really. I just… hate thinking about it.”
“Well,” Klaus said carefully, “If you ever… need anything, or want to talk about something, Sunny and I are right down the hall.” Duncan nodded, smiling a bit, and Klaus turned to the record. “What song is this?”

“It’s Vera Lynn.” Duncan said. “I mean, the song is ’We’ll Meet Again’ right now, but I… Mother really only had super old records, and this was the oldest we could find in Esme’s stuff.”

“Esme’s got records?”

“Not a lot, and a lot of them are dumb; she doesn’t use her record player anymore, either, so me and Isadora can use it all we want. Carmelita sometimes plays really loud music on the stereo, too.”

“Really? I wouldn’t have expected that of her.”

“She’s just a bundle of surprises.”

The two boys laughed, and even Sunny giggled a bit. The record then paused, moving on to the next song. Klaus and Duncan just grinned at each other for a second, and let the music play on.
Violet and Fiona have Unfortunate Experiences

Chapter Notes

Warning for the Chapter: Flashback to previous child abuse during the Fiona segments.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Violet and Fiona have Unfortunate Experiences

Violet was being walked to another room, and she was really starting to hate everything around her.

They’d taken her out of solitary after a few hours, and those hours had been fucking torment. By the time she’d rested enough that she could process what was happening, she’d started realizing just how small the room was, just how dark, just how cold. She’d lost track of time in there, just trying to pull her hospital gown over her legs for some semblance of warmth, wondering if she’d get electrocuted again if she took her hair out of those pins- they did electrocute her, right? That’s what that thing was- now that she thought about it, it almost looked like a cattle prod, but they wouldn’t use those on a kid, right? Well, apparently they did. They’d electrocuted her because she was just too fucking tired to keep going.

When they finally opened the door, someone asked her if she was ready to cooperate. She considered saying no, just to piss them off, but… well, anything would feel better than being in that room at the moment. She’d nodded, and they took her into another room, and placed some food in front of her.

“No.” she’d said, almost instantly. There were groans, and what the hells and can’t you just do one things, but she just shook her head, saying, “You’re going to drug me again. No.”

“We’re not gonna drug you again.” said one guard finally. “Waste of resources. We already got your abilities activated, and there are better ways to punish you.”

Violet glanced down at the tray she’d been handed, with some kind of soup and glass of water. She wondered how much they’d hurt her if she used her mind to flip the tray.

Then again… if she starved herself, she’d definitely die before she could find her siblings again. Unless they force-fed her, which was something she’d rather not experience.

So she shut up and ate, and thankfully nothing really tasted off, and then they took her to another room, put the wires back on her head, tied her hands to the chair with something distinctly non-metallic this time, and placed some more metal in front of her.

“Alright,” she’d said, resigned. “What are we doing with this?”

They’d continued testing for several parts of the day, and Violet busied herself with wondering
what exactly they were studying. Parts of her brainwaves, obviously, otherwise they wouldn’t bother with the wires; the machine behind her must be tracking that somehow, with the lines on the paper. And of course they wanted to see just how much she could do, wanted to see the extent of her powers. She wondered if they realized just how much she could feel the metal.

The pings were getting more obvious the more she focused; while she’d been in the Solitary room, and when she was eating, she didn’t even notice what was metal and what wasn’t. But when she was focusing, when she was busy moving the metal objects around, she could start to feel where all the metal was. She wondered if she could open the door by swinging the hinges, wondered if she could move that lock. She’d have to practice a bit more, though, she didn’t want them to find out she could do that before she could use that power to get out. She could feel bits of metal on the thing on her head, which was some kind of wire-hat. She could feel the metal under her, on the chair she was strapped to. She could even feel a bit of it outside in the hall.

It was a bit… stressful, honestly. She stopped actively looking for metal other than the things in front of her after a few minutes, thinking she might just shut down if more of it started calling to her. But she could still feel it, just more distantly the more she focused on one item.

She wondered if they knew that.

And if they didn’t, she wondered what they would do if they found out.

One thing she did know was that she was getting more tired the longer the experiments went on, and she kept getting a nosebleed. She wondered how long it would take before she passed out; maybe that’s what they were looking for. They wanted to see what it looked like when she straight-up passed out from all of this.

After what felt like forever, someone came in, placing two action figures in front of her; she supposed they were from some show or comic book, but she hadn’t been too into television (except how it worked), and while she did enjoy the comic books sometimes, she didn’t recognize these figures.

“We’re trying something different.” the woman said. “Combine these.”

Violet stared up at her, fighting back exhaustion. “What?”

“Take them apart, put them back together. Whatever you want. Then you can go back to your room until we need you again.”

Oh, thank fuck. They actually were giving her a break.

Violet turned to the action figures as the woman left the room, studying them for a second. And for the first time all day, she was glad her hair was pinned up, because it was out of her face, giving her much more focus.

She really didn’t want to enjoy herself; she knew full well this was just another sick experiment, by people who didn’t give a shit whether she lived or died.

But, well, she got to make something.

She concentrated, and moved her head slightly, and the right arm of the second figure came off. She kept staring, taking the limbs off; she used to do this to old dolls her Mother bought for her-remaking them, restyling hair and repainting faces. Well, right now she didn’t have paint or wigs with her, but she could still mix-and-match some things. She could swap arms- and she did, changing them around. She could swap one leg and not the other, giving them a cool multicolored
pants look- shit, the shoes didn’t match. She could fix that- the one on the right would look better with the boots, and the other with the flats. She made the nose a bit longer on the one on the right, stretching the metal as far as she could, and changed the arm position on the left, and then sat them up on the table.

Violet took a breath, looking over the figures. They weren’t great, and she was feeling very tired, but… they looked alright.

Well, that was the first not-horrible thing that had happened to her all week.

She paused for a second, waiting for them to come in. They said she’d be done after this, right? Shouldn’t they come in to let her out? She should be done now. What more did they want? Were they waiting to see if she was done?

“Well?” she called out, waiting. No response. “Are we done?”

Still no response. She tried to sit up farther, only for the restraints against her arms to hold her in place- what were these made of, anyway? Not metal, she couldn’t feel it…

She looked back at the mirror, yelling, “Hey! Hey, assholes! Hey! Hey! You said I was done! Are we done or not?”

Nobody answered, and she started to feel panicked again. She struggled not to breathe too fast, tried to keep herself calm, remember to stay calm, don’t freak out, don’t fuck up again.

But she was panicking. She still felt hurt from where she’d been shocked, she was exhausted, she was alone and it took everything in her not to just start screaming and cursing.

Don’t yell again. Don’t get hurt. They’ll kill you. Don’t give them a reason to.

“Hey!” she called again, her voice slightly cracked. “Are we done?”

Maybe they couldn’t hear her. She didn’t actually know if they could. She glanced around the room, trying to find… there. A camera was in the corner, right behind her. She looked back towards the action figures, and lifted one. After a second, she tossed it at the camera, watching until it clinked against it and then fell to the ground.

Still, nobody came.

She took the second figure, tossing it at the mirror, then lifting it and tossing it again. She had to take a second after that, shutting her eyes and breathing in, reminding herself not to pass out.

What the hell are they waiting for?

“Let me out!” she shouted again. “Hey! Let me out!”

She took a deep breath, and shut her eyes again, allowing the fear to sink in, reaching for the pings in her mind that would alert her to what she could move.

There was metal in the thing on her head, on the chair, the door hinges, part of the camera, the action figures, and behind the mirror.

Wait, no. No, if she started throwing things, they’d hurt her again.

They’re leaving me here. They left me here.
They’d come back and torture her some more, they wouldn’t just abandon her. She wasn’t thinking rationally, she was exhausted, she was in pain, she could feel blood on her face…

She was trapped. She was trapped and they weren’t going to let her out.

No. They had to, they…

Violet let out a choked sob, which turned into an angry scream faster than she’d thought possible. She gripped the arms of the chair and shut her eyes, and focused, and lifted the hat off of her head, tossing it behind her. She briefly turned her attention to the chair, wondering if she could bend it or twist it or cut off a piece to cut the restraints with…

She tried to move part of it, and instead felt a blinding headache. She immediately stopped, breathing hard, exhaustion filling her.

As the door opened, and people came forwards, loosening the restraints, something suddenly occurred to Violet. Maybe that was the point. Maybe, if she was so tired she couldn’t move, she couldn’t try to escape. Not until they’d found a way to force her to stay.

Well, fuck.

Some guards stood her up, and she heard Olaf’s voice from the doorway. “Well, you didn’t have to throw a tantrum. We were just finishing everything up.”

Violet was silent for a moment, as the guards urged her to walk forwards. She stopped, though, right by Olaf, and said quietly, “What happened to the other numbers?”

He didn’t respond, and after a second, she was pushed forwards. She was too tired to press the issue, but the silence was answer enough.

“God fucking damnit.”

She’d just got done stealing a new car- this time she didn’t have to poison anyone, she just had to swipe a key while the girl at the desk was busy talking to what she assumed was her boyfriend and rush out to the cars before they noticed what was going on. She’d just stopped at a store to swipe a meal for the road, and she spotted a worker heading towards her- a bit older than her, female, looking way too into her job. Great, she’d have to talk to someone.

Fiona plastered a smile on her face, anxiously pulling her glove up as the worker said, “Can I help you find anything?”

“No, no, just tracking down the snack bags and got distracted by the flowers.” Fiona shrugged, gesturing to the stand of flowers for sale in front of her. “I can find it, don’t worry.”

“It’s alright,” the worker shrugged, smiling slightly. Fiona scanned her nametag- Lisa. “I love flowers, too. My favorites are roses, they’re just so pretty, aren’t they?”

Basic. “Oh, yeah.” Fiona smiled slightly. “My favorites are foxgloves, though. Very pretty. Larkspur are pretty nice, too, and Morning Glory, Lily of the Valley, Mountain Laurel, Oleander, Wolf’s Bane…”

“Wow.” the girl looked impressed; Fiona guessed she didn’t know very many flowers. “You a florist or something?”

“Oh, well, whatever floats your boat.” Lisa shrugged, looking a bit uncomfortable. “You sure you don’t need any help?”

“Absolutely.” Fiona nodded. “Don’t worry, I’ll be out of your hair soon enough, I’m sure you all are close to closing.”

“Not close enough.” Lisa joked, rolling her eyes.

Fiona waved, and then scampered off, looking for the food. Damn, did she hate having to talk to people. She just needed some snacks, and then she needed to get back on the road; if she was heading back to the fucking Lab, she should at least get there fast, before those poor kids could get too trapped or brainwashed.

She ducked through an aisle, fidgeting with her hands slightly, looking through the bags for something interesting. She probably should grab something healthier, but she really wasn’t in the mood to eat something she didn’t care for when she was already marching back into her worst fucking nightmare. Might as well get something fun for herself. Plus, this wouldn’t spoil as fast.

She grabbed a bag of chips quickly, hoping it would last until she was at least out of state. She walked out, heading towards the checkout in the front of the store. She just needed to pay up, get back in the car, and start driving again.

That’s when she passed something that made her stop dead in her tracks.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

She’d only caught it out of the corner of her eye, but it was enough to paralyze her for an instant.

A Dad was across the aisle, shopping with two kids. The girl was giggling and bouncing and chatting about something at school, while the Dad tossed food into the cart. The boy, meanwhile, was sitting on the ground, rolling his eyes and flipping through a book.

Of all the books in the world, he had to be reading *Moby Dick*, didn’t he?

Fiona managed to duck into an empty aisle and get onto the ground, shutting her eyes and dropping the chip bag beside her, before it the fear overtook her.

It was one of the only books she’d been allowed. She was given a new book twice a year- once on her birthday, once on the anniversary of the start of the tests. She used to ask for fairytales. But then she asked for bigger books, around the time she was eight. Books she remembered being referenced by people, the kind people who used to be her friends, who used to take care of her. People like Mother.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was fine, but she didn’t understand a lot of it, a lot of what happened outside the walls of the rooms she went to. *Fahrenheit 451* was next, and she had to keep asking if it had really happened, and they kept telling her no, shut up, stop talking about the book and get back into the testing room.

And then she’d asked for *Moby Dick*.

She’d been starting to forget, forget things that were important. What Mother’s eyes looked like. What color her room was, before she was shoved into the white laboratory. The names of the
people Mother said they could trust.

But she remembered the book. Her Mother had it on the table in the living room- or the dining room? Or had her Stepfather placed it there? *Moby Dick*. She remembered the cover, and when she requested the book and was given a version with a different picture, she’d almost been disappointed. Almost as if they’d tricked her, given her a different *Moby Dick* just out of spite.

And then, late at night, she pulled a pen she’d smuggled out of a nurse’s bag out of the drawer, sitting in a way that the cameras couldn’t see, and she’d write.

In the middle of the book- the exact middle, she’d counted pages- she wrote the names she had to remember.

*Baudelaire. Quagmire. Snicket.*

She wanted to write her Mother’s name, too.

But she’d already forgotten that.

She’d gotten caught, when she was eleven. She kept the book out too long, stared at the middle page for too long, memorizing the names. *Baudelaire. Quagmire. Snicket*. She’d added names over the years. *Fernald. Fiona. Widdershins. Fiona Widdershins. Not Six. Fiona.*

They’d found it, and they got angry. They couldn’t see how she could remember the names. *Baudelaire. Quagmire. Snicket. Fernald. Fiona.*

She hadn’t been able to hurt them yet, so she couldn’t stop them from hurting her when they found the names.

And the book was taken away from her, too. She couldn’t write the names in her book anymore, but she kept them in her mind.

*Baudelaire. Quagmire. Snicket. Fiona.*

But she couldn’t write it down again. She couldn’t. Not after how mad they’d been. After what had happened, after the hitting and the screaming and the… she shouldn’t remember it this clearly. It was four years ago, and she was so young. She shouldn’t remember the hands on her arms, the hands that hadn’t hurt her in years, since she’d stopped yelling, since she’d started cooperating and smiling at guards and giggling during experiments. She remembered the exact feeling of the hands throwing her into the wall, remembered the punches and hits, remembered every word she said as she begged them to stop, to just let her have *this*, just let her have *one thing*.

*Stop thinking about it, stop thinking about it, stop thinking about it-*

And they hadn’t cared when they were done hurting her and she was still crying, and the book was in tatters in front of her, ripped up to make sure nothing else horrible was in it that could poison her mind. She was still sobbing, and they pushed her to her feet, and she started screaming then, screaming about how much she hated them, and that got her another kick to the stomach until she shut up. And then it was Solitary, trapped in the dark, small room, bleeding and sobbing and wishing that she could just kill them, that they’d die and she could walk out and find *someone*, someone who could help her.

*Baudelaire. Quagmire. Fiona.*

But nobody helped her. She didn’t know how long she was in Solitary, but she thought it might’ve
been a few days. Until they could go through all her books, and decide whether or not she was worth keeping- her tests had been slipping a lot, they didn’t know what else they could learn. She’d heard them whispering that when they thought she couldn’t hear. They apparently decided to keep her, probably hoping more interesting things would happen as she got older. But she didn’t know that while she was in the dark room, bleeding and bruised and sobbing and just repeating words in her head, whispering them to herself.

_Baudelaire. Quagmire. Fiona. Fiona. Fiona._

“Miss?”

Fiona glanced up, her vision a bit blurry—fuck, her glasses must’ve gotten smudged. How long had she been… Lisa was staring at her, looking incredibly concerned. “Are you alright?” she asked. “You look like shit.”

Fiona bit her lip. Her heart still felt like it was about to burst out of her chest, and her mind was screaming at her to look around everywhere, keep your eyes open, they’re going to take your book away again and slam you into the wall and hit and kick and scream…

“Miss?”

Fiona bit her lip, and said, “Sorry. I just… need to get out of here.”

She grabbed the chip bag, and raced out of the aisle, still shaking.

“Am I really fucking doing this?”

She knew if she got caught, she’d be worse than dead. She’d be there again. She’d be under wires and behind glass walls, poked and prodded and kicked and hit and…

She curled up in the driver’s seat, knowing that she should keep moving. The police might be looking for this car already. She should get out as soon as she could.

But could she actually go back? If she was right, if there was a Lab there, they’d recognize her. It didn’t matter how long it had been, she knew they’d recognize her. They’d take her away again and keep her under heavy supervision, and she’d be trapped again.

But if she just kept going, just went somewhere else… what the fuck was going to happen to those kids?

If they weren’t already experiments, they would be soon.

_Baudelaire. Quagmire._

She couldn’t just let this happen, couldn’t just let the same shit happened. And, who knew? Maybe she’d have good luck for once in her shitty life and they’d just be normal kids in a new foster home.

_Hawkins, though—_

Yeah, her luck had always been shit.

_Baudelaire. Quagmire._
“Fiona.” she muttered to herself. “She who hesitates is lost. Let’s go, Fiona. Go bust some kids outta hell.”

Time to drive again.
“We have gym class again?”

Duncan laughed a bit as Klaus glanced between the three of them, wondering if Isadora had been joking. Carmelita giggled quite a bit, tossing her hair over her shoulder.

“We have gym class every day here.” Isadora explained. “Although some high schools have it differently, and if you take a sport you can sometimes get exemption.”

“Yeah, I think you saw how much I suck at normal gym class yesterday,” Klaus said. “So I doubt I’m getting onto any sports teams anytime soon.”

“I get an exemption because I’m too adorable.” Carmelita said.

“You get an exemption because you’re a Cheerleader.” Duncan said. “And you got on the team-”

“Because I’m adorable.” Carmelita rolled her eyes.

They reached the school, and Klaus ducked slightly, hearing all the kids running around and shouting and chatting. He got a few odd looks, but a bit less than the day before. That was nice, at least.

“Well, cakesniffers, I’m going to go find my actual friends.” Carmelita rolled her eyes, playing with one of her eight slap bracelets. “Or are you going to get lost without me?”

“If you want to fuck off, please do so.” Isadora said. “We’d rather not have to talk to you.”

“Well, we agree on one thing.” Carmelita sighed. She then walked up to a teacher, saying, a bit loudly, “I want food! Where can I get food?”

“Just head to the Cafeteria,” said the teacher amiably, “And I’m sure someone can help you.”

“Whatever.” Carmelita then walked into the building, playing with her hair again.

“Why do the teachers put up with her?” Klaus asked.

“Cause she’s rich and popular.” Duncan shrugged. “If they’re mean to her, Esme yells at the principal and he yells at them, so they’d rather just give her what she wants. At least, that’s how I think it works.”

“All the kids love her, too.” Isadora said. “Probably because she conforms to the social hierarchy.”

“Conforms to the…?” Klaus laughed a bit. “This is school, not the feudal system.”

“Oh, buddy, wait until we have to do group projects.” Isadora shook her head.

“They’re going to kill him.” Duncan said quietly.
Sunny sat against the door, playing with the carpet and staring at the clock in the hall.

3:00. They’d be home soon, right?

She’d explored some more all day, but hadn’t found anything more interesting than the kitchens, and she still couldn’t do anything in those, because she couldn’t climb onto those chairs or counters and play with the nice things. She tried the library again, but it was a bit hard to find interesting books when she couldn’t yet read. So she wandered the second floor for a few hours, biting onto table legs and rolling on carpets, messing up her hair, but really, today had been another bore.

Unless this door held something interesting.

She turned around, pushing the door open and crawling in, glancing around. It looked a bit like Father’s office had; it had a desk, and some shelves, and a cabinet, and one of those cups with pens in them. She’d never found either of her parents’ study rooms very interesting before but, well, it was better than sitting on the carpet and trying to put herself to sleep.

Sunny crawled in, moving to the desk first, crawling under it. It might make a nice hideout if they ever played hide-and-seek, or if she ever just needed a nice spot to nap. She tried to open the drawers, but they were locked. She wished Violet was there, she’d know how to open them. Hopefully she’d be back soon; Sunny didn’t like leaving a mystery behind, especially since she’d always had things explained to her very quickly.

There was a chair, and Sunny could only barely reach the seat, which didn’t make for optimal climbing. She huffed, leaning against the desk as she stared at the chair. It looked like it moved- it had wheels, at least- and she loved those seats that moved; Mother used to have one in her room, and sometimes she’d let Violet and Klaus take it out and push Sunny down the hall on it, spinning it in some form of dance while a tape player played music she couldn’t understand. She’d like to sit in this one, but only if she could reach.

She spotted a thick book off to the side, and she grabbed it, pushing it with all her strength until it was beneath the chair. She climbed onto it, then hoisted herself onto the seat, giggling as she leaned back and it started spinning. It was a bit smaller than the one she’d had at home, or maybe she’d just gotten bigger since she’d last been on one of these, but it was still fun.

Probably would’ve been more fun if Klaus and Violet could be there.

Sunny let the chair slow down, glancing around at the room; it was a bit easier to see the shelves when she was higher up. She could see more thick folders than books, and the occasional ornament, inhabiting the shelves.

Something did catch her eye, though, shoved into a shelf in the far corner.

It was like a big, gray box, on the second-to-top shelf. She could see a dial on it- Mother had one of those in her office, she’d called it a Safe? She’d said there were secret things hidden in those, and that sounded very, very fascinating to her.

She slid off the chair and crawled over to the shelf. Hmm, pretty high up. Well, maybe if she stacked some books like steps… there were some very thick books on the bottom shelves, she’d only need to stack a couple, she thought, if she just…

She stopped as she caught something out of the corner of her eye, and she turned to stare at something else, her attention completely drawn away.
There was a small light on one of the shelves, and it was flickering, just like the flashlight had.

Sunny crawled over, sitting beside the light, giggling. Maybe this was something that happened in Hawkins? Lights just turned on and off? That was one good thing about this boring town; she got to see the lights flash.

The light suddenly stopped, and Sunny pouted for a second, grabbing it to see if something had gone wrong. Then she saw another light flash, on another shelf. She dropped her light, crawling as fast as she could to get to the new one, giggling.

Once she arrived, though, it also stopped, and she could see flashing from the hall.

Oh! So it was some kind of hunt now! Cool!

She crawled into the hall, following a flashing lightbulb from above her. Another one glowed from down the corner, and she kept moving, laughing as she did. This was fun! It was almost like a game!

She turned a few bends, following the flashing lights. She had to go up the stairs again, which took quite a while, but eventually she followed the lights to a room right beside her own. Pushing open the door, she noticed there were several lamps decorating the empty bedroom, which all kept going off, as if spinning in a circle.

Sunny giggled, moving to sit in the middle of the room, watching the lights flicker around her. She clapped her hands a bit as the lights went faster, the lamps going on and off and on and off and on and off. She wondered how this worked; she could probably ask Klaus when he got back- he’d get back soon, right?

Then, just as suddenly as they’d started, the lights stopped.

Sunny glanced around, confused. Why had it stopped? Everything had been going okay… maybe something went wrong with the lights?

Wait… something was going on. There was something on the wall- in the wall?

Sunny slowly crept towards the wall, curiosity overwhelming any self-preservation instincts she might have (though there were few to begin with). She sat in front of it, watching; something was stretching behind the wall, reaching out, almost like a hand, but the fingers were too pointy, looking sharp, more like animal claws. This area of the room felt really cold, too. Though the window wasn’t open…

Sunny reached up, as if to touch the hand, wondering exactly what was happening. Was someone stuck behind the wall? Maybe she could bite the wall, get them out…

“Sunny!”

Sunny jumped, turning around, as she heard Klaus run up the stairs. “Kla!” she called, and she started crawling away, forgetting about the hand for a second. She made it halfway across the room, before turning around and seeing that the wall looked completely normal.

“Hey!” she turned back to the door, seeing Klaus walking in, smiling a bit. She lifted her arms, and he picked her up, saying, “Hey, I’m gonna get some decent clothes on, and then we’re heading to the Library again. You alright with that?”

“Ya!” Sunny said, which meant, “I’d love to, because even though the Library seemed a little
strange, I really enjoyed getting to help with the research!"

“Alright, let’s go!” Klaus walked her out, saying, “I can tell you about school today. It was just as boring, but we had to do gym again-”

Sunny glanced over his shoulder as they walked. The lights didn’t move, and the wall remained normal.

Maybe Klaus could explain that to her later.

“I wanna help with the newspapers today.” Isadora said on the way over.

“You sure?” Duncan asked, shouldering Sunny; he’d offered to carry her on the way over, and she kept playing with his shirt collar, bored by the walk. “You don’t want to go over more books?”

“I need some variety or I’m going to die.” Isadora said simply. “And if I have to read one more fucking story about some guy who kidnapped children and ripped off their arms I’m gonna-”

“Yeah, please don’t mention that.” Duncan flinched.

“Maybe you two can use the computers,” Klaus suggested, “And I can dig out those old newspapers in the back.”

“That’s a good idea.” Isadora said. “If you put Duncan in charge of that, he’ll get distracted by other interesting articles and we’ll be the only ones doing work.”

“Not true!” Duncan protested.

“You guys use the computers better, too.” Klaus said. “I might not be able to use them okay, but I can definitely go through papers better. Father always says I’m good at researching things.”

“We can take some of the kidnapping books home, too.” Isadora said. “I’m returning the ones from last night- nothing really stood out, by the way- and we’ll just grab some more on our way out.”

“Sunny, you can go with Klaus, then.” Duncan said.

“Aw, I quite liked having her to rant at.” Isadora joked, poking Sunny on the arm.

“Nopro.” Sunny shrugged, which meant now, “I love to help!”

Klaus quickly translated for her, and then said, “We could drag Carmelita along and rant at her.”

“Naw, she’d just call us delusional and then kick us in the shins.” Duncan said.

“I’d sooner step into a ring of faeries,” Isadora rhymed, “Than take Carmelita to the library.”

The kids laughed as they finally reached the building. They entered, greeted Ms Caliban, and then went right upstairs.

“I went through a couple before I decided to go back to Computers,” Duncan explained, pulling out a box from a storage closet; apparently Ms Caliban had lent him a key the week before and forgot to ask for it back, and he was too concerned he’d get in trouble if he turned it in late to turn it in at
all. “I got up through November 1960, so if you wanna start at December, let me know if they ever found the bank robbers from June.”

Klaus smiled slightly, “Thought you weren’t gonna get distracted by other news stories.”

“Could be related.” Duncan joked, smiling back.

“You wanna tell Isadora that?”

“She doesn’t have to know everything.”

The two boys smiled at each other for a moment, and Sunny muttered something under her breath that neither boy heard, but meant something along the lines of, “If you’re done flirting, we have a job to do.”

“Well,” Klaus said, taking the box from him, “I’ll let you know if I see anything on bank robbers.”

“And I’ll tell you if we find something interesting.” Duncan added.

Duncan wandered back to Isadora, who was at the computer already, reading over some article from the 1940s.

“Well,” Klaus said, pulling open the box. “Sunny, you wanna look at some old pictures?”

“Yee!”

December 1960 turned out to be a pretty boring month, and by February 1961, Klaus was starting to see why they’d given up searching the newspapers themselves and started just using the computers and books; it was quite difficult to search through each paper, without knowing exactly what he was looking for. Even when he narrowed his search just to the crime sections, a lot of the time the text was hard to read, and most everything was irrelevant to anything he was searching.

“This was a bad idea.” Klaus muttered once he reached halfway through March, and glanced towards Sunny, who was playing with a crossword puzzle from somewhere in May 1961; not trying to solve it, just playing with the page. “Maybe I should take over with the books downstairs.”

“Hmm.” Sunny said, tossing the paper over her shoulder and grabbing the box, digging her hands in it to try and find a new thing to mess with.

“Careful not to get that out of order.” Klaus muttered, flipping over some report on a missing cat. “We don’t want to mess up-”

“Oops!” Sunny yelled as she leaned over too far and fell. She landed on the floor, due to the fact the box flipped with her added weight, and the papers all scattered into the air.

“Sunny!” Klaus groaned, immediately dropping his paper and rushing to grab the rest, which had spread across the floor.

“Holy shit!” He flinched as Isadora ran up, seeing the mess. Klaus had forgotten that the triplets weren’t that far away. She knelt down to help, too, as Duncan raced up and Sunny also started picking up the messy papers.

“Be careful, you could break the pages!” Duncan said.
“Ugh, we’re going to have to re-order them.” Isadora huffed. “How many of these are there?”

“Well,” Duncan said, kneeling down and gently picking up a few, ordering them by date as he grabbed them, “I’d say quite a lot of time is covered here, and since these newspapers are daily-

“ Fucking hell.” Isadora said. “Okay, we’ll make a pile per month and then order it from there. Put all the January 1961 here, all the-

“What the hell are you cakesniffers doing?”

They all jumped, looking up at Carmelita, who had stopped just a few feet away and was staring in complete bewilderment.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Duncan asked.

“You go to the Library?” Isadora looked like all her worst nightmares had come true. “You can read?”

“I’m not an idiot.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “I came to find you and the stinky librarian lady said you’d be up here. Why are you tossing all the papers around? If you were going to destroy property you should’ve invited me.”

“We’re not destroying property, this was an accident.” Klaus said. “We wouldn’t-”

“Foder,” Sunny said, not even looking up from the papers she was flipping through, which roughly translated to, “Fuck off, won’t you?”

“Sunny!” Klaus yelled, startled.

“Why are you here?” Duncan asked, carefully putting some December papers back into the bottom of the box.

“I could ask you the same question.”

“We’re doing research.” Isadora said stiffly. “Why do you care?”

Carmelita paused for a second, glancing between them and the papers, and Klaus wondered for a moment if she was piecing something together, or if she was just being judgemental. After a pause, she said, “Esme called, she wants you to be home instead of running around here being nerds.”

“Why does she care?” Isadora asked. “She never gave a shit before.”

“She gives a shit because she’s been informed that if one of us goes missing like those other people…” Carmelita paused. “Well, CPS’ll show up to annoy her, and she’s a bit too busy being the Sixth Most Important Financial Advisor to bother with them.”

“But can’t we-” Klaus began.

“If you don’t come home right now, I’ll start screaming and everyone will yell at you and you’ll be in trouble.” Carmelita said, crossing her arms. “And leave the dumb papers here, nobody cares about those anyway.”

“God, can’t you just leave us alone?” Isadora snapped, turning towards her.

“Can’t you not be an embarrassment to nature for five minutes?” Carmelita retorted, giggling slightly at her own insult.
“You know what?” Isadora shot to her feet, tossing the papers she’d gathered into the box. “Why don’t you say that to my face, you little-”

“Isa!” Duncan jumped up, too, placing the papers in the box and running to grab her arm. “Don’t, she’s just being a pain.”

“You’re all huge pains, and I can’t wait til you disappear, too.” Carmelita said.

Klaus paused as he placed the remaining papers in the box- too late to organize now. As Sunny started digging through the box again, apparently not having learned her lesson, he said, “What do you mean?”

“Three people are gone, and nobody cared about any of them.” Carmelita shrugged. “So you’re next, cakesniffers.”

“Three?” Duncan asked confusedly. “It’s just Martha and the man from the store, right?”

Carmelita smirked. “Did you eat a brain tumor for breakfast? That dumb old guy who sells stuff at the hunting store is just gone, everyone’s been talking about it- oh, wait, no, nobody talks to you. Anyway, all the people who are gone are people who suck and have no friends, so that fits your description.”

“Just ignore her.” Duncan muttered as Isadora huffed. “Just ignore her, let’s go back to the house, okay?”

“Why do you hate us so much?” Isadora asked.

Carmelita glared at her, and then said, “Why shouldn’t I?”

Isadora glared back for a moment, and then said, very quietly, “You know, I think you’re just being a bitch-”

“Isadora, let’s go.” Duncan said, almost forcefully.

Klaus pushed the box back into the closet- they could sort them later, he was sure- and picked up Sunny, who was playing with Klaus’s bag now. After a tense moment of silence, Isadora broke away from Duncan and pushed her way past Carmelita, racing out of the room.

“Aw, is she going to go cry?” Carmelita said, laughing a little.

“You know what, Carmelita?” Duncan said, and Klaus was shocked to hear how angry he sounded. “I think you’re a bitch, too.”

He left, then, and Klaus and Sunny hastily followed.

“I hate her!” Isadora screamed, kicking the wall.

“She’s just being mean to get attention,” Klaus said quietly, leaning against the wall, Sunny in his lap. “If you ignore her, she’ll-”

“This isn’t a fucking afterschool special, Klaus!” Isadora snapped, glaring at him. “She’s not gonna stop just cause I don’t look at her or if I start being nice to her, she’s just gonna be a bitch cause she can get away with it and it’s some kind of powertrip for her!”
“I’m aware,” Klaus said, starting to feel upset, too. “That we’re not in an afterschool special. Maybe if we explained to her what we were doing.”

“She’ll just call us nuts and blab about it.” Isadora huffed. “She already picks on us for thinking Quigley’s alive, if she finds out we’re researching it, she’ll never stop. She used to get all the kids in school in on it, too, but she got bored of that. Hell, though, now that you’re here, maybe they’ll join in again; there’s a new crazy kid to pick on.”

“I’m not crazy.” Klaus said, placing Sunny on the floor and standing up, too.

“Stop it!” Duncan said, jumping off the bed and standing inbetween Isadora and Duncan. “Isa, you need to calm down, you’re just pissing all of us off.”

“Good, we should be pissed!”

“Not good, we need to think rationally!” Duncan said. “Now, Esme doesn’t want us off on our own, but whenever Carmelita’s distracted I’m sure we can sneak over to the Library.”

“You think we’re gonna be able to do that every day?” Isadora asked. “You think Esme’s gonna let us run around everywhere without getting in trouble anymore? What happens if she actually gives us supervision now? You said we shouldn’t investigate the other disappearances, but now it’s our problem cause we can’t do shit thanks to them! And you said it didn’t mean anything!”

“Isa-”

“Hell, maybe it didn’t! Maybe none of this means anything!” Isadora yelled. “Maybe this was pointless! Maybe our siblings just got kidnapped by some cult or ring or gang and we’re never gonna see them again!”

“Isa!”

“This was all pointless!” Isadora screamed. “We’ve been wasting our time going through books when we should’ve just fucking left and gone back home! We should’ve gone back home and let those fucking people take us away, because there’s nothing better we can fucking do!”

“Isadora, stop it!” Duncan yelled.

“This wasn’t useless,” Klaus shook his head. “We had to have done something! We had to-”

“Didi!” Sunny suddenly yelled, and Klaus froze, staring at her.

“The hell does that mean?” Isadora asked.

“She… she said, ‘I did.’” Klaus said. “You… you found something?”

Sunny crawled towards the bag, which Klaus had dropped onto the floor second they got into the Quagmires’ room. She reached in, digging into the bottom, and then pulled out a paper.

“You stole a newspaper from the Library?” Duncan asked, shocked.

“How do you know this is important?” Klaus asked carefully, moving towards her and taking the paper, reading the June 30 1961. “You can’t read.”

“Eeyi,” Sunny said, meaning, “I know! Let me show you!”

Carefully, Klaus sat beside Sunny, handing her back the paper. Isadora and Duncan moved, too,
sitting next to them.

Sunny flipped the pages carefully, finally reaching one and passing it back. Klaus stared at it for a moment, bewildered. The article title just read, Young Orphan Adopted by Local Scientist. “I don’t get it.” he said, reading the title aloud. “Is this because we’re… we’re orphans, too?”

Sunny shook her head, then pointed at the picture that Klaus had barely glanced over.

The picture showed a man, with several children around him; one of them, Klaus assumed, was the titular orphan, though he wasn’t sure who. There were two girls about the same age, two boys about the same age, and then another boy and girl, looking to be in their late teens. They were all standing in front of a large house with an adult man, and none of them were smiling; Klaus read somewhere that not a lot of people smiled in old photographs, though, so this didn’t mean anything to him.

“I don’t know any of those people.” Duncan said, and Isadora murmured agreement.

Klaus was about to say something similar, but something caught his eye.

One of the younger girls, she looked… familiar. The way her hair parted, the shape of her eyes… it reminded him of something.

“She looks kind of like…” Klaus paused, still staring at her, waiting for something to finally click in his head. “Sunny, why-”

Sunny shrugged, and Duncan then said, “Uh, Klaus?”

“Yeah?”

“Did… did your Father take your Mother’s name when they got married?”

Klaus stared at him for a second, puzzled. “Uh, yeah. How did you-”

Duncan slowly pointed at the caption of the photo, and Klaus only got halfway through it before dropping the paper.

Armstrong Feint, with his daughter, Ellington (middle left), and his wards (top to bottom, left to right), Jacques and Kit Snicket, Beatrice Baudelaire...

“Beatrice Baudelaire.” Klaus repeated numbly, as Duncan picked up the paper, scanning the article.

Slowly, Sunny said, “Mama.”
“Why…” Klaus shook his head. “Our Mother didn’t… she never mentioned Hawkins, she never mentioned being adopted, Father mentioned being adopted, she never said she had siblings-”

“Foster siblings.” Duncan said. “None of them are actually related to her, I don’t think.”

“Who the hell is Armstrong Feint?” Isadora asked.

“Let me read the article.” Duncan said. “Okay, some kid’s parents died over in… Maine or some shit- it’s a bit blurred cause this paper is old as fuck- and Feint adopted him. He’s got a shitton of kids-”

“Including my Mother, apparently!” Klaus said.

“Well, that ties you to the town.” Isadora said. “Duncan, are our parents-”

“No, not seeing anything about them.” Duncan said.

“If we can find something about them, we can prove Klaus’s theory that there’s a reason we’re all here.” Isadora said. “What does it say about Feint?”

Duncan read. “Uh… it doesn’t mention if he has a spouse, only that one of the kids isn’t adopted, it looks like these Snicket kids were adopted in 1950, and then your Mother showed up in the family about seven years later, it doesn’t say where she came from…”

“I’ve never heard of these other people.” Klaus insisted. “Not the Feints or the Snickets-”

“You never asked your Mother about her childhood?” Isadora asked.

“She didn’t say much, so we just assumed it was a touchy subject.” Klaus said, nervously playing with the hem of his shirt. “Uh, we know at some point her hands got burned, and she mentioned living in the country once, and she said…” he struggled to remember. He’d never realized how little he knew about his Mother, and it wasn’t helping his nerves. “She and Father met when they were twelve or so? She said they had the same classes or something, but she always changed the subject, we just assumed…” he shut his eyes. Fuck it, he knew nothing about his Mother.

“What about your Father?” Isadora asked.
“I…” Klaus curled up, hugging his knees, sudden realization setting in. “I don’t know. I… I don’t even know what his name was before he married Mother, I just knew he took her name cause he mentioned it… we never thought to ask…”

Isadora paused, before moving to sit next to him, putting a hand on his arm. “We… we kinda had the same realization, about a week ago,” she said quietly. “For a project, we had to do a report on a relative- we got exempt, for… you know, obvious reasons, but… well, we realized we’d never met any of our family outside of our parents. We just assumed they didn’t have any, and they probably didn’t if we got stuck with Esme, but… we never even heard anything about them. We realized we didn’t… didn’t know where our parents grew up, or how they met, or…”

She took a breath, glancing at Duncan, who was watching sadly. Finally, he said, “What Isadora’s trying to say, is that we… we get it. It’s a bit… disturbing.”

Sunny crawled over, too, leaning against Klaus.

“Are you sure there’s nothing about Mother and Father in that article?” Isadora asked.

“I can look up Armstrong Feint next time we get to the Library.” Duncan said. “Or go through what files they have on 1957, see if we can find information about Klaus’s Mother’s adoption.”

“What else does this say?” Klaus asked, looking at the paper.

Duncan skimmed. “It’s not much. Mostly just a simple report and brief history of this Feint guy. Uh, he’d lived in town since childhood, he’s currently employed at Hawkins Lab-”

“Still?” Isadora asked.

“‘Currently’ in terms of when the paper was released, he’s probably super old now.”

“Or dead.”

“Wait.” Klaus said, feeling unsettled for some reason. “What’s Hawkins Lab?”

“It’s this weird old building halfway through the woods, but they’re technically part of town.” Duncan said. “At first Isadora and I thought it was, like, a hospital or something, but Carmelita says that they build weapons to fight the Russians.”

“And you believe her?”

“We didn’t want to, but nobody else has any ideas.” Isadora said. “And Esme didn’t say she was wrong… though, it’s not like she ever does.”

“What kind of weapons?”

“We think it’s probably nuclear or something.” Duncan said. “Which is why they’re so far away.”

“Maybe we could go visit.” Klaus suggested, seeing absolutely nothing wrong with that plan. “If this Feint guy is still around, maybe he can answer some of our questions about Mother.”

“I don’t know, it’s pretty remote. They probably don’t want kids running around.” Duncan said.

“We’re not just kids, Sunny and I apparently have family there.” Klaus said.

“Mehapa!” Sunny said, which meant, “I agree, it might be a clue as to why we’re here!”
“What if it’s bad, though?” Duncan asked quietly.

“Bad?”

“Well… we only ended up in town because our parents were murdered.” Duncan said. “It’s possible that the people who… who killed them know where we are. What if they even… what if they’re even the ones who got us into town? If we just go off alone to a closed-off lab—”

“If the kidnappers wanted us here, why wouldn’t they have taken us already?” Klaus said. “But there has to be a connection, a reason why we’re all here together. And if the Lab has answers for that, and information about my Mother…”

Duncan paused. “I do kinda want to know what's there…”

“I think you’re forgetting,” Isadora said, “That we’ve just been banned from leaving the house.”

They all stared at each other, and then Duncan said, “Esme won’t get home for another two hours.”

“Back door’s probably unlocked.” Isadora added.

“Is it?” Klaus asked.

“It will be, I stole a housekey last time we got kicked out.” Isadora shrugged. “And we’ve got bikes in the shed…”

They looked to each other, and then Duncan said, “If we take the path through the woods, nobody from town can spot us and tell Esme.”

“We can take a bike with a basket, and then Sunny can come with us.” Isadora said. “Make sure our commonplace books are in the bag, we should go before Carmelita notices we’re gone.”

She stood up for a second, and then let out a gasp, stumbling backwards.

“Isa!” Duncan jumped to his feet, panicked, and Klaus joined him soon after, lifting Sunny. “What happened?”

Isadora blinked for a moment, and then said, “I don’t know, I just suddenly felt… cold.” She paused, and then shook her head, trying to clear it. “Come on, let’s… let’s go.”

They snuck out the back door, and Isadora made sure to lock it behind them before they ran to the shed.

“It’s a bit bigger than our old shed.” Klaus said, as they opened the door.

“How big was yours?” Isadora asked.

“Maybe a quarter this size.” Klaus shrugged, as Sunny nodded in agreement. “We could never get it open, though. Father lost the key when we were toddlers and they never bothered to find it.”

Isadora hummed, and then walked in. There were four bikes shoved into the corner to make room for the sleeping bags they’d tossed in, and she grabbed the one with a basket. “I’ll take this one. Klaus, Duncan, there should be one for each of you, just pick the one you’d like better.”
Duncan came in, grabbing a bike, calling over his shoulder, “Carmelita told us she has all these bikes cause she’s ‘too adorable for just one,’ but I’m pretty sure she stole half of these. Don’t worry about it, though, I don’t think anyone will see us—”

He realized Klaus was still in the doorway, his face looking a bit red. “What?”

“I, uh…” Klaus muttered. “I, uh, think, I, uh…”

“Ecar.” Sunny said. The two triplets weren’t quite good at translating Sunny’s babble yet, but eventually Duncan figured out what she’d said.

“Klaus, do you know how to ride a bike?” Duncan asked carefully.

Klaus bit his lip and shook his head.

“You never learned?” Isadora asked.

“Uh, no. No, we never had any at the house and we never had any reason to learn.” Klaus said. “I, uh… how hard is it?”

Duncan glanced at Isadora, and she matched his gaze, both thinking the same thing: there was no way they could teach him to ride a bike, get to the Lab, and then get back on time.

“Maybe we can show you tomorrow.” Duncan said. “It’s Saturday, and if Esme doesn’t let us into town, we can probably convince her to let us in the yard.”

“But the Lab—”

“Just ride with me.” Duncan said, pushing his bike out of the shed and towards the dirt path. “Sunny, you can ride in Isadora’s basket—just hold on to the edges very tight, okay? Don’t want you to fall out.”

“Bohlin.” Sunny said.

“What my sister means,” Klaus said quickly, “Is that maybe next time we should bring a seatbelt. Duncan, are you… are you sure, I can probably…?”

“It’s no problem, we used to ride on each others’ bikes all the time at home.” Duncan shrugged. “Just jump on the back of the seat and, uh, hold on.”

Klaus hesitated, and then passed Sunny to Isadora, who moved to sit her in the bike basket. Sunny gripped onto the edges, and as Isadora got onto the seat, she said, “Yeah, you know, one time, we tried to sit all three of us on the same bike. It didn’t end well.”

“Quigley thought it was funny, and I did not.” Duncan said, as Klaus slowly tried to climb onto the back of the seat. “Mother and Father didn’t, either, because we fell right into the mud.”

“Aw, that was the fun part.” Isadora teased. She was about to start pedaling, when she felt it again.

Starting from her arm, she felt a paralyzing cold, much more chilly than the autumn air she’d been feeling just a moment ago. She paused for a second, shutting her eyes, wondering if she was sick or something. Duncan was saying something to Klaus, so neither of them noticed, but Sunny slowly moved a tiny hand over hers.

Isadora was about to move past it, but… well…
It was almost instinctual. She remembered when she’d been hugging Duncan just a few days before, and she’d known he was scared, she’d just known, even though he hadn’t been showing it. And it was only a few moments after that when she’d felt this cold for the first time, though it wasn’t as powerful.

She didn’t think about what she was doing, she just reached out with her mind.

And she didn’t just feel cold then.

She felt fear.

“Alright, Isa, you ready to go?”

Isadora snapped, broken out of her momentary reverie, and said, “Yeah, let’s go check out the creepy lab!”

She started pedaling the bike, pausing only to reach up and wipe her nosebleed.

It took them almost twenty minutes to bike to the Lab.

They moved down a dirt path, passing by a couple of houses that also bordered the woods for the first few minutes. Then they were going through the forest, and Klaus kept staring through the trees, watching as they passed by. He thought he’d see some animals running around, or at least a bird, but the forest seemed uncomfortably empty.

After several more minutes, they reached the edge of the forest, and looked through the trees at the building up ahead.

“Oh.” Klaus said quietly, looking up at it.

“Oh.” Sunny said, too. Duncan and Isadora were silent.

Hawkins Lab towered above them, looking still and cold against the darkening sky. It was marked off with a large fence- barbed wire, they recognized quickly- and from where they stood, they could only see one opening, with some kind of radio in front of it to contact whoever was inside.

It felt… off, for some reason, and Klaus couldn’t really pinpoint why. Sure, the barbed fence was worrying, but everything else looked normal. It looked like a normal, hidden lab in the middle of the woods. (Or at least he assumed, as he’d only seen the one.)

But there was some kind of dark feeling in his chest, one he couldn’t place, one that begged him to turn and run and never look back.

“Maybe we should go to the gate?” Duncan suggested, though he didn’t feel very enthusiastic.

“Something feels weird.” Klaus finally admitted.

“You want to go back?” Duncan asked.

“No, no, we have to…”

“We can just go to the Library tomorrow.”

“We came all this way…”
“It’s okay, it’s nice to get some fresh air…”

“No, no, we should go at least say hello-”

“I…” Duncan bit his lip. “Klaus, you’re right, it feels wrong. We-”

“We need to go.” Isadora suddenly said, her voice low.

Duncan and Klaus turned towards her, and Duncan suddenly started, seeing just how horrified she looked.

Isadora was incredibly pale, and she was barely moving, just staring ahead at the lab, terror in her eyes. Even as Sunny grabbed her hand, muttering something, she didn’t look down. She was almost completely still, her breathing very slow.

“Isa!” Duncan said, moving to get off the bike.

“We need to go.” Isadora repeated, her voice barely above a whisper.

Duncan and Klaus both ran over, with Duncan grabbing her arms, saying, “Isa, what’s wrong? What’s going on?”

“We need to go…” Isadora muttered. “I need to go, I need to get out of here, I need to go…”

“Isa!” Duncan sounded completely panicked, and finally, Isadora snapped out of it, blinking and shaking her head, turning to look at everyone else, still terrified.

“We… we can’t go in there.” Isadora finally said. “We have to go back.”

“Isa, what’s going on?” Duncan asked. “Wh- are you bleeding?”

Klaus stared as Isadora moved her sleeve to wipe blood from her nose, and it suddenly hit him that he’d seen that before- Violet had a nosebleed, right after the first kidnapping attempt. Right after she’d… right after those things had started flying…

No, no, that couldn’t be related to this.

“We have to get out of here.” Isadora repeated. “There’s… there’s too much fear here.”

“What does that mean?” Duncan asked. “Isa, what are you talking about?”

“There’s too much…” Isadora bit her lip. “We can’t be here. We have to go.”

“Okay, okay.” Duncan said. “Can you bike on your own-”

“I’ll be fine, we have to go-”

“Okay, we’ll go, we’ll go, Klaus, maybe we can come back later…”

“Ee?” Sunny asked, which meant, “Who is that?”

The kids all looked past the fence, seeing someone walk by.

“It looks like some kind of guard.” Duncan said. “Why would they need-”

“We need to go, now.” Isadora said, starting to shake. “I don’t think he should see us, he can’t see us, we need to go…”
“Okay, we’re going. Klaus, get back on the bike.” Duncan said, turning his friend. “We’ll come back later, let’s just go.”

Klaus hesitated, glancing from the Lab to the woods, and then he nodded.

Isadora still looked very bad while they were biking back, and every now and then Klaus scanned her over to see if she might topple, knocking her and Sunny into the bushes. He gripped tighter onto Duncan, who kept his eyes focused ahead on the road.

Only halfway back, though, Isadora skidded to a stop, once again staring into nothing.

“Oh, fuck.” Duncan said, also stopping the bike.

“Maybe she’s having some kind of panic attack?” Klaus suggested, as they got off the bike.

“I mean, it’s possible, but she’s never…” Duncan said. They ran up to her, and after a second, Klaus lifted Sunny out of the basket as Duncan helped his sister off the bike.

“Isa, what’s going on? You’re bleeding again, wha-”

“There’s something in there.” Isadora said, and she shakily pointed towards the woods.

They all turned towards the woods, following her gaze. They didn’t see anything.

“Are you su-”

Isadora started shaking again, not even noticing her nosebleed, which looked to be getting worse.

“Something’s out there.”

“Do you want to leave?”

“I- I don’t know, I think…I don’t know.” Isadora said. “I don’t know, I don’t-”

“Isa! Isa, hey, hey, look at me. Look at me.” Duncan said, putting one hand on her face and keeping the other on her arm. “Look at me, hey. Hey, we’re okay. It’s probably just a deer.”

“No, I can feel it, it feels wrong-”

“Isa, just calm down.”

Klaus stared at his friends, feeling even more worried as Duncan kept struggling to keep Isadora calm.

“Kla?” Sunny nudged his side, and he turned towards her. She pointed towards the woods, and said, “Gack!” “Look over there!”

Klaus peered into the woods, not seeing anything. He glanced over his shoulder, and then walked a bit in, occasionally glancing over his shoulder to make sure he didn’t get too far from his friends’ sight.

“Are you sure there was something here?”

“Ye!”
Klaus stopped inbetween the trees, glancing around. It felt a bit cold; night must be settling in, it was already getting a bit dark…

Something moved behind him, running fast, and Klaus whipped around. Sunny spotted it first, and screamed. Klaus then followed her gaze, only managing to see something huge and brown disappear into the trees, but it definitely startled him enough that he leapt back, letting out a shout.

“Klaus?” he heard Duncan call.

Klaus held Sunny close and ran back through the trees, seeing that Duncan and Isadora had started towards them, too, with Isadora having snapped out of her panic again.

“What happened?” Duncan asked.

“Isadora’s—right, there’s… there’s something there!” Klaus said, out of breath.

“Kaonashi!” Sunny screamed.

“What? What are you—” Duncan began.

“It— it might’ve been some kind of bear?” Klaus said, though it hadn’t looked much like a bear from the brief glimpse he got.

“Kaonashi!” Sunny repeated.

“What’s she saying?” Isadora asked, still shaking slightly.

“She’s saying it didn’t have a face!” Klaus said. “You probably just didn’t see it, Sunny, it was blurry—”

“Kaonashi!” Sunny insisted.

“We should get back to the house.” Duncan said quickly. “We’re all stressed, we’re all terrified, this was a bad plan, we shouldn’t have done this…”

“Give me Sunny, I can bike the rest of the way.” Isadora said, even though she sounded very tired.

“But—”

“I don’t care what’s going on,” Duncan said, grabbing Klaus’s arm, “But we need to get the hell out of here. We can talk about everything back at the house, just come on!”

Klaus hesitantly handed a still-crying Sunny over to Isadora, and then ran with Duncan back to the bikes.
Violet sat at the table, tapping her foot and waiting.

That morning had been a little different than the first few; when she was woken up, she’d been taken to a small bathroom, and told she had thirty minutes to wash up; if she took too long, they threatened again to cut off her hair. Violet probably didn’t need that in order to move fast, though, as the water was much colder than she’d ever felt, and she felt very uncomfortable in that bathroom the entire time; she assumed there were cameras somewhere to make sure she didn’t figure out how to escape while she was there, and she didn’t like the idea of someone watching her shower for longer than necessary.

After that, she had more food, and then she was taken to a different room. She wasn’t strapped to anything in this one, but one of the guards warned her that if she acted “tempramental” again, they’d do so. Violet just gave him a glare and resisted the urge to flip him off.

And now she was alone in the room, and she sat at the table, nervously glancing around.

Maybe they had drugged her again. That’d happened the last time she’d been in a room alone. If they did that, she’d just lift her chair and toss it at someone’s head.

She curled up a bit, and said, “Alright, Klaus. If I get drugged again, could I get out?”

She wondered what he would say. “I don’t know, Vi. Your powers were mainly awakened through the LSD, though it might’ve just been the panic that they caused. So you might be more powerful if they drugged you up, but you would also not be in your right mind. You wouldn’t be thinking straight at all.”

“I can’t remember a lot of it.” Violet said to nobody, reaching up to feel her hair, which had been pinned back again. “But it was terrifying, I thought I could… I wasn’t thinking right. God, I hope they didn’t drug me again. I’ll kill them if they…”

“Don’t say that, Vi. You’re not a murderer.”

“They certainly don’t have any problem killing people.” Violet shut her eyes, willing herself not to think of that night.
“That doesn’t mean it’s right.”

“But it’s the best way to make sure they don’t hurt you, too.”

She shut her eyes, struggling to stop thinking of… of the fire, of her Mother falling in front of her, of being dragged away by unfamiliar hands, of the panic that they might take her siblings away from her, too… seeing her Mother’s arm…

“Klaus, we were so sure that Mother and Father didn’t have marks. But I thought I saw one on Mother. We always thought if they had marks, they would’ve shown us. Shown us that it wasn’t just us, that we weren’t alone.”

“Maybe the marks mean something bad, something she didn’t want to tell us about.”

“She did want us to hide them… but she hid them even from us. Did Father have one? Did they both…” She took a deep breath. “That man told me that our marks meant that we… it meant that they owned us. And that we were supposed to be here all along.” she let out a dark laugh. “Guess that explains why Mother did her best to keep anyone from finding us, huh?”

“They have to be wrong. They’re lying. To keep you here.”

“I mean, it’s possible… but where did Mother’s mark come from, then?”

“If Mother had a number, does that mean she was supposed to be here, too?”

“Yeah. I think there were other numbers, once, but as far as I can tell, it’s just me, now.”

“So. What are you going to do?”

“What can I do? I’m stuck here until I can find a way to keep you out of here. They want you, too, and Sunny, I think.”

“Come on, Vi. Think of a way out.”

Violet glanced around the room. It was just her and a table right now; they hadn’t even put the wires on her head yet, though the table that the headset and machine rested on was once again pushed into the corner. The table in front of her was made of wood, so she couldn’t lift that. She might be able to lift the chair, rolling table or machine, but she didn’t know how long she’d be able to use that as a weapon before she made herself pass out; her powers definitely drained her energy. Last time she’d looked out the windows, she’d been pretty high up. She’d have to go down the stairs, and any number of people could be there. And if they had some kind of fence or perimeter, she was going to be in trouble.

She turned towards the door, and shut her eyes, reaching out, focusing only on what was around her. After a minute, she felt those pings again, those light areas in the room that were metallic. Some of it in the mirror, definitely a lot in the chair, a bit in the camera in the corner, definitely the machine and rolling table, but she also felt a bit in the door hinges, knob and lock.

She probably should’ve practiced locking and unlocking the door in her room, but she’d been too exhausted to do anything over than collapse on her bed. Besides, they might’ve noticed that on the cameras. She was starting to wonder how many cameras there were; were there some she didn’t see, were the ones she did see real or decoys?

She sat for a few more moments in silence, before the door opened behind her. She turned, biting her lip as Olaf walked in.
Once the door shut behind them, Violet said, “What the hell do you want me to do in here?”

Olaf gave her a look, walking over and sitting on the other side of the table. “Honestly, you can’t be patient at all, can you? The last experiment did as he was asked and didn’t complain nearly as much.”

“Oh? And where the hell is he?”

Olaf gave her a glare, and then said, “That’s none of your concern.”

“Kinda is, seeing as you only got me once you lost him.” Violet said. “And all the other numbers, apparently.”

“If you’re going to continue talking back,” Olaf said, “We can put you in Solitary for a little while.”

Violet bit her lip and gave him a glare.

“We’ve been testing your metallic manipulation for a bit.” Olaf said, “But we’d like to see if you have any other abilities. Most subjects display more than one-”

“If you drugged me again,” Violet said, leaning back slightly, “I swear to God-”

“No, no. We got what we needed from that for now.” Olaf said. “So long as you keep cooperating, we shouldn’t have to use the LSD again.”

“Don’t you fucking dare!” Violet said, her voice raising in a deep fear. “Don’t you fucking-”

“God, can’t you ever shut up?”

Violet took a few deep breaths, reaching to grip onto the edge of the table. She kept her glare on Olaf, until he finally said, “Anyway. We’ve got a few more tests. If you have any other abilities, they may be somewhat related to your control of metal. Have you noticed anything different since the LSD?”

“Well,” Violet said quietly, “I’ve been terrified and paranoid, so there’s that. I can move metal with my mind. And I’ve been electrocuted and shoved into solitary confinement when I complain about my treatment so, if that’s what you mean, yeah.”

Olaf glared right back at her, and then said, “Well, we thought you might have some form of telepathy, due to your conversations with nobody, but our sources tell us that your brother hasn’t been hearing you, so-”

Violet felt her face go a bit red. She probably should’ve assumed they’d heard her talking to herself, but it wasn’t a nice fact to acknowledge. She thought back quickly, wondering how much she’d said out loud, how much they might know. Maybe they hadn’t been listening to specifics, maybe they didn’t… she shouldn’t have spoken up, shouldn’t have assumed she had any privacy…

“We were hoping you’d have some locating powers, but we’re doubting that as a possibility now. We would also like to see what happens in the Sensory Deprivation tank, but that’s currently-”

“I don’t want you listening to me!” Violet finally snapped. “That’s private.”

Olaf didn’t even flinch. “I don’t give a damn what you have to say to your imaginary friends. You know, your Father used to do, that, too- at least, I think that was your father…”
Violet stared at him. “Father was here, too?”

“I’m getting really tired of your ignorance.” Olaf said, indeed sounding frustrated. “I believe it must be willful at this point—”

“What number was he?”

Olaf gave her that disappointed and annoyed look. “What?”

“What number?” Violet asked. “Mother was one, I… I think. I thought I saw her mark once. But I never saw Father’s… which one was he?”

Olaf stared for a moment, and then said, very darkly, “You would like to find out, wouldn’t you?”

Violet felt several alarm bells going off in her head, though she wasn’t entirely sure why. She suddenly felt like she was in a lot of trouble, even though little had changed. She glanced towards the camera in the corner; those were everywhere, so it wasn’t as if anything could happen to her that nobody would know about…

“Yes, that’s why I am asking,” she finally said, “But… we have tests to do, don’t we?” She unthinkingly reached up to touch her pinned-up hair.

Olaf paused. “We do. But I believe I have an idea of the… things we can tell you. That might convince you to cooperate.”

Violet flinched and, without another word, he stood up and left, leaving her alone for a moment. She breathed hard, curling up, trying to decide what branch of fear was causing the sudden ache in her stomach.

In a few moments, some doctors came in, attaching that wire-thing to her head. Violet bit back the urge to ask questions about how it worked; she knew they’d just get mad at her for talking, and she already felt like she’d fucked in some regard.

They gave her a coke bottle, which she crushed upon request, and then she slammed two sheets of metal into each other. Her hands were still free, but she couldn’t quite reach the table with the wires still on her head, attaching her to the machine.

“I’m getting good at this, Klaus,” she said, as quietly as possible. She didn’t know whether that should scare her or not.

Then a woman came in, saying, “According to your files, you should find this interesting.”

Violet groaned, but watched carefully as she placed a music box in front of her. Or at least, she assume it was a music box; it was painted with the image of a garden (though the art had faded with time), and there was a dial on the side.

“Do what you want with this,” the woman said, before leaving.

Violet got up, getting as close to the table as she could. She paused, before immediately spinning the box with her mind, opening up the back to look at the mechanics inside. The ratchet lever looked a bit rusted, and she thought she saw a loose screw on the bedplate. She stared at the screw, and shut her eyes, focusing only on that. When she opened her eyes, it was re-screwing itself back in.

That might be a helpful skill to have.
She moved a bit forwards, leaning down and examining it closer. She had repaired Sunny’s music box just a month ago, the one that played some old jazz song. Mother had found it in storage, and played it for Sunny to make her go to sleep, but it had fallen off the dresser and busted itself in the night. So Violet and Klaus read up on music box mechanics, and she’d been able to repair it fast enough that Sunny could sleep by herself.

That box was probably gone now. She wondered how Sunny was sleeping without it.

She shook her head and remained focused on the music box in front of her. It didn’t look as badly damaged as Sunny’s had; in fact, it was in pretty decent condition. She wondered if she could reprogram the song herself. Well, first, she should probably figure out what it was already playing. She put the back wall of the box back, and then turned it around, intending to wind up the box and open it to see what would play for her.

The door opened before she could do that, though. She reached up to wipe the trickle of blood from her nose, and backed up a bit, confused, when Olaf walked up, picking up the music box.

Instead of replacing it with something for her to test, he dropped a file on the table, only barely within her reach.

“The hell is this?” Violet asked.

Olaf gave her a look. “You asked for information.” Violet suddenly felt her stomach plummet.

“Let’s see what happens when you get it. You have three minutes.”

Violet stayed perfectly still as Olaf walked away, staring at the folder as if it might explode. Suddenly dread filled her.

“It could be all fake.” came Klaus’s voice in her head.

“It’s definitely filtered. They’ve been so vague and… and evil, Vi. They wouldn’t tell you everything.”

Violet felt suddenly very aware of the wires on her head, feeling like they were pressing down on her. “There’s no harm in reading it.” she said quietly. “Gathering information.”

“There might be.”

“They might get angry if I don’t. I don’t want to get electrocuted again.”

Slowly, very slowly, Violet reached out and took the file, moving to sit in the chair, suddenly feeling very small.

“Maybe this is wrong.” insisted the voice in her head that sounded like her brother. “Mother and Father didn’t want us knowing all these things. That’s why they never told us, they didn’t want us to know, you don’t want to…”

“To what? Disrespect their memory?”

“Just…”

“They didn’t tell us shit, and that’s why we’re in this mess.” Violet shut her eyes, fumbling with the edge of the file. “Maybe more information can help. Help figure out why I’m here, why you
and Sunny are in danger. Help me figure out how to…” How to get out. “At least contextualize some things.”

Violet sighed, and flipped open the file.

There were only three papers, she noticed first, as they almost fell. Well, one was a paper; the other two felt like photos.

“Oh, well, that settles it. That’s just what they want you to see. Wouldn’t they have more files on Mother and Father if they were marked?”

“Shut up, I’m busy.” Violet muttered, grabbing the paper and looking it over, ignoring the photos for now.

At first, she didn’t understand why this was relevant; it was just a file, with a blurry picture of a young girl in the corner, younger than Klaus. The paper looked incredibly old, the writing a bit faded.

Then she stared at the girl some more, and recognized the eyes.

“I’m…?”

She glanced towards the file. There, towards the top - LEGAL NAME: BEATRICE BAUDELAIRE.

The girl barely looked like her Mother; she seemed so small, and her hair was falling over her shoulders, reaching past the frame- Mother had always had short hair, from what Violet could remember. And her eyes looked distant, confused. Like she wasn’t sure what she was doing.

However, now that Violet knew who this girl was, she suddenly realized something she hadn’t before, and felt her heart sink.

She looked just like Klaus.

It was easier to tell when they were vaguely a similar age, and of course this young Beatrice didn’t have Klaus’s signature glasses, but her nose, her eye shape, the way her eyebrows furrowed in her bewilderment, it looked so much like her brother. And now that she paid attention, she could see bits of Sunny in the way her face was structured, and the way her hair curled a bit towards the top.

“You need to look at the rest of the paper. Focus on what’s important. Get all the information, like I would.”

Violet felt tears at the edge of her eyes, and she forced herself to look away from the photo, at the rest of the file, straining to make out the words; there weren’t very many that were still readable.

13 OCTOBER 1958

EXPERIMENT 003 - LEGAL NAME: BEATRICE BAUDELAIRE

BORN | 4 SEPTEMBER 1948

EXPERIMENTS BEGAN | 13 JANUARY 1957

ABILITIES MANIFESTED | 29 SEPTEMBER 1958
CURRENT ABILITIES

- MANIPULATION OF FIRE (does not currently include smoke or heat)
- FIRE IMMUNITY (only gained after extensive pushing; when abilities first appeared, she gained burns, which have not yet disappeared)

Below that were several other notes Violet didn’t quite understand, listing different factors and using large words, a lot of the sentences missing with age.

“Wish you were actually here.” Violet whispered. “You could translate to me what they’re saying about our Mother.”

“You seem upset.”

“Of course I am. Our Mother was… some kind of experiment. We’re caught up in this now, and the doctors are probably listening to our conversation right now.”

“One-sided conversation. I’m not here, remember?”

Violet bit her lip and flipped the page; blank on the back. Okay, that was okay. She could keep going. She reached for the first photo, holding it up.

The first one was labelled at the bottom with 28 June 1961. Violet held it up to her face, inspecting it.

It looked like a sad family photo—sad in that all the children in the photo were in hospital gowns and nobody was smiling. Violet spotted her Mother quickly; she was kneeling on the floor with a boy her age, and her hair was drastically different from the first photo; it was even shorter than she’d kept it as an adult, her haircut almost like a boy’s. She looked a bit older than she had in the file, which made sense; simple math told Violet that she would be twelve now, while she’d been about nine or ten on the paper. In the photo, her Mother looked very nervous, and Violet noticed familiar gloves on her hands quickly. The boy next to her was looking at the camera, she thought, but his face was a bit blurred, as if he’d been facing another direction and moved too fast.

There was a cold bench behind the children on the floor, and three other kids were sitting there; one only looked a little bit older than her Mother, with very dark hair in a bobbed style, and she sat in the middle of two teenagers, her hands nicely folded on her lap and her face emotionless. The two others—Violet would place them at maybe fifteen or sixteen—also had blank expressions, and they were sitting upright. The one on the left was a boy, and the one on the right was a girl, though they looked remarkably similar to each other; she also noted quickly that the girl’s hair was even shorter than Beatrice’s, and she had a pair of glasses. Violet also noticed that the girl in the middle had a locket against her neck, while nobody else looked like they had jewelry.

Once she finished scanning the children in the photo, she noticed that there were little written numbers beside each kid. Her Mother was labelled 003, the number written right underneath her, and the boy beside her was 004. The boy teenager was 001, and the girl 002. She searched for a moment, but didn’t see anything beside the girl in the middle of the bench.

Violet flipped the photo over, and once again, it was blank, except for the date, once again scribbled in the margin. She flipped it over again, looking for more, but the photo had been taken in front of a blank wall, and nothing besides the numbers and date was written.
“So,” said Violet, “They had up to Four while Mother was here. Father must be Five or Six, then, if I’m Seven.”

“How do we know Father was marked?”

“Why wouldn’t he be?”

“I wonder who these people are. I wonder what happened to them.”

“Mother never mentioned them.”

“She never mentioned this place at all.”

“Well, I’ll just get to the end of the file. We can theorize later, figure it all out once I’m done. They might take this file away if I don’t finish it soon.”

Violet put the photo down, then glanced at the next one. Well, that one had been shoved in backwards; on the white backing, she could see the date written, 06 June 1972. So her Mother would be an adult by then. Maybe there’d be something interesting here.

She picked up the photo, flipped it over, and immediately dropped the rest of the file.

No. No, no, no…

“Come on, Vi, why are you surprised?”

No, no, no…

Her Mother was sitting on a porch step, definitely an adult now, not dressed in a hospital gown anymore- she had a short-sleeved shirt and long, dark skirt instead- and her hair fell to her shoulders, and instead of looking confused or scared, she was smiling pleasantly for the photo. Next to her was Bertrand Baudelaire, looking a bit younger than Violet had seen him, also looking happy.

That wasn’t what had shocked her so much.

What shocked her was that she was in the photo.

She wouldn’t have guessed it was her without the context of her parents on the porch, and the date that would put her at slightly less than three years old. A little girl, barely past toddler-age, sat beside her Father, her hair in two small pigtails, and she was wearing an oversized sweater, looking very tired, not very excited to be taking this picture.

And Beatrice was holding a baby, barely a year old, squinting at the camera and frowning, probably upset at having to hold still for so long.

“No.” Violet said out loud.

“They did warn you, Vi. We were supposed to be here, since birth.”

“No, no.”

“Don’t be so surprised. We had to get our marks somehow, didn’t we?”

She still stared, disbelieving. It looked too jarring after the first photo, because this one looked like an actual family picture. Violet then glanced down at her younger self, and found her eyes drifting
to her arm. She didn’t have her mark yet.

“Wonder when they added those.”

“Stop it.” Violet shook her head. “Wh-when did Mother get out, then? I didn’t think… Klaus, did she…?”

The door opened behind her, and Violet let the photo drop to the ground with the rest of the file. She stayed in place as Olaf came back, stopping in front of her. “Are you going to pick that up?”

Violet felt very, very cold. “Why do you have that?” she pointed to the photo she just dropped.

Olaf glanced down at the photo, and then said coldly, “Who do you think took the picture?”

The tears started sometime around then.

“Are you going to pick that up?”

Slowly, Violet leaned over and picked up the papers, shoving them back into the file.

“I’ll take that-”

“Don’t.”

Violet stared down at the file, and then let out a choked sob.

“God, we don’t have time for this. Hand me the file, we can continue our testing-”

Violet got to her feet, her eyes dark, terror and shock turning to frustration and anger. She let out a scream, and flicked her hand, and the chair she’d been sitting in threw itself against the wall, before clattering to the floor.

Then she doubled over, still clutching the file to her chest and sobbing.

In a moment, Olaf moved forwards, ripping the file away from her. “Don’t throw another tantrum, we have things for you to do.”

She struggled to make words out, to breathe through her tears.

“Come on, Vi, get up. Don’t let them hurt you again.”

I can’t, Klaus. I can’t…

“Get up!”

She shouldn’t be shocked. Her Mother had the mark, they’d all been tattooed, marked for this experimentation, it only made sense that they’d been here before, that some of these doctors knew who she was…

But her Mother had looked so happy in that photo. As if it what was happening here wasn’t a problem. As if this was a normal part of life. Her Father hadn’t looked upset, either. And her and Klaus had been so young, so small…

She shouldn’t be this panicked, this terrified, but she was, and she couldn’t stop it.

“Get up!”
She felt a hand on her shoulder, forcing her upright. She stared at Olaf, unable to hide her sobs, shaking and struggling to breathe.

“Violet, are you overstimulated?”

No, Klaus, it’s worse.

“That’s not possible.”

Klaus, I can’t breathe.

“That man is saying something to you. You should listen.”

I can’t. I don’t know what’s going on. Klaus, I’m dizzy.

“You’re shaking.”

I don’t know what’s happening. I can’t breathe.

“Try to listen. What if he hurts you?”

Everything hurts! Everything hurts, Klaus, I’m dying.

“You’re not dying.”

“-won’t calm down, we’ll have to put you in Solitary again.”

Help me, please…

“You see? There are some things you just shouldn’t know. This is what happens.”

I can’t breathe…

A guard came in, dragging her by her arm. She couldn’t even stumble after him, letting herself just be taken into the hall. Another guard took her arm, and they were dragging her down the hall, but it seemed so long, so far, so cold…

“Do you feel that?”

Klaus?

She suddenly started screaming, screaming and crying and feeling something wrong. She felt like she was being watched, more than just from the doctors staring at her as she was dragged down the hall, doubled over and sobbing. Like someone was distant, watching her like a ghost. Someone was grabbing onto her, grabbing onto her feelings or thoughts or…

Klaus, I’m scared. I’m so scared.

“Breathe, Vi. Breathe.”

I can’t breathe!

She saw the door before she processed what it meant. She started screaming harder, backing up, trying to break away, no, no, don’t put me back-

They threw her into Solitary and shut the door.
She screamed louder, curling up and staring ahead in the pitch blackness. She still couldn’t breathe, and she still felt like someone was watching her—no, no, not watching, not watching, but she couldn’t describe this feeling, almost like someone had... hooked onto her. And she couldn’t stop screaming and sobbing and trying to breathe...

“Violet, I’m here.”

No, you’re not. You’re just my imagination.

“Breathe, Vi. You have to breathe, or you’re going to die.”

I can’t.

“Breathe, Violet. Breathe.”

I have to go. I have to go, I need to go, I need to get out of here, I need to go...

“Breathe!”

Violet laid against the wall, shutting her eyes and gripping the edge of her dress, gasping for air and struggling to wipe tears and blood off her face with her other arm. She was shaking and sobbing and shivering, and she felt like she was going to die.

“Breathe, Vi. What happens to us if you leave?”

“Help me. Help me, please.” she knew Klaus couldn’t hear her; nobody could. But she just needed to beg someone. Someone, please, hear her, help her...

“I can’t help you, Vi. You need to get out on your own.”

Violet’s chest hurt, and she felt too hot. She moved, and all of the sudden all the pins holding her hair up were hurting, she could feel all of them, she hated them. She reached up, running her hands through the pins and ripping them out, screaming, ignoring the pain coming from her head, not caring how much her hair was getting tangled and knotted as it fell down her back. She just wanted them out.

The pins clattered to the floor, and she ran her fingers through the strands of hair, pulling it over her shoulders.

She kept crying, and screaming, for God knew how long.

“Violet...”

This is her fault.

That was unfair. But she didn’t care. Everything was unfair. And she couldn’t stop crying.

“No, it’s not. It’s not her fault. She tried to keep us safe-”

And look where that got us.
“For the love of f-fuck.” Quigley muttered, hugging himself in order to get some kind of warmth.

He knew Isadora and Duncan were talking to somebody, some kid he’d never seen before—had they called him Klaus? It took him the last two days to finally pick up on his energy, and the visual of him kept going in-and-out, a lot more transparent than Isadora and Duncan. There was a baby, too, that he thought might be named Sunny. She wandered around too much, and he could never keep her attention. He’d thought she might’ve been in trouble, when he thought he heard the Monster in the house, but he’d hidden in the attic for a few hours and it hadn’t come to kill him, and nobody else seemed hurt, so maybe he’d been mistaken? Either way, the two seemed to be mostly helpful.

But of course Klaus had just said the most dumbass thing—“Yeah, let’s go visit Hawkins Lab. Not a bad idea. Not a bad plan.”

“You can’t go there.” Quigley yelled as loud as his voice would allow, hoping to God that somebody heard him. “You hear me? Don’t go there! They’ll kill you, they’ll kill you, don’t go!”

Apparently Klaus’s Mother had been living in Hawkins, with five other kids and a guy who worked for the Lab. Quigley was piecing some things together in his mind, some things he really didn’t like, and the fact that his siblings’ new plan was to waltz up to Hawkins Lab and announce their identities and relations was just making him more and more nervous.

“Duncan! Isadora! Don’t go! Hey!”

The four kids on the Other Side were sitting around, staring at each other, and Duncan said, “Esme won’t get home for another two hours.”

“No!”

“Back door’s probably unlocked.” Isadora added.

“No! Stop it!”

“Is it?” Klaus asked.

“It will be, I stole a key. And we’ve got bikes in the shed…”

“Just listen to me! They’ll fucking kill you!”

Quigley started coughing again, doubling over. He’d been coughing a lot recently, which was probably cause for alarm, but that wasn’t important right now, not while his siblings were about to march right up to the gates of Hell and beg to be let in.

He glanced up just as the flickering image of Isadora got to her feet, and, without thinking, he rushed forwards, as if to tackle her, hold her back, stop her from moving.
He fell right through her, which he should have expected; he hadn’t been able to touch her at all. But as he fell, he heard her let out a gasp, and he looked up to see she’d stumbled backwards, leaning against the bed.

“Isadora?” Quigley asked.

“Isa!” he heard Duncan yell. “What happened?”

Isadora was staring into nothingness, and as Quigley stumbled to his feet, gripping onto the bed to keep his balance, he watched her, wondering if he’d accidentally done something… had he hurt her?

“I don’t know,” Isadora finally said, sounding breathless, “I just suddenly felt… cold.”

Quigley bit his lip. He knew that was the only way he could touch his siblings- he could only spread the freezing cold of the world he was in- but it still hurt to remember, to remember that they didn’t actually know it was him, they just thought something was wrong.

Though…

The kids all left the room, and Quigley hesitantly followed. He hadn’t left the house in the last few days, even as his siblings did, preferring to wait where he knew they would be; he didn’t know if he could walk with them everywhere, anyway, he was starting to get tired more easily, which was probably just a side-effect of the Lab schedule, probably nothing to worry about. But now that he thought about it, if they could feel the cold, maybe he could use that. Maybe he could stop them.

They moved over to a shed in the backyard- he didn’t know what it looked like on the Other Side, but he assumed it was better than what he saw in this place. This shed was overgrown, covered in mold, and looked about ready to crumble at any moment. He waited a moment, watching as they chatted and grabbed bikes- he could see them once his siblings grabbed them, he didn’t even know there was anything of value in this shed. He peered in, seeing only broken parts that might’ve once been bikes, or might’ve once been something else. His siblings didn’t notice him as he passed by; they were all talking as if they weren’t about to walk right into the one place that would destroy them most.

“Yeah, you know,” Isadora said, getting onto the phantom image of a bicycle, “One time, we tried to sit all three of us on the same bike. It didn’t end well.”

“Quigley thought it was funny,” Duncan said, “And I did not.”

Quigley stared at him for a second, and then said, “It was funny, idiot.”

“Mother and Father didn’t, either,” Duncan said, “Because we fell right into the mud.”

“Aw, that was the fun part!” Quigley and Isadora both said at the same time. He paused, before smiling sadly at her.

She looked like she was about to start moving, and so he took a deep breath, ran up, and grabbed her by the arm.

Isadora paused, which was good enough. Quigley kept watching her, wondering if maybe he should move forwards, maybe he could walk through her again… what happened if this didn’t work? What if she just waltzed into the Lab, and took Duncan and these other kids with her? What
if they took them and drugged them and tortured them and tested them until they snapped or broke or…

Isadora bit her lip, and shut her eyes, getting that look she always got when she was focusing. Quigley stared at her, watching as she started to shake slightly, suddenly looking just as scared as he felt. *Just* as scared… maybe he was doing something right?

She pulled away as Duncan said something, and then yelled quickly, “Yeah, let’s go check out the creepy lab!”

“No! No, don’t-” Quigley started after her again, only to freeze over.

She reached up, wiping blood away from her nose.

*No, no, no-*

“No, no, no!” Quigley yelled as she started pedaling away, racing after her and Duncan. “No, *no*!”

She’d done something, she’d used some ability. Because of him. She had an ability and she’d just used it and now the Lab was going to find out and take her away. She was going to be thrown into all of this, she was going to die…

He was still running after her and Duncan, yelling for a while before he shut up and focused on breathing normally while he ran- if they hadn’t been going a bit slow on their path, probably trying to avoid running over too many rocks or twigs, he probably wouldn’t have been able to keep up. He thought that the Klaus kid might have noticed him a few times, as he kept looking into the woods, almost right at him, but if he did, he said nothing.

He kept running, sometimes losing their images, too worried and tired to keep focusing on them. But he kept following the path, trying to map out the routes he was taking in his head in case they got separated, or he lost them, or if he needed to remember how to get inbetween the two places.

When they finally got to the Lab, Quigley skidded to a stop, staring ahead in horror. It had been days since he’d seen the place, but it still filled him with some kind of dark dread. He started shaking, stumbling back while Duncan and Klaus started distantly talking.

*I need to go, I need to…*

He looked towards Isadora, who shut her eyes, looking like she was thinking very hard. Quigley approached her, putting a hand over hers; even though he wasn’t really touching her, it was better than just watching, and maybe it could function as another warning-

He staggered back, suddenly bursting into another coughing fit. It almost felt like he was about to throw up, but he didn’t think he was… God, he felt *awful*, maybe he was actually sick or something…

He looked up when his coughing stopped, and his eyes fell on Isadora; she looked absolutely terrified, which did nothing to calm him down.

“Isa?”

“We need to go.” Isadora said, so quietly that Quigley barely heard.

Quigley stepped back, as Duncan ran up, grabbing her arms. “Isa, what’s wrong? What’s going on?”
Oh, God. Had he done something to her? Had something happened? Was it when he touched her, or was it something to do with the Lab? Fuck, fuck, they needed to go, they needed to get out of here…

Quigley slowly turned towards the Lab, a sudden realization hitting him. The Gate was probably still open. Still there. Maybe he could get through it, get back to the Other Side, the Right Side…

And then the doctors catch you, and kill you.

They wouldn’t care if he was sick, or tired, or scared. He’d die in there, he knew it. He wouldn’t have the chance to get out, they’d find him and trap him somewhere…

He turned, realizing that his siblings and their friends were starting to leave. He took another glance at the Lab, and then ran back down the path.

When Isadora stopped on her bike, Quigley sat on the ground, trying to steady himself, shutting his eyes. All this running was starting to get painful, and it was getting kind of hard to breathe.

“There’s something in there.” Isadora said distantly.

Quigley paused, looking up at the image of her. In the woods? Maybe she felt him. Maybe that was her ability, maybe she could feel…

Unless… oh. Oh no.

Quigley got up, walking into the woods for a moment. He thought he saw something red flash from a tree, and after a hesitant second, he moved closer, following the flashing and shining color, walking through the trees, really hoping his siblings didn’t keep moving while he was gone.

He finally reached the source of the glow, and he knelt in front of a tree trunk, seeing some kind of red gunk that almost made a hole in the tree. He reached towards it, as if to touch it, and retracted his hand when he suddenly saw moldy bark start growing around it. He jumped to his feet, stumbling back, as, incredibly quickly, the tree covered the slimy thing itself.

That stuff… that hole in the tree… had almost looked like the Gate, but much smaller.

He heard a scream behind him and turned, seeing that Klaus and Sunny were a lot closer to him than he’d thought. They backed up as the baby started screaming, and Duncan and Isadora ran forwards. Quigley moved closer, barely catching the words.

“There’s something there!” Klaus was saying, while the baby yelled gibberish.

“What? What are you-” Duncan said.

“It- it might’ve been some kind of bear?”

Oh no.

“Run!” Quigley yelled, hoping that one of them could hear him. “Get out! That thing’s going to kill you, it’s in your world, run-”

“We should get back to the house.” Duncan said.

“Yes! Good! Listen to Duncan!”
They kept talking, but instead of paying too much attention, Quigley heard something behind him.

He heard a distant, muffled screech.

_The thing’s coming back._

His siblings turned to leave, and Quigley rushed to follow.

Thank God, he was gone before the Monster fully returned.

For some reason, they didn’t go into the house right away; they stopped outside the shed, talking to themselves, or maybe to someone else, but Quigley didn’t bother to listen. Instead, he went right into the house, feeling completely exhausted.

_Damn it, why’d you have to even try to go there?_

As he entered the foyer, yawning slightly, he stumbled over towards the nearest lamp. Half-heartedly, he tapped it again, seeing it glow.

_Still here. Still alive... kind of._

Technically, he could be dead. But he didn’t think so. He’d had to teleport to get here, and even if this was some form of afterlife, he hadn’t gotten there by dying, and he could get out if he found that Gate again. But if he found the Gate, he’d have to walk right back to the Lab.

Right now, he didn’t know which place was worse.

This World was cold, and dark, and filled with Monsters and screams and hopelessness, and his siblings couldn’t even see him, and he couldn’t do shit as they threw themselves into danger. But the Lab had monsters too, and those were somehow scarier to him, because they thought they were the people and he was the monster.

He coughed again, and then sat in the corner where the staircase met the wall, leaning up against it.

He couldn’t cry again, he wouldn’t cry again.

_I don’t think they’ll mind if I just sleep here. Don’t feel like going upstairs._

_Don’t feel like moving much._

Fiona spotted the man from across the street, and really wished she didn’t, because she really didn’t have time for this.

He was reading a newspaper, chatting with a boy who looked like he might be his son; they had enough physical resemblance. The man didn’t notice her, didn’t see her watching him from the bench she was on.

She’d had to ditch the car in the last town, and she’d walked to this one, thinking it might be far enough away that any police reports wouldn’t have reached it. She thought someone might’ve been looking too closely at her license plate, and she really didn’t want to have to tell the cops where she’d found that car, or why her driver’s license was faked. She definitely didn’t want to have to kill any innocent people; she didn’t like that much.
But this man? This man was not innocent.

She should’ve assumed she’d run into one of those assholes sooner or later, the closer she got to Hawkins. If that really was still their base of operations, they’d have people nearby.

People who might’ve recognized her if they looked across the street.

She shut her eyes, clenching her fists as she could distantly hear the man talk, as if he was a normal man going to a normal, morally upright job.

She wondered if his son knew.

If his son knew how that man used to flash his gun at her when she was getting too sarcastic, just to remind her he wasn’t afraid to use it. How he used to drag her down the halls, gripping her arm as she was sometimes solemn, sometimes bored, sometimes kicking and screaming and pleading and begging to stop. She remembered him above most of the other guards, because he’d often gotten to use the cattle prod. She hated that one most, she thought.

His son got up, going into a store, while the man waited outside, still reading the newspaper.

Good. The boy wouldn’t be around to see anything.

Fiona stared at the man, and considered. What would be best? It took a lot of energy to just produce something from nothing, but her bus was coming soon and she could sleep once she was on. Arsenic might take too long. Maybe brodifacoum- no, no, definitely too long. Strychnine would draw too much attention. Stop thinking pain, Fiona, think speed. The faster, the less likely he can get cured and realize what had happened to him. Granted, someone might suspect once the cause of death was determined, but hopefully she’d be in-and-out of Hawkins by that point.

She spotted a bus arriving out of the corner of her eye. Shit, better hurry up. She stared at the man, before making a decision and flicking her wrist, focusing on him and only on him.

She stared at his face. This was definitely the man she was thinking of. She wouldn’t forget that face, wouldn’t mistake it for another’s. That man had done awful things to her, it was only right she should get to do something in return.

As she boarded the bus, she noticed him reach towards his stomach, probably feeling pain there.

Good. Meant the Digoxin was working.

Fiona sat in the back of the bus, wiping her bleeding nose with her sleeve.

She was getting closer to her goal. Hopefully she could get there before getting caught.
“Are you sure you’re okay?”

Isadora nodded. They were biking pretty slow now that they were getting closer to the house, and it was getting darker and harder to see, and Duncan apparently saw fit to talk a bit.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know.”

That was sort-of true. She didn’t really know what had happened. She just knew that she did that reaching-out thing she’d done right before they’d left, once they arrived at the Lab, and she’d been so paralyzed she couldn’t do anything but insist they leave; her mind had been screaming at her, she’d been shaking and feeling ready to throw up, and every part of her just wanted to get the hell away from there.

And then she’d felt it again, on the way home, but it was different. It was a similar fear, but she hadn’t been reaching out. It had just spiked, and she’d thought she’d seen something, and then Klaus and Sunny saw some kind of animal…

“We’re almost home, we just need to sneak in the back and nobody will know we were out.” Duncan said. “We can go over things some more in our room.”

Everyone was silent; Sunny had only recently stopped crying and was biting the edge of her sleeve, Klaus looked a lot like he was disassociating, and Isadora still didn’t feel up for chatting.

Unfortunately, once they biked out of the woods and got back to the house, they stopped dead in their tracks. Carmelita was leaning against the shed, slamming yet another slap bracelet onto her arm.

“Aw, fuck.” Duncan said.

He and Isadora hopped off their bikes, and Klaus quickly moved over to grab Sunny. Carmelita looked up towards them, glaring and tossing her hair over her shoulder.

“Well, Cakesniffers, was it worth it? Did you have fun?”

“What the hell are you-”

“Go back to the library? Mess around with your books and shit? Or did you run around in the woods to see if you could disappear, too?”

“What are you doing out here, Carmelita?” Isadora snapped, not feeling like going through her torment again. “Why do you care where we go?”

“I don’t, and I couldn’t care less if you up and vanished.” Carmelita said, looking down at her nails. “But I figured you should know we’re locked out.”
“What?” Duncan said.

“Esme locked us out, her boyfriend’s over again.” Carmelita sighed.

Isadora and Duncan both looked frustrated, while Klaus and Sunny both looked panicked. “We’re-we’re locked out?” Klaus asked.

“I have a key, but I have a feeling we’re probably not gonna want to be in there.” Isadora whispered to him, then turned to Carmelita. “Okay, we’re gonna have to all fit in the shed, did we put the extra sleeping bag in-”

“It doesn’t matter, I’m not sleeping in the fucking shed again.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “I’m going to Jenny’s house.”

“Who the hell is Jenny?” Duncan asked.

“One of my friends, because I, unlike you, have those.” Carmelita said. “And they have houses they’ll let me stay in when I ask. I’ll see you Cakesniffers tomorrow morning.”

“You’re just gonna run off and ditch us?” Duncan asked.

“It’s my dream.”

“Wait!” Klaus said quickly. “Carmelita, if people are disappearing, shouldn’t you not be anywhere alone?”

Carmelita laughed. “I’m not going to disappear. I’m too special. You, however, should probably make sure the shed’s locked, or you might just vanish, too.”

She waved cheerily, and skipped off.

“I fucking hate her.” Isadora said, watching her go. “And I hate Esme and her stupid boyfriend.”

Duncan bit his lip. “We might only have three sleeping bags in here, Klaus, sorry about that, but you might have to share with Sunny.”

“That’s okay, we don’t like being far from each other.” Klaus shrugged.

“Lillet.” Sunny added.

“What my sister means is that she’s very small and will probably fit anywhere.”

“Well, alright.” Duncan said. “We can regroup in there just as well as in the house. There’s a lantern and everything. Come on in.”

They spread the three blankets around a lantern in the center of the shed, which Isadora lit with some matches they kept under loose floorboards. Duncan pulled out his notebook, and said, “Well, today was a bust, but that’s okay, because we found out some interesting things.”

“Wazink!” Sunny yelled, which meant, “Like the monster!”

“It wasn’t… it was probably a bear.” Klaus said.

Sunny shook her head. “Staty!” “I know what I saw! It didn’t have fur or a face!”
“Did you see it?” Klaus asked, turning to the triplets. They shook their heads. “Look, Sun, it was probably a bear, okay?” Klaus said carefully. “We can figure that out later; let’s get into finding Violet and Quigley right now, okay?”

Sunny hesitated before nodding and leaning into her brother, a bit frustrated.

Duncan sighed. “Let’s start from the beginning; we both lost our parents in suspicious accidents, and our siblings were kidnapped and fake corpses of them were released.”

“Yeah, thanks for bringing that up so casually.” Isadora said, curling up slightly; it was getting very cold.

“Isadora and I were studying various kidnappings,” Duncan said, passing his notebook to Klaus, who flipped through it, showing Sunny some of the pages. “But nothing concrete came up. But once we started researching town history, we found out that Klaus’s Mother’s Foster Dad worked at Hawkins Lab about twenty years ago.”

“Twenty-two, to be exact.” Klaus said.

“I still have the paper in my bag.” Isadora said, leaning in to find it.

“I don’t think we’ll get new info from that article,” Duncan said, “But maybe we can search the rest of the newspaper.”

“I don’t think they’d have other articles about one normal family,” Klaus said quietly, “Which is what they seemed to be.” he paused. “Is there anything you guys know that you haven’t told me yet?”

Isadora froze for a second, trying to decide if that was an accusatory question. She glanced towards Duncan, before instinctively pulling her sleeve down. “Uh… don’t think so.”

“You said your parents said you were kidnapped?” Klaus asked.

“As babies. We were sick in the hospital and someone tried to take us away.” Duncan said. “Mother only told us because we wanted to know why she seemed so scared of the doctor’s office.”

“She was also a bit scared of leaving us alone anywhere.” Isadora muttered.

“My parents wouldn’t let us outside the house without supervision for even a few moments.” Klaus said. “It was a bit… suffocating, but… I guess they had some reason for it.”

“We could go places alone, but only if it was public or we were together, and they knew where we were at all times.” Duncan said. “And Mother always said if we got into trouble, all manners were out the window and we could fight whoever we wanted.”

“Father and her taught us some self-defense stuff.” Duncan said.

“I learned a bit, but I’m not very good at it.” Klaus admitted. “Did you have any friends back home?”

Isadora bit her lip. “A few. We kinda lost contact after our parents died.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s no problem. Duncan and I were closer to each other anyway.” Isadora said. “And we just want
to get our brother back.”

“I just want Violet back, too.” Klaus said quietly. “She’d be able to figure something out, she can do anything. I’d be surprised if she hasn’t already escaped and run off to find us.”

“Well, maybe she’ll knock on the shed door while we’re asleep.” Duncan said. “And then she can help us.”

“Maybe she’ll bring Quigley with her.” Klaus said, smiling slightly at the idea. “And we won’t have to do anything.”

Isadora paused, turning to Klaus. “Is there anything you haven’t told us?”

Klaus glanced at Sunny, and then said, “Um. Actually, the night my parents died, I heard them say some… weird things.”

“Well,” Klaus said. “They mentioned tunnels, or a tunnel system, and I’m pretty sure we don’t have those, Violet and I would’ve found it. They mentioned friends, too, that got… caught? But I didn’t recognize any of the names- God, I can’t remember…”

Isadora shared an excited look with Duncan. *This* was something.

“I’m trying to… it’s a blur, really, I forgot about it for a while because of the fire—”

“It’s fine,” Duncan said, “You’re telling us now. What else?”

Klaus bit his lip, trying to remember. “Mother didn’t want to tell us something, she thought it would mean we’d hate her. She thought that…” he trailed off. “Well, I think she blamed herself for whatever was happening,” he glanced towards the newspaper Isadora had pulled from her bag. “Maybe she…”

“What?” Duncan asked, when Klaus didn’t finish that thought.

Klaus opened his mouth again, but shook his head, and they noticed quickly he was starting to cry. “It can’t have been her fault. I don’t care what happened here, she’s my *Mother*, she just wanted us to be safe, it can’t be…”

Duncan leaned over, giving Klaus a hug, and Klaus hugged him back, burying his head in his shoulder. Sunny leaned in closer, and Isadora paused, wondering if she should join the hug, too, or if that would be too overwhelming.

Who would it be overwhelming for, though?

Isadora bit her lip, glancing down at her hands. That… that *outreach* she’d done, almost instinctively, it wasn’t… she wasn’t exactly an expert on normal, but she was pretty sure that wasn’t something people could do. Just, reach out and feel the fear of… of something else. It wasn’t her emotion, she knew that. It was… the strangest thing she’d ever felt. Like, she was experiencing fear, but no matter how paralyzing it was, she knew it wasn’t hers. She wasn’t the one who was afraid.

Duncan pulled away from Klaus, saying, “It’s okay. I’m sure whatever happened, she didn’t do anything wrong.”
“Maybe her or her foster family pissed off the people who killed her and kidnapped Violet.” Isadora suggested.

“That doesn’t explain our parents or Quigley.” Duncan said. “And it might be the same kidnappers. Maybe the people who took Violet tried to take you or her when you were babies, and your parents just never told you.”

Klaus bit his lip. “Would explain the overprotective thing. And their dislike of hospitals- we had to take Violet to one once because she got really sick and they refused to leave, traded off who was watching her and who was with me. And…” (Isadora didn’t notice him push his sleeve down a bit there.) “I dunno, why wouldn’t they tell us?”

“Probably for whatever reason your Mother never mentioned living here.” Isadora shrugged.

Duncan bit his lip. “Tomorrow we can probably get to the Library before Esme gets up and unlocks the house. We could spend all day there, I think we still have emergency cash shoved somewhere in my bag, we can get lunch in town. We’ll look up Armstrong Feint, Beatrice Baudelaire-”

“We should look and see if our parents are there.” Isadora said. “If they were in this town, too, we can confirm it’s not a coincidence.”

Duncan smiled a bit. “It’s nice to have a lead.”

“If we find enough,” Klaus said, “We can find our siblings faster, or gather enough evidence to convince the police to help us.”

Isadora glanced towards the door of the shed. “Sure hope the kidnappers don’t know we’re in here and break in to take us away. We’re sitting ducks.”

“They haven’t attacked us before now.” Duncan said.

“Carmelita was here and Klaus and Sunny weren’t before now.”

“Can we not talk about this before we go to sleep?” Klaus asked.

“Heffzle.” Sunny said, which translated to, “We’re more likely to get killed by the monster.”

“It won’t get us in here, don’t worry.” Klaus said, a bit tired of trying to convince her that it was probably a bear. “We’re locked in, see?”

Sunny didn’t look convinced, but she nodded.

Klaus reached over to put his arm around her, and Isadora caught a flash of something against the lantern light. She glanced at his wrist and said, “No offence, but that bracelet looks more like some kind of clamp or something.”

Klaus instantly pulled his sleeve down over it, and said, “It… yeah, you’re right, it looks like crap, but… well, my Mother got it for me, so…”

Isadora turned red. “I… I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s fine. Really.”

“Well,” Isadora said, “W-we should probably get some sleep, then. If we fall asleep while studying tomorrow, we’re going to lose a lot of time.”
“But-” Duncan began.

“Duncan. We have time.” Isadora said, reaching out to put a hand over his.

She did it without thinking, but once their hands were touch, she felt an opportunity. She shut her eyes, and let herself reach out.


Isadora retracted her hand, gasping in shock, backing up against the wall.

“Isa!” Duncan rushed forwards. “Isa, what happened, are you-”

“I’m fine!” she snapped, anger taking the place of fear for a moment. “I’m fine, piss off!”

Duncan stared at her in a sad shock, and then he got a similar anger to hers on his face. “I’m sorry that I’m concerned about my sister!” In fact, now that she thought about it… it was an anger that perfectly matched hers.

“Isadora,” Klaus said quietly, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I…” Isadora took a deep breath, forcing herself to be calm. “Yes. I’m just… tired. Get some sleep, we’ll figure everything out in the morning.”

They stared at her for a moment, and then turned away- Duncan to get the lantern off and Klaus to help Sunny into the sleeping bag.

As soon as she saw they weren’t looking, Isadora leaned against the wall and wiped her bleeding nose with her sleeve.

She got to test her theory one more time when she woke up in the middle of the night.

Isadora had tried pushing her theories to the back of her head and follow her own advice, attempting to get some sleep for tomorrow morning.

That didn’t work.

She’d had the strangest dream; she’d been in a field, and something was after her. She’d started running, and it was chasing her, and she felt like her legs were made out of lead, she could barely move, she didn’t dare look behind her, and then she tripped and fell, fell into blackness, and landed in water. She was in an ocean and she was drowning, no matter how hard she tried she couldn’t swim to the top, it felt like her arms were tied to rocks, like she was too heavy and she couldn’t even get close to the surface, and she couldn’t *breathe* …

She woke up with a start, staring at the dark, black ceiling of the shed. It took her only a second to remember where she was, and then she curled up, struggling to keep herself warm in the cold shed. Shit, she hated this place. She hated the fucking shed, and Esme, and Carmelita, and Hawkins, and…

She heard a whimper beside her, and paused, straining to listen. Was that Duncan? Was he hurt, was something wrong? No, no, he was asleep to her left, the noise was to her right, that was…
Oh. Shit.

Isadora slowly crept out of the sleeping bag, flinching at the cool night air. She moved towards Klaus, crouching beside him and his sister. Sunny was in a deep sleep, but Klaus was moving slightly, his legs kicking a bit under the bag, his eyes shut way too tight.

“Aw, fuck…” Isadora muttered.

She and Duncan had had their fair share of nightmares since the accident, but this looked… bad. He started whimpering again, kicking harder; Isadora briefly worried he might accidentally hit Sunny.

“Shh, shh, it’s okay…” she began, reaching out to touch him. She stopped just short, though, her hand hovering above his shoulder, remembering her touching Duncan just before they tried to sleep.

I… I felt his emotions. I felt someone else’s feelings.

What would happen if I touched him during a nightmare?

“No…” Klaus muttered.

“Klaus?”

“No, no…” shit, he was talking in his sleep. Isadora leaned over slightly, waiting, and then he started talking again. “No, I’m sorry, I’m…”

“Oh, Klaus…” Isadora sighed, watching him. Should she wake him up? She thought she’d read somewhere that you shouldn’t do that. Usually when Duncan had a nightmare she just hugged him for a bit until he was sleeping calmly again or woke up on his own. But she couldn’t touch him, she didn’t want… she didn’t want to feel his fear. She wasn’t sure she wanted to feel anyone’s feelings at all, she didn’t want feelings that weren’t her own, and besides, it felt a bit like digging into something private.

Just don’t reach out, then.

What if that doesn’t work? What if I do it instinctively?

Fuck, Isa, do something…

She paused, then, thinking of something, thinking of something else she’d done. When Duncan had been worried, and she’d snapped at him, she… it was almost like she’d spread her own feelings. But, no, that wasn’t something someone could do. Stop it, Isadora, but sensible.

But, instead of backing off, she shut her eyes and let her instincts take over again. She lowered her hand, slowly putting it on Klaus’s shoulder. She took deep breaths, and thought of nice calming things- cloudwatching with her brothers, reading poetry under the dining room table, watching the first snow fall from her bedroom window every year.

Just stay calm, Isa, don’t feel his fear. Spread yours.

Slowly, Isadora muttered, “It’s okay.”

And almost as soon as she said that, Klaus calmed down.

Isadora watched him until she was absolutely certain he wasn’t kicking or muttering anymore,
instead sleeping much more calmly, and then she backed up against the wall again, shaking uncontrollably.

She’d done that, she’d done that, she’d *done that* …

No, no, it was a coincidence, she was deluding herself, she was tired and scared and… that wasn’t her.

She reached a hand to her face, and felt blood under her nose. She suddenly caught onto the connection, then- all her nosebleeds had come after she’d… she’d felt something, whether consciously or unconsciously. But this time she didn’t feel something, she… *changed* someone else’s feelings.

*It can’t have been me…*

Isadora took a deep breath, and then said, “Okay, Isadora. Okay, find out what’s going on. There’s an explanation, you just have to… find it.”

She glanced towards Duncan. He’d help if she asked… or maybe he wouldn’t. Maybe he’d just tell her not to be silly, people couldn’t change each others’ emotions. What if he didn’t listen to her? What if nobody did?

“It’s okay. I can figure this out.” she muttered to herself, clenching her fists beside her. “I *will* figure it out.”
“You think we have everything?” Duncan asked.

They stood outside the shed, blinking in the sudden light. Sunny was trying to fall back asleep, leaning on Klaus’s shoulder, while her brother just tapped his foot and glanced towards the house. Isadora had dug a hairband out of her bag and tied her hair up in a bun, and she kept staring off into space, barely responding to any of his questions. That worried Duncan a bit, but after she’d snapped at him last night, he didn’t want to bring the issue up. Better not make her mad.

“We’ll wash up in the Library bathroom, nobody ever goes to that place on Saturday mornings, except the Librarians,” Duncan explained quickly, “And then we can head upstairs to research our families.”

“Actually,” Isadora said numbly, “I might do some more research downstairs.”

Duncan paused. That… hadn’t been the plan. “Are you sure?”

Isadora nodded. “I’ve been getting more nosebleeds. I’m gonna look up some causes. Then I’ll join you guys.”

“Do you want someone with you-?”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Are you-”

“I’m sure, Duncan, let’s just get the bikes and go.”

Duncan stared her for a moment, before nodding; don’t make her mad, just get to the Library and find out all you can, she’d probably be fine, she might feel better if he gave her space.

Klaus put Sunny in Isadora’s bike basket, and Sunny gripped onto the sides as Isadora got on, still not looking very happy. Duncan got onto his bike, stiffening slightly as Klaus got on behind him, leaning up against him.

“Still tired?” he asked, as casually as he could.

Klaus *hummed*, putting his arms around him for support. Duncan smiled lightly, glancing at Isadora, expecting to be able to share a glance with her. Instead, she continued staring ahead into nothing.

“Alright.” he finally said. “Let’s go to the Library, yeah?”

Duncan and Klaus washed up in the bathroom, and he was happy to see he’d been right; the library was as empty as they’d expected. They managed to look halfway-presentable in a few minutes.
“You don’t think anyone will notice we’re wearing yesterday’s clothes?” Klaus asked hesitantly.

“Not if you throw a jacket on.” Duncan pulled one out of the bag, tossing it to him. “We always have a spare or two.”

“How many times has Esme locked you out of the house?”

Duncan grimaced. “I don’t keep count. Surprised Carmelita hasn’t thought of sneaking off to a friends’ house before, though.”

“You think she’s okay?”

“Who gives a shit?” Duncan glanced towards Klaus, noticing that he did look a bit distressed. He sighed, saying, “Look, I’m sure she’s fine. If she’s not, we’ll notice, because everyone’s going to lose their minds. Everyone loves her for some reason.”

Klaus nodded slowly. “Do you think Isadora’s okay?”

Duncan bit his lip. “She’s just stressed. I mean, I get it. A lot of… lot of shit’s happened to us in the last few weeks.”

Klaus nodded, and they shoved everything back into their bags and walked back into the hall. Isadora was waiting, leaning against the wall and holding Sunny, who was jabbering on about something. Isadora quickly passed the baby off to Duncan, muttered something, and then ran off. Duncan watched her go sadly, wondering whether he should… no, no, she wanted space, he should give it to her.

Isadora muttered under her breath, reading out loud the spines of the books. She grabbed psychology books at random, dumping them into a pile on the table in the corner. It was a bit difficult to do research when she wasn’t entirely sure what she was looking for, but she had a decent idea of where to start.

She grabbed the first one, flipping to the index. She laughed slightly to herself as she did; when they were doing schoolwork, Duncan used to constantly remind her and Quigley that they didn’t need to scour the book over and over, the indexes were right there, they just needed to flip to the back and they wouldn’t have to spend two hours on their science lesson, trying to find the answer to one question. He somehow never seemed to pick up on the fact that they were doing that just to annoy him.

But now Quigley was gone, God only knew where, and Duncan was upstairs, researching shit to try and find the people who murdered their parents and took their brother away. She should probably be there. But whatever this thing was, this thing she could do… she needed to know something about it. She needed to know what was going on, what the explanation was. She needed to know she wasn’t crazy.

She scoured the index, under the E. Ek… El… Em, good, she just needed to find…

*Empathy, pg. 133.*

She flipped to that page, pushed the book aside, grabbing the next one, scouring the index again. *Empathy, pg. 99.* She found the section, put the book on top of the first one, and then grabbed the next - nothing. She put it on the chair next to her, then checked the next book- *pg. 110.*
She flipped through each book, piling up about fourteen. She supposed most of them would be useless, and she’d have to pull more books off the shelves; she wasn’t sure how to search for Heightened Empathy or… or some kind of *Supernatural* Empathy, but this was as good a start as any.

*No, no, it’s not supernatural, Isa. You’re not six years old; you know superpowers aren’t real.*

“Well,” she muttered to herself, pushing a strand of hair behind her ear, “Let’s see what we’ve got.”

Duncan used the computers, while Sunny and Klaus went through the newspapers. Even though Sunny still had trouble reading, she insisted upon helping, though her was of helping was flipping over papers to look for pretty pictures and tossing them behind her when they failed to interest her. Klaus was scouring papers for the names *Feint, Baudelaire* or *Quagmire*; the papers in the box didn’t go back as far as the 1950s, when his Mother was adopted, so he couldn’t look that up specifically, and they still weren’t organized. Once he finished a paper, Klaus put it in a pile by year, trying to get them in some kind of order.

They worked in silence for quite a while, occasionally glancing towards the door, waiting for Isadora to come back. Finally, though, after about an hour, Duncan said, “Klaus, I found the adoption!”

Klaus lifted Sunny and raced over towards the computer. Next to a clipping of a small article, he could see a photo of a short girl, maybe eight or nine, standing at a train station with a small backpack. She was next to a tall man, but it was hard to make out any distinguishing details with the inverted palette on the screen.

“Noipmar,” Sunny said, which meant, “*Her hair is really long.*”

Klaus nodded; the girl’s hair reached to below her waist. “Are you sure that’s her?”

“Article says ‘Beatrice Baudelaire.’” Duncan shrugged. “Does it not look like her?”

“I… guess it does.” Klaus said. “We’re just… used to her with short hair.”

“You’re also used to her being an adult.” Duncan said. “The article is dated January 12, 1957. It’s not very descriptive-”

“ Noticed that.” Klaus said, eyeing the three short paragraphs.

“-yeah, well, there’s not much to say. Apparently she’d been in the foster system for a while.”

“Is there anything about her new foster family?”

“Just the same thing about Armstrong Feint working at Hawkins Lab.” Duncan said. “Uh… ‘Young Beatrice will be joining the large family, which includes Feint’s daughter Ellington and his other wards; Jacques, Kit and Lemony Snicket.’”

“You said they were adopted in 1950, right?”

“Yeah, I’ll see if I can find stuff on them,” Duncan said, “Or something else about Feint-”

“What if you try looking up Hawkins Lab?” Klaus asked.
Duncan nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, that might be a good idea. Especially since it freaked out Isa so much. I was just trying to get this first.”

“Lotze?” Sunny asked, which meant, “What do you think scared Isadora so much?”

After Klaus translated, Duncan said, “I don’t… know. It really did feel… weird. The whole place, it gave me this awful feeling but I don’t know why.”

“I’d have to agree.” Klaus said.

“She’s never done that before, though.” Duncan said quietly. “She’s never… it was like she was having some kind of shutdown, but I… I dunno, it was different somehow.” Klaus nodded a bit, and then Duncan said, “Well, I’ll take notes on this article. Let me know if you find anything in the papers?”

“Of course, yeah.”

“Fucking hell.” Isadora muttered, slamming another book onto the useless pile. She leaned over onto the table, burying her head in her arms and groaning.

Fourteen books, and not a single one of them was helpful.

They all described empathy as a normal occurrence- being able to relate to other people, interpret emotions. Nobody said anything about what to do when you could literally feel what someone else was feeling.

“Are you doing alright, Isadora?”

Isadora glanced up, seeing Ms Caliban had stopped by her, looking a bit concerned. “Yeah. Studying just sucks.” Isadora said numbly.

Ms Caliban still looked concerned. “Are you sure? You look very tired.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t get much sleep last night. It’s…” she hesitated. “Different than what I’m used to.”

“I’m sure.” Caliban said sympathetically. “What are you studying?”

Isadora considered for a second, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. She probably couldn’t just up and tell her what was going on; she hadn’t even told Duncan yet. But… Ms Caliban was a Librarian, she might be able to help.

“Actually, we’re doing a speculative fiction project in school.” Isadora said.

“You mean like science fiction?” Ms Caliban asked, interested. “Those are always interesting! You know, I considered briefly being a science teacher before I became a librarian.”

“You know a lot about science?”

“You could say that.”

“Well,” Isadora said hesitantly, “I’m writing about a girl with Hyper-Empathy.”

“Hyper-Empathy?”
Isadora paused. “Like... like being able to literally feel other people’s emotions. Or... change them, maybe. And I’d like to look up other occurrences of... more natural hyper-empathy.”

“Well, that is interesting.” Ms Caliban said brightly. “I don’t know much about that, but I can get you some of the more adult psychology books that would talk about enhanced empathy, I can show you where they are if you would like-”

Isadora nodded, jumping up. “Yes! Yes, let’s do that!”

“Kla!” Sunny called, from her spot on the floor.

Klaus looked up. “You found something?”

“Ye!” she yelled, holding up a paper.

Klaus ran over, picking it up. She’d flipped it to a page somewhere in the middle. “Marriage Announcements? What...?”

Sunny gave him a glare. “Wawhha.” “Just read it.”

Klaus skimmed, and he saw what she’d seen.

“One of the announcements had a photo of their parents beside it, smiling brightly at the camera. Klaus sat next to Sunny, staring at them; it suddenly hit him that he hadn’t seen any photos of his parents’ wedding before now.

“You find something?” Duncan asked, running over and sitting beside them.

Klaus put a hand on his parents’ photo, still staring at the picture, before he read the description aloud. “Beatrice Baudelaire and Bertrand... shit, it’s blurred out. Isn’t that lucky, Sunny? We still can’t fucking learn our Dad’s last name.”

“Beatrice and Bertrand were married April 1, 1969,” Duncan picked up, “In the... ugh, that’s blurred, too.”

“Presopi!” Sunny yelled, frustrated. “Just read the bit that’s not blurry!”

“You’re right, Sunny, sorry.” Klaus said. He turned back to the paper. “The bride is the daughter of... someone, and the foster daughter of the late Armstrong Fate- late?”

“He’s dead?” Duncan asked.

“Lokacin?” Sunny asked. “When did that happen?”

“I... I don’t know.” Klaus said, skimming the rest of the article. “It doesn’t say. It says they’re still living in town, in her childhood home-” He paused, glancing again at the top of the article.

“Klaus?”

“Nothing. Just... nothing. Are we sure the date’s right?”

Duncan took the newspaper, flipping to the front of it. “Yeah, seems to be. Why?”
“It’s just… nothing.”

“No, I’m sure it’s not.”

“If they got married here, it’s likely that…” Klaus hesitated. “I wonder when they moved away. Because I… if they lived here for a bit, Violet may have been born here. She was born in this year, so…”

“Do you think you might’ve been born here, too?” Duncan asked.

“I… it doesn’t matter.” Klaus looked back to the article. “Uh, it’s stating bridesmaids and groomsmen, I don’t know any of these people.”

“Wouldn’t one of your Mother’s foster siblings be one of them?” Duncan asked. “You’d think they’d be up there.”

“Maybe she had other friends.”

“Just, I know if I got married, I’d want Quigley and Isadora to be part of the whole ‘planning and celebration’ thing.” Duncan said. “She’s been with these people since she was nine.”

Klaus considered. “Maybe something happened and they died with her foster father.”


“Maybe his death is part of the reason she didn’t tell us about Hawkins?”

“Dunmharu.” Sunny said, which meant, “Maybe he was killed by the people who kidnapped Violet.”

They glanced at each other, and then Klaus said, “Alright, Duncan, you find anything on the computers yet?”

“No.”

“Then you’re on Newspaper duties with us. Look for obituaries between ‘61 and ‘69. Sunny-”

“Iyoo.” Sunny shrugged, which meant, “I got it.”

“Let’s get to work.”

Ms Caliban had to go back to the front desk after a while, but Isadora finally thought she had what she needed. She glanced down at her commonplace book, where she’d taken extensive notes on what… what could be happening to her.

**HYPER EMPATHY**, she’d written at the top.

The ability to literally feel another person’s emotions.

**EMOTION MANIPULATION**

Change the emotions of another person.

Possible Uses: Causing fear in enemies, removing fear from friends, causing tiredness or alertness,
manipulate others into desired situations.

Unfortunately, the emotional manipulation was not discussed in the books. But the stuff about Hyper-Empathy a lot like her situation, so maybe she just had a… very strong case of it. Or maybe, hell, she just imagined calming Klaus down and pissing off Duncan. Maybe she didn’t do anything.

Possible Causes: Genetics???

Isadora sighed. She hadn’t been able to find much more than that.

Possible problems: Inability to assess threats (too trusting of others), short-term memory of bad memories and long-term of good, difficulty escaping toxic people (too sympathetic).

Isadora considered that section, leaning back in the chair a bit. She didn’t think she had problems detecting when someone would be a threat; hell, Duncan was worse at that than her, he used to wander up to strangers all the time in public to ask them about their shirt or their dog or their hair or whatever until their parents finally got him to stop. She definitely didn’t think she was too trusting, and while she hadn’t ever examined her memories to figure out whether she remembered the good or bad more, she’d rather not do that currently. And she’d never been in a toxic relationship. If those might be problems for her later, though, it was nice to be aware.

All of that information came from the books that just described hyper-empathy as feeling for another person a lot, though. Even the more speculative books didn’t seem to consider that literally feeling someone else’s emotions and then manipulating them was a possibility.

Well, she knew slightly more than she had that morning, so there was something.

“I should talk to Duncan.” she muttered to herself. But what exactly was she supposed to say? I can change your emotions? What if she tried to show him and it didn’t work, and she’d been mistaken about all of this, and she just looked like an idiot? What if it did work, and he… what if he thought she was some kind of freak? What if she was?

Stop it. Stop it, Duncan would never…

She paused, then, something suddenly springing to mind.

Duncan’s overstimulation.

He always got overstimulated when too many things were happening, but all the incidents she could remember had been around other people. What if he felt all their emotions, too? Felt all of them at once and it overwhelmed him?

What if he feels this, too?

What if Quigley did?

She suddenly got a very bad thought then.

If we’re all like this…

What if that’s why someone is after us?

No! Stop it! You can’t just change someone’s emotions. You’re not a superhero, Isadora. You’re just a hyper-empathetic kid with an overactive imagination.

Still…
“I found him!” Duncan yelled.

“Thank God!” Klaus said, rushing over to his friend’s side and peering over his shoulder. “What’s it say?”

“It’s from 1969, only, like, a few months before your parents got married.” Duncan said. “This is him, right?”

“It says ‘Armstrong Feint’, and the picture looks kind of like the one that was in the first article.” Klaus said.

“Relabit?” Sunny yelled. “What does it say?”

Duncan glanced down at the article. “Well, a bunch of it is blurred- I think someone spilled something on the bottom of the article, but the last paragraph’s usually just information on the funeral service anyway. But from what I can make out- ‘Armstrong Feint, scientist and doctor at Hawkins National Laboratory (a branch of the Department of Energy), died February 28. His death occurred during an incident at the laboratory believed to have been…’”

Duncan trailed off, staring in shock at the paper. Klaus slowly read on. “An incident at the laboratory believed to have been orchestrated by his daughter, Ellington, and ward, Lemony Snicket. The two have since fled town and have yet to be apprehended. Mr. Feint had been working at the Lab for over twenty-five years and his funeral will be arranged by the Department and held March… March something-or-other, that’s where the thing gets blocked out.”

“Your Mother’s foster siblings killed him?” Duncan asked, sounding almost confused, like he couldn’t imagine someone doing such a thing.

“It only says they think they did. Maybe we can find more about them?” Klaus said. “Maybe they were innocent.”

“Or maybe that’s why she never talked about them.”

“Patton?” Sunny asked, glancing up from a paper she’d been going through. “What was the name of the boy again?”

“Lemony Snicket.” Klaus said.

Sunny held up a paper. “Eehe?” “Is this him?”

Klaus and Duncan glanced at each other, then walked over to Sunny, sitting beside her as she tossed them a paper from early 1961. On the bottom corner of the page was a photo of several kids sitting at the counter of a diner, smiling at the camera. The article itself was about some sale at the diner, but the caption of the photo did indeed list Lemony Snicket as one of the children.

“Sunny, how do you keep finding these?” Klaus asked.

Sunny shrugged, then said, “Eh,” which in this situation meant, “I guess I’m just good at recognizing faces in photos, or maybe I am just very lucky. But I would assume the former; I know what Mother looks like, and I recognized Snicket from the first photo.”

“If you say so.” Klaus said.
“There’s nothing about him in the article itself,” Duncan said, “But he and Ellington are both here with these other kids- it says, left to right, there’s her, some kid named Kellar Haines, then Snicket, Pecuchet and Bouvard Bellerophon, and… Moxie Mallahan. I think I’ve heard that name before.”

“Maybe from your parents?”

“I don’t think so…”

“Duncan!” they turned as Isadora ran up the stairs, followed by Ms Caliban. “Hey, uh, we need to go-”

“What?” Duncan asked. “But we’re researching.”

“Yeah, well, uh,” Isadora said, “Our darling foster sister just called and told us that the house is free and if we don’t come home she’ll tell Esme we ran off, and I need to go punch her in the face.”

“Now, Isadora,” Ms Caliban said, not unkindly, “I’m sure she’s just worried about you.”

Isadora hmmmed, and then shot Duncan a quick, pleading look. “Did you find anything?”

“Well, it should,” said Ms Caliban, to their surprise. “Ms Mallahan is one of the few celebrities that came from this town.”

“Celebrity?” Isadora asked, as Klaus put the box away and picked up Sunny to go.

“She’s an Investigative Journalist.” Ms Caliban said. “Not exactly a household name, but she’s broken several big news stories.”

“Investigative Journalist.” Duncan repeated, looking enchanted instantly.

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“Do you have any of her articles?” Klaus asked.

“I believe we keep several copies.” Ms Caliban said. “Would you like to borrow them?”

“Yes!” Duncan said very quickly. “Yes, we do!”

As he went back downstairs with Ms Caliban, Klaus caught up to Isadora. “Hey, are you okay?” he asked, while Sunny also glanced at her sympathetically.

Isadora bit her lip, glancing at the door. She absently pulled down her sleeve, and then said, “I will be.”
“Why the hell do you care so much that we go to the fucking Library?” Isadora asked the second they threw open the door to the house.

Carmelita was sitting on the steps, braiding part of her hair. “Well,” she said, glaring up at them, “First of all, I don’t even see why you’d want to be there, only nerds go to the Library on purpose.”

“We’ve been doing research.” Isadora snapped, as Duncan closed the door behind Sunny and Klaus.

“And Second, Esme just went back to work but she said you’re not supposed to be out on your own.” Carmelita said, finishing her braid and tossing it over her shoulder. “I covered for you and said you were in the stinky shed singing campfire songs or whatever, because I don’t want to have to listen to her lecture us, but I’m not pulling that shit again, so count yourself lucky. Also, I’m throwing a party tomorrow and I don’t want you messing it up by getting caught out alone, cause then Esme’ll come back and spoil everything.”

They all stared at her for a long time, before Klaus said, “You’re throwing a what?”

“She’s gonna be at work overnight and won’t be back til Monday morning,” Carmelita said, “So I’m throwing a party tomorrow night. Not tonight because my friends have things to do, but they said they’re all free-”

“You’re not throwing a party here!” Isadora said. “Esme’ll kill you.”

“She’s not gonna find out!” Carmelita said cheerily, standing up. “And she won’t kill me, she loves me. And you’re not gonna tell her cause I’ll just tell her it was your idea. I’d avoid it if I were you, you all have awful social skills and you just make everyone sad because they have to think about your ‘dead parents’ and ‘dead siblings’-”

“Our siblings aren’t dead.” Duncan said.

“Sure, keep thinking that.” Carmelita said. “Anyway, since Esme’s gone, I’m just gonna eat cake in my room instead of dinner. You can just eat stuff out of the trash if you want, or you can have leftovers if you’re feeling fancy. Don’t do anything stupid without me, kay?”

“Oh, piss off, Carmelita.” Duncan said.

“Busheney.” Sunny said.
“Carmelita,” Klaus stepped forwards slightly, saying, “I really don’t think a party would be a good idea. I mean, a lot of kids here would mean you can’t keep track of everyone, and if someone decided to tell-”

“They’re not gonna tell,” Carmelita said, “And it’s not like a dumb movie party, we’re not gonna completely wreck the place. I mean, I assume you’ve never been to a party, because you’re a loser, but-”

“I just really don’t think-” Klaus began.

Carmelita suddenly threw up a hand, stopping him. “What the fuck kind of bracelet is that?”

Klaus hastily pulled his sleeve down; he hadn’t noticed that it had rolled up to show the bracelet. “It’s nothing.” he said quickly. “Why does it matter?”

“God,” Carmelita said, “You all are lucky you have Esme, your fashion sense is stupid.”

“Just piss off!” Duncan said.

Carmelita hmmmed, flipped them off, and then turned to rush up the stairs.

Once she was gone, Isadora turned to Duncan and Klaus. “So. I think we do still have leftovers.”

“I can try to cook something.” Klaus said. “I’ve read books on cooking before.”

“There might be recipe books we could try in the kitchen.” Duncan said.

“Yay!” Sunny looked excited. “I can’t wait to play with all the things in the kitchen!”

“Alright,” Klaus said as they all started to walk, “Why don’t Sunny and I find something to get us started, and you two can go over the articles from Moxie Mallahan?”

“I, actually, uh, got some books on stuff I’d like to research.” Isadora said. “Think it might have to do with my nosebleeds.”

“That’s fine, I’ll take the articles!” Duncan said, extremely excitedly. “I love journalism! Investigative Journalists are like regular reporters but so much cooler, it could take months or years-”

“Yes,” Isadora said, sounding a bit distracted, “I’ve heard this rant before.”

“I haven’t.” Klaus said, interested.

“No, no, don’t get him started.” Isadora advised.

“But-”

“If we’re going to make food, let’s do it now. Come on, kitchen’s this way.”

“Pasta Puttanesca sounds good.” Klaus said after a minute. “I saw noodles in the pantry, and the rest of the ingredients should be lying around.”

He and Sunny were sitting with a cookbook at the counter, while Duncan had Moxie Mallahan’s reports spread out on the table and Isadora sat in the corner with a book on her lap and her
commonplace book on the floor beside her. Sunny kept bouncing on the table, beaming and playing with the pages of the cookbook. Isadora and Duncan both looked very focused, and they nodded briefly at Klaus as he went to the pantry, swinging open the door again and grabbing a box of noodles.

“Sunny, what else do we need?”

Sunny read off the list as he gathered ingredients; thank God, everything was there, so he wouldn’t have to make a different plan.

“Alright, we need to boil some water on the stove.” Klaus said. “Sun, can you open this while I do that?”

He handed her a box while he opened a cabinet to find a pot.

“You’re gonna need a strainer.” Duncan called, scouring over the articles at a very fast speed.

“Thanks.”

“This is fascinating,” Duncan said quickly. “She’s busted up crime syndicates, dug up some hidden illegal operations- holy shit, she found a kidnapped kid once.”

“Maybe we can hire her to find our siblings.” Klaus suggested, putting the strainer by the sink before filling up the pot with water.

“I wonder how much we’d have to pay her.” Duncan said.

“Maybe she’d do it for free,” Isadora suggested, “Because if she knew Snicket and Feint, she probably knew Klaus’s Mother, so she might agree to find Violet because of personal reasons. We can just say Quigley’s her brother or something.”

“I think Quigley’s very obviously our brother.” Duncan said.

“How much water am I supposed to put in?” Klaus asked.

“Halfvejs!” Sunny called out. “*Halfway!*”

“Maybe Ms Caliban knew her growing up, I think she said she’s lived here a while.” Isadora said. “Maybe she’d know Klaus’s Mother.”

“If she did, she would’ve mentioned something when she met Sunny and I.” Klaus said. “‘Baudelaire’ isn’t a very common last name, and I’m sure the local newspaper had something about us moving in.”

“Or she would’ve mentioned something when showing me articles.” Duncan said. “But anyway, Mallahan’s been undercover a lot. Her most recent report was from last Spring, so she might be undercover now, or she might be taking a break somewhere.”

“Just find her in the phone book and call her.” Isadora said, while Klaus stopped the faucet.

“What? No, no, no, I wouldn’t know what to-”

“You wanna be a reporter? Just interview her.”

“What if she’s busy or doesn’t wanna talk to a kid or-”
“God, Duncan, just tell her you wanna talk about Beatrice Baudelaire, Lemony Snicket and Ellington Feint. She’ll probably listen.”

“What if it’s a touchy subject?”

Klaus put the pot next to the stove, and then tried turning a dial to get the heat up. “Hey, the stove’s not turning on!” he called.

“Just hit it a bit!” Isadora called. “Duncan, really, I don’t have time for this-”

“Why? What are you reading?”

Isadora glared up at him, suddenly snapping, “Oh, so now you’re interested in my research?”

Duncan froze up, shocked, and that’s when the stove caught fire.

“Holy shit!” Isadora yelled, jumping to his feet. Duncan also leapt up, and Sunny let out a screech.

Klaus, meanwhile, backed up, staring at the flames, almost transfixed. He suddenly seemed very pale and very quiet.

Isadora ran forwards, pushing Sunny back farther across the counter; the baby had stopped yelling and just reached up to cover her ears. “It’s okay! You just need to put the pot on the fire. Klaus, just-”

Klaus didn’t appear to be listening. He backed into a corner, shutting his eyes and dropping to the ground, suddenly breathing very rapidly, reaching to grip onto the something, his hands only scraping the floor.

“Klaus!” Duncan rushed towards him, dropping in front of him. “Isadora-”

“I can help!” Isadora said, starting forwards.

“Put the fire out!” Duncan yelled at her. “Put it out, I’ll help Klaus!”

“But, really-”

“Put it out!”

Isadora hesitantly ran to the stove, while Duncan turned back to Klaus. “Klaus, hey, hey buddy. It’s okay, we’re here, I need you to count with me-”

Klaus still didn’t respond, hugging his knees and still breathing hard, looking absolutely terrified.

Duncan glanced at the flames, which Isadora was slowly placing the pot over, trying to stifle it. It wasn’t hard to guess that Klaus was going through some kind of panic attack, but he could probably help him out of it, he could try to help. He took a deep breath, trying to keep his own panic in check, trying to ignore the fact that Isadora muttering and Klaus’s panic and Sunny’s yelling and the sounds of the fire crackling were all rushing into his head at once, and that everything was so loud…

“Hey, Klaus, can you breathe with me? One, two, th-”

“I’m sorry.” Klaus suddenly shut his eyes tight, backing into the corner. “I’m-”

“Klaus,” Duncan said, reaching to touch his hand. “Klaus, you’re-”
And suddenly everything changed.

The second their hands touched, everything was suddenly too much, and Duncan felt his stomach sink, felt his breath catch in his throat, and he suddenly felt very scared, incredibly anxious, so many things were happening all at once and...

And...

For a split second, he saw Klaus open his eyes again, staring at him in confusion, and it took Duncan a second to realize it was because he’d screamed, and all of the sudden he felt hot, almost overheated, and he started feeling panicked, terrified, someone was grabbing his arms, someone was...

“No! No!” he could see, he could see someone in front of him, someone ripped Sunny out of his arms, someone else was holding him back. “Give her back! That’s my sister, give her back!”

“Let them go!” yelled a voice, and he recognized that voice, and yet he didn’t. He turned, he could see a girl with long hair, crying and kicking and struggling...

“Duncan!” someone was calling for him, distantly, too far away.

And then he was outside, and he was holding Sunny close, and telling her not to look, and to be quiet, Mother was coming, and then the woman and the girl ran out of the house, and people were running towards them, and the fire spread to their feet, and the two women were trying to run again, and then there was a gunshot, and it was so loud, so loud, it was too loud, and the woman fell, and he felt a sickening dread, a burst of denial. The breath had been knocked out of him as he watched her hit the ground. He wasn’t sure he could breathe at all.

Then the girl screamed, and suddenly he could see cars lift into the air and come crashing down, the crash louder than anything he’d heard before, and the girl kept screaming as someone grabbed her, and...

“Duncan, please!”

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the vision was gone. Duncan was staring up at his sister’s face, and it took him a second to even process that he was on the floor, and his hands were over his ears. He was breathing too quickly, his heart felt like it was going to burst out of his chest. He sat up, glancing around; the fire was out, and Klaus was hugging Sunny, glancing between her and Duncan, shaking a little.

“What…” Duncan began, his mind still catching up to him.

“Duncan, what did you feel?” Isadora asked, grabbing his hands. “When you touched Klaus, did you-”

“What are you-?” Duncan began, before everything got loud.

God, fuck, I hope I’m right. I hope he’s okay. That much panic must’ve overwhelmed him. Why isn’t he talking? He should be talking. Oh, fuck-

I fucked up, I fucked up, I fucked up, I don’t know what happened, I just felt terrified and now Duncan’s hurt, I hurt him, I don’t know what I did but he’s hurt-

It was their voices, he thought. Isadora and Klaus. He thought he heard Sunny babbling, too, but he wasn’t sure. But their mouths weren’t moving, or they weren’t matching the words he heard…
He raised his hands to his ears, almost instinctively. He heard the voices anyway, heard Isadora’s voice, Oh, God, he’s overstimulating, he’s-

“I’m fine!” Duncan yelled. “I’m fine, shut up!”

We’re not saying anything. What is happening to him? What did he feel?

Oh, fuck, we’re not saying anything, is he okay? He’s not okay, this is my fault, I shouldn’t have suggested cooking, I started a fire, I could’ve killed us-

“What do you… how are you…?” Duncan began, shrinking back.

He’s feeling something, I know it, he’s-

He’s bleeding!

“Shut up!” Duncan yelled, jumping to his feet.

“Duncan, you’re hurt…” Isadora said.

He’s bleeding, he’s got a nosebleed, he must have shit, I need to talk to him...

“I’m sorry-” Klaus said, and Duncan suddenly realized he was crying. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what I did to you-”

I fucked up I fucked up I...

“Stop it!” Duncan yelled. “Whatever you’re doing, stop it!”

“Duncan-?”

He’s not okay...

No, no. No, he couldn’t be, he couldn’t, that was impossible, he...

He’s not okay, I need to calm him down. Focus, Isadora.

He’s not okay, I did something, I-

Oh, fuck.

He was hearing their thoughts.

“I… I have to go.” Duncan said, and he turned around and ran.

“Duncan!” Klaus called, moving forwards. “I’m sorry, I-”

“Wait.” Isadora reached out, grabbing his arm. “Wait, he… look, when he shuts down, he likes to be alone.”

“I did something to him.” Klaus said, as Sunny leaned into him, trying to comfort him. “I-I-I fucked up, I’m sorry, I don’t know what happened, I saw the fire and it was like… Isadora, I’m sorry, it was like I- I felt so scared, I’m sorry…”

He started crying again, and Isadora ran up, throwing her arms around him and Sunny. He hugged
her back, sobbing while Sunny murmured some kind of consolation. Klaus was shaking and crying, and was feeling so bad he didn’t even notice that Isadora was whispering something for a few moments.

“Okay. It’s not your fault. Okay? It’s not your fault. I know it.” she said. “I can promise you. Whatever happened to Duncan, it’s not you.”

“B-b-but-”

“It’s not you. Whatever happened, it can’t have been you.” Isadora pulled away. “Are you feeling better?”

“I- I don’t know.”

“Do you want to try and find him?”

“I-if you think-”

“He might not want the pressure and sympathy.” Isadora sighed. “He gets like that a lot.”

“Gatavot?” Sunny said, which meant, “What if we finish the food and bring some up to him? He’ll have time to cool down and then we can eat together.”

Klaus sniffled and translated, and Isadora said, “Good idea, Sunny. Here, Klaus, you want to grab the noodles? I’ll set the timer, kay? Make sure the water’s starting to boil.”

He nodded, and Isadora smiled at him. “If you’re feeling upset again, just let me know. I’ll help.”

Klaus nodded and turned around, putting Sunny back on to the counter and not noticing Isadora’s face fall as she wiped her nosebleed on her sleeve.

Duncan rushed up the stairs before dropping in the hall, grabbing his stomach and breathing hard. He heard their thoughts. He heard their thoughts. He heard their thoughts, he heard their thoughts, he heard their thoughts, he…

That was probably rude of him. They didn’t tell him he could listen to their thoughts, that must have been intrusive, he shouldn’t have-

**HE HEARD THEIR FUCKING THOUGHTS.**

That wasn’t normal. That wasn’t normal. He had heard their thoughts, he had read their minds …

He reached up, wiping his nose on his sleeve; Klaus and Isadora were right, he’d gotten a nosebleed.

Wait… wait, fuck.

He’d gotten a nosebleed whenever he had gotten too overstimulated. Since the day out to the theater, when it had started getting really bad…

They’d always been around people during his breakdowns, and he’d been able to hear every word they’d said. He’d never actually paid attention to find out if their words matched what they were saying, and there’d never been few enough people he’d think to wonder how many voices were in
his head.

He was a telepath. He was a telepath. He was…

He stood up, shaking slightly. Okay… okay, he needed to get to his room and figure something out. Figure something out, he… maybe he could find out what was going on. There had to be some kind of explanation, right? Maybe… maybe he was just… no, no, he’d definitely heard their thoughts.

And he’d… he’d gone into Klaus’s head. Into his memories. That had to have been the fire. God, he’d never said it was so… he’d never said how awful it had been. Duncan hadn’t expected it to be pleasant, of course, but Klaus never mentioned being grabbed and restrained and seeing his sisters screaming and watching that woman… shit, that was his mother, wasn’t it? He’d watched his own Mother die.

And then… the cars had floated? That had to have been some kind of illusion, right? From the stress? Maybe it was part of the panic attack he’d had, some dream had entwined itself with the memory?

Then again, if he could read minds and memories, maybe Klaus’s sister could lift cars by screaming.

Duncan went into his room, shutting the door. He’d read their minds. The more he said it to himself, the more it seemed real. It wasn’t normal by any means, but it felt more… likely. Natural. Almost like he’d just discovered part of himself he’d been hiding, however unintentionally.

When he’d been getting panicked, his powers must’ve activated. He assumed he probably was also overstimulating, too, which caused the panic, or maybe his powers activated and that overstimulated him, or…

Come on… come on…

That… sounded very similar to his own voice. But he hadn’t been thinking that, he didn’t think.

Light up, please, light up. When they come back, I need to be able to get their attention this time.

What?

Duncan was about to turn and leave, maybe to find somewhere else to calm down, but then something hit him.

Very similar to his own voice…

Oh, holy fuck.

Duncan turned back, shutting his eyes. Where was the voice- the thought- coming from?

Thank fuck. Okay, now turn off.

Duncan looked wildly around the room, until he spotted a dim light behind the closet door. He ran forwards, took a breath, and then opened it.

A flashlight in the corner dimmed.

Light again. Come on, get good at it, we can morse code something- fuck, why do I keep coughing? Hope I’m not sick. I don’t know when I last ate, I need to find food soon…
Duncan was close to tears.

He moved closer, kneeling in front of the flashlight. The voice sounded a lot more distant and echoey than Isadora and Klaus's had, but he could definitely hear it, especially when he focused.

*Oh! Oh, shit, Duncan's here. Did he see it? Better flash again-*

Duncan reached out a hand, as if to touch the flashlight, and suddenly felt cold.

*Shit, fuck. Hope that didn’t scare him off. He doesn’t look scared- is he bleeding? His nose is… oh no. Oh no, oh no, that only happens when…*

Duncan was crying now.

He could *hear him*.

“Quigley?”
... I feel like you're gonna hate me for this one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Quigley has a Chat with his Brother

Quigley started crying.

He knows I’m here. He knows I’m here.

He put his hand over his brothers’ again, and even though it passed through, he could see Duncan flinch slightly. He felt him. Shit, shit…

“Am I hallucinating?” Duncan asked, raising an arm to wipe his face. Oh, fuck he was crying. “I have to be… you can’t be here, you were kidnapped- are you dead? Quigley, are you dead, or am I imagining all of this?”

Oh, he thinks he’s hallucinating, I’ll just tell him-

“Don’t tell me anything.” Duncan whispered. “I… I don’t think I can hear you talk.”

What? What is he-

“Quigley, I… I know this sounds crazy, but I’m a… I’m a…” Duncan shut his eyes. “I think I’m a… telepath, Quigley. I heard thoughts, just a few minutes ago. I think it’s…”

He started sobbing, shaking and starting to rock back-and-forth. Quigley froze.

He’s like me. He’s got abilities. They’re going to come after him-

“Who?” Duncan shot up, terror entering his eyes. “Who’s after me?”

The Lab, the lab’s going- no, don’t tell him, he’ll-

“Hawkins Lab? Are you talking about Hawkins Lab?”

Is that what it’s called? I just know it’s a Lab, Department of Energy.

“Department of Energy, fuck, that’s probably it.”

You know, I don’t know if I like Duncan reading my mind.

“Would you rather I not hear you?” Duncan snapped.

No! No, listen to me, please-
“I’m sorry.” Duncan said quickly, still crying hard. Don’t be sorry. “I’m sorry, I… this is all new. I don’t know when it’ll… turn off. I don’t want… are you sure you’re not a hallucination?”

I sure hope I’m not.

“Or… or a ghost?”

Don’t think so.

“Look, I… this might turn off soon, I don’t know how it works, is there a way we can talk better?”

I don’t know, I don’t…

“Where are you?”

An interesting thing about thoughts is they don’t always come in words; when Duncan asked his question, Quigley suddenly thought in images, in memories. The Other Place. The Gate. The dark forest. The Monster. The Monster running towards him, about to hit, claws out, screaming…

“Ah!” Duncan put his hands over his ears.

Oh, shit, did I-

“I can see it!” Duncan said, shutting his eyes, holding back more tears. “The Monster! Sunny was right, it’s… did it really… it could’ve killed you! Is that what took you and killed our parents?”

They are dead.

They’re gone.

The Lab killed them-

“They killed them? Why?”

I can do things. I can disappear and reappear places. That’s how I got out of the car when it crashed, that’s why they took me-

“Holy shit. Do you know- no. No, stop. We need a better way to talk, this could stop at any minute-”

You’re bleeding a lot.

“Is that a side effect?” Duncan asked, reaching up, realizing just how badly his nose was bleeding.

It happened to me, and the Lab workers weren’t surprised. If you keep straining your abilities, you’ll drain your energy and pass out.

Duncan shut his eyes. “We need a way to talk. How can I talk to you?”

Lights.

“You can flicker the lights.” Duncan said, glancing at the flashlight.

Yes! Yes, I can! Do you remember morse code?

“Not really. I’ll figure something out, stay with me?”
Always.

“I’m so glad you’re still here. I can feel you, right? That’s the cold?”

*It’s so cold here, Duncan. And I’m sick- no! Ignore that thought! I’m not sick!*

“You’re sick?”

_Fuck._

“I’ll find you, okay? We’re going to find you. Isa, and Klaus and Sunny- they’re our friends, can you see them?”

_Barely. I can see you and Isa more._

“What does- have you seen their sister? Violet?”

_No. Vaguely familiar name, but no._

“Okay. I’ll get the lights, stay with me. But… where are you?”

*It’s like our world, but it’s dark and cold. Like another reality. Like… an upside-down reality._

“Upside Down?”

_Shit, I’m crying. I don’t want him to know I’m crying- fuck, he can read thoughts, fuck._

“I’m sorry, I think… I think it’s going out.” Duncan said, wiping his bloody nose on his sleeve. “I can only hear a bit. I’m so sorry. I miss you so much, I’ll find you, I promise. I’ll keep talking to you, okay? Just stay with me, please.”

*I will. I love you. And Isadora. So much. I love you two so much._

“I love you. I’ll never stop looking for you, okay?”

Quigley burst into a fit of coughing, and his immediate thought was the last one Duncan heard before the telepathy shut off.

_Hurry._

“Duncan?” Isadora knocked on the door. “Hey, it’s us. We have food. Can we come in?”

They heard a crash. Isadora jumped, glancing to Klaus, who was holding two of the bowls they’d prepared. Isadora pushed the door open with her shoulder, placing the bowl on the sidetable and running to the closet, where the noise had come from. Klaus rushed to do the same, with Sunny simply throwing her plate and hoping it didn’t smash.

Isadora threw open the closet, yelling, “Duncan, are you-”

She paused, staring, as Klaus ran to join her and also froze.

Duncan was standing on top of a box on top of a chair, reaching up through the hanging clothes. “Come on, come on…” he muttered. “Quig, can’t you lift me or something?”

“What the hell are you doing?” Isadora said, shocked.
Duncan turned towards her, said, “Isadora, I-” and promptly fell.

Klaus ran forwards, managing to catch him right before he hit the floor, flinching as the box and chair toppled. He also jumped as another box fell beside them, landing with a thump; that was what Duncan had been reaching for.

“Why were you digging out Esme’s junk?” Isadora asked.

“Why does Esme have stuff stored in your closet?” Klaus asked.

“This used to be a guest room, and she stores her shit on the top of the guest room closets.” Isadora said, as Duncan jumped up and ran to the box. “Your room’s got empty photo frames and shoeboxes, we’ve got-”

“Miniature lights.” Duncan said, throwing open the box and beaming.

Inside the box was a tangled mess of lights, all connected by a chord shoved into the box and jumbled up. Duncan reached in and pulled it out, struggling to untangle.

“Duncan,” Isadora knelt next to him, “Look, uh, I don’t know what happened, but I just want to say-”

“Quigley’s here.” Duncan said sharply.

There was a long pause. “What?” Isadora said.

“He’s…” Duncan held out his hand, and then smiled slightly. “Here. Quigley. On the Other Side.”

“What?”

“He’s here, but in the Upside-Down World.” Duncan said. He kept trying to untangle, saying, “What did Esme call these? Fairy lights?”

“Shut up, what are you talking about?” Isadora asked, grabbing his arm.

Duncan flinched away, saying, “He’s here.”

“What are you talking about?” Isadora shouted. “Quigley’s not here.”

“Duncan,” Klaus said, “Look, I… I don’t know what I did, but I’m so sorry-”

“Don’t be sorry, you just gave me a way to find out what I can do.” Duncan shrugged.

They stared at him. “What?” Klaus asked.

“I think,” Duncan said, rubbing his eyes slightly- they were a bit red, Isadora noticed with a pang, “I might be a telepath.”

They stared at him for a moment, before Isadora said, “Duncan, what the fuck?”

“I heard your thoughts.” Duncan said. “Sorry about that, I didn’t know I was even… well, I think that’s what’s been happening when I got overstimulated the last few months. I’ve been hearing everyone’s thoughts as well as everything else, and I didn’t notice cause we were in public, but once there were only two of you…”

“Duncan,” Klaus said carefully, “You’re saying you can read minds?”
Duncan glanced at him. “Not right now, but yeah. On occasion.”

Klaus hesitated, glancing at Sunny, who shrugged. Isadora stared at Duncan, really wanting to believe him, but at the same time… telepathy was a bit of a leap from what she’d been expecting.

“I think,” Duncan said, “I might be able to enter memories, too, but that’s something I-”

“Duncan,” Isadora said, “Are you sure you’re reading thoughts?”

“Yeah.” Duncan said.

“You’re not just… hyper-empathetic?”

“No, it’s definitely thoughts.” Duncan said, untangled the chord enough to find a plug, and standing up to get out of the closet. Isadora wilted slightly. “And I heard Quigley.”

Klaus and Isadora shared a confused look before following him out; he stopped in the corner of the bedroom, plugging the lights into the wall watching them glow.

“Duncan,” Isadora said, kneeling next to him, trying to figure out how to explain that he was probably just mistaken, “Look, a lot of… weird things have happened, but this is… a bit much.”

“You’re saying that you can hear your brother’s thoughts? From wherever he is?” Klaus asked.

“He’s here.” Duncan said. “But in the Upside Down world.”

“In the-”

“Watch.” Duncan sat on the floor, holding the bundle of lights. “These are lit, cause they’re plugged in, right?”

“Yes?” Klaus said. “What do you-”

Duncan leaned over, unplugging the lights, letting them dim. “Okay.” he said, holding up the lights, gripping them as if they were his lifeline. “Quig, light it up.” he turned to the others. “Quigley can light the lights. That’s why the lamp was going nuts-”

“Anker.” Sunny muttered, looking a bit sheepish. “Oh! That explains a lot.”

“Duncan,” Isadora said carefully. “Look, I know we’ve been under a lot of stress recently, and a lot of… not-normal things have happened to us. But talking about… Quigley being a… a ghost -”

“He’s not a ghost, he’s not dead, he’s in the Upside Down.”

“And what’s that?”

“It’s… like our world, but really cold. And evil. And we need to get Quigley out of there.”

“Duncan!” Isadora shouted, starting to feel very frustrated. “I thought I was the crazy one-”

“Isadora…” Klaus began.

“-but you’re saying that… that-”

They all shut up when the lights in Duncan’s hands started to glow.

Duncan let out a relieved laugh, beaming. “Quigley! Hi! Hi, it’s me! I can’t hear you, but I’m here,
I swear, I’m here. I’m here, we’re gonna fix this, okay?”

“Duncan, it’s… it’s probably just… a weird thing that happens after you’ve just unplugged it.” Isadora said. “Like, I don’t know if you can have leftover electricity or something-”

“It shouldn’t be doing that.” Klaus said, staring. “It shouldn’t be doing that.”

Sunny scooted towards the lights, and said, “Hi-ee!” which meant something like, “Hello, Quigley, it’s nice to meet you!”

The lights dimmed again, and Duncan said, “Okay, Quig, flash once if-”

“Duncan!” Isadora said. “There’s no way Quigley’s here!”

“Yes there is! He’s in another world like ours, and-”

“Duncan, this is insane! Quigley was kidnapped by those people who stalked us back home, he didn’t disappear into some other dimension!”

“Yeah, well, he ended up there.” Duncan said. “Actually, speaking of which, the kidnappers were Hawkins Lab, and they took him because-”

“They’re what?” Klaus jumped.

“-because Quigley can teleport.”

Isadora gave Duncan a long look, before saying, “You need sleep.”

“Isadora, please, trust me. There’s a monster in this world with him, and that’s what’s been taking all the missing people-”

“Oh, now you want to talk about the missing people?” Isadora snapped. “Now it’s connected to Quigley? When it plays into your delusions?”

“It’s not delusions!” Duncan held up the lights. “Look, he can light them again-”

“Quigley isn’t in another dimension, this isn’t fucking Star Trek.” Isadora said. “Duncan, real people took him away from us, and real people are the threat here.”

“They’re a threat, but the Monster is, too!”

“You said Quigley could teleport?” Klaus asked, reaching out to put a hand over Sunny’s.

“Yeah, he-”

“When the hell did Quigley teleport?” Isadora asked.

“It’s a new development, like my telepathy.”

“Could either of you lift things with your mind?” Klaus asked quickly.

Duncan turned to him, a quick realization showing in his eyes. “Uh… no. But I don’t see why-”

“You’re both nuts!” Isadora yelled, jumping to her feet.

“Isadora, you’re not listening to me!” Duncan jumped up, too.
“Oh, I’m not listening to you? Duncan, we’re trying to find our fucking brother, not pretend he’s a ghost!”

“He’s not a ghost! He’s not dead!”

“You’re saying that he’s-” Isadora then flinched, jumping back. “Holy fuck! Why is it so cold?”

“That’s Quigley, he-”

“Shut the fuck up!” Isadora screamed.

Everyone paused for a moment, and then Klaus stood up, too, saying, “Isadora, I think you need to calm down. Look, we’re all stressed, but I think there’s stuff we all need to talk about.”

“There’s nothing we need to talk about.” Isadora said, backing up. “I thought I had… I thought there might be weird stuff going on, but it’s not, because that shit doesn’t happen. But it’s not like you’d care. You wouldn’t listen to me for weeks, and now you’re asking me to just trust you with this shit?”

Duncan stared at her, horrified. “Isadora, I didn’t mean to make you feel like I wasn’t listening-”

“It doesn’t matter.” Isadora said, shaking her head. “It doesn’t fucking matter. You’re going nuts, just take a fucking nap, I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Wha… where are you going?”

“I have my own room, remember? See you tomorrow.”

“What?” Duncan suddenly looked panicked. “No, no, we’ve always shared a room-”

“We’re thirteen, we can have our own rooms, can’t we?”

“Please don’t fight!” Klaus said, running inbetween them. “Please, guys, we can’t be fighting! We need to work together, to figure out what’s going on. To find our siblings.”

“In the other dimension?” Isadora asked skeptically.

Klaus bit his lip. “Maybe. I dunno, I… before she got kidnapped, Violet did some… weird things, I… look, we shouldn’t just… maybe we shouldn’t just throw this idea out, okay? Maybe some weird shit is actually happening.”

“Maybe,” Isadora said, glaring, “We all need some fucking space.”

“Isa,” Duncan looked about ready to cry. “Isa, I’m sorry, don’t go-”

“See you tomorrow.” Isadora said, and she turned and left, slamming the door behind her.

Duncan burst into tears, and on the other side of the door, so did Isadora.
Violet woke up to alarms sounding in the halls.

She sat up, rubbing her eyes. They’d left her in Solitary all night, no matter how many times she’d banged on the doors and asked if they were done yet, if they were going to take her back to testing or feed her or hurt her. The waiting was somehow worse than the actual tests, she’d found. At least then, she had some idea of what was happening to her. In here, she was just waiting, imagining the worst, all the horrible things they could do, all the things they might do if she let her guard down. She’d been alone for hours, and even once she’d calmed down, she had nothing to do but wait and think.

She had resorted to talking to Klaus about it, and since the room was so dark it was easy to imagine he was there with her, in the other corner of the room, hidden by shadows.

“They’re horrible, Klaus. And they can do whatever they want to me.”

“Only if you let them.”

“Only if I want to survive. They’ll kill me and take you if I’m too much of a problem.”

“They could be bluffing.”

“I can’t take that chance. I am taking care of you. I’m not going to fail like…” she took a deep breath. “I’m not going to let this happen to you and Sunny.”

“You shouldn’t blame her.”

“She should’ve told us.”

“She wanted us to be safe.”

“We don’t know what she wanted, Klaus. We don’t know shit about her. Or Father.”

She’d fallen asleep sometime after that, after pushing the pins that had been in her hair over into a corner. And when she woke up, she heard the alarms.

Violet moved over to the door, kicking it. “Hey.” she said, still exhausted. “What the fuck is up?”

Nobody answered.
“Excuse me? How long am I gonna be here?” Violet called. “Hello?”

No answer, so she just sat in the corner.

“Maybe they’re gonna let me starve to death.” Violet said numbly. “That’d be a suitable punishment, wouldn’t it?”

“It’s not fair.”

“Of course it’s not, this place isn’t fair. Life isn’t fair. You shouldn’t have been dragged into this.”

She heard footsteps running down the hall, sounding like they were coming towards her room. “Hey, they remembered I existed.” she said. “Yay.”

The door flew open, and a guard came in, grabbing her arm and lifting her to her feet. “You need to go.” she said quickly.

“Where are we-?”

“Don’t ask questions, come on.”

Violet bit back a groan and allowed the woman to drag her into the hallway.

They turned down a few bends, and Violet occasionally noticed guards running towards the same direction, all yelling into handheld radios and generally not looking very pleased. They went up a flight of stairs, passing more people who rushed past them without a second glance, before moving into a long, empty hall. Violet started feeling pain in her arm from where she was being grabbed, and the alarms just kept getting louder and louder, and that anger within her was rising up. She didn’t like being dragged from place to place, she didn’t like not being told shit, and she didn’t like being treated like some fucking animal.

“Hey! What’s going on?”

“I told you-”

“I want to know! What’s going on?”

“Can’t you shut up for a minute?”

Violet had a dark idea then, one that she decided might be worth trying. They turned a bend and Violet stopped dead in her tracks, looking ahead at the hall, eyes darting around to every door around them.

“Come on, Seven, get a move on!”

Violet took a deep breath, shutting her eyes and focusing. She could feel the pings of metal surrounding her; from the doors and what was behind them. It was a bit… overwhelming, but if she could focus enough…

Focus enough...

Focus...

“Seven! Move!”

Violet opened her eyes, about to take a step forwards, intending to put her focus on one of the
doors, just on the hinges and the lock. That would make a suitable weapon, or…

But when she opened her eyes, she saw something very, very wrong.

Violet gasped and jumped back, suddenly feeling like the breath had been completely knocked out of her, like someone had just punched her in the gut.

“Seven!”

“What the fuck is that?” Violet managed to say.

The guard followed her gaze. “There’s nothing there.”

“No, no…” Violet shook her head, refusing to move her eyes from the thing. “What the fuck is that?”

Up ahead, at the end of the hall, was… something. It was huge and brown and slimy, and it didn’t look… it didn’t look like anything she’d seen before. She thought it was turning towards her, but it was hard to tell, because it had no face.

“What the fuck is that?” she repeated, her voice rising in fear.

The guard suddenly seemed interested. She stared at the girl. “You can see something?”

“What the fuck is that? What the fuck?”

The creature opened its face, then, letting out some kind of unearthly screech, and it started rushing forwards, and Violet screamed, instantly throwing her free arm towards it. As soon as she did, a door ripped itself from the wall, rushing for the Monster.

Right before it could collide, the creature vanished, as if it had never been there.

The door clattered to the floor, and the woman said, “What the hell did you just do?”

Violet saw a chance, and turned to glare at the guard before lifting the door again and ramming it into her.

She didn’t stop to even look if she was knocked out or injured or anything; the second the grip on her arm loosened, Violet broke away and tore down the hall.

Violet got lost very quickly.

She was hoping to find the stairwell, but apparently she wasn’t good at figuring out buildings. She ran to the nearest window, only to back up incredibly quickly once she realized how high up she was.

Maybe… maybe she could lift a door, use it to break a window open, and then fly down on it? She could use it to fly over that fence, too; she wasn’t sure she could mess with that, especially if it was electrocuted.

What would happen if she fell, though?

Anything’s better than here.
“And what,” said her brother’s voice in her head, “Are you going to do if you get out?”


“And what if they take us while you’re gone?”

“I’ll go fast. They’ll get shut down before they can even get you in here.”

“And what if they take us while you’re gone?”

“Are you absolutely certain of that?”

“Klaus, if I stay here, I’m going to die. I already knocked out a guard. It’s too late to turn back now.”

“Well, then, you better hurry before they kill us all.”

Violet took a deep breath, scanning the hall, searching for the pings of metal again. Once it was located, it was easy to toss…

She felt some sort of dread in her stomach, some kind of instinctual fear. She paused, trying to block out the alarms blaring, to focus on what she might be sensing. What might be terrifying her.

She heard the screech, and starting running before she even glanced over her shoulder to see.

She was taking off down the hall, and it was hard to look, but that thing was behind her, running. Violet did her best to keep herself from screaming, from being too noticeable, but holy shit, that animal was disturbing.

It’s not here, it’ll vanish if something hits it, she only recalled once she turned a bend, still running. Throw something at it, it’ll disappear…

She stumbled a bit and tripped, falling to the cold, hard ground. Violet rolled over, staring in horror as the thing got closer to her, and its face opened up again, and it screeched at her, and…

Violet threw her hands over her face, screaming.

There was no impact, and when she lowered her arms, nothing was there.

Nothing was… it wasn’t real. It disappeared when she hit it, and when she looked away. Maybe she was hallucinating. Maybe they drugged her again. But it’d been at least a day since she’d been fed… unless they somehow drugged her while she was asleep… could that work? Could they do that? Maybe this was a nightmare…

Abruptly, someone grabbed her arms, lifting her to her feet.

Fucking hell, goddamnit, shit, fuck…

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” said a guard- Violet wasn’t sure she recognized this guy. “Why can’t you just behave for one goddamn day?”

“Let go of me!” Violet screamed, kicking and thrashing around, trying to break free. “Let go!”

“The fuck do we have to do to you?”

“Let go of me!” Violet shut her eyes, feeling for the pings again, and sensed some kind of metal on the guard’s belt. Weapon. She opened her eyes again, pulled away as far as she could, and lifted it-
a gun, okay, he had a gun…

In that split second, she had a new idea.

*Wonder if I can heat up the metal?*

Before he knew what was happening, she cocked her head and watched as the gun flew at him, focusing on the weapon and thinking *heat up*.

One the gun made impact, the guard screamed and released her arm, so she guessed that meant it worked. She tore down the hall, not looking behind her as she did, even as she heard the man yell into his radio.

She didn’t find the stairwell, but she did find something that looked like elevator doors. She rushed inside; yep, an elevator. Shouldn’t be a problem, she just needed to hit the button for the lowest floor, get out that way.

As the doors closed, she saw some guards run down the hall. The second they saw her, they looked panicked, rushing forwards, yelling for her to stop, don’t do that, you don’t know-

The doors shut, and Violet crumpled into the corner.

Goddamnit, she was *exhausted*. And she had a pretty bad nosebleed again.

“Alright, Klaus, just stay calm.” Violet said, shutting her eyes. “We’re almost out.”

“What was that thing?”

“I don’t know, I don’t… It doesn’t matter. Here’s the plan: I escape into the woods. I find a road, follow it into a town, raid any cars I see heading towards the Lab. Make sure they’re not bringing you in. If I find you and Sunny, we all run together.”

“Where would we go?”

“Anywhere. Don’t worry, someone will listen to us. Someone will help us.”

“And then what?”

“Then we’ll be together, and nothing else will matter.”

“You probably won’t even get out the doors. They can track you with security cameras, and you were spotted in the elevator. They’ll be waiting for you. You won’t get out.”

“Don’t be a downer.”

“I’m being realistic. You are not getting out this easy!”

The doors opened, and Violet instantly realized something was wrong.

The halls before her were darker than she’d seen before, and the alarms were even louder, and she could hear shouting and screaming down the halls. Sounding frustrated and scared. This didn’t look like the way out.

Her immediate instinct was to just go to the buttons and find another floor. That would be sensible. She could get out that way, unless there were guards waiting there, which there probably were, knowing her luck.
But… as she shut her eyes, about to press the buttons, she suddenly felt something.

Something was there.

She felt something outside those doors, something calling to her. Something was down the halls, something she needed to get to. To find.

Almost in a trance, she stood up and walked out of the elevator doors, ignoring the cold underneath her feet, the loud alarms and shouts dimming in her ears. She wandered down dark halls, following her sense, ignoring anything around her. Turning down bends to get closer to whatever was calling to her.

There was a door, swinging open, at the end of the hall. She could see people running around inside, could see brighter lights, flashing red.

“Turn back, Violet. They’ll see you.”

I thought you said they’d catch me anyway.

“You shouldn’t be here.”

No… I think I should.

Violet walked past the door.

Nobody noticed her at first. The room ahead was huge, bigger than any she’d seen yet in this building. It was covered in stairs and ladders railings, leading up and around the room, and more doors along the walls, along with a large, dark tank of water in the center of the room. It almost looked like some kind of stairwell that doubled as a viewing room, for something. The tank of water was a bit concerning, but it didn’t seem to be doing much.

At first, she almost shut down there; there was so much noise and action and metal she could sense, and she was confused and dazed and already a bit out of it…

But then she saw the Wall.

Her eyes trailed to the far wall, and she spotted it very quickly. How had she not seen that before? There was some kind of… growth on the wall. It looked like a bunch of tangled brown, slimy webs had grown over some kind of… red gunk. And it was pulsing and glowing, and there were people in some kind of suit that covered their faces running towards it. They were retracting something out of it, some kind of cord. In the back of her mind, Violet remembered researching people who went diving into the ocean or into mysterious tunnels, and they usually had such a cord strapped to them so they didn’t get lost.

Well, they finally finished pulling the cord out, and the end of it had been ripped apart.

That probably should’ve freaked her out. But for some reason, she didn’t really feel much of anything. She just felt that call.

She started stepping towards the thing on the wall, suddenly unaware of all the other people in the room, feeling like she was all alone. She could feel the call, the… she wasn’t sure what it was. But she could sense something, something there.

She made it halfway across the room before someone grabbed her arms again, and that’s when she processed enough of reality to think, even vaguely, about what was actually happening. Someone
dragged her off, and she could hear yelling, but she only barely processed all of that, still staring at the thing on the wall.

*It’s a Gate*, she thought, but she didn’t know why.

That was when she was tossed in another room, and the second the door closed, she felt awful. No, no, she needed to get closer to the Gate, she needed…

Someone slapped her, and just like that, the dissociative trance was broken.

But the call to the Gate was still there.

Violet let out a scream and started running towards the door, but guards were pulling her back, dragging her away. She heard angry yells from more people behind her, people from all over, yelling “What are you doing?”’s and “What were you thinking?”’s, but all she could think about was getting out there. Getting to… to…

She noticed the cattle prod in her side right before it was turned on, only able to think, *Shit*, before the electricity hit her.

It was just as bad as the last time. Violet screamed and doubled over, breathing hard, as more yelling suddenly pounded in her ears, the alarms getting louder and louder. She felt like absolute shit again, she felt like like she was *burning*…

“What the hell is she doing down here?” she heard a distantly familiar voice enter the room, sounding pissed.

“I don’t fucking know, she just showed up!” said some voice in the back, one she didn’t recognize. “Thought you said you were keeping her upstairs. You’re not just letting the kids run around wild, are you?”

Violet stumbled forwards, her legs shaking; she didn’t know if she could stand up for long. She felt a rough hand grab her shoulder, sending of some kind of panic in her, and she was forced upright. She was breathing hard, and every part of her was screaming at her to *run*. But she just… couldn’t. Her legs felt like lead, her chest felt like it was being crushed, she could barely process what was going on in front of her.

Someone was gripping her shoulder, it took her a second to remember. That man… Olaf, yeah. He was holding her up… he was grabbing her shoulder. She didn’t like that, she didn’t like that at all.

“Let *go* of me!” she shouted, trying to back up, break his hold.

He just pulled her closer, yelling, “What are you doing down here?”

“She’s attacked the guards upstairs.” said one of the people in the room, holding up a radio. “Trying to escape, sounds like.”

“Let go of me!” Violet yelled again. “I need to-”

“We are all getting very tired of your behavioral problems,” Olaf said darkly. “I don’t think you quite understand the position you’re in. You belong to this facility, like all the other experiments before you, and you’re not about to get special treatment because your parents failed to train you the way you should have been—”

“I need to get out there!” Violet screamed, still trying to break away, feeling more and more
panicked the more he held her. “I need to-”

“Shut up!” he pushed her, or threw her, she wasn’t quite sure, she just knew that now she was on
the ground, breathing hard, struggling to get up, feeling dizzy and blurry and... and desperate. Was
she crying? Yes, she was crying... she was...

Olaf stooped low and grabbed her face, turning her to look towards him, as she barely managed to
scramble onto all fours. He stared at her darkly and said, “You are one of us, Seven, and your
behavior has been despicable. I don’t know what we have to do to get you to behave, but we will
do whatever we have to,” She felt her stomach drop, as he continued, “Even if it involves disposing
of you and studying your siblings instead.”

“No...” Violet said, shaking her head, trying to break away from him; that panic was growing
again, it was getting hard to breathe, and all she could think about was the Gate ... “No, no-”

“You’ve attacked our guards, refused to participate in experiments, broken into dangerous areas-
and you refuse to listen to any of us. Are you even worth the trouble?”

“Please...” her mind was drifting, even as she stared, horrified and tearful, at the man in front of
her. Drifting to the Gate. “Please, I...”

“We went through so much trouble just to get you here, and you refuse to do anything for us. You
are-”

“I need to get to him!”

Even though the alarms were still blaring, it felt like there was a deathly silence after that. The
doctors stared at her, bewildered, and even Olaf looked a bit shocked at her outburst. “What?”

“The Gate...” she said, her voice choked up, and she managed to back away, breaking away from
him, turning her face towards the room she’d been taken from. “There’s someone there.”

She could not explain, even to herself, how she knew. She just knew that her nose was starting to
bleed again.

“What do you man, there is someone behind the ‘Gate’?” he asked again.

“I feel him.” She did. A pull, a pull that she knew led to somebody. “I feel him, he’s scared. And I
need to go.”

“Go?”

“To the Gate. He’s there.”

“Who do you feel?”

She shut her eyes, reaching out with her mind. “I don’t know.” she said, feeling a sob blocking her
throat. “I don’t know, he...” she shut her eyes. “We’re connected. It’s... it’s not Klaus, I don’t
think, I don’t... I don’t know him. I feel him. He’s in the same place as the Monster, he... I need
to... I need to...”

She started sobbing, then, wrapping her arms around herself and starting to rock back-and-forth.
She vaguely heard the adults around her talking- “Ten is still alive.” “She can feel him.” “That
shouldn’t be in her skillset.” “She knows about the creature.” “She could be lying.” “Do we still
need her siblings, or should we wait on that?”
After a minute, Olaf moved back towards her, kneeling down to get eye-level. Slowly, he reached out and stroked her hair, pushing it a bit forwards. Her feelings of absolute terror flared up again as he did, but she couldn’t do anything but keep crying, feeling paralyzed.

“This is interesting.” he said carefully. “We have a new idea of what to test you for.”

“No, I have to help him…”

“If Ten has survived this long, he clearly doesn’t require your assistance. You have experiments to-”

He reached forwards towards towards her arm, and Violet screamed and leapt back, shaking and still crying. He grabbed her anyway, and she started screaming again as he lifted her to her feet. Without even thinking, she grabbed his arm with her free hand, trying to wrestle it away. Instead, she only managed to pull up his sleeve, and…

And…

The world seemed to hold still in that moment, as Violet stared at his wrist.

Then she felt herself slammed into the wall, and suddenly the call to the Gate was broken. Gone. She screamed as she hit the wall, both from her back suddenly feeling as if it was on fire, and from the feeling almost as if something important had been severed, something had snapped, but she couldn’t tell what.

“Give tests similar to One’s. It sounds like she has Extrasensory Perception of some sort.” she heard called, and she was dragged out of the room again, the alarms finally slowing, as the Gate must have calmed, something must have stopped.

Slowly, she turned to stare at Olaf as she was dragged away. They met eyes for a moment, his angry, hers almost disbelieving.

And then the door slammed, and her thoughts drifted to the tattoo on his wrist.

005.

Chapter End Notes

you all are not ready for tomorrow either :)
Isadora was sobbing and she desperately wanted to stop.

*I can control other people’s emotions, why can’t I just change mine?*

She was hugging a pillow, laying on the cold bed and trying to keep herself from running out the door back to her brother. Brothers? No!

She knew she was being unreasonable. She could change emotions, that couldn’t just be a normal thing, but… it was a bit of a leap from hyper-empathy to telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation and alternate dimensions. A bit of a leap from “Quigley might be nearby” to “Quigley’s basically a ghost.”

Something must have happened during his panic attack. Maybe he heard something wrong, maybe he felt something too, and misinterpreted… maybe he was sick, maybe he just needed to rest, maybe he…

*Duncan’s not crazy. He’s not.*

Maybe he was right. She wanted to believe him, she *did*, but… Quigley was in another dimension? He could teleport?

Slowly, Isadora rolled back her sleeve, looking at her number. 009. For as long as they could remember, they’d had the numbers. 008, 009, 010. They’d had theories about it- Quigley liked the idea they were secretly clones, Duncan thought they might’ve just been three kids out of ten who’d been kidnapped and they were the only ones rescued, but they had other theories, too, ones they discussed late at night after their parents had gone to sleep. But when she was little, Isadora had liked to imagine that it was some kind of magical mark, meaning that they had a fairytale destiny, like in the fantasy books she and Quigley had read in their spare time. She’d given up on that thought a few years back, instead agreeing with Duncan, in that it was just probably some sick record their abductors used to keep track of the kids they’d taken. It wasn’t magical at all, it was just a remnant of the horrifying incident none of them could remember.

Unless… if Duncan was right, and they all had some kind of magic, it would explain why someone tried to take them away. It would explain…

*Stop it, Isadora. It doesn’t make sense.*

*It could. I should go apologize to Duncan. I just need to run in, hug him, tell him that it’s okay and I want to help him and maybe we are magic after all…*

*Or maybe we’re all just nuts.*

Isadora kept crying, and stayed in her room.
“I’m so sorry!” Klaus said. “I- I don’t know what’s going on, but…”

Duncan curled up on the bed, hugging a pillow, feeling cold but, for the first time in his life, finding the cold very comforting. Sunny was leaning up against him, muttering something in her babytalk that he supposed was supposed to be an attempt to cheer him up.

“It’s not your fault.” he muttered numbly. “I should’ve been listening to her. Now she hates me.”

“She doesn’t hate you!” Klaus said, sitting beside him and putting a hand over his. “She couldn’t hate you, I can’t see how anyone could… she’s just mad. She’s just mad and confused and she doesn’t… know what’s going on. I mean, it does sound crazy…”

“But you believe me?” Duncan asked, glancing up.

Klaus took a deep breath. “I… I think… I think so. I didn’t… when Violet first said those flying things might be her, I didn’t believe her, but…”

“I saw that.” Duncan muttered. Klaus stared at him, and he said, “I didn’t mean to, but when you were freaking out, I… I touched you, and… that’s how I figured out I… I saw the fire. Some of it, I… and I saw her lift the cars. That was her?”

Klaus bit his lip, and Sunny crawled over to him, grabbing his hand. “Yeah. I think so… I didn’t think about it much, tried not to, to just focus on finding her, but… it was her. She can move things with her mind.”

“Telekinesis.” Duncan said quickly.

“Yeah. And you’re… telepathic?”

“And I can read memories, apparently.” Duncan said.

“So…” Klaus paused. “Uh, what am I thinking right now?”

Duncan paused. “It’s not… working now. I can… try? But…”

“No, I don’t want to be a bother-

“And just so you know, I won’t… use that if you don’t want me to. At least not on purpose.”

“Of course, yeah.”

“And I…” Duncan sighed. “Quigley’s here, I swear. But he’s not a ghost. He’s in a world like ours. He’s right here.”

“I… okay.” Klaus sighed. “Okay, I… can he see us?”

“Yeah, but he can’t talk. I can hear his thoughts when my telepathy’s working.”

“But it’s not.”

“Not right now.”

“Oh.”

Klaus took a deep breath. “Duncan, I’m gonna start this with ‘I do believe you’, okay? But… are you certain that this is real?”
“Yes. He blinks the lights…” Duncan paused, narrowing his eyes. “The lights…”

“Duncan? Are you okay?”

Duncan slowly sat up, nodding. “I… I just think I need some sleep. Need to process all of this, right?”

“Do you want me to stay?” Klaus asked quickly. “Since Isadora-”

“No, no.” Duncan said. “I don’t want to be a bother.”

“It’s not a bother-”

“No, really, I… I’ll be fine.” Duncan held back tears. “Isadora’s right, we’re old enough to have different rooms.”

“Duncan-”

“And, I mean, I’m not alone. Quigley’s here.”

“Right. Right, Quigley’s…” Klaus glanced around the room. “Where?”

Duncan held out his hand, waiting until he felt cold. “Here.”

Klaus and Sunny awkwardly waved at the spot.

“Look, just…” Duncan sighed. “Get some rest. Tomorrow morning I’ll tell you everything I get from Quigley, alright? We’ll find Violet, too, and get Quigley back. We’ll… I really do think the Lab has something to do with this, we’ll find everything, okay?”

“Okay.” Klaus nodded. He lifted Sunny, and, after a split second of hesitation, he gave Duncan a quick hug, too. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“Alright.” Duncan said.

Slowly, Klaus left. Sunny waved as he shut the door.

The second the door was closed, Duncan leapt out of bed.

“Okay, Quig,” he said, “I’m packing some stuff and climbing out the window.”

After a split second, the tiny lights started flashing wildly. He could assume that was a what the fuck are you thinking?, but he didn’t have time to stop and explain much.

“We’re doing some research, come on.” he said, jumping up to grab his schoolbag, dumping all of its contents onto his bed. He shoved his notebook and pencils back in, before running and grabbing a jacket from the closet, as well as the flashlight. He put another coat in the bag, and also an extra flashlight that he’d kept stored in a drawer, just in case the first one died.

He felt very cold as he was doing this; Quigley was probably trying to stop him.

“Look, I know it’s dangerous. But I’m going to find out what’s going on, what happened, and how to get you the hell out of there.” Duncan said. “Are you coming with me?”

Silence. Oh, yeah. Duncan shouldered the bag, and knelt by the lights.
“Blink once for yes, twice for no.” he said. “Are you coming with me?”

Pause. Then a blink.

“Good.” Duncan smiled. “Come on, time to go.”

He managed to push open his window, and glanced down.

“Huh.” he said, suddenly realizing how high up he was. “Nevermind, we’re going out the back door.”

Duncan walked down the streets, throwing a hood over his head and keeping his hands in his pockets, wishing he had managed to find gloves. Everything was so cold. But, well, it had been a few streets, he should check again…

He slowly moved his hand out of his coat, grabbing the flashlight out of his bag’s pocket, holding it out. “You still here?” he asked.

The light flickered, and Duncan smiled before putting the flashlight back in the pocket. “Sorry I keep asking.” he said. “It’s super cold out here so it’s not like I can tell you’re here by the weather. We’re almost to the Library. It’ll be closed, but I can probably… hmm… do something. We learned how to pick a lock, right?”

He saw a car rush by, and turned away, really hoping nobody could recognize who he was. He didn’t want Carmelita’s friends letting her know he’d been spotted out late, or for someone who worked with Esme to let her know they saw her foster kid breaking and entering in the middle of the night.

He finally reached the Library, and he went around to the back, pulling a hairpin out of the jacket pocket and kneeling down to the doorknob, muttering as he worked the lock.

“Alright, so the newspapers are upstairs. I’m not sure if you can see them from your side, so I’ll read them out loud. We’re looking for Armstrong Feint, Hawkins Lab, the Snicket Siblings, Moxie Mallahan and Beatrice Baudelaire, and our parents… shit, what was the other adopted kid’s name? Omar? I’ll find that out, but we might be here a while. Maybe my telepathy will act up again while we’re here and we can chat for a bit.”

The door opened, and he walked in, holding out the flashlight again. Once it flickered, he closed the door, saying, “It must be a weird conversation, since I’m not hearing words but thoughts. Guess it means you can’t lie to me, huh?”

He felt a cold feeling on his arm, like Quigley had punched him there. “Hey! Chill out, dude. Think you can make it up the stairs?”

The flashlight blinked once. Yes.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Duncan spent several hours compiling his research, reading everything interesting out loud and taking notes. He stuck the flashlight on a table, so Quigley could message him at any moment.
It took him almost forty minutes to find the first relevant thing- on one of the microfiches he dug up from a more generic newspaper, from the late 1970s.

“Quigley, you here?” One flash. “Okay. It says here that there were some experiments in the 60s- you heard of MKUltra?” Two flashes. “Alright, well, the article says… uh, there was ‘a covert CIA operation, code-named MK Ultra.’ and that some documents got released around the late 70s here, containing ‘significant details of the extent of the drug tests, including details of death at the hands of the experimenters.’ It was supposed to have stopped in 1973, but, like, who knows? Could be going on in secret.”

“Anyway,” he continued, pointing to the photo on the computer. “Hawkins Lab was accused of taking part in the experiments, and look who’s in the pic? This Armstrong Feint guy himself.”

He pulled out his notebook, writing MKUltra down on a page.

“We’ve got a new thing to look for.” he said. “If this Feint guy’s connected to this… it could be important. We got time.”

He did manage to find some more information over the course of an hour, or maybe two, he wasn’t looking at the clock- the CIA apparently started to try and find forms of mind control, and testing included a lot of things Duncan did not like thinking about. Not that he had a choice.

Once he had written down everything he could find, he moved the flashlight closer to him, staring down at his notes. He read off of them for a moment, and then said, “Okay, Quigley. Once for yes, twice for no. Does this sound like what they did to you?”

One blink. Yes.

“Oh, God…” Duncan took a deep breath. “Did they use drugs?”

One blink.

Duncan could barely hold back tears. The reports on the effects of those drugs… “LSD?”

One blink.

“Oh, oh God, Quigley, I… I’m so sorry, I…” Duncan struggled not to cry, staring down at the list. “Did they use Isolation? Like, lock you up away from people to see how long you could last?”

There was a bit of a pause, and then one blink.

“Hypnosis?”

Two blinks. No.

“Sensory Deprivation?”

One blink.

“Did they… hurt you? Physically?”

One blink.

“Oh, Quigley… the papers didn’t go into specifics about the rest of it, but there were reports of… physical torture alongside the psychological and I’m sorry, but I… I need to know, I need to know, I need to know, so I’m going to ask specifics, is that okay?” One blink.
Oh, fuck, he was going to cry. No, no, don’t do that, just list off stuff, find out exactly what was happening.


Duncan was definitely crying now, staring down at his notes, making little marks by the ones Quigley said yes to. He had a few more left to go, but he really didn’t want to ask, part of him didn’t want to know.

Get it together, Duncan. You’re a journalist; get all the facts, cry about it later.

Duncan took a deep breath. “Did they… touch you?”

Quigley might have taken a moment to figure out exactly what he was asking and respond, or it might’ve been an hour; Duncan was so fucking terrified he couldn’t really tell. But, eventually, there were two blinks. Duncan was almost relieved, but there was still one horrifying question left.

“Did they try to kill you?”

A long pause. More specific? “Did they… threaten to kill you?”

One.

“Did they actually try?” When there was another pause, Duncan said, “Okay. Three blinks for ‘I don’t know.’”

One, two, three.

Duncan gripped the edges of the notebook, trying not to cry. “Okay… okay… wait, wait, hold on. Were Mother and Father… part of this?” Nothing. “Not the Lab itself, but were they… experimented on, too?”

One.

Duncan took a deep breath. “How do you- nevermind, that’s not a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question, you can’t answer that… Did the Lab people tell you that?”

One.

“Are you sure they weren’t lying?”

One.

“How- shit, uh… uh… do you know when?”

Two.

“Was it before we were born?” Three blinks. “After?” Three blinks. “So you don’t know? Okay… okay, we can figure something out. We can… we need more research. Uh… let’s find… would our parents be here? Did they do anything that would get in the papers?” Three blinks. Then, after a pause, two. “You don’t know but you don’t think so? Okay. Okay, we can figure something out. We need to look up more stuff. I’m moving on, stay here.”

He spent another hour digging through newspapers from the seventies, having to dig another box out of the closet to find them. He found what he was looking for eventually, around 1973.
“Look at this,” he said, holding out a paper, placing the flashlight on top of the box beside him. “In the obituaries, October 11. Some woman was killed in a… a car accident, just outside of Hawkins. It… it doesn’t look like our… what happened to… it looks like they just found her dead in the car, crashed into a tree, our parents… this woman was employed at the Lab. They say that she had a kid in the car with her, and the kid’s just fucking missing… does Fiona Widdershins ring any bells? Sounds vaguely familiar, doesn’t it?”

Three flashes.

Duncan wrote down the obituary in his notebook, and then moved on.

After several minutes, he put the newspapers back and dug into the 1960s box again. Then, after more time going through, he said, “Quig, found something! Early December 1969, ‘Volunteers travel to Hawkins for Work at the Department of Energy.’ These must be the people who were experimented on- oh.”

Duncan paused for a moment, staring at the attached photo. Then, he said, “Well. There they are.”

There was a photo of some adults in hospital gowns, standing outside the Lab for a photo. He spotted his Mother first, in the front row, looking a bit younger than he remembered. He eventually found his Father, too, a row behind her.

“Kay. Guess that wasn’t a lie.” Duncan said. “Can you see this, Quigley?” Two flashes. “Mother and Father are here. Wait… Early December 1969…” He glanced at the date again. “Quig… uh, hey, Quig, doing some quick math in my head… wouldn’t, uh…” he took a deep breath. “Weird question, maybe, but wouldn’t that be only a little bit before Mother got pregnant with us?”

Long pause, before one flash.

“How… how long do you think those experiments lasted?” There was a long pause, before Duncan said, “I… think I have a theory on everything that’s going on. You thinking the same thing?”

One flash.

Duncan sighed. “We really need to talk. Okay, we’re gonna leave this here for tonight, catch Klaus, Sunny and Isadora up in the morning… if she’ll listen to us. But we’ve got one more stop before we go back to the house. Okay?”

One flash.

Duncan stood up, shouldered his bag again, and walked back towards the stairs. Once he reached the lobby, though, he paused, feeling a bit strange. “Quigley, do you feel… weird?”

Quigley kept as close as he could to Duncan, but it was a bit hard when he was having trouble moving his legs.

He was sure it was nothing, probably just nerves or the cold or something. It wasn’t like he was really sick, that coughing was probably meaningless. He had to focus on keeping up with Duncan, going down the stairs, and making sure he didn’t get himself killed.

“You know, it’s f-funny,” Quigley stammered, as they walked down the cold stairs, knowing full well his brother couldn’t hear him. “Usually I’m the impulsive little shit. And you’re the one who keeps reminding me of all the ways I could die. Now you’re ru-running around alone at night
with a flashlight and government conspiracies.”

He sighed. God, he wished he could talk to his brother; conversing with yes-or-no answers and a flashlight didn’t count. He needed to tell him things, tell him we was doing stupid, dangerous stuff, and that he was going to die, but also that he… he was probably right. About the Lab. This MKUltra bullshit.

What scared Quigley most about those questions Duncan asked, though, was it was getting a bit hard to remember what he had and hadn’t experienced. He was about 95% sure his answers had been accurate, but he’d been drugged and sedated so many times that things got blurry, and it wasn’t as if he liked remembering all that stuff. But… there was also the fact that it was getting a bit harder to sit down and think, cause if he rested for too long that just meant he’d be more likely to start coughing and feeling like shit. If he kept moving, kept distracted, things would work out.

Duncan suddenly froze, though, and Quigley stumbled to a stop, starting to cough again. He heard Duncan ask, “Quigley, do you feel… weird?”

Yeah, I’ve been feeling “weird” since I got to this hellhole.

Still, Quigley strained, listening the area around him. Nothing really seemed out of the ordinary, but…

He heard the screech very quickly, and instantly panicked, waving his hand over Duncan’s flashlight repeatedly, letting it turn on and off and off and on and…

“Quigley! What is it? What’s wrong?”

It took him a moment to realize that it sounded from outside; the thing was outside the building, but at least that meant it was on This Side, and not with his brother. It was outside the Library, it was probably trying to get in, it was going to…

“Is it that monster?”

Quigley paused for a moment, letting the flashlight dim, before blinking it once.

“Oh, fuck, oh, God, Quigley, you need to get out of there!”

Two blinks. No, no, I can’t leave you, I can’t-

“Listen, Quigley, get to the house. I’ll meet you there, once I get everything I need, okay? Hide there, alright? I swear I’ll find you, but you need to run.”

What if it tries to take you, too, and I’m not there?

“Quigley, please, just-”

Quigley heard the screech again, this time much closer, and he finally ran.

The Monster was close to the front of the Library, so he’d have to go out the back; that door was broken on this side, so it wouldn’t be too hard to get out. Then he just had to run for a bit, lose the creature, and…

Quigley only made it one room away, before he started coughing again. It wasn’t a normal coughing, either; his chest suddenly ached, and he started shaking uncontrollably. He rushed to a nearby closet, ducking in and curling up in the corner, trying to steady his breathing and get
himself to keep moving. It took him a moment to realize he was crying, and by that point, he didn’t care, it just made him louder, easier to track.

But maybe that was a good thing.

After all, if the Monster was tracking him, it wouldn’t drag Duncan into this world, would it?

He knew that the Monster was able to get between this side and the other, and he was starting to worry that him opening the Gate might be why; after all, nobody had seen this creature before. He knew it somehow was able to travel, because it brought people back with it, and he knew that apparently Sunny had seen this thing- Duncan mentioned something about that. And this thing… Duncan wouldn’t stand a chance against it. He didn’t even have teleportation powers, so he couldn’t even retreat easily. And his powers wouldn’t let him hide or fight, either.

So he’d just have to make sure the Monster didn’t target him.

Slowly, Quigley managed to get to his feet, getting out of the closet and stumbling back through the room, which was, just like the rest of this world, filled with mold and vines. And whatever that blue slime was, Quigley was covered in it; it was a bit hard not to be when he’d been there for what had to be several days. He might’ve been there a week already, actually, but he wasn’t sure. He wasn’t sure about much of anything.

He kept thinking he heard the Monster somewhere, but that might just be his imagination getting the better of him. It better be following him, so that it wasn’t following anyone on the Other Side.

Quigley was heading towards the back door, but he wasn’t quite paying attention to where he was going, and he realized too late he’d forgotten to turn at the overgrown shelves and was standing in the doorway of another room. “Shit…” he muttered, about to turn and change direction, figure out where the door was.

Until he saw something moving.

There was something in the other room, almost… pulsing. His eyes were drawn to it, and after a moment, his stupid curiosity got the better of him.

He slowly stepped inside, suddenly realizing just how many webs of slime were in the room; more than he’d seen in other parts of town. He started stepping over roots, looking around in a tense silence. The slime was cocooned around certain lumps, holding them up against the walls or keeping them bound on the floor.

“What the hell…?” Quigley murmured, wondering if he dared get closer.

Well, it wasn’t like he had anything else to do.

Carefully, Quigley stepped towards one of the webs on the wall, staring down at the ground so that he didn’t trip over the vines or roots. It took him a minute to make it over, barely glancing up to make sure he wasn’t about to run into the wall. When he finally got close enough, he slowly looked up, staring at the webs of slime.

Then, very slowly, Quigley reached up and pulled the web aside.

A bloody skeleton stared back at him.

Quigley screamed, stumbling back and tripping over a root. He felt an awful pain the second he hit the ground, spreading across his whole body, but he barely noticed, his eyes completely fixed on
the skeleton, wondering how long it had been there, when that thing had killed it, when…

He heard a heavy footstep in the doorway.

Abruptly jolted back to his situation, Quigley whipped around, scrambling to his feet as the Monster took another step closer, staring right at him.

There was a tense moment, and then Quigley bent down, grabbing a slimy brick off of the ground. He threw it at the monster and yelled, “Catch me if you can, motherfucker!”

He took off running then, racing towards a half-destroyed window and almost leaping through it. He could hear the Monster running behind him, screeching and ripping up the ground as it raced to try and catch him. Quigley only barely managed to jump up, clambering through the window, swearing as he didn’t avoid the broken glass well enough and a shard ripped into his arm. He heard the Monster screech again, and he reached up to cover the blood with his hand.

“Shit, shit, shit…” he muttered, stumbling as he tried to keep running. He knew he only had a few seconds, barely an instant before the Monster would make its way out of the building. He knew he couldn’t run far; he was cold and injured and that thing would be on him in a few seconds.

So he’d have to focus.

He hadn’t been able to do it in the last week, not since the first day. But he was plenty fucking terrified; and the Monster would still be focused on tracking him, distracting itself from Duncan on the Other Side.

Quigley shut his eyes, and thought back to Duncan’s room back at the broken house. He thought as hard as he could, while he shut his eyes and raced down the street, hearing the screeching too close behind him…

There was the nothingness again. The blackness, the numbness, the stillness. For a split second, Quigley was relieved.

Then it was gone, and he was back in the room, and he didn’t feel relieved at all.

He started shaking, violently coughing, feeling almost as if he was choking on something invisible. He collapsed to the ground, not even able to stand up, his feet shaking and slipping too much to support his weight. He was on all fours for a moment, coughing and hacking and sputtering, tears streaming down his eyes. He couldn’t breathe, he could barely think, he didn’t know what was happening…

He leaned over and threw up onto the floor, still shaking and sobbing. And then he leaned back, still feeling absolutely terrible, hugging himself and trying to figure out how to calm down, how to do anything…

Okay. Okay, it had to have been the disappearing. Something was weird with his teleport, he had to stop doing that. Don’t do it again, you won’t feel like… like this.

Slowly, he managed to rip part off of the bottom of his hospital gown, tying it around his arm as a makeshift bandage. That might stop the bleeding for a bit, make him less of a target.

But that thing would still be looking for him.

Quigley leaned up against the bed and kept crying, curling up on himself, wondering when Duncan would get back.
Duncan had a very bad idea.

Though, then again, this had been a night of bad ideas.

It was about four or five in the morning, depending on if someone had fixed the general store’s clock or not; either way, people would be here soon. He’d just done several stupid things; climbed in a window, grabbed what he needed from the shelves, shoved whatever money he had in his pockets onto the counter, and then he’d ducked underneath to shove everything he’d grabbed into his bag.

And he’d looked to the right and found a phonebook, shoved next to a drawer.

“This is a bad plan.” Duncan muttered, though he didn’t stop flipping through the pages.

He managed to find her, which surprised him; he would’ve assumed that an investigative journalist like her would have a lot of enemies that she wouldn’t want contacting her. Then again, she might want other people to be able to call her up for jobs.

Duncan had already put his notebook away, and it was unfortunately at the bottom of the bag, so he took a deep breath, shut his eyes, and ripped out the page. He felt a bit bad about that, but he didn’t want to take a chance and get the number wrong.

He stuffed the page in his pocket, shouldered his bag, and ran back to the window.

Once he got outside, he held out the flashlight again, waiting. “Quigley?” he called.

No response.


He made his way down the street, ducking into shadows when he noticed people moving by, going to an early job or taking a morning walk. He went to the corner of the road, pulling up his hood and ducking into a phonebooth.

Duncan dug out the paper, put some coins in the phone, and dialed the number, shaking slightly. He was never great at talking to people, what if he fucked this up? What was he supposed to say to her? What if…?

This is important, Duncan. Just tell her what you need.

Shit, she probably should dig his notebook out, in case she needed him to write something down. He opened his bag, reaching over the boxes he’d stolen- bought illegally- trying to find the commonplace book as the phone rung.

Maybe she’s not home…
Click. “Hello?”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Duncan dropped the bag. He’d dig out his notebook if he needed it. He took a deep breath, and then said, quietly, “Is this Moxie Mallahan?”

There was a pause, and Duncan wondered briefly if he’d gotten the wrong number. Finally, though, she said, “Depends on who’s asking.”

Shit. Shit. “Um, my- my name is Duncan, and-”

“Is this a prank call?”

“What? No, no-”

“How old are you?”

“Thirteen.”

“Why are you calling?”

Duncan took a deep breath. Now or never, Duncan. “I have some questions for you, if that’s okay?”

“Kid, do you know what time it is-”

“It’s- it’s about Beatrice Baudelaire.”

There was such a long silence after that, Duncan feared that they might’ve gotten disconnected. But after a minute, the woman said, “Where are you?”

“Hawkins, Indiana.”

He heard a muffled “Goddamnit,” and then, “Where specifically?”

“A phonebooth? Downtown, on the corner of Mulberry Street.”

“Do you think you’re being listened in on?”

“I- I should hope not!”

“Never assume that. You’re probably safe here, but don’t say anything rash.”

Duncan shook slightly. “I… please, I need to know. About her, or Lemony Snicket and Ellington Feint. You were friends, right?”

He was surprised to hear an almost fearful tone in her reply. “Why do you need to know about them?”

Duncan hesitated. “Beatrice is dead. Her kids are here. A-and we’re in trouble.”

Another long pause. “She’s dead?”

“And my parents, too.” Duncan said, his voice breaking slightly. “The… the people who… they have my brother. And Beatrice’s daughter. We… we need to know everything, so we can get them back.”
“Oh, God. They took more kids.”

“You… you know about-?”

“She told me she’d burnt the place down. She told me-”

“Ms Mallahan?”

The woman took a deep breath. “You said they have your brother?”

“Yes.”

“What number did they get up to?”

Duncan suddenly felt very cold. “I’m sorry?”

“How many kids? What number? The tattoos?”

“I…” Duncan suddenly felt panicked. *How did she know about that, how did she know about that, how did she…?* “I don’t know. The… the highest I know is Ten. Is that connected? I thought it might be, but-”

“Fucking hell. Oh, fuck, I thought…” she took another breath. “That’s it. I’m calling Cleo, she needs to-”

“Who’s that?”

“What’s your name again, kid?”

“Duncan. Duncan Quagmire?”

“Why are you in Hawkins?”

“After… after my parents died, and they took my brother, my sister and I were sent to a foster family here. Beatrice’s other kids are here, too.”

“Oh, fuck. Who’re your foster parents?”

“Just one, Esme Squalor?”

“Okay, listen to me very carefully.” Moxie said. “You are not safe there.”

“I know. We know, we-”

“You need to get out of there.”

“No.” Duncan said. “No, not without Quigley.”

“Is that your brother? He’s the one they took? Does anyone else know?”

“Yeah, he’s my brother. They said he’s dead, they’re lying, they took him. He’s-”

“I believe you.”

Duncan let out a sigh of relief. He hadn’t heard those words from an adult in a while. “You do?”

“Yeah. They didn’t go so far as to fake any deaths before, but your brother’s not the first kid to get
stuck there.”

Duncan paused for a moment. “Feint’s kids? Klaus’s Mother?”

“Klaus? Is he Beatrice’s kid? Where is he? Is he-?” Moxie stopped herself. “God. Okay, do you have something to take notes on?”

“Yes! Yeah, give me a moment!” Duncan said, reaching back into his bag.

“Okay. Make sure you’ve got this all correct. This could be life or death.”

Duncan shook slightly as he pulled out the notebook and pen, flipping to a blank page. Well, he’d known this was serious, of course, but it was different to hear someone say it, and she didn’t even know about the Monster. “Alright.”

“Okay? I cannot tell you where I am, or to find me, I can’t even tell you what places are safe and what aren’t- I haven’t been to that helltown in over twenty years, they might be... but I cannot tell you to stay put. You need to get out of there; I’ll find your brother and Beatrice’s daughter, I promise you. There are some people you can go to, tell them Moxie sent you and that she needs them to watch you while she does a job, okay? Are you sure nobody’s listening in? Could the phonebooth be bugged?”

“Nobody’s around,” Duncan said, “And... I guess, but I doubt it’s legal for anyone to tap a public phone without a warrant.”

“Ugh, okay: look for Monty Montgomery, the Herpetologist; Josephine and Ike Anwhistle; and Jacquelyn Scieszka, in Winnipeg. Got that?”

“Winnipeg?”

“Do you need to-”

“I know Winnipeg, I just...” Duncan hesitated. “I can’t leave without Quigley.”

“You have to. I promise, my team and I will get him back- as soon as I can track them all down.”

“What happened?” Duncan asked quietly. “All those years ago? To Lemony Snicket and Ellington Feint? Did they really kill that guy?”

There was a pause, before Moxie said, “I... they... I will be honest, kid, I don’t know, but I know that he... deserved whatever happened to him.”

Duncan took a deep breath, reminding himself that this man worked for the Lab, the Lab that had tortured his brother. “I don’t doubt that.”

“Look. We’ll fix this, it might take awhile, but I’ll figure something out. But I’m not letting you kids get caught in the crossfire. Get the hell out of town, okay?”

Duncan glanced down at the paper of names he’d just written down. “How do you spell ‘Scieszka’?”

“S-c-i-e-s-z-k-a.”

“Thank you.”

“Okay, kid? Get out. We’ll take care of things.”
“Alright. Thank you, Ms. Mallahan. I better get back to my sister and the Baudelaires.”

“Stay safe, kid.”

Duncan hung up, stuffing the commonplace book back in his bag.

“With all due respect, Ms Mallahan,” he said to himself, “I’m going to disregard all of that. I can’t leave without him.”

“I don’t see anything.”

Violet was struggling to hold back tears again. She’d been in this room for hours, the wires on her head again and her hair pinned back up, as doctors kept going in-and-out. The panic hadn’t fully gone away, but it had numbed after the first hour, and now she was just nervously doing whatever they asked, hoping that they’d listen to her after a while. But they kept leaving after they did their tests, and now she had no fucking clue what they were testing for- they hadn’t made her throw anything with her mind at all in the last few hours, instead doing some weird mental tests.

They held up pictures so she could only see the back, asking her to “reach out” and see what was on the front. They asked her to shut her eyes and tell them who was in the other rooms. They asked her to just tell them what she could see when she “focused hard enough.”

She was surprised she hadn’t passed out, but that was possibly because she had no idea what other power she was supposed to be using. She could piece together some clues- apparently she wasn’t supposed to have seen that monster, and of course it was definitely abnormal that she could sense someone beyond the… the Gate, whatever the fuck that was. But the specifics were eluding her, thought that might be because she was so tired.

Now they were doing the picture test again, and she had no idea whether or not she was guessing right because the doctor never changed expression as he held up blank photos and asked her what was on the other side.

“Why are we doing this?” Violet asked, her voice hoarse, as she reached up to wipe her bloody nose on her sleeve again.

“We are testing you for Extrasensory Perception, which means-”

“I know what ‘Extrasensory Perception’ means.” Violet snapped, though she was a little happy she finally had some idea of what was happening. “It’s getting information through something outside of the five senses. How do I know if I have it if you won’t tell me if the tests are working?”

“You’ll know when we continue tests. Though, of course, pairing such an ability with your ferrokinesis will-”

“You mean moving metal shit with my mind?”

“I’d appreciate if you didn’t talk back to us.”

Violet bit her lip and glared at the ground.

“You have one more test, and then you can take a break while we go over our findings.”

“Great.” Violet muttered, still staring at the ground as the doctor gathered the papers together and
She kicked her legs together; they hadn’t restrained her, mainly because she’d gone quietly after the Gate Incident, but she had a feeling that they were waiting for an opportunity to do so. She hadn’t seen Olaf since then, either.

“He’s one of us.” she muttered.

“Then why does he work for them?” She could almost see her brother, sitting on the table in front of her, rubbing his glasses with a cloth to clean them.

“I don’t know, I don’t…” Violet took a deep breath. “He must’ve known Mother, then. And the other numbers. He must’ve been experimented on, too, he must know how awful it is, then why… why would anyone…?”

“Don’t break down.” Klaus glanced up at the ceiling, putting his glasses back on. “They’re going to be back soon.”

“Do you think if I didn’t go to the Gate I might’ve gotten out?”

“No. More likely they would’ve caught and killed you. You’re lucky you started showing this power, otherwise they might’ve done so anyway. Or they could have-”

“Shut up!”

“I’m not even here.” Klaus said, bouncing his leg and finally turning to look at her. “You just need someone to talk to so that you don’t go insane.”

“I am insane. I’m talking to nobody.”

Klaus stared at her, sympathy in his eyes. “That’s not insane. People talk to nobody all the time. And they usually have reasons, too.” He paused. “I guess you’re talking to me to remind yourself of why you have to hold on. Why you can’t let them break you. Don’t let them break you. Vi. We still need you.”

“Do you think I’m dead?” Violet whispered. “You and Sun?”

“How could we? You told us to run. And we ran.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“I don’t have another answer for you.” Klaus held up a hand, studying it, as though expecting it to disappear. “I’m not here.”

“Nobody’s here.” Violet muttered. “Not you, not Sunny, not Father or- or Mother. I’m alone.”

“Then figure it out on your own. You always do.”

“I can’t. Not this time.”

“Then we’re all fucked.”

Violet glanced up, and Klaus was gone.

The door opened, and another man came in, sitting on the other side of the table. Violet stared at him for a moment. Then, he said, “Describe what you saw.”
Violet sighed, and didn’t bother asking for clarification. “Some kind of animal. Really tall, and it
didn’t have a face. Where there should’ve been one, there was just a… it almost looked like a
flower, and it opened up to show its teeth, and to scream. It had claws, I think. It ran after me, and
it disappeared when I tried to hit it.”

“It ran after you?” Violet could hear the machine in the corner printing out more paper, reading
her brainwaves again. “You think it saw you?”

“Maybe. Or sensed. I don’t know.”

Once again, no reaction from the doctor. “And then you sensed someone behind the Gate?”

“I got in the elevator, and felt like I needed to go to the Gate.” Violet stated numbly. “And when I
got there, I felt a… call. Not an… auditory call. Like a feeling, that I needed to go. And I just…
knew there was someone there.”

“How did you know?”

“I don’t know, I just… felt it. Like whoever’s on the other side… he needs me.”

“Are you sure it’s a boy?”

Violet shut her eyes, considering. “Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’t know.”

“Think about it.”

“I don’t know, I don’t know!” Violet said. “I don’t fucking know!”

“No need to shout.”

Violet held back tears of frustration. “That’s all I know.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Are you lying to us?”

“No.”

There was a pause, before the doctor said. “One more question, and then you can go.”

“Thank God.”

“Who’s on the other side of the Gate?”

“I just told you, I don’t know shit.”

“Well, try to find out.”

Violet groaned, and then curled up, hugging her knees and shutting her eyes. When did she first see
the Monster? When she was going down the hall, and she was so tired and scared and frustrated,
and she was going to fight. She was going to try and get out, and she reached out for metal;
must’ve reached too far. How was she feeling then?

She was feeling pissed.

And then she’d just… focused. Searching for the metal. She did that now, searching for everything with her mind. She felt the pings from the door, the machine, the chair, the…

She felt the call again.

“I need to go.” she said numbly.

“No, Seven. Stay here and tell us about who’s behind the Gate.”

Violet focused, shutting her eyes. Focus on the source of the call. “He’s Upside-Down.”

“What?”

“Upside Down.”

“Who is he?”

“A boy. He’s scared.” Violet gripped the fabric of her hospital gown. “He’s waiting.”

“Waiting? For what?”

“I don’t know. I should go-“

“No. Who is calling to you?”

“I…” Violet trailed off, focusing all of her energy on the call, ignoring her nosebleed for now. “I…”

He was waiting.

He was scared.

He was Upside Down.

“Seven? Is it Ten?”

“No.” she said, feeling distant.

“No?”

“No.”

“Then who’s on the Other Side?”

It took a moment, and then she knew. It didn’t happen suddenly, not really; it was more like a gradual memory had opened, like she’d just brought back something she’d forgotten long, long ago.

“Quigley.”

There was a tense silence, and then the doctor stood up and left.

Violet sat in the room for a moment, staring at the wall. She should go, she should go, she
“Don’t go.” Klaus said, sitting on the table again.

“What?”

“Don’t go.” Klaus said, staring at her. It looked like Klaus, but... it wasn’t him, and it wasn’t her imaginary Klaus, either. He was too still, too monotone, and he had a faraway look in his eyes. “Don’t go now. You’ll die.”

“I need to find him.” Violet protested, staring at the image that wasn’t from her or was from her, but unintentionally. From her mind, which was reaching out to discover things she didn’t quite know.

“You will.” said Klaus. “But not now. You need to be here.”

“What...?”

“We’re connected, Vi. Us, and Quigley, and the others. You can feel us above everyone else, right?”

“What... what are you-?”

Klaus smiled at her. “Find a way to fix it. For all of us.”

“Klaus?”

“See you soon.”

Klaus disappeared then, and so did the call.
Fiona remembered way more than she should.

She leaned against the window, staring at the road as the bus rushed down the street. They’d be near Hawkins soon, maybe a day’s drive. She’d use her fake ID and get a hotel, get some sleep, and then spend the next day planning. She could probably find a map of Hawkins around town, figure out where the kids would be (if they weren’t already at the Lab), and then plan around that. She could in-and-out in three days max.

So long as she didn’t get caught.

Fiona groaned and curled up, shutting her eyes. Why was she doing this?

_save them, Fiona. You know you have to. You can’t just let them stay there._

Why the fuck did she have to have a moral compass? Why’d it have to kick _in now_? Where the hell did all her self-preservation instincts go? She’d had them for years, knowing exactly what to do to stay alive. She’d learned those very quickly in the Lab, and she’d learned more on the streets.

It’d been… a little over three years now. She lost the actual date, and it wasn’t as if she kept track of whatever day it was at any given moment. She figured out the date if necessary, or if some holiday was going on, or if she happened to have a newspaper by her. It didn’t really matter, she mostly kept track of how long she’d been out by how many winters she’d lived through. She tried to go to warmer places during the cold, but occasionally she got caught up in snowstorms and blizzards, and that wasn’t fun. She’d almost died once, during her first winter outside the Lab, when she was still a little confused by the snow and icy weather. She’d been freezing in an alley with only one jacket as protection against the cold. She’d only survived because she finally buckled up and broke a window, going into a store and sleeping in the storage closet. She’d almost gotten caught, then, because she woke up to the yelling of employees who came in early. She’d had to sneak out the back door to avoid getting caught.

She’d only been caught once, and it was the first time she’d hurt someone who wasn’t from the Lab. She’d only been out three weeks, and some man found her stealing clothes from the dumpster. He’d been yelling at her, holding her arm too tight and yelling something about calling the police. She’d been so scared, terrified that these people would bring her back to the Lab, so before he could even reach the phone, she waved her hand, picked the first thing that came to her mind, and ran as the man fell to the floor. She’d been so upset after that, and she’d cried in the back of an abandoned building for an hour.

She normally tried to limit her powers to people who deserved it, but sometimes exceptions had to be made. It was the only way to survive. If she took pity on every disgruntled employee or suspicious police officer, she’d be caught and dragged back to the Lab before she could even explain herself. She knew they were everywhere, and they were always waiting for her. The Lab worked for the government, so it’d be easy to use some connections to take her back.
She’d learned a lot on the road, by listening in on other people sleeping in the next alley, or by sitting outside classroom windows and trying to understand what the teacher was saying, or by breaking into a library or store at night and grabbing a book for the next long bus ride. She’d learned some very useful things—how weather happened and how to predict it and make allowances, certain parts of history and basic math, and, much more importantly, how to get whatever she needed. Pickpocketing was easy for her, she’d learned how to do that before she’d even escaped. But stealing food and clothes without getting noticed was a valuable skill to learn, and occasionally, when she could get away with it, swiping money from a store was something she could do pretty easily.

God, this wasn’t a life for those kids. The stealing and hiding and running and… stop it Fiona, it’s better than the Lab. It didn’t matter how shitty this life got, it was better than going back. If she had known what was waiting for her outside the walls back when she was twelve years old, she still would’ve poisoned her guards, run down the halls until she could climb out the window and crawl past the fence in the pipes. She still would’ve run through the woods, barefoot and cold, reaching town and hiding in the coffee shop attic until she had a clear shot to the bus out of town. She still would’ve left. Because at least here she was free, and she had a shot at happiness on occasion. She wasn’t being tormented for some sick tests every day. She wasn’t with the people who murdered her Mother. The people who…

Technically she didn’t know what happened to him. But she could infer as much. He’d helped her escape, held off the guards while she climbed out. He betrayed the Lab. He was gone, just like their Mother, and probably any other family she had left.

Fiona heard a humming from across the aisle, and slowly turned, rubbing her eyes under her glasses. (She’d had to swipe her prescription from one of the doctors at the Lab, that was probably the hardest thing she’d done during the planning stages. Though getting new glasses on the run was not exactly easy, either.)

There was a little girl, sitting an aisle over, kicking her feet while her Mother slept next to her. The kid was humming some song Fiona thought she’d heard on store radios—what was it called again?

Fiona paused, singing quietly to herself, matching the girl’s melody. “A higher voice has called the tune… Two hearts that lost the beat will now resume…”

She’d always been a fast memorizer. She learned to be, in order to file away the information she’d need to stay on the scientists’ good sides, and then to figure out everything she’d need to know to escape, all the names of poisons and toxins, all that jazz. It was a useful ability for life on the run. Unfortunately, it meant that she sometimes memorized some things she didn’t need to; songs on the radio, for example.

She suddenly noticed the silence. She turned, seeing that the girl was staring at her, wide-eyed. At first, Fiona wondered what she’d done to attract attention; had she been too loud? Too noticeable? What did this girl think, did she recognize her from a wanted poster or-?

The girl, still staring, started humming again. The next part of the verse, if Fiona wasn’t mistaken. Why would…?

Oh.

Fiona paused, and then started singing quietly. “The gift of life extension, by divine intervention…”

The girl grinned, and started humming, and Fiona quietly sang along with her.
“It’s gotta be a strange twist of fate, telling me that heaven can wait, telling me to get it right this
time. Life doesn’t mean a thing without the love you bring; love is what we’ve found, the second
time around.”

The girl started giggling, staring at Fiona as if she was some kind of angel. Fiona smiled slightly,
and then decided to take a risk.

Normally, she didn’t like attention. But this was a little girl, nobody would believe her even if she
told. Besides, seeing children smile was… nice. And it was nice when someone reacted to her with
something other than fear.

She put a finger to her mouth, a simple sign, asking the girl if she could keep a secret. The little girl
glanced around the practically empty bus, and then nodded enthusiastically, positively beaming.

Fiona leaned forwards, holding her palm out. She shut her eyes, considering. She probably didn’t
need to, it wouldn’t matter to the girl, but she couldn’t just pick something randomly. In fact, she
wasn’t sure she could pick randomly. Oh, well; Tabun would have to do.

She stared down at her hand, and watched as a colorless liquid floated out of her fingers,
converging into a small orb that floated above her palm. The girl stared, wide-eyed and fascinated,
as Fiona let it bubble and flow around the air, reflecting the dim lights of the bus and the street. It
was pretty small, and definitely not the best she could do, but damn if it wasn’t enough for this kid.

The girl stared up at her, and then leaned in, and said, only just loud enough for Fiona to hear,
“How are you doing that?”

Fiona smirked and leaned in, too, then whispered, “Magic.”

She flicked her palm, and let the tabun dissipate into the air. She and the child watched it vanish,
and then the girl asked, squeeing slightly, “Are you a fairy?”

Fiona smiled and put her finger to her mouth again, and then winked. “Not supposed to talk to
humans.” she muttered. “Sometimes it’s a bit too much for them, you know?”

The girl nodded, trying to look serious. “I won’t tell.”

“Thanks, princess.” Fiona said, smiling slightly. She glanced around the bus: all the other
passengers were either asleep or too busy to notice them. She turned back, and sung, “Don’t
understand what’s going on; woke up this morning, all the hurt was gone.”

“This is a new beginning.” the little girl sang along, grinning. “I’m back in the land of the living.”

Violet waited until they shut the door to start crying.

She walked over to her bed, curling up and facing away from the camera. She wrapped her arms
around herself as she sobbed, trying to keep her breathing level, terrified she might slip into that
panic again.

“Klaus? Klaus, please talk to me again.”

“Wasn’t me. Part of the ESP, probably.” said her image of Klaus, sitting on the edge of the bed and
kicking his legs.
“You knew something.”

“I don’t. That was your mind. Your abilities—”

“Fuck my abilities, Klaus. Fuck Mother’s, too. Fuck all of this.”

“You’re still crying. Think they’d get you a tissue box if you asked?”

“They won’t give me—give me shit.” she was getting choked up. “Klaus, they… Klaus, I’m going to die here. I don’t know what they want from me, and… and I’m going to do something wrong any second and they’ll kill me.”

Klaus was silent.

“Klaus, I’m sorry. I’m sorry I fucking up in the bookstore and got us into this mess, I’m sorry I couldn’t save Mother or Father, I’m sorry it’s only…it’s only a matter of time before they get you…”

“Violet, I’m sorry.”

That wasn’t Klaus’s voice.

Violet shut her eyes. No. No, this was her imagination, she wasn’t going to let it get the better of her.

“I should have told you more.”

Violet sat up. Well, if she could rant to Klaus, she could get out her anger on someone.

“Yes,” she said, as she imagined her Mother sitting at the foot of her bed. “You should have.”

The image of Beatrice stared back at her.

“How much of this would’ve been different,” Violet asked, “If you had warned us? Told us, ‘Hey, guess what, I fucked up as a kid and let you get marked for experiments, here’s how to avoid that.’”

“Why do you think I couldn’t?”

“Cause you were scared. Or embarrassed.” Violet said. “But it doesn’t matter. You should’ve told us. Told us what the danger was. What there was to be afraid of. We could’ve been prepared for this!”

“You were too young for this.”

“You ended up here when you were nine.” Violet said. “If you weren’t too young, neither were we.”

“Violet—”

“When did we get these?” Violet asked, holding up her wrist, staring at the 007, tears still streaming down her face. “Was it right after that photo, huh? When Klaus still couldn’t even talk? Did you get to pick what numbers we got?”

“Violet—”
“When did you decide to leave, huh? Cause apparently it wasn’t until after they branded us!”

“When?”

“You know something?” Violet said, staring up at the image. “I hate you. I hate you!”

Beatrice watched her sadly, and then said, “I’m afraid you don’t.”

“Yes, I do! I hate you!”

“I’m not your Mother, just your imaginary version of her. I’m you. And you don’t hate her.”

“Shut up!” Violet grabbed her pillow and, without thinking, threw it.

Of course it didn’t hit her Mother. Her Mother wasn’t there. The pillow hit the wall instead.

“You want to hate me.” Beatrice said, still giving her that awful sympathetic look. “But you can’t. You know I didn’t want this.”

“Shut up!” Violet yelled, jumping to her feet.

“You know I just wanted to protect you, that I tried so hard.”

“Stop it! I hate you! Stop it!” Violet reached up, covering her ears.

“You know I was scared, too.”

“SHUT UP!”

Violet screamed, and her sidetable suddenly split.

It didn’t completely split in half, but a huge fucking crack showed up in it, looking like any more force could break it entirely. Violet froze for an instant, staring at it, as her Mother disappeared behind her.

“Shit…” she muttered, wiping her face with her sleeve, catching both tears and blood as she did. She knelt down, running her finger over the crack, starting to shake. She’d forgotten the table was metal, shit, this thing was going to break. Would they hurt her for that? Maybe if she fixed it, they’d ignore it.

She opened the drawer, pulling out her makeshift ribbon. She should fix the table- with what? She sat on the bed, flipping the ribbon over in her fingers. She should just tie her hair back and think of something, anything…

Slowly, she took the ribbon and tied it around her number instead.

She didn’t want to see that ever again.

She stood up and slowly got her pillow off the floor, putting it back on the bed. She moved to shut the drawer, too, only to pause a moment.

Her nose was bleeding again, just slightly, as she reached in and pulled out the stuffed whale.

It was a child’s toy, very worn with age, the color faded. As Violet curled up on the bed, positioning herself so that she could hide the toy from the camera’s view, she flipped it over, running her hand along its side.
Somewhere towards the tail, she spotted a hole.

Slowly, she reached a finger in, pulling until she could fit her hand in, which was incredibly easy; the hole must’ve been intentional. She reached inside, suddenly very conscious of the camera on her back. Hopefully they didn’t think she was doing anything suspicious. Hopefully her body was hiding the whale from view. Hopefully they just let her rest.

There was very little stuffing in the whale, so she didn’t have to push past much. She gripped the first item she felt and pulled it out, staring at it.

A black pen.

She bit her lip and reached in again, finding some much smaller items, which felt almost cold. Removing them from the toy, she saw two quarters. She dug in deeper, and clasped two items at the same time. She took them out, staring at them in her palm. Two necklaces, the chains tangled up together. One of them was a silver image of two mushrooms, looking a bit rusted. The other was a beige heart-shaped locket, an EF engraved in it. Violet tried to open it, to no avail.

She reached in, and found the last item.

A hairpin. Very useful for lockpicking.

Violet stared at the items. A pen, a hairpin, two coins and two necklaces. Whoever had this whale before was clearly a collector.

Slowly, Violet put the items back; there wasn’t anywhere else for her to put them, really. Besides, what use would she have for…

On second thought, those necklaces were metal…

She left them out for a moment, and stared at them, focusing hard. Then she watched the chains unravel themselves, until both necklaces were split apart and lying in front of her. She flipped the mushroom necklace over, seeing nothing of interest, and she put it back. She took the locket in her hands, though, and, very intensely, thought, Open up.

The locket flipped open, and she saw the two photos inside. On one side was a black-and-white photo of adult couple she didn’t recognize, both with dark hair. The other side was another photo, and she recognized the children pretty quickly.

Her Mother and the other Numbers.

They were all sitting on a couch or chair, squeezed together so as to fit in the frame. In the center was the girl with no number, still with bobbed hair, though now she was smiling a smile that could’ve meant anything really. The two teenagers were staring at the camera properly, but Beatrice was laughing in the corner with the boy who was numbered 004.

And in the other corner was what had to be a young 005, who stared awkwardly, his eyes betraying that feeling of wishing he was somewhere else. He looked as miserable as Violet felt.

She didn’t want to look at this anymore.

Okay. Close up.

The locket snapped shut, and slowly, Violet put it back in the toy.
She was going to put the whale back in the drawer, but instead, she hugged it until she fell asleep.

The bus stopped after another hour, and the girl’s mother woke up about ten minutes before then. The kid kept glancing at Fiona and giggling as her Mother tried to read through a letter that gave her directions once they got to the city.

Fiona got off the bus, playing with her jacket zipper and glancing between street signs. She went to sit on the bench, hugging one knee and swinging the other. It should be pretty easy to find a hotel. She started fiddling with the strap of her bag, wondering how far she’d have to walk to get there.

She glanced across the street, spotted the two men instantly, and froze over.

* I haven’t even been here two minutes. *

Those fucking guards. She remembered them, of course. They were the ones who took her to Solitary after they found the book.

They were watching the bus; hadn’t spotted her yet. Fiona moved through all the most painful yet quickest ways to die in her head, seeing more red the longer she looked at them. She clenched her fist, fury flowing through her.

“Hey, Miss Fairy?”

Fiona froze for an instant, before turning towards the same little girl from the bus. She was bouncing as she watched her, occasionally glancing towards her Mother, who was leaning against a pole, trying to make sense of a map.

“Do you know where Main Street is?” the girl asked, fiddling with a pair of sunglasses in her hands. “Can you tell with your… *magic*?”

She didn’t want this child caught in the crossfire.

“Sorry, kid,” Fiona said, glancing over the girl’s shoulder to see that, unfortunately, the men were now staring at them. Fucking wonderful, she’d been spotted. She could deal with this, she just had to make sure they didn’t radio in her location. “Only here for the ride home.” She glanced at the men again, then leaned over conspiratorially. “Princess, you see those men back there?”

The girl glanced over her shoulder, nodding seriously before turning back.

“Trolls in disguise. Trying to steal magic.” Fiona said.

The girl’s eyes widened. “What do we do?”

“They only hurt fairies, but I may have to use magic to fight them.” Fiona said, thinking fast. She had to come up with something to get this girl out of here. “But that means everyone around will have their memories wiped, so if you want to remember, you should leave very quickly.”

“Will you be okay?”

“Of course, Princess. I can handle trolls.” Fiona smiled a little. “Don’t stop believing in us for a while, okay?”

The girl nodded excitedly.
Fiona jumped as the girl’s mother came up suddenly, saying, “Oh, I’m sorry, was she bothering you?”

“No.” Fiona said sweetly. “Just asking directions. I’m new here.”

The girl giggled at that, and the mother said, “Well, sweetie, we gotta go, I found our route.”

“Bye, miss!” the girl waved, put on her sunglasses, and then they were off.

The second they turned the bend, Fiona fixed her eyes on the men again; one was watching the mother and daughter leave, and the other was pretending to read a newspaper.

Well. Batrachotoxin would have to do.
Klaus woke up feeling very wrong, though he didn’t know why at first.

He’d just awoken from another nightmare, staring at the wall and trying to breathe normally. Sunny was asleep on her pillow at the end of the bed, looking much more peaceful than Klaus felt. He took a second to grip the edge of the blanket, steadying himself, reminding himself of where he was. Once he did, he started to realize that something felt strange. He just wasn’t sure what.

He sat up, glancing at the clock- six in the morning, why was he up so early? He sat up, rubbing his eyes, trying to adjust his sight to the dim lighting. He reached over to turn on the lamp on the bedside table, glancing at the door- had he left it open last night?- and then at the window- that was still closed, at least- and the schoolbooks that had fallen on the floor when he dropped his bag- he should really pick those up. Nothing seemed too out of the ordinary, really…

Until he reached down to pull up his sleeve.

It was too simple, and Klaus realized why after a split second, suddenly retracting his sleeve back.

He leaned over, shaking Sunny slightly until she sat up, grumbling and yawning.

“Sunny,” Klaus said, starting to feel very panicked, as if he was still having a nightmare- hell, he might be. “Where’s my bracelet?”

Sunny sat up sharply, hearing the fear in his voice. She also looked at his arm, reaching to touch the 011 on his wrist.

“Did you remove i- no, that’s stupid, there’s no way you could take it off…” Klaus said, starting to talk quickly. “Maybe I took it off last night? No, you need two hands… maybe it fell off because it was on too long? Could that happen? Is it on the floor, did it fall under the bed, where-”

“Kla!” Sunny said, reaching forwards and wrapping her hands around his fingers. Klaus turned to look at her, and she said, “Mialyo,” which meant, “Stay calm. We’ll figure this out.”

“Okay…” Klaus said. “Okay, uh, I… I know how to cover it with makeup, but… but we don’t have makeup, I don’t know where that is… I bet the Quagmires know, but what if they ask why? Should I show them? Mother and Father said nobody could know, nobody could…”

“Kla.”

“Okay, okay. Um… I’ll just wear really long sleeves and make sure they don’t roll up, and then we’ll find the bracelet. I can ask Duncan first, I know where his room is… do you think he and Isadora are okay?”

Sunny considered, then said, “Neke,” which meant, “Probably not, but maybe once they make up, they’ll be fine.”
Klaus nodded slightly and got off the bed, kneeling down to look underneath it, and then the sidetable; his bracelet was nowhere to be seen. He struggled to remain calm while Sunny stretched, and dug a sweater out of the closet drawers that seemed long enough at first; unfortunately, when he put it on, he realized that it only barely covered the mark, and he’d have to keep pulling it down. Well, it was better than nothing. He got Sunny dressed, and then carried her over to Duncan’s room, knocking on the door.

“Duncan! Hey, Duncan, you there?”

No answer. He might still be asleep. Maybe he should…

Sunny pushed the door open again.

“Sunny! People have privacy!” Klaus muttered.

Sunny peered in, and then said, “Ebag.” “He’s not here.”

“What?” Klaus threw the door open all the way and ran in.

Sunny was right. Duncan was nowhere in sight.

“Oh no.” Klaus said, his breath catching in his throat. “No. Oh, no, no, no. Oh, I shouldn’t have left him alone, I shouldn’t have left him alone, I shouldn’t have…”

“Kla.”

“What if they got him, Sunny?” Klaus asked, turning to her, started to feel very worried, his mind racing, tears springing to his eyes. “What if they took him away like they took Violet, a-and they’re going to burn the house, and what if they take Isadora or you, or-”

“Kla.” Sunny said, reaching to put a hand on his shoulder. “Dora.” “Go check Isadora’s room.”

“Yeah, yeah…” Klaus said, struggling a bit to breathe. He raced down the hall, trying to remember where Isadora’s room was. He tried a few doors before he finally found it; Isadora was still there, thank God, hugging a pillow and facing the wall.

Klaus ran over, shaking her slightly. “Isadora! Isadora, hey! Isadora!”

“Uuugh, whaat?” Isadora groaned, kicking slightly. “You better not’ve destroyed the kitchen again.”

“What? Isadora, it’s- it’s Klaus?”

Isadora sat up suddenly, yawning. “Huh? Oh.” her face flickered slightly, and she said, “Sorry, I was thinking- n-nothing, what’s wrong?”

“Where’s Duncan?”

Isadora stared at him, suddenly reflecting the horror he was feeling. “What?”

“He’s not in his room. I- I couldn’t find my Mother’s bracelet, and I wanted to see if I’d- I’d left it in there, or if he knew where it was, and… his window’s open, he’s gone, I-”

Isadora shot out of bed, racing out of her room and down the hall. Klaus ran out to follow her, but she stopped dead in her tracks in the doorway to Duncan’s room.
“No…” she said quietly, staring in horror. “No, no, no…”

“Ianua?” Sunny asked, which meant, “Maybe he just had to use the bathroom?”

“No, no, no…” Isadora walked into the room, running to the closet and opening it, as if he’d be hiding in there. “Duncan! Duncan!”

“What do we do?” Klaus asked, following her in. “What do we do? Do we… go into town? Try to find him before Esme finds out? Wh- what if they got him? Isa, what if they got him? What if-”

“Duncan!” Isadora called again, before turning to look at the window. “Is that open?”

“I… I think…”

“What if he ran away?” Isadora ran to the window, looking out. “God, what was he thinking, he can’t climb all the way down there? He… he…”

She stumbled, backing up and sitting down on the bed, looking shell-shocked. Klaus moved to sit beside her, saying, “It’s… we’ll find him, right? We have to go find him.”

“He left.” Isadora said blankly. “He left. I shouldn’t have yelled at him, I should’ve listened to him, he left…”

“We have to go find him, we have to-”

“He left and it’s my fault.” Isadora curled up, hugging her knees, starting to cry. “He left and… and I should’ve listened to him, if I wasn’t so stubborn and- and stupid, and… and I should’ve told him, I should’ve told him beforehand, I…”

“What do we do?”

“Klaus, I should’ve listened to him. I… I don’t think he’s lying.” Isadora said quickly, turning to him, struggling to talk through her tears. “I don’t. I… I was upset, and angry, and stubborn, and… and I didn’t think he might be… I thought he might be misinformed, or- or misinterpreting things, but I- I should’ve listened, I should’ve explained, I should have believed him, maybe he did find Quigley, maybe…”

“What the hell is wrong with you all?”

Klaus and Isadora glanced over their shoulders to see Carmelita standing in the doorway.

“How long have you been there?” Isadora asked, quickly wiping her eyes and jumping to her feet.

“Like, two seconds. Geez. No need to freak.”

“Carmelita,” Klaus said quickly, standing up and shushing Sunny, who looked about ready to curse the girl out, “This is very important: have you seen Duncan?”

“Yeah.” she said, raising an eyebrow. “That’s what I came to-”

“Where is he?” Isadora asked quickly.

Carmelita took in a deep breath. “You’re gonna wanna come see this shit.”
“What the hell?”

Duncan didn’t even pause to acknowledge them. He dragged a paintbucket onto the couch, before grabbing a brush and looking up at one of the strings of lights he’d put on the wall.

“When Esme kills you,” Carmelita asked, leaning against the wall and staring, “Can I have your room?”

The living room had been strung up almost completely in holiday lights, their boxes shoved unceremoniously into a corner. Without even glancing towards the door, Duncan rapidly started painting letters onto the wall, underneath the string of lights he’d hung in a zig-zag pattern.

“What are you doing?” Isadora asked carefully, stepping inside. “Why’s your window open? Where have you-?”

Duncan barely glanced their way. “We’re talking to Quigley.”

There was a long pause, before Carmelita said, “Well, since he’s cracked, please keep him away from the party tonight. People are showing up at five, don’t fuck this up for me.”

She turned and left, then, and Isadora said, “Duncan, what the hell-”

He was painting the alphabet on the wall, and he was onto G before he answered, “He can only flicker lights, but that’s not a good way to have a conversation. Unless he has a better way to spell.”

“Duncan…” Isadora began, sounding a bit perturbed. “Look. Look, we need to talk-”

“We can talk after I finish this.” Duncan said, starting a second row with the letter L.

“Duncan, this is important, I need to say-”

“Where did you get all of this?” Klaus asked, slowly placing Sunny down on a chair. “Was this in your closet?”

“No, I got it from the general store.”

“You stole it?” Isadora asked, horrified.

“Illegally bought.” Duncan said, writing O. “Stop, I’m gonna mess up.”

“Duncan, please! I… I’m sorry, okay?” Isadora said. “I’m sorry, and I need to tell you-”

“Quigley’s here.” Duncan said carefully, moving onto the T. “Quigley’s here and we’re going to talk to him, and figure out how to get him out of the Upside Down, and everything’s going to be okay.”

“Duncan! Duncan!”

“Duncan, how are you going to explain this to Esme?” Klaus asked, staring at the wall.

“I don’t care.”

“What are you going to do once he talks to you?”

“I don’t care.”
“Duncan!” Isadora yelled, as he finished the alphabet. “Please-”

“Hold on a-”

“Please, Duncan, just listen to me!”

There was a beat where Duncan still stared at the wall, paintbrush in hand. Then, slowly, he put it on the table and turned around, staring at Isadora for a moment. Then he said, “Okay.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry.” Duncan said quietly, staring at the ground. “I’m sorry. I haven’t listened to you and I’m still not and I should be.”

Isadora watched him for a moment. “Duncan-”

“I’ve been trying too hard to… to fix this. And I’ve just… I’ve been trying to fix this so much that I didn’t even notice you were…” Duncan paused. “I didn’t notice you and I should’ve. I’m sorry, I-”

Isadora rushed forwards, throwing her arms around her brother. Duncan froze for an instant before he started to cry, hugging her back. “I’m sorry.” he said again. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m-”

“Do you remember what you said?” Isadora asked quietly.

“What?”

“After the police came and told us our parents were gone.” Her voice broke a bit. “Do you remember what you said? In the back of the car?” Duncan didn’t answer, still crying, so she said, “You said, ‘It’s going to be okay, Isa. I’m gonna take care of you.’ Do you remember what I said back?”

“You…” Duncan stuttered. “You s-said, ‘I’ll take care of you, stupid.’”

“We compromised, remember? ‘It’s just us. We’ll take care of each other.’”

“Isa, I’m so-”

“Just shut up, okay?” Isadora said, burying her head in her brother’s shoulder. “Shut up. I shouldn’t have yelled at you.”

“You should-”

“I believe you, okay?” Isadora said. “I’m so sorry, I believe you, and I need to tell you something, but before we even get into that, you need to know that you’re my brother and I love you, okay?”

“Isa-”

“When I saw you were gone, I went nuts.” Isadora cried. “Duncan, I can’t lose you, too. I was so scared that I drove you away and I can’t do that.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry.”

There was a pause, and then Isadora slowly pulled away, wiped her eyes with her sleeve, and said, “Well, that’s one apology Mother and Father didn’t have to force out of us.”
Duncan let out a shaky laugh. “God, yeah. Quigley’s never gonna let us live this down.”

Isadora paused for a moment, and then said, “Can we talk? Somewhere where it’s not a mess?”

Duncan paused. “Kitchen’s right next door, can we leave the door open in case-?”

“Yeah. Yeah.” Isadora turned then, slightly embarrassed, to Klaus, who was sitting next to Sunny. “Sorry you had to see that.”

“It’s fine.” Klaus said hesitantly, pulling down his sleeve. “Uh… do you want me to-”

“No, you should probably hear this, too.” Isadora said. “Come on. I have some weird shit to tell you.”

“I just told you that our brother’s in an alternate dimension and can talk through lights.” Duncan said. “How much weirder can it get?”

“So,” Duncan said, slowly, “You can control emotions.”

They were sitting at the kitchen table, and Isadora had managed to make them coffee, while Sunny had managed to figure out the toaster and made them some waffles. Duncan and Klaus were both watching Isadora carefully while Sunny, completely unperturbed, was eating Klaus’s abandoned breakfast. Duncan had insisted on leaving the lights pretty dim, so that they could tell when Quigley was ready to talk.

“Um. Yes.” Isadora said, wringing her hands. “Sense and control.” She reached over, grabbing Duncan’s hand, and then said, “Well. You’re a little confused, but you believe me. That’s nice. You’re also tired- how long has it been since you slept?”

Duncan slowly retracted his hand. “That’s kinda weird, but then again, I read your mind, so-”

“Wait, I can try something.” Isadora said. She stared at Duncan a moment, and then moved to touch his shoulder. He suddenly started, sitting up straighter taking a quick breath. “Feel more awake?”

“Uuuuuuh, a lot.” Duncan said, starting to kick his legs. “Lots of energy. Holy shit, please don’t do that again.”

“I’m sorry, I… didn’t mean to… manipulate you at any point,” Isadora reached up to wipe her bloody nose with her sleeve, “And I didn’t mean to lie or… I just wanted to know what was going on, and I didn’t… know how you’d react, or if you’d even… believe me.”

“Isadora, I’m a part-time telepath, and our brother is in another dimension.” Duncan said. “And Klaus’s sister is telekinetic.”

“Well, it’s not like I knew that.” Isadora said. “Anyway, I did some research at the Library on empathy, and I thought it might be genetic, but with the whole ‘telepathy and teleportation’ thing I’m not sure.”

“Actually, it might be.” Duncan said. “I did some research, too.”

“When?” Klaus asked.

“When I broke into the Library last night with Quigley.”
“You broke into the Library?” Isadora asked, shocked.

“Yes, keep up.” Duncan said. “Did some research on Hawkins Lab; they were accused of taking part in MKUltra experiments in the 60s and early 70s. What do you know about those?”

“Uh, nothing.” Klaus said hesitantly, straining to remember if he’d heard that before and coming up with nothing. Isadora and Sunny also shook their heads, as Klaus pulled his sleeve down, noticing it had rolled up again.

Duncan pulled his commonplace book out of his jacket, flipping. “It’s not pleasant. From the information I could gather, the CIA decided to study mind control after World War II, to try and see if they could use it against Russia. They… used illegal means to do so, including non-consensual human experimentation, especially involving the use of hallucinogenic drugs.”

“What?” Sunny asked.

“Drugs that make you imagine weird things but think they’re real.” Klaus explained, sounding a bit scared. “Wh-when was this?”

“50s to 70s.” Duncan said. “So, yes, when your Mother was in the custody of a guy who worked for Hawkins Lab.”

“Do you think she was experimented on?” Klaus asked, a little scared.

“Not just her.” Duncan said. He pulled something out of his pocket, and showed it to all of them. It was a newspaper article. Volunteers travel to Hawkins for Work at Hawkins Lab. He pointed to the picture, and Isadora’s eyes went wide.

“Mother and Father?” she identified.

“They were here, too.” Klaus noted.

“They took part in the experiments.” Duncan said. “Willingly, at first, but considering that they never told us shit about it, I’m assuming it didn’t go well.”

“That puts both our families in Hawkins.” Klaus said.

“You were right.” Isadora said.

“Not just in Hawkins, at Hawkins Lab.” Duncan said. “Quigley was there, too.”

“You got that from him?” Isadora asked hesitantly.

“Yeah. They’re… continuing the experiments on him.” Duncan said. “And Violet, I’m sure, but Quigley ended up in the Upside Down before she arrived.”

“So they took him for what? Revenge on our parents for leaving?” Isadora asked.

Klaus slowly reached forwards to grab the paper. If that talked about the Lab, maybe it talked about what happened inside, what was happening to Violet. He needed to know what they were doing to her, what was going on…

“Well,” Duncan said, “My main theory is-”

Isadora suddenly froze. “Klaus…?”
Klaus glanced at her, noticing that she was staring down at the table. “What?” He followed her gaze, and then instantly paled.

He hadn’t even noticed his sleeve had rolled up again, and both triplets could see his mark. 011, facing up, for all to see.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck…

Klaus instantly retracted his arm, pulling it back and shoving the sleeve down, but the damage was done. Isadora was almost frozen, and Duncan had also started back, and was now staring at Klaus, shocked.

“What was that?” Isadora asked.

“Onho.” Sunny said. “Well, we fucking up.”

In the back of his mind, he knew he should tell them, but… all his life, he’d been told it was supposed to be hidden, nobody outside of his family had seen it, nobody could see it, it was a bad mark, a bad thing, they shouldn’t…

“It’s… nothing.” Klaus said quickly, reactively. “It’s nothing.”

“Was that a number?” Isadora asked, sounding very far away.

Klaus felt terror flare up in his chest. No, no, he’d been doing so well at hiding it, no, Mother and Father would kill him… he had to get out.

He stood up abruptly, lifting Sunny off of the table. “We have to go. I’ll be in my room.”

“No!” Isadora jumped to her feet, as did Duncan. “No, wait!”

“We… we have to…” Klaus was shaking, and he turned to leave, moving quickly. He just needed to hide in his room forever, and maybe they’d forget about it, maybe they’d-

“Stop!” Duncan said, and he and Isadora ran after him.

“No, hey! Let me- it’s nothing, I need to go.” Klaus said quickly, as they tried to catch up. “I need to- I can’t-”

Duncan grabbed his arm, and Isadora ran up in front of him, holding her hands out. “Hey! Hey, chill!”

“No, no.” Klaus wrestled his arm away, feeling another flare of panic.

“Floo!” Sunny yelled angrily, meaning something like, “Piss off! He doesn’t want to talk!”

“Was that a number? Why do you have that? Where did you- did Violet have one? Do-” Duncan began.

“Go away!” Klaus shouted, turning around, trying to push past Isadora.

Isadora, meanwhile, pushed him back, then pulled up her own sleeve and showed him her wrist. Klaus stared, his face paling.

009.
He slowly looked up at her, seeing fear reflected in her eyes. Sunny muttered a “whoa,” and, slowly, he turned towards Duncan. Duncan was watching Isadora carefully, as if deciding if he wanted to risk it, too. Then, slowly, he lifted his own sleeve to show the 008.

“Quigley’s Ten.” Isadora said hesitantly.

Klaus and Sunny stared for a long while, then looked at each other in shock. Klaus then reached down, rolling back his sleeve.

“I’m Eleven.” he said, feeling almost disconnected from reality. “Violet’s Seven. Sunny doesn’t have one.”

There was a long pause, before Isadora said, “We weren’t supposed to-”

“Show anyone.” Klaus finished. “That’s what the bracelet was for. I didn’t think there were any more.”

“We assumed the other numbers were dead, if there were any.” Isadora said. “We assumed we got them from our kidnappers.”

“We did.” Duncan said.

They turned towards him. “What?” Isadora said.

Duncan looked up at them. “We did. I… I think we’ve all been here before. We’ve been to Hawkins before. I… I think we were all at the Lab.”

Klaus suddenly felt very, very cold.

“I think these numbers are from them.”
Slowly, they moved back to the table, sitting down and staring at each other in disbelief.

“Seven.” Isadora finally said quietly. “It must be in birth order. Violet, Duncan, me, Quigley, Klaus.”

“Sunny.” Sunny added.

“We should’ve told you.” Duncan said, staring at his own mark. “But—”

“My parents told me to hide it, too.” Klaus said quickly. “Me and Violet couldn’t even leave the house without makeup or a bracelet. Not that we left the house much. And when people came over, it was both, just in case. We never quite figured out what they meant.”

“I think it’s kind of like a brand or something.” Duncan said. “From the Lab.”

“The Lab?” Isadora asked.

Duncan grabbed the paper again, showing it to her. “Look at the date the experiments in Hawkins started.”

“December 1969?”

“Do the math.”

“What math?”

Duncan sighed. “Isa, we were born about… thirty-six weeks after this began.”

“And…”

“We were born early, remember?” Duncan said. “Mother told us that, said that Quigley had trouble breathing at first and they thought he wouldn’t make it. Meaning that, considering the average—”

“Oh.” Isadora interrupted, staring at the date again. “You’re saying that Mother probably got pregnant with us while they were doing these experiments.” She looked up at him, eyes wide. “You think that’s why we’re like this? You think those drugs somehow… changed us?”

“And if Klaus’s parents got married when they were still in Hawkins,” Duncan said, “Chances are your Mother was still under testing when she had you and Violet. The experiments lasted until 1973, you were born in 1971, right?”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded, suddenly feeling very scared.

“Yike,” Sunny said; this normally meant “This is an unfortunate situation,” but in this case, it meant, “Would that mean you have powers, too, Klaus?”
“I… I don’t think…” Klaus began. “I mean…”

“When did your parents move away from Hawkins?” Duncan asked.

“I only just found out they lived here at all! I… guess I assumed it was before I was born, but…” Klaus hesitated. “I don’t know.” He took a deep breath, reaching to turn the paper towards him, looking at it. “You’re sure this is the MKUltra thing?”

“Yeah.” Duncan said.

“So you think we were… here as children?”

“Probably, yeah.”

“Do you think we were together?”

“How could we be?” Isadora asked. “We would’ve known. Why wouldn’t our parents tell us about each other?”

“They didn’t tell us about any of this.” Klaus said.

“But you’d think we’d be stronger together. Strength in numbers- shit, no pun intended. But like… our parents could protect us together.” Isadora said. “Unless we weren’t here together, and our parents just… didn’t know the other family existed.”

“They tattooed us in birth order.” Duncan said.

“That could’ve happened any time.” Isadora said. “We were kidnapped for a bit, remember? Maybe… maybe that happened, and Mother and Father found us alone…”

“You think they… branded us?” Klaus asked, rubbing a finger over his number. “As infants?”

“I think,” Duncan said, “They marked us for… experimentation while our parents were here, and then they got us out. Our parents always told us that they were scared because people tried to kidnap us once, and I think… I think it was the Lab, and… I might have some evidence for that.”

“You found us in your research?” Isadora asked.

“Not exactly.” Duncan took a breath. “I called Moxie Mallahan.”

“You did?” Isadora asked.

“What did she say?” Klaus asked.

“She… didn’t say much, she was scared we were being listened in on.” Duncan said. “But she basically confirmed that the Lab’s kidnapping kids, so it’s not like I hallucinated Quigley’s memory of that, and she basically confirmed the tattoos are from them, too. I think your Mother, Klaus, and her foster siblings were the first six numbers. Ms Mallahan said almost as much, and… I think Armstrong Feint was either part of the experiments or willingly shepherding kids into this.”

“I don’t think my Mother had a mark,” Klaus said, “But… I’m not sure. I’m… not sure about much of anything anymore.”

“Our parents definitely didn’t, we’ve seen them in short sleeves.” Duncan said. “But, well, Ms Mallahan said that we need to get out of town. She gave us some names for safe people while she investigates the Lab herself. But we can’t leave without Quigley or Violet.”
“So, recap?” Isadora said. “Our parents all did drugs in a lab, got pregnant with us, we got superpowers as a result of said drugs, the Lab branded us, our parents got us out and have been hiding this from us ever since?”

“Yeah.”

Sunny’s eyes widened with a sudden realization, and she said, “Soclo,” which meant, “And the fact you’re all back in Hawkins, relatively close to the Lab, definitely means the people who tried to kidnap us know you’re here, and probably orchestrated all of this.”

Once Klaus stuttered out a translation, they all froze up at that thought, and Isadora said, “Well. Mallahan’s right, we are not safe here.”

“If Violet’s in that Lab,” Klaus said, “We have to get her out.”

“How? We can’t just break in.” Isadora said.

“We could tell the police-”

“Hawkins Lab is run by the government, what are the cops gonna do? Those guys might be in charge of them.” Duncan said. “Hell, they could lock us up once they’ve found out we know.”

“I mean, technically this is just a theory.” Klaus said hesitantly. “Maybe we could leave an anonymous tip?”

“And then Hawkins Lab gets cleared by the government and we get kidnapped under the radar.” Isadora said. She turned towards Duncan. “Wait. How does the… Upside Down fit into all of this?”

“I’m not sure.” Duncan admitted. “From what I… got from Quigley, the Gate to the Upside Down just kinda opened, I don’t…”

“Maybe the Lab found out about it and used Quigley to open a portal.” Klaus suggested.

Isadora glanced up, and then froze again, eyes wide.

“Isadora?” Klaus asked, a bit worried.

Breathlessly, she said, “Duncan… is that… him?”

Duncan, Klaus and Sunny all turned to follow her gaze, to see the string of lights in the living room had started glowing, flickering in a pattern, like landing lights.

Duncan stared for an instant, then started beaming, jumping up and grabbing Isadora, dragging her towards the living room. Klaus stared for a moment, before lifting Sunny, and the four of them ran into the other room.

“Quigley?” Isadora called as they ran in. “Quigley, is that… is that you?”

The lights on the ceiling flickered, leading to the wall where Duncan had painted the alphabet.

“Whoa.” Sunny muttered.

“Okay, okay, Quigley.” Duncan said. “Are you here? Spell it out.”

There was a bit of a pause, where everybody wondered if maybe they’d gone insane.
Then the Y lit up.

*YES.*

“Oh my gosh.” Isadora said, backing up slightly tears springing to her ears. “Quigley, oh my gosh…”

“Quigley.” Duncan said quickly, “Klaus is Eleven.” he gestured to himself, “Eight,” he pointed to Isadora, “Nine, you’re Ten…”

“Eleven.” Klaus nodded, rolling up his sleeve. “Do you… know what that means?”

*LAB.*

“It was the Lab. You’re right.” Isadora said, looking to Duncan. “It was them.”

“Is Violet there?” Klaus asked quickly, while Sunny said something similar. “Is she okay?”

*DON’T KNOW.*

“Oh.” Klaus said.

*SORRY.*

“Quigley,” Isadora said, “How did you get… here? From the Lab?”

*GATE.*

“They opened a gate? To the Upside Down?” Isadora asked. “Why would they-”

“Did it happen during one of their experiments?” Duncan asked.

*YES.*

“Quigley,” Isadora asked, now definitely crying, “How long have you been there?”

*LONG.*

“Are you hurt?” Klaus asked.

There was a long pause, before a *YES.*

“Oh, God.” Isadora sat on one of the chairs, still crying.

“How do we get you out?” Duncan asked. “Quigley, how do we get you back?”

*DON’T KNOW.*

“There’s… there’s got to be a way.” Duncan said. He was crying now, too. “There’s got to be… how did you get there?”

Complete silence.

“Quigley?” Duncan raced to the wall, panicking. “Are you there? What happened?”

No response.
“Quigley?” Isadora jumped to her feet. “Quigley, are you-”

“Else.” Sunny muttered, very worriedly. “It’s really cold.”

“What?” Klaus glanced down at her, before realizing that she was right.

“Quigley?” Isadora called. “What happened? Where-”

There was a small thump against the wall.

“Did something happen? Are you hurt?” Duncan asked. “Did the Monster come back?”

“Did the Lab find you? What’s happening?” Isadora added.

Another thump.

“Guys…” Klaus began, and they finally turned to look at the far wall.

The thumping was continuing, like someone was pounding from the other side.

“Yawa…” Sunny muttered, frightened. “Don’t go near it.”

Isadora slowly walked to the wall, putting her hand on it and shutting her eyes. Then she said, very quietly, “Quigley?”

They heard a muffled, “Isadora?”

“Quigley!” Isadora and Duncan both yelled. Duncan ran to the other room, while Klaus ran up towards Isadora, who was banging on the wall.

“Quigley! Quigley, I’m here! We’re right here!” Isadora yelled. “Can you get through? Did you get through? Can you hear me-?”

“Isadora! Isadora, you have to-”

Duncan ran back. “He’s not on the other side of the wall.”

“He’s in the wall?” Klaus asked.

Isadora reached up towards the top of the wallpaper, trying to peel it down. “Quigley, we’re right here! We can hear you!”

Duncan realized what she was trying to do and started to help, while Sunny suddenly started screaming.

“Sun? What’s wrong?” Klaus asked, backing up slightly.

“Desino!” Sunny yelled, covering her ears. “Make them stop it! That’s bad! They need to stop!”

“Sunny, Quigley’s- what are you saying? Why is it bad?”

“Desino!” Sunny simply repeated, starting to cry.

Duncan finally managed to tear off part of the wallpaper, but behind it wasn’t any wall. There was some sort of red, pulsing thing, almost like some part of a skin. They all screamed when they saw that; however, once they looked closer, they could see some shadowy figure behind it.
“Quigley!” Isadora yelled first, putting her hand on the red gunk.

“Isadora! Duncan!” Now that they looked closer, they could almost see a face behind the wall. And they could make out his voice a lot better; it sounded a lot like Duncan’s, though a bit deeper, and very hoarse, as if he’d just spent a lot of time screaming or crying. He probably did.

“Quigley!” Duncan yelled, too.

“What is this?” Isadora asked. “What’s-”

“I think… I think it’s a temporary gate, but you have to leave!”

“Could you get through?” Duncan asked.

“I can’t- I don’t- I don’t think so, I don’t know, I can’t get through, but if it’s here then so is-”

They all suddenly heard some kind of inhuman screech.

“What the fuck is that?” Isadora yelled, as Sunny started screaming some more.

“Oh, God!” Duncan screamed, before putting his hands on the red wall. “Quigley, you have to run. That thing’s going to kill you!”

“That’s the Monster?” Isadora asked, terrified.

“You need to run!” Duncan yelled. “Or teleport, whatever! Go, that thing will kill you!”

“Duncan-”

“How do we get to you?” Isadora asked.

“The Lab has a Gate, but you can’t go there!” Quigley yelled. “They’ll kill you! There’s no way you can get out, they’ll kill you!”

“My sister’s there, we have to-” Klaus began.

“They will kill you!” Quigley repeated. “They killed Mother and Father, they almost killed me, you can’t go, I can’t lose you-”

“Quigley, listen!” Duncan said, putting a hand over the slime. “I promise, I promise we’ll find you, but that thing is coming and you have to run!”

“Duncan-” Quigley sounded like he was sobbing. “Isa, I-”

“I love you!” Isadora said quickly, putting her hand over the shadow of his. “We love you, Quig, we’ll find you!”

“We’ll find you, we promise!” Duncan’s voice broke; all three triplets were heavily sobbing now.

“I- I love you, too.” Quigley cried. “I love you so much.”

He turned and ran.

Before any of them could do anything else, the wood of the wall suddenly started appearing again, looking like it was somehow growing back over the slime.

“No!” Isadora yelled, starting forwards, but Duncan yanked her back, and they watched as the wall
closed up over the portal, completely cutting them off from the Other World, from the Monster, and from Quigley.

They were silent for a moment, and then Isadora crumpled to the floor, hugging herself, screaming and sobbing. Duncan dropped beside her, throwing his arms around her and whispering some sort of comfort, also crying and shaking.

Klaus stared at the wall for a long minute, while Sunny also screamed, looking completely panicked. He slowly approached, touching the wood.

It was as if that temporary gate had never been there.

“Holy fuck.” he muttered.

Then he turned around, and ran to the Quagmires, sitting beside them. Duncan glanced up at him, then stretched his arm out and let Klaus into the hug.
The Flea and the Acrobat

Chapter Notes

We finally move past the first four Stranger Things episodes after twenty-eight chapters, and now we're gonna speedrun the next four so get ready.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Flea and the Acrobat

“We’re not going to find anything.” Duncan said, crossing his arms.

“It’s worth a goddamn shot.” Isadora replied.

When the four of them had managed to stop crying, Isadora had made the suggestion of sneaking out back and racing to the Library as fast as they could. They’d followed numbly, and only really processed what they were doing when they were halfway to town.

“This… Upside Down… if people knew about it, it would be big news. We’d already know.” Duncan said.

“But,” Isadora said, “There might be theories. On how to get there, and how to get Quigley out. And I know just who to ask.”

They finally reached the Library, and Isadora pushed open the door, running forwards, completely focused on her new mission. “Ms Caliban?” she called. “Can we borrow you for a second?”

Ms Caliban looked up from her book at the desk. “Children? Did something happen?” she asked, watching as they all rushed in. “You look like you’ve been-”

“Crying?” Isadora finished. “Yeah, but that was twenty minutes ago. We need to ask you a question, about that science fiction project. You know a lot about science, right?”

“Yes, but-”

“Great! Can we talk in one of the study rooms? It’s real important, our outlines are due Monday.” Isadora said.

Ms Caliban glanced between them, and then said, “Well, alright. Sure, I can help.”

“So,” Duncan said, sitting at the table, “We would like to know about alternate dimensions.”

“Alternate Dimensions?” Ms Caliban asked.

“Like, beyond our world.” Klaus said. “Those could… theoretically exist, right?”
“Theoretically, yes.” Ms Caliban said.

“So, theoretically,” Isadora asked, “How would we travel there?”

Ms Caliban paused. “Did you read about Hugh Everett’s Many-Worlds Interpretation in school?”

Duncan and Isadora shook their heads, while Klaus nodded, and Sunny, sitting on Klaus’s lap, started biting the edge of the table.

“Well, basically,” Ms Caliban said, “The theory is that there are parallel universes just like our world, but… infinite variations of it. So, there would be a world where we all never moved past Victorian Fashion, or… a world where some tragedies never happened, or…”

“Could there be a dimension that’s like ours, but… evil?” Duncan asked.

“Evil?”

“Like… a dark echo of our world.” Duncan explained. “It looks like our world, but it’s been taken over by shadows or dark magic or something. Say that existed and was very close to our universe. How would we get there?”

“Theoretically.” Klaus added.

Ms Caliban paused, and then grabbed a scrap sheet of paper some student had left on the table and pulled a pencil from her pocket. She started drawing a line, while the children watched.

“Picture an acrobat standing on a tightrope,” she said, drawing a stick figure person on the line. “Now, the tightrope is our dimension, and our dimension has rules. You can move forwards or backwards, but not in any other direction.”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded, listening.

“But, say, next to our acrobat, there is a flea.” Ms Caliban said. “The flea can also travel back-and-forth, but it can also go on the side of the rope, our underneath.”

“Upside Down.” Duncan said.

“Exactly.” Ms Caliban nodded. “But, see, in our world, we are the acrobat. We can’t travel with the flea.”

“Would there be a way to… become the flea?” Isadora asked.

“Well, you’d have to create a massive amount of energy.” Ms Caliban shrugged. “Energy humans are currently incapable of creating. You’d use that energy to open up a doorway-”

“Or a Gate?” Klaus asked.

“Yes, you could call it a gate.” Ms Caliban said. “But, again, this is all theoretical, there’s no evidence that it would even work.”

“If this Gate existed-” Duncan began.

“I think we’d know. It would probably disrupt our entire environment, or the other dimension may begin to leak into ours.”

“Leak into?” Isadora asked.
“Well, I would speculate that parts of it coming through the Gate may not want to or be able to return. In your dark dimension, parts of the shadows might settle on our world.”

“Could…” Klaus considered. “Could the dimension open up temporary gates? That open and close more quickly?”

“I suppose it’s possible.” Ms Caliban paused. “What is this story about?”

The boys turned to Isadora, who paled slightly. “It’s, uh, about that hyper-empathic girl I told you about. Her… friend goes missing, and she can feel… his emotions, even though she can’t see him. We were thinking of putting the friend in this dark reality, but we’d need to know how to get him out.”

“Well,” Ms Caliban said, “That sounds very interesting; I hope your project goes well. Is there anything else?”

“Yes.” Klaus said quickly. “Uh, a few things. Would you have any books on this subject?”

“Yes.”

“And… we’ve been digging through old newspapers and stuff, but…” Klaus hesitated. “Are there any extra on Hawkins Lab?”

Ms Caliban looked confused. “What is that for?”

“Fun.” Klaus said too quickly.

“We’ve been thinking about setting the story near a laboratory-” Isadora began, and Klaus shot her a grateful look.

“-and we’d like to know the… histories of such a place.” Duncan nodded.

“I could look in the back.” Ms Caliban suggested.

“That’d be great.” Isadora sighed. She turned to the others. “I’ll take the dimensions; Klaus, Duncan, you take the Lab.”

“Alright, the library closes in ten minutes, so what’ve we got?” Duncan said.

They’d locked themselves in the study room with all of their notes, and Isadora began, flipping her commonplace book to the beginning of her notes.

“Well, most of these interdimensional books agree on what Ms Caliban said.” Isadora said. “Lots of energy to open up, we’d notice if it did-”

“Apparently not, since it opened and everything seems okay.” Klaus said, bouncing his leg nervously.

“Not exactly.” Isadora said. “The missing people- the Lab’s not taking them. The Monster is.”

She flipped a page and showed them a large sketch of the creature.

“Eton.” Sunny said proudly. “I helped her with that, told her what I saw of the Monster.”
“Well, she helped with that until you dragged her upstairs to sort through old papers.” Isadora said, smiling slightly.

“She’s… very good at finding photos.” Duncan defended.

“Anyway, this sketch is probably not accurate,” Isadora said, “But it’s what we’ve got. Sunny said it had no face, but it almost looked like a closed flower, so that’s what this is. She also thinks it has claws, but other than that seems vaguely humanoid.”

“And it’s been killing people.” Duncan said. “Probably eating them, if I had to guess.”

“How much of it did you get from Quigley’s… memories?” Isadora asked.

Duncan shivered. “Not much. But it looked… kind of like that. It seemed a lot like a… hunting predator.”

“It seems to be able to open temporary gates,” Isadora said, taking her commonplace book back, “In order to drag people out, but there’s a main Gate that’s holding the link between our dimensions.”

“There is, but I only saw a flash of it when my telepathy was working.” Duncan said.

“And that Gate is in the Lab.” Isadora said. “Which we can’t get into, because the people there will kidnap us for experimentation.”

“Exactly how bad is the whole MKUltra thing?” Klaus asked, turning to Duncan.

Duncan paled slightly. “Really, really bad.” When they stared at him, waiting for more, he took a breath and said, “Hallucinogenic drugs, not always consensually administered. Physical abuse, torture, sleep deprivation, isolation… it was not a nice project. And… they did all that to Quigley, while trying to get his powers out.”

Klaus and Isadora stared in horror, and then Klaus said, very quietly, “Is that what they’re doing to Violet?”

Duncan hesitantly nodded, and Klaus let out a small cry, putting a hand over his mouth. Isadora recovered faster, saying quickly, “Any-anyway, uh, a Gate like that would probably disrupt the magnetic field, so if we ever needed to find it, we’d just need to… use some magnets, I guess.”

“I wish Violet was here.” Klaus said sadly, staring up at the ceiling while Sunny put her hand over his. “She’d invent something to trace the Gate.”

“We know where it is, though.” Duncan said. “The problem comes in getting to it, getting Quigley out, and then busting Violet out of Hawkins Lab. Once they’re out, someone will have to listen to us; they’re legally dead, them turning up alive and pissed at the Department of Energy will turn some heads, especially if we can make it public, keep people from covering it up. And I think some dead kids walking is pretty public.”

“So, what have you two got?” Isadora asked, as Sunny ripped the corner of a page off and ate it.

“Well,” Klaus said, “We have some useless details on Hawkins Lab opening and random staff changes that were interesting enough the newspaper caught wind of it. That took up a couple hours. But finally we landed on something interesting.”

“Armstrong Feint,” Duncan said, “Was in charge of the MKUltra experiments. Which, I already
knew he was involved, but the files we found seem to imply he was in complete control of all the testing that took place in Hawkins.”

Klaus bit his lip, shaking slightly, as Isadora leaned forwards, interested. “Really?”

“He was put in charge shortly before Klaus’s Mother was adopted.” Duncan said, flipping through his commonplace book. “We’ve got a timeline written out. We’re not entirely sure when the experiments began, but we think it might’ve been before most reports—”

“That’s just a theory, though.” Klaus said. “Because the obituary for his wife said that she died of an overdose shortly after their daughter was born, but that was all the way back in early 1948, these experiments wouldn’t officially begin until 1953.”

“But it would make sense for the first numbers to have been born under the experiments, right? So they’d have powers, like us.”

“We don’t know that Feint’s kids were the first few numbers.” Klaus said hesitantly. “I’m still not sure Mother was one.”

“They may not have been tattooed.” Isadora suggested. “Or maybe your Mother just had lots of makeup, covered it up well.”

“If they didn’t get their powers from birth— still assuming that his wards were the first numbers—” Duncan said, “There’s a possibility that they got powers from extended exposure to the drugs from childhood.”

“Wasn’t Klaus’s Mother adopted when she was, like, nine? You think they drugged up a nine-year-old?” Isadora asked.

“They were willing to kill a baby,” Duncan gestured to Sunny, who flinched a bit, “Don’t see why drugging a nine-year-old is out of the question.”

“The experiments officially halted in 1973,” Klaus said, “And were revealed to the public in the late seventies. But here’s the thing: Mother left town in October of 1973.”

“1973.” Isadora said. “Does that mean you did live here?”

Klaus nodded hesitantly. “Which is… surreal. I don’t remember any of this, I’ve never heard of this town, and… apparently I was born here. And… I know I did, because we found the, uh, birth announcement article.”

“Well, Sunny found it.” Duncan said. He flipped a few pages in the commonplace book. “Nothing real important, just name and date.”

“But, anyway, uh, about Mother—” Klaus said.

“There was an article about Klaus’s family just straight-up disappearing.” Duncan interrupted, “Really short, since there wasn’t much to say, but apparently someone visited the house and found the entire family gone. You’d think that’d be big news, but apparently they didn’t talk to the townspeople much, so they were just the weird people who lived near the woods.”

“My dream job.” Klaus joked slightly. “I peaked at the age of two.”

“Anyway, apparently the Lab announced a few days later that the Baudelaire family had simply been transferred, and that was that. Wasn’t even a big enough news story that anyone would
“Remember.”

“Were our parents reported on?”

“No. I don’t think they lived here, just worked at the Lab.” Duncan said. “You wanna know something, though? We realized, when we pieced together the timeline, that Klaus’s family disappeared sometime around this one woman’s death, someone who was employed at the Lab. And her five-year-old daughter was reported missing at the same time.”

“You think they kidnapped her daughter?” Isadora asked.

“Of course,” Duncan said. “It doesn’t entirely sync up with the theory that Feint’s kids were the first experiments, as he had six adopted children and adding this girl, that’d be seven—”

“Which is Violet.” Klaus finished.

“But maybe one of the Feints wasn’t an experiment.” Duncan said. “Maybe this kid didn’t make the cut. But—”

“What was the girl’s name?” Isadora asked.

“Fiona Widdershins.” Duncan said.

Klaus thought over the name again. He felt like he’d heard that before, but he was having trouble digging it up in his memory.

“Anyway,” Duncan said, “Feint died in February of 1969, and his daughter and Snicket weren’t in any papers we dug up after that, so I assume they were never caught. But if they were experiments in the Lab, it makes sense they’d kill that guy, he was in charge.”

“But then why would my Mother stay until 1973?” Klaus asked. “You’d think if they tortured her in a Lab she’d want to get out as soon as possible.”

“Maybe something else was keeping her there.” Duncan said.

“Or maybe she just didn’t know there was anything better for her outside the Lab.” Isadora suggested. “Maybe they were blackmailing her. You never know. Did you find anything on your Father?”

Klaus shook his head.

“Anything else?” Isadora asked.

“Uh, just one more thing.” Duncan said.

“Well?”

“You remember how we found Klaus’s Mother lived here? When Sunny found her in an article about her other foster brother, after the Snickets?”

“Olaf something-or-other.” Klaus said quickly.

“Yeah?”

“Turns out he’s…” Duncan hesitated. “Still here. In town. He’s officially employed at the Lab, took over his foster father’s position a few years back.”
They were silent for a moment, and then Sunny said, “Egraled,” which meant, “We should probably talk to him, but I really don’t want to.”

“He still works at the Lab,” Klaus said, after translating her sentence, “So we should really… avoid him, if at all possible.”

They stared at each other, and then Duncan said, “Here’s an idea. We take all this home, and go over everything again in our room, and then in the morning, we work out how to bust into the Lab.”

“Quigley said we’d die if we tried.” Isadora said.

“Then we’ll just have to come up with a really good plan.” Duncan shrugged. “The alternative is leaving them there.”

“Not a chance.” Isadora and Klaus both said.

“Then we’re in agreement.” Duncan stood up, smiling slightly and shoving his commonplace book in his bag. “Let’s plan on how to bust our siblings out of the Department of Energy.”
“Quigley won’t be there when we get back, will he?” Isadora asked sadly.

They were getting close to the House, having been walking in silence for a while, when Isadora asked this question. Duncan stared at the ground, while Sunny leaned in a bit on Klaus’s shoulder.

“I don’t think so.” Duncan said. “He had to run.”

“You… you don’t think that thing caught him, do you?”

“No. No, he can freaking teleport, there’s no way that thing’s gonna get him.”

“But he’s hurt, Duncan, he said so.”

“That might not affect the teleporting.”

Isadora hesitated. “I… when I was still figuring out the empathy thing, I think I might have… felt him.”

“When you felt cold?”

“Not just that, sometimes I… I felt scared.” Isadora seemed a bit hesitant, like she wasn’t exactly sure what she was trying to say. “But… it didn’t feel like me. I think I felt him, sometimes…”

“I mean, I could hear him, when my telepathy was working.” Duncan said. “It’s possible when your empathy was spiking up you could feel his emotions, too.” He hesitated then, before he asked, “You… you can turn yours off-and-on, though, right?”

“Sort of.” Isadora shrugged. “If I focus, I can… turn it on, yeah. But sometimes it just… happens. Or sometimes I just kinda instinctually slip into it. It tends to happen most when I’m… stressed, though.”

“But you can turn it on?”

“Yes.”

Duncan hesitated. “How do you… do that?”

Isadora looked at him sadly, knowing why he was asking. “It’s not easy to explain. I guess I just kinda let my mind… reach out. I don’t know, it’s… but we’ll figure out how yours works, yeah?”
“Yeah.” Duncan said. “And I won’t use it on you guys, if I can help it, I know that’s probably a huge violation of privacy and I didn’t mean-”

“It’s fine.” Klaus said. He’d been quiet for a while, lost in thought. “We know it’s not intentional.”

“But if I could turn it on, I could listen to Quigley.” Duncan said. “Or we could find someone who works at the Lab and I could spy on their thoughts. Figure out where they’re keeping Violet.”

Isadora glanced sideways at a van for some electrical company that passed them on the street, before saying, “That would be incredibly dangerous.”

“We’re talking about breaking into a government laboratory to rescue our heavily guarded superpowered siblings,” Duncan said. “Nothing about this is safe, Isa. Might as well just dive right in.”

“Are we sure you’re not Quigley and Duncan was the one who got kidnapped?” Isadora joked. “I thought you were the safe one.”

“Come on, Isadora, I couldn’t survive two days in an evil dimension of monsters.” Duncan said. “Quigley, meanwhile, once went three days using exclusively a skateboard for travel.”

“Woulda been four if Mother hadn’t made him stop.”

“Exactly! If anyone can survive the hell dimension, it’s him.”

“You guys,” Klaus said, cautiously, “Are taking this really well.”

“We’re not.” Duncan and Isadora said in unison.

“We joke to cope with the stress.” Isadora said. “You should try it.”

“I’d rather not.” Klaus said.

“Breton,” Sunny said, which meant, “I’m not entirely sure how to make jokes out of this.”

“Anyway,” Isadora said, “Klaus, you can Sunny can spend the night in our room. We can find some extra pillows and blankets somewhere, and-”

Duncan turned towards her, eyes wide. “You’re coming back?”

“Uh, yeah, stupid.” Isadora smiled a bit awkwardly, elbowing him in the side, “I’m not sleeping on my own again, that was the worst night of my life.” Duncan smiled at her, and Isadora added, “And, don’t forget, the second I left you alone, you ran away, broke into a Library, and stole fairy lights from the general store.”

“Hey!” Duncan said.

“Yeah, Isadora.” Klaus smiled slightly. “What was the term he used? ‘Illegally bought’?”

“Oh, sure.” Duncan said, throwing up his hands in mock frustration as they all started to laugh. “We’re all trashing Duncan today! Got it!”

“You should be used to it by now.” Isadora said. “That was basically how Quigley and I bonded.”

“Bowlby,” Sunny said, “And that’s how we’re all going to bond once we get our siblings back.”
Klaus quickly translated for her, and Duncan said, “As if we’re not going to drag Isadora nonstop, too-”

“What the *fuck*?” Isadora stopped dead in her tracks, staring ahead. The others stopped, too, and followed her gaze.

They’d reached the house, but the front door was propped open, and they could hear distant music, that sounded pretty loud.

“Did Carmelita leave the door open?” Duncan asked. “Why’s she playing her angst music?”

“Goddamnit.” Isadora groaned, putting her head in her hands. “Fuck, we completely forgot, Carmelita’s throwing a fucking party.”

“Oh, damnit.” Klaus muttered, as Sunny curled up a little against him, confused at the stereo noise.

Duncan froze up for a second. “Oh.” he said quietly. “Oh. Huh.”

Isadora slowly slid her hand into her brother’s. “Duncan? Are you gonna be okay?”

“Yeah, yeah.” he said unconvincingly. “We’ll just go in, sneak upstairs, and avoid the noise. No problem.”

“Duncan-” Klaus began.

“Let’s just go.”

They all looked at each other for a moment, and then went up to the house.

“Well, it’s not destroyed.” Duncan said hesitantly, closing the door behind them.

The noise was coming from a room somewhere to the left, but the only real sign of a party were some dirt tracks in the foyer; Carmelita’s friends apparently didn’t care about wiping their feet at the door. Klaus suddenly felt a bit nervous, checking his own shoes to see if they were dirty.

“We just have to go upstairs.” Klaus repeated to himself. “They won’t even notice we’re here.”

Duncan nodded, running his hand over the doorframe.

“Duncan?” Isadora asked.

“Just feel weird.”

“We should go, then-”

“I’m not a baby, I can handle some dumb music.” Duncan snapped.

Sunny glared at him, while Isadora and Klaus flinched, and Duncan quickly said, “I’m sorry! I’m sorry, we shouldn’t fight, we can’t be fighting, this is-”

“Look, it’s okay.” Isadora said. “We’ll just-”

Duncan suddenly froze, a realization hitting him. “The Living Room.” he said.

“What?” Klaus said.
“They’re in the Living Room, that’s where the noise is coming from.” Duncan said. “They’re- the lights-”

“Oh, fuck.” Isadora’s eyes widened.

Duncan and Isadora ran past the Baudelaires, suddenly moving as fast as they could. Klaus and Sunny rushed after them, following as they slid to a stop in the doorway of the living room.

“Carmelita? What the hell are you-” Duncan began.

Klaus glanced around the room. At least fifteen kids, from about Carmelita’s age to maybe early High School, were inside, sitting on every available surface- on the couch and chairs, on top of the tables, spread across the floor. Glowsticks and glitter were now scattered in the room, and Carmelita was sitting on a table, wearing a pink ruffly dress and arm and leg warmers that clashed horribly with it, her hair up in a high ponytail. She gave them an annoyed look and groaned, turning to the rest of the kids. “God, my dumbass foster siblings crashed the party.” she said.

“This is our house, too.” Isadora protested.

“Whatever.”

“Yeah, piss off.” said one of the girls on the couch. “Lita was just telling us how you went nuts and started putting up these stupid lights.”

“He’s not nuts!” Klaus said.

“Don’t touch the lights!” Duncan said, just as quickly.

“God, see? They’re all insane.” Carmelita said, laughing a bit. “They’re under some sick delusion that their siblings are running around somewhere, talking to them through the fucking lights, instead of dead and buried.”

“Shut up!” Isadora yelled, as the other kids also laughed, somehow finding that funny. “Shut up, Quigley’s alive, and so’s Violet, and we’re going to find them!”

“Did you find them in the walls, too?” asked a boy on the floor, pointing to the peeled wallpaper. “Or did you just go Yellow Wallpaper crazy?”

“Oh, and how are the lights helping?” said a girl, tossing a glowstick into the air. “Are they ghosts or some shit?”

“They’re not!” Duncan yelled, looking very stressed. “They’re not dead.”

“Gonna be honest,” said a boy, sitting on a sidetable, “I didn’t expect these nerds to trash the place.”

“It’s not as if you aren’t making a mess.” Isadora said, glancing at the floor.

“Pfft, Esme pays people to clean the house,” Carmelita rolled her eyes, “They’ll come in before she gets back tomorrow morning. And they’ll clean up your stupid mess, too.”

“No!” Duncan said quickly. “No, you can’t clean this up, we need this-”

“Why’d you write the fucking alphabet on the wall?” asked a boy who looked closer to high school age. “Can’t remember how to spell?”
“No, idiot, it’s for their ghost siblings.” a girl rolled her eyes.

“It’s none of your business, and we should go.” Isadora said.

“Aw, but you guys are fun.” Carmelita smirked, before turning to Klaus. “Hey, Baudelaire, why don’t you tell us about those nightmares you keep having?”

“What?” Klaus’s eyes widened, suddenly feeling very cold.

“Yeah, your door keeps opening at night and I can hear you.” Carmelita said. “You keep yelling for people to leave you alone, but, really, you’re the one being too loud. It’d be nice if you could shut up once in a while, some of us are trying to sleep.”

Klaus stepped back a bit, feeling shocked and embarrassed and hurt all at the same time. Sunny started immediately shooting off a string of swear words, but in her own baby language, which was hilarious to the kids at the party; one of them reached to turn down the stereo so they could hear more.

“God, teach the baby to talk. She’s so fucking dumb.” Carmelita said.

“Leave Klaus alone!” Duncan said quickly, moving to put a hand on his friend’s arm.

“What has he done to you?” Isadora snapped.

“Uh, he exists, and he’s here. That’s enough.” Carmelita said. “But don’t think I’m forgetting you two, you guys are just as funny! Izzy here sleeps on her brother’s floor, cause she’s too much of a baby to sleep by herself.”

“Great, we get it!” Isadora yelled, as Sunny started cussing again. “Rag on the orphans, ha ha, fun sibling bonding, we do it all the time. Look, we’re just asking you leave our fun decorations alone, and we’ll be out of your stupid hair.”

“Come on, Izzy, the party’s way more fun now that we have someone to talk shit about.” Carmelita fake-pouted, standing up. “We ran out of snacks, anyway, we need something to do.”

Isadora glanced towards the corner, where there were a few empty plates, and…

“Is that alcohol?” Isadora gasped, running forwards and grabbing a bottle off the table.

“Uh, yeah, it’s a fucking party.” Carmelita said.

“Wh-where did you-?” Klaus began, startled, and starting to feel incredibly uncomfortable and stressed. He grabbed Duncan’s hand, his anxiety building as the kids all gave them patronizing looks or laughed a bit.

“Yeah, Tom’s Dad leaves the liquor cabinet unlocked.” said a girl from the floor.

“You’re drunk?” Isadora asked.

“No!” Carmelita rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. “Some of us just took a few shots during truth or dare, which was totally bitchin, by the way.”

“You’re twelve!” Isadora yelled, immediately tossing the bottle into the garbage can.

Several kids let out groans, but Carmelita held up a hand, somehow getting them to quiet down. “God, shut up, Mom.” Carmelita huffed. “Let the kids have fun.”
“I’m not your fucking Mom, but it’s illegal for you to be doing that, all of you!” Isadora yelled.

“Who’s gonna tell?” Carmelita asked, giggling. “And who’re the adults gonna believe? Everyone loves me, remember? And everyone hates you. We’re all just waiting for you to disappear like the other losers in this town.”

Klaus watched as Isadora stared at Carmelita, taking in deep breaths, looking pissed beyond belief. Maybe they should just run, just leave, drag Isadora out by the arm if they had to…

“Why are you like this?” Isadora asked, her voice loud. “People are gone, they’re probably dead, and you think it’s funny?”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

Isadora glared at Carmelita, and then said, “I don’t think you actually think it’s funny, you know? I think you’re scared.”

“Isa!” Duncan suddenly realized what she was doing, and as soon as it hit Klaus, his stomach dropped.

“I think you’re scared right now.” Isadora said.

“Isadora, let’s go!”

“Nonono…” Sunny muttered. “This is bad, she shouldn’t be doing this.”

“I think you’re just upset that we have a family,” Isadora said, “Because yours ditched you.”

The silence that followed was so tense you could cut it with a knife. Carmelita’s smile completely dropped, and for just a second, she looked a little shocked, then a little upset, then very, very angry.

“Oh, yeah.” Isadora said darkly. “Guess they didn’t think you were adorable.”

“Isadora.” Duncan said, sounding almost scared. “Let’s go.”

“I’m just kicking her off her fucking high horse, Duncan.” Isadora snapped, turning towards him. She saw his shock, though, and a flash of regret showed across her face. She quietly wiped her bloody nose with her sleeve before she dared turn back to Carmelita, and they stared at each other for a good long moment.

Then Carmelita said, “You know what, guys? I have a better idea for a game.” She jumped onto a side table, reached up and said, “Let’s see how many lights you can rip apart.”

She grabbed onto a string of holiday lights, and pulled down.

“No!” Duncan yelled, letting go of Klaus and running towards her. “No, don’t-”

“Come on, everyone!” Carmelita yelled, jumping off the table, pulling down the string of lights farther, almost ripping it off the ceiling. “Let’s wreck the place! Go right ahead!”

“No! Stop it!” Duncan looked panicked as the kids quickly jumped up, grabbing on the lights and cords and starting to rip them down. “Stop it! No, we need those up-”

Isadora ran over to the nearest kid, trying to grab their arms and stop them. Sunny started yelling, and Klaus ran over to Carmelita, reaching out to touch her arm; she pulled away, giving him a glare.
“Carmelita, make them stop!” Klaus pleaded.

“Why should I?” Carmelita turned towards the wall, dragging down another cord.

“Please, we need this-”

“And I need you,” Carmelita whirled around, giving him a dark look, “To shut the hell up!”

Klaus stared at her, shocked, and then, slowly, he dropped Sunny onto a chair. Sunny opened her mouth to protest, but saw the look on his face and suddenly quieted.

“Carmelita,” Klaus said, sounding angrier than he’d ever been in his life, “Make them stop.”

Carmelita, unfazed, flipped him off and ran off into the middle of the room, towards two of the girls. Klaus backed up slightly, hearing Isadora yell behind him as she tried to rip some lights away from a kid. One of the boys found where Duncan left the paint bucket and splashed it onto the wall, blacking out a good chunk of the letters.

“Stop it!” Duncan yelled again, running to the boy with the paint and grabbing him by the arm. “Please, stop it, we need that!”

“God, we’re just messing around!” the boy yelled.

“Please!" Duncan was almost crying. “Please, just-”

The boy managed to wrestle his arm out of Duncan’s grip, and pushed him away.

Duncan stumbled backwards, losing his balance and falling. The second he hit the floor, he let out a scream.

Isadora and Klaus both ran towards him, dropping beside him as he curled up.

“Duncan?” Isadora asked, reaching forwards to possibly try and calm him down.

“Hey, Lita, the hell’s wrong with the kid?” asked a girl, turning towards them.

“It’s happening!” Duncan said, a bit too loudly, throwing his hands over his ears and burying his head in his knees. “Isa, it’s too loud.”

Oh, fuck.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked a boy, not looking at all concerned, raising an eyebrow judgmentally.

“Leave him alone!” Isadora put her arms around her brother, holding him tightly and glaring down the kids who got close. “Piss off! Duncan, it’s okay, it’s okay, just let me calm you down a-”

“Holy shit, is he bleeding?” asked a kid.

Carmelita pushed her way forwards. “Whoa, really?”

“No! He’s not, leave him alone!” Klaus said, standing in front of the triplets. “Leave us alone!”

Too much was happening, and his anxiety levels were about to burst. There was too much
stimulation to begin with, and add to that that Duncan was having another burst of telepathy, and
Isadora was still struggling to keep him calm, and the lights and letters were broken and the kids
kept trying to push forwards-

“What’s wrong with him?” asked another kid.

“Hey, idiot! What’s wrong with you?” Carmelita moved towards Duncan, managing to push him
slightly before Isadora started screaming at her to go fuck herself.

“Get away from him!” Klaus also yelled, pushing Carmelita back.

Carmelita seemed shocked for an instant, and then said, “You can’t make me do shit!”

“Don’t touch him! Piss off, you’ve done enough!”

Isadora stared up at Klaus, shocked to see him so angry. Sunny started whimpering slightly,
struggling to get off the chair and crawl over. Duncan, meanwhile, kept shaking, his hands
clamped over his ears, trying to block out everybody’s thoughts as well as the rest of the noise.

“Come on, you little shit,” Carmelita said, “Let’s all see the freakshow.”

“He’s not a freak, he’s overstimulated, leave him alone!”

“Fuck that!” Carmelita said.

“Just leave us alone!”

“Fuck you!”

Klaus suddenly felt overcome with… with something. With everything. All the panic, the fury, the
despair and grief and utter terror that they’d just ruined something, that they everything was going
wrong, that everyone here was an asshole and everyone hated him, that they’d all just lost Quigley
and would never find Violet and that he wouldn’t be able to protect Sunny, or his friends, and
everything would fall apart and it would all be his fault.

He threw his hand forwards, intending just to push Carmelita back.

Instead, before he could even touch her, something- some kind of invisible force, invisible push-
threw her into the air, tossing her across the room.

It took Klaus an instant to realize that something was him.

Everyone was silent for a moment, and then Klaus let out a shocked scream, and suddenly, all hell
broke loose.

All in a few seconds, so many things happened. Furniture threw itself into the air, barely missing
Sunny, who’d managed to crawl onto the floor and now let out a startled yelp. Carmelita’s friends
all shot back, ending up tossed into the walls or across the floor. And, most worrying of all, the
small lights, that had been torn off the wall and tossed to the ground, all exploded into shards of
glass.

And just as suddenly as it all had happened, it stopped, and Klaus felt paralyzed.

There was a tense silence for a second, and, very slowly, Klaus turned towards Isadora and
Duncan.
Duncan was still shaking and holding his hands over his ears, but both he and Isadora were looking up at Klaus, and they both had a realization and fear in their expressions. Klaus stared at them as the other kids started getting up, starting to yell and shout, but it all sounded so distant. The first thing he noticed, instead, was that his nose was running. He slowly reached up, using a finger to wipe the blood away.

Did he just…

He felt a tap on his foot, and he glanced down to see that Sunny had crawled over. She looked up at him, looking very concerned.

“Kla?”

“Everyone stay calm.” Carmelita said, and Klaus turned towards her. She was staring at him, and she also looked a bit scared. Scared of him.

“I…” Klaus began, as the kids all turned to look at him. “I have to… we’re going.”

He picked up Sunny, and held out a hand for Isadora. She grabbed it, getting to her feet, an arm still around Duncan, who was shaking and on the edge of tears.

Then they ran as fast as they could.
Violet was feeling so lost and confused that she wasn’t sure if she could even find the strength to get upset at the moment. She wondered if that was better than being perpetually angry and scared, or if it just meant she was in more trouble because she’d gotten numb to everything.

They did a bunch of different tests that day, alternating between giving her metal things to work with or giving her things to sense. Who’s in that room? (Three doctors, two men and a woman.) Move this sheet. (I can crumple it, too, you’re taking too long to end this.) Can you hear the words in the other room? (No.) What if you concentrate? (Maybe “Raven.” Not sure about anything else.) Crush these cans. (Give me something harder to do, at least.) Do you hear the Gate? (No.) Are you sure? (No.) So you can hear it? (No.) Are you lying? (No.) You shouldn’t lie to us. (I know.)

She was genuinely wondering if they’d drugged her again, she just felt so detached from everything. But she eventually decided that she was fine, she just didn’t have enough energy to think very hard. She probably didn’t need to do much today, anyway. She could just get through today, get through some tests, not have to think about things too hard, and then maybe she could figure something out. She’d figure something out soon, yeah. But she should cooperate now. If she didn’t, they would threaten Klaus and Sunny again. She couldn’t let that happen. She didn’t know what she would do if they got hurt, if they ended up here…

Her main problem was that every now and again the ESP would act up, and she would feel that call again. She would grip the edges of her chair, begging herself to stay, to not try to run to that awful place, to not try to throw herself into… whatever was on the other side of the Gate. She really didn’t know, she just knew that it was bad, and the Monster was there. And so was the boy, Quigley, and he needed help.

But if she tried to go, they’d stop her, and they’d hurt her. She didn’t know how much more she could take. She just needed to play along for a bit, and figure things out later. Figure out her feelings later, too. About her Mother. And those other experiments.

And what must have happened to all of them.

Unless, of course, they were all doctors like 005. He must’ve graduated from prisoner to tormentor, used whatever ability he had to help torture children. Violet couldn’t imagine doing that, even if it meant her own freedom. She couldn’t imagine taking part in hurting anyone, any other kids, no matter what they threatened her with. Maybe that’s why she felt the Call to the Gate. She wanted to help this boy. Quigley.
She wondered who he was.

Klaus ran into the triplets’ room, dropped Sunny on the bed, and then sank into the corner, covering his ears and starting to cry.

Isadora shut the door, and Duncan ran to close and cover the windows.

“We’re fucked!” Isadora yelled, as she turned the lights on. “We are so-”

Duncan ran to join Klaus in the corner, grabbing his hand, still shaking himself. “It’s not your fault, Klaus.” he said quickly. “Don’t blame yourself, it’s not- oh, oh, shit, you weren’t saying that out loud, I- sorry, I didn’t mean-”

“Duncan!” Klaus turned to him, also sobbing. “I just blew up the fucking living room, I think you’re allowed to accidentally read a few minds!”

“I can’t turn it off, I’m sorry-”

“Don’t be sorry, and it is my fault! I- I didn’t even- I didn’t know-”

“Kla?” Sunny asked, scooting towards the edge of the bed, looking at him sadly.

“Klaus, it is not your fault. Your powers must’ve set off when you got angry, it’s alright.” Isadora sat in front of the boys. “You haven’t shown them before, it’s not like you could’ve been aware of them. Now, I’m going to try to calm you down, then we’re going to figure out what to do. Okay?”

“Isa-” Duncan began.

“I can’t turn the telepathy off, I don’t think, but I can calm you down, alright? You want to go first? Show Klaus it’s okay?”

Duncan hesitantly nodded, while Klaus continued to sob, curling up farther into the corner. Isadora held out her hands, and her brother took them, and she shut her eyes, breathing deeply, her eyes shut tight in concentration. After a moment, Duncan’s breathing slowed, too.

“Better? Did it work?” Isadora asked.

Duncan nodded.

Isadora turned towards Klaus. “Klaus, I-”

“All those kids saw that!” Klaus looked up at her. “They know I can… they’ll- they’ll- they’ll tell someone, what if we get found out, what if they take me away, they took Violet away when she floated things, what if they try to hurt you-”

“Klaus, hey. Let me calm you down.” Isadora said. She held out her hands, but Klaus just shook his head, curling up farther into the corner. “Klaus. Look, if you don’t want my help, that’s okay, I know messing with feelings is probably really weird. But you have to stay calm. Whatever happens, we’ll figure it out together.”

“But what if they hurt you be-because of me?” Klaus asked, struggling to talk through his tears. “What if they kill you? What if they hurt Sunny?”

Sunny said several things, but Isadora picked up on her meaning when she held out her arms. She
walked over, lifting the baby off the bed and bringing her over, setting her down in front of her brother.

Klaus barely noticed, he was still talking. “Wh-what if they kill her? Sunny, I can’t forgive myself if they hurt you. They- I’m supposed to take care of you, I have to take care of you and find Violet and-”

Sunny sat up, putting her hands on Klaus’s knees, waiting until he met her eyes.

She took a deep breath, and then said, “Miedo.” “I’m scared, too. I’m scared that someone will take you away, like they did when Violet made things fly.”

“Sunny-”

She continued with, “Solrig,” meaning, “But that just means we should do something about it, right? Just keep going. And it’s not your fault. You’re not in control of everything, and that’s okay. Just… stay with me?”

Klaus kept crying, but he leaned forwards and hugged his baby sister. “Of course.” he whispered. “Of course, I’m staying righ-right here, okay?” After a moment, he pulled away, wiping his eyes with his sleeve and shaking. “I’m sorry, I’m just…”

“Scared?” Duncan asked sympathetically.

Klaus glanced at Duncan. “I don’t know how to put it all into words, can you…?”

“Tell what it is? Yeah.” Duncan said.

“Translate?”

“Oh! Oh, that’s something I can do!” Duncan looked excited, turning to Isadora. “Yeah, he’s, uh, just under a lot of anxiety from general overstimulation, as well as the fact he’s been a bit traumatized from the fire, and he’s worried about Sunny, and us, because we’re the first friends he’s- you’ve never had friends before?”

Klaus flinched slightly. “Just my sisters.”

“But you’re so cool!”

“Duncan, please.” Isadora said.

“Right, right.” Duncan said. “But, well, Klaus, the… the point is, it’s not your fault, and we’re going to stay together, right?”

“I think we should run away.” Isadora suggested. “There’s this coffee shop at the edge of town, it’s always empty, we can hide in there until we figure out what to do.”

“We can’t go out alone, what if the Monster shows up?” Duncan asked. “Or, worse, what if Quigley can’t find us?”

“Would you rather Carmelita call the fucking cops on us?”

“She’s not going to.” Duncan said. “She’s scared of us.”

They paused for a moment, before Isadora said, “Shit, I forgot about the mind-reading thing. You heard her thoughts?”
Duncan started wringing his hands a little, needing to do something. “I… it was all jumbled with the other kids, I couldn’t hear much, there was… too much going on. But… yeah. When Klaus did that thing, she… was terrified. I think she’ll keep things quiet out of fear we’ll go Carrie on her.”

“You read Carrie?” Klaus asked, knowing full well that had nothing to do with anything.

“Yeah, it was cool.”

“Focus.” Isadora said. “In case you haven’t noticed, Klaus has indeed gone a bit ‘Carrie White’. Just promise us you won’t pull a Prom Scene.”

“Of- of course not.” Klaus said. “I wouldn’t- I don’t think I could-”

“That was a joke.” Duncan clarified.

“Oh.”

“It’s okay, I’m bad at picking up on those, too.” Duncan said. “But this telepathy could help with that.”

“Are we sure I’m telekinetic?” Klaus asked carefully.

“You made things float and explode.” Isadora said.

“Maybe he just has wind powers.” Duncan said.

“Don’t think so.” Isadora said. “He probably just has the same powers as his sister, would make sense.”

“None of us have the same power,” Duncan said, “And we’re triplets.”

“Maybe your Mother just took more drugs than mine did.” Klaus said.

“This is a weird conversation.” Isadora noted, which caused Sunny to giggle.

“Klaus, did your Mother ever show any powers?” Duncan asked.

“Uh…” Klaus considered. “She jumped through fire once, but I just assumed she survived due to a lucky coincidence.”

“She did what?” Isadora asked.

Duncan stared at Klaus. “Wait, she touched people and knocked them out? That’s badass, why didn’t you tell us that?”

“Duncan!”

“Sorry, shit! Mind-reading again, sorry!”

“Hey, Duncan,” Isadora asked, “What’s Sunny thinking?”

“She thinks in babytalk, I don’t know.” Duncan said. “Wait… now she’s thinking of an image. Of a… duck?”

Sunny burst into laughter, and Klaus said, “I guess that’s her idea of a joke.”

“You know what, fuck it.” Isadora groaned. “We keep getting off topic. Look, we need a plan to
“get out of this house if things go south. Duncan, you climbed out the window, right?”

“Nope.”

“Okay, how’d you get out of the house?”

“Back door.”

“I have a plan to get out.” Klaus said quickly. “There’s a fire escape about three rooms to the right of mine. This house goes up in flames, go there, check outside to make sure nobody’s out there, then run out. If someone’s out there for you, wait for me, I’ll distract them and you run.”

Isadora stared at him. “How long have you-”

“You found that fire escape really quickly, you must really want to make sure the fire doesn’t happen again.” Duncan said. When Klaus flinched, Duncan shut his eyes. “Sorry, I’m- Isa, I think you calmed me a bit too much. I’m having more trouble with personal space than usual.”

“I can try to fix it.” Isadora said.

“No, I don’t want you to freak out if you get it wrong.” Duncan said. He froze. “Wait. Was that a thought? Shit, I-” He stared at her for a moment, and then said, “That is a bad idea.”

“I didn’t say it yet.”

“I don’t think I can do that, that’s a bad idea, I only just figured out I have powers.”

“What are you talking about?” Klaus asked.

Isadora paused. “You know how… we were here before? In Hawkins?”

“Yeah. We… had to get these tattoos somehow.” Klaus said hesitantly.

“Well…” Isadora glanced towards Duncan. “He went into your memory, when you were having the… panic attack. What if… while his powers are working, he tried to… dig up our Lab Memories?”

Klaus stared at her for a moment, and then said, “That’s… not a bad plan.”

“Really?” Duncan asked nervously.

“Look,” Klaus said, “Yeah, your powers are new. But… mine only just happened and I blew up a room, it’s pretty powerful. You might be able to dig into our toddler-memories.”

“I- I don’t know.” Duncan said. “I don’t know how these work, what if I somehow get trapped in, like, a loop of memories, or what if I accidentally erase or alter it, or-”

“Just… try it.” Isadora said. “I can try to calm you more, if you want. That might make it easier.”

Duncan glanced towards Klaus, then Isadora. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” she said. “Sunny can make sure none of us die or anything. Think you can guard, Sunny?”

“Yee.” Sunny said, meaning, “I’m on it.”

“Whose memory should I try first?” Duncan asked, glancing between them.
“Why don’t you just… reach out?” Isadora said. “And see whose you can get to first?”

“Reach out?” Duncan said.

“Yeah, just…” Isadora grabbed his hand again. “Try to stay calm. I’ll try to keep you grounded.”

“I- I don’t-” Duncan stammered. “What if it doesn’t work?”

“It’ll be okay.” Isadora said soothingly. “We’ll be right here.”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded, and before he could think about what he was doing, he reached out and grabbed Duncan’s other hand. “Right here.”

Duncan blushed slightly, and Sunny also moved, putting her hands on his leg and leaning up against him.

“Okay…” he said. “Okay, how should I start?”

Violet started when the door opened and Olaf walked in.

She turned towards him, trying her best to hide her surprise. They stared for a moment, and then he said, very coldly, “Seven.”

“Five.” she replied.

She watched him as he glared at her and then moved to the other side of the table, sitting down and pulling out another file. Instead of passing this one to her, though, he flipped through it, saying, “We believe you have extrasensory perception along with your ferrokinetic abilities.”

“Would explain why you’re testing that.” Violet muttered, resisting the urge to roll her eyes.

“You’ve done remarkably decently, despite the fact your experiments have been a bit rushed. We normally take much longer to test abilities, but we have more pressing matters to attend to.”

“Like the Gate?” Violet asked.

“Perhaps.” Olaf said darkly. “Your connection to this ‘Gate’ is of interest-”

Before she could stop herself, Violet burst out, “Why are you doing this?”

Olaf looked over at her, and Violet immediately felt colder. She gripped the edges of the chair, feeling like she’d just made a horrible mistake. But after a few seconds of silence, in which he didn’t start yelling or hitting her, she continued.

“Wh-why are you working for them? You’re like me.” Violet said, her voice barely above a whisper. “They… they must’ve done this to you, too.”

“What we are doing here,” Olaf said slowly, “Is incredibly important, and it’s worth certain sacrifices.”

“Like my parents.” Violet said quietly.

“Like them. They got it into their heads that-”
“That children shouldn’t be here.”

“Yes.” Olaf narrowed his eyes. “Interesting, their timing on that opinion.”

Violet didn’t even ask what that was supposed to mean, instead wringing her hands in her lap while Olaf started flipping through the folder. “As I was saying, we’d like to test your extrasensory perception once more, and then we may have a vital task for you.”

Violet nodded quietly, still wringing her hands, trying to swallow the fear.

*Just play along, and nothing bad will happen.*

Olaf stood up and moved over, grabbing her shoulder and forcing her to her feet. Violet flinched as his fingers dug into her arm, her stomach sinking and her mind racing, and suddenly feeling like she couldn’t breathe. She suddenly felt as if the only thing she wanted in the world was for him to let go of her, but she didn’t say anything, absolutely terrified of what could happen to her if she did.

“Come with us.”

“I think I saw something.” Duncan muttered.

Isadora slowly edged her hand over to Klaus’s, gripping it tight; Klaus realized then that she wasn’t as calm as she looked.

“Whazit?” Sunny asked.

“I…” Duncan shut his eyes. “I blacked out for a second, and saw a… dollhouse. I didn’t recognize it, did-”

“Was it green?” Klaus asked quickly.

“Yeah. With yellow windows. I was…” Duncan tried to focus. “I was- you were looking in, trying to find something.”

“Violet’s ribbons.” Klaus smiled slightly. “Father built us that dollhouse when I was six, and when we got mad at each other we would hide each others’ stuff in the secret compartments.”

“Your Father built secret compartments into your dollhouse?” Isadora asked.

“Yeah, he made it so that we could play out Nancy Drew and Sherlock Holmes.” Klaus smiled slightly. “We kinda stopped playing with it after a while, mostly because Violet got really mad that she lost an argument and hid my glasses in there all day. Mother and Father were not happy.”

Isadora laughed a bit. “Sounds nice.”

“Shh.” Duncan said. “I’m trying to focus.” he paused for a moment, then said, “But that is hilarious.”

“Duncan, that’s really good, though! You saw the dollhouse, that’s Klaus’s memory!” Isadora said. “From childhood, keep digging.”

“It didn’t last long, I don’t-”

“Just stay calm, Duncan.” Isadora said. “You’re doing great. We’ve gotta keep trying before your
telepathy shuts down again.”

“Okay.” Duncan muttered, gripping onto her and Klaus’s hands. “Okay. I... I’m focusing, I just need to do that again but harder.”

“Mahi!” Sunny said encouragingly. “You’re doing a good job, keep going!”

Duncan took deep breaths, struggling to keep focus. Klaus shut his eyes, too, hoping that maybe if he and Isadora both relaxed a little, that might help him.

“Just... quiet.” Isadora muttered, almost distantly. “Focus, and reach out. I’ll reach out, too.”

Klaus remained silent, still not entirely sure what reaching out meant. He bounced his leg slightly, trying to relax as much as possible. (He didn’t notice, at this point, Sunny scoot closer to him, copying him.)

“Try focusing on Klaus.” Isadora suggested after a second. “You saw his first.”

“I don’t... I don’t know.” Duncan said quietly. “I think I feel something- can you quiet your thoughts, Isa?”

“Don’t know how to do that, but I’ll make an attempt.”

Violet was shaking uncontrollably, and she really wished she could will herself to stop.

She almost wanted to slip back into that numbness, that emotionless void. Then she wouldn’t have to show such obvious weakness to the guards holding her arms, following Olaf and a few other doctors down the hall. She didn’t want to be weak, she just wanted to be invisible. She wanted them to leave her alone, especially because she wasn’t entirely sure this new test would be a pleasant one. Then again, it wasn’t as if the tests had ever been nice.

They stopped in the middle of a hall, and Violet felt her arms released. She struggled to keep a blank face, even as the guards put their hands on their weapons, should she try to run. Remain calm, Violet, do what they say, and they won’t use those. They won’t hurt you.

“Wh-where are we?” she finally asked. She glanced towards the side, and saw a door.

On the doorframe was a rainbow sticker.

It was faded with age, the colors all but washed out, but... Violet approached it, very slowly, and reached up, gently running a hand over it.

“Well?” she heard a doctor ask behind her.

Violet said, very quietly, “I remember this.”

She didn’t know how, really. She just... remembered it brighter. Remembered the way it decorated the frame. Almost a rush of excitement upon seeing it.

She stepped back as a doctor approached and unlocked the door, swinging it open.

“What is this?” Violet finally asked.

“Go inside,” said Olaf from behind her, and Violet felt even more fear, “And tell us.”
Violet took a deep breath, and pushed open the door.

“Duncan?”

Isadora and Klaus both glanced at him, as he fell silent. He was completely still for a few moments, and then he fluttered his eyes open, looking at them. “Time out,” he said.

“What?” Isadora asked.

“I saw from you.” Duncan said. “You got put in time-out for cutting our hair.”

Isadora smiled slightly. “I forgot about that. Cause Mother finally let us cut our own hair when we hit eleven.”

“But you cut mine and Quigley’s when we were little.” Duncan said. “I let you, Quigley didn’t want to until-“

“I bribed him with candy.”

“And Mother put you in time-out for like an hour.” Duncan said. “While she fixed our hair. I saw you, tracing the wallpaper in the corner.”

“The daisies.” Isadora nodded, smiling a bit. “I forgot all about that.”

“That’s a good sign.” Klaus said. “It means Duncan can dig into forgotten memories. Maybe he can reach the Lab ones, if they’re there.”

“Shh.” Duncan said. “I’m trying again.”

They shut their eyes, gripping hands tighter, and Sunny moved backwards, watching carefully.

Violet entered the room, a bit confused at first. It seemed blank at first, its walls and floor colored the same silver, a matching table in the corner. She spun around the room, seeing nothing on the walls. Aside from the table, it was empty.

Slowly, she moved and sat on the floor, pulling her hospital gown over her knees, all too aware that people were watching her from the doorway. She tried to tap into that frustrated feeling again, that angry feeling, the one that opened up her ESP, but she was shaking, and felt nauseous and she wasn’t sure why, and she was starting to feel dizzy.

“Figure it out, Violet. Figure it out.” said her brother’s voice beside her. “Remember the sticker?”

Yes. So we were here before. But why do I remember that? I couldn’t be any older than two.

“Than four.”

What?

“You were four. I was two.” Klaus was sounding monotone again, and suddenly she knew that he wasn’t entirely her imagination anymore. “Don’t you remember?”

I can’t remember anything from when I was four.
“Do you feel anything?” a doctor asked, somewhere far away.

Violet turned to look at the table, where the vision of Klaus was sitting. “I was two, and you were four.” Klaus repeated. “You remember.”

_I don’t._

“You think you don’t. You hid it well.”

_Hid what?_

“You don’t remember, but I think we’re fixing that.”

_What’s that supposed to mean?_

“A lot of us are connected, you see.” said Klaus. “ESP is very common among us. A lot easier to tap into new senses and perceptions when we were born… different. But some of us are stronger than others. Although, we’re a lot stronger together. Just the six of us.”

“The…” Violet caught herself speaking out loud, and quickly shut up. _The six of us?_

She noticed someone move in, and she flinched back, pressing herself against the wall as Olaf came in.

“He wants to hurt you.” the vision of Klaus said, his voice suddenly seeming more tense, slight emotion seeping through.

_I know. You don’t have to tell me._

Olaf dropped something in front of her. “Perhaps this can speed things up. _The six of us?_”

She glanced down. It was the music box. The one they’d had her play with a few tests ago.

Olaf stepped back out of the room, and she slowly picked up the box and got to her feet.

“Open it.” Klaus said.

Violet opened it.

Klaus started humming.

“Shh!” Sunny whispered, but he didn’t seem to hear her.

Duncan and Isadora didn’t react, either, both with their eyes shut, holding hands and reaching out. Klaus kept humming, and after a second, Sunny picked up the melody.

_Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream._

_Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream._

When Klaus stopped humming, Duncan let out a gasp, and grabbed tighter onto the hands of Klaus and Isadora, and suddenly, they could see it, too.

“Rainbow room.” Duncan said quietly, completely ignoring his nosebleed.
“Whazit?” Sunny asked, but nobody seemed to be listening.

Of course it was *Row Your Boat*. She’d always hated that song. But instead of shutting it, Violet listened to the music box play on, feeling very strange. Almost as if the cranking box and gentle song was… familiar.

“I’m reaching out, too, Vi.” Klaus said. “So are the some of the others. We’re stronger together.”

“I don’t know what that means.” Violet whispered.

“You can just look up and see.” Klaus said.

Confused, Violet looked up.

The doctors were gone. The door was shut.

“What the-” she started forwards, only to realize a puzzle was under her feet. “What is this?”

“Memories. Hidden ones.”

They were in the Rainbow Room.

They only saw flashes, really. Blurry flashes of hastily retrieved memories. But they saw enough, they remembered enough.

Violet was four. The triplets were three. Klaus was two. The other girl was five.

The music box was playing. Vi was fighting with the other girl over it. She wanted to take it apart and play with it, find out how it works, the other girl wanted it to stay and keep playing music. Duncan and Isa were playing with the puzzle blocks, not paying any attention. The boy identical to Duncan- Quigley, it was Quigley- ran forwards, pulling on the other girl’s hair. She yelled. Klaus started crying. They were fighting. Usually this was when Father would stop them. Why were they alone, again?

The alarms went off. They started yelling. Duncan covered his ears. The other girl yelled. Vi got under the table with Klaus, who just kept crying. Quigley squeezed in beside them. He was covering his ears, too.

“Father will come.” Vi had said, the memory distorting her voice, almost like an echo.

He usually watched them, but something was happening with Mother and he had to step out. Another woman was supposed to watch them, but she’d gone into the hall for something. That’s why they were alone. And now the alarms were going off- they’d been going off a lot recently. It was always so loud.

Father didn’t come, though, at least not fast. Isa started crying, too, in the middle of the room. The other girl finally moved under the table, and after a moment, Duncan dragged Isa with him, and they all crowded together.

Klaus and Isa kept crying, and Duncan joined them after a second. Usually they had an adult to tell them it was okay. They were alone now.
“Shh.” said the oldest girl, trying to take control. “Shh!”

“It’s loud!” Quigley had yelled, leaning up against Duncan.

“Father will come.” Vi said again. “He always comes. ‘s what fathers do.”

“He’s not coming!” Duncan yelled.

“Shut up!” Isa wailed.

“Yeah, shut up!” the older girl said, reaching to side-hug Isa. “We’re fine! Mama said this room is a safe room, okay? So we’re safe.”

“Safe?” Isa asked, looking up at her.

“Yeah.” the girl nodded, giving Isa a kiss on the head- she used to do that a lot, she’d learned it from her Mother. “We’re safe.”

Quigley moved to Isa, also hugging her tight. Duncan hugged her, too, and Vi scooted her and Klaus over, and soon they were all embracing each other.

The memory was more blurry after that- the alarms were still going off. A woman opened the door, a doctor they didn’t know. She asked them to come. But Father wasn’t here, none of their parents were here, they couldn’t just leave.

“Mama said not to go with strangers.”

“Mother and Father are still here!”

“Go away!”

Isa was still in the middle of the hug, her face red from sobbing. They weren’t moving. They didn’t want to move. Isa cried harder, and she hugged all of them, and they all suddenly felt warm.

It started with her, then spread to her brothers, and then the Baudelaires and the other girl. Everything suddenly felt warm. It felt right.

They all stopped crying.

The alarms were loud, but they were all calm. And warm.

“Holy shit!” Duncan screeched, falling over onto the floor.

Isadora gasped, staggering backwards, almost knocking over the table behind her. Klaus screamed, jumping back before curling into a ball, suddenly feeling sick.


“Why did we see that?” Isadora asked, staring at Duncan. “I thought that was your… what-”

“What was that?” Klaus screamed. “What was that?”

“That was the Lab.” Duncan finally said. “We were… we were together. We were together in the Lab. And our… our parents were there, too. They dropped us off! They knew we were- what did
you do, Isa? You did something-”

“What was that?” Klaus repeated, starting to cry.

Violet dropped the music box, letting it clatter to the ground.

She stood in one place, breathing hard. What had she just seen? That… that was a memory, she’d remembered… they were here.

She started to remember more vague images. Father had eventually come back for them, yelling at the doctors for scaring them and trying to get them to leave the room. People were watching her, but they scared the younger girl most- what was her name? What was her name… she couldn’t remember, she just remembered that they kept talking to her, and her Mother had gotten upset… she remembered feeling like she should be crying, but she just… didn’t. She kept staring at the rainbow sticker as the adults talked, wondering why she felt so calm.

“That was an interesting day.” said the image of Klaus, now kneeling on the floor, tracing the pattern on the music box. “You saw what happened, didn’t you?”

Violet stared at him, starting to shake. “What…”

“The alarms were too loud that day. We never found out what happened, but I just assume it was some kind of chemical malfunction. Or maybe Mother set something on fire.” Klaus shrugged. “But that wasn’t important. You saw what she did. Isa.”

“What are you talking about?” Violet thought she could hear a distant voice somewhere else, trying to talk to her, but she focused on Klaus.

“She connected us. You know she did.”

“She was three. She couldn’t have- we didn’t have abilities as babies. We would’ve known.”

“Sometimes things burst out.” said Klaus, and he stood up, staring her in the eye. “And then settle down again. Fear causes lots of things to happen, really. That’s why the drugs worked so well. Fear makes things explode, even before they’re ready. And sometimes they vanish again until you need them. But that was the day everything changed, because she connected us. And they knew-”

“We didn’t have powers as babies.” Violet insisted.

Klaus stared at her, a dark look behind his eyes, one that definitely did not belong to her brother. And then he said something that was even more worrying.

“Tell that to Sunny.”

Violet was paralyzed with fear. It took a second before she could say, “She doesn’t… she can’t…”

“They’ll take her, once they find out.” Klaus said. “You take care of her, okay? They’ll kill her.”

“No… no…”

“Seven! What did you see?”

Violet started, jumping, suddenly realizing that the doctors were in the room. They had all come in, she must have missed them… she turned back to Klaus, but the image was gone.
“No…” she whispered. “No, no-”

“What did you see?”

Olaf was closest, he moved to grab her again, but she backed up instead, screaming, “Don’t touch me!” she screeched, tears coming to her eyes and her voice breaking.

She stopped for a second, then burst into tears, shaking and sobbing.

Olaf grabbed her shoulder again, and she felt like she was going to explode. “What did you see?”

“They’re dead, aren’t they?” she asked, her voice suddenly quiet. “The kids. They were here with me. We were together. We were together..”

“You saw the other numbers?”

Violet nodded through her tears, and then she something came to her. “You didn’t kill them.” she said, just as quietly. “Quigley’s in the Gate.”

“Ten is behind the Gate, and if the creature doesn’t get him, we’ll return him here-”

“His name is Quigley.”

“Not to us.”

Violet kept crying, but she quieted, still shaking.

“Why don’t you go back to your room?”

“I want the box, please.” she said, almost blankly. “I want her box.”

Olaf glanced at the other doctors, having a silent conversation. “I don’t know if that is wise. You haven’t exactly proven that you can be trusted with-”

“Please.” Violet begged, “Please, I won’t use it for anything, I promise, I won’t do anything, I just want her box, please. Please.”

There was a brief pause where Violet thought it was all hopeless, and then Olaf released Violet’s shoulder as someone handed her the music box. She felt a deep relief. “You’ve behaved well today, so you can have it for now.” he said. “But if you use it for anything, you will be punished very harshly.”

“I won’t do anything.” Violet promised. “I just want the box.”

She clutched it tightly as the guards took her back into the hall, and she stared at the sticker on the frame. The rainbow sticker.

She was starting to remember the rainbow room.

And, though she didn’t know what, she had a feeling that something worse than a sudden connection had happened in there.
“Wha?” Sunny yelled again.

Klaus was still shaking, stuttering, trying to figure out what was going on. He’d been a baby, he remembered an incident from when he was barely older than Sunny… this was jarring. Not to mention that the other kids there…

“We were in the Lab together.” Klaus said.

“I… I didn’t think we’d be there at the same time.” Isadora muttered, running her hands through her hair and starting to rant. “I thought… our parents… I… I didn’t think they dropped us off for fucking playdates at the Torture Lab… who was the other girl? I can’t remember her name, I can’t… Duncan, why did we see that?”

“I don’t know!” Duncan yelled, grabbing the tissue box off of the counter and sitting on the floor, grabbing a tissue before tossing it to Isadora. “I just know that that happened, and your nose is bleeding so take care of that, and now my telepathy’s shut off…”

“Wha?” Sunny repeated.

“I don’t know, Sunny!” Klaus yelled. “I don’t fucking know what we just saw! It… we were in the Lab, all together, and we got upset and Isadora-”

“I was so upset. The alarms were too loud.” Isadora said quietly, wiping her nosebleed. “And our parents were late. I hated the alarms. I… I can’t remember anything past that. Duncan, do you-”

“We were three, Isadora, I’m shocked we got that much.” Duncan said. He sounded almost angry, though Klaus wasn’t sure who he was angry at.

“Our parents left us there.” Klaus muttered, still feeling like he’d gone into shock or something. “In the Lab. They let us run around in the Lab. The people who wanted to kidnap us.”

“Maybe they didn’t know that.” Isadora said. “Maybe they didn’t… they found out later-”

“The Lab was MKUltra-based, meaning that they did nothing but drug you up and see how well you could withstand torture!” Duncan yelled. “Why would they bring kids into that?”

“They got us out, okay?” Isadora said, shaking. “They got us out eventually, and we didn’t remember any of it, so-”

“What did you do?” Klaus asked, turning to her.

“What?” Isadora started. “Why are you assuming I did something?”

“At the end of the memory.” Klaus was starting to sob. “We were hugging and crying, and we felt different. You did something.”
Isadora yelled. “I was three goddamn years old, I don’t know what the fuck happened!”

Sunny shouted. “Stop it! Stop yelling, calm down, and figure out what’s going on!”

They all paused for a moment, and Duncan said, “Isadora, I- I think Klaus is right. I think you did something.”

“I don’t know, I don’t…”

“We’re not saying you did anything bad.” Duncan said. “Just that… something happened.”

“We knew each other.” Klaus said quietly, nervously fiddling with the edge of his shirt. “We knew each other. Our parents knew each other.”

“We don’t know that.”

“They dropped us off in the same Evil Lab Daycare, Duncan, they knew each other!”

“Can you do that again? The memory thing?” Isadora asked. “Maybe we can find out more-”

“No!” Duncan and Klaus both yelled.

“My telepathy’s off, I don’t…” Duncan began.

“I can’t do that again.” Klaus said at the same time, curling up. “I… that felt so awful, Isadora! It felt so bad! Just… seeing all that, remembering something that happened to me so young, but it was like- like it was happening again, I… please don’t do that again.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t… I don’t know why you all saw it, too. Maybe my powers just… maybe I can make people relive memories and didn’t know it.” Duncan said. “I don’t…”

“I think it was both of us.” Isadora said suddenly.

“What?”

“All of us. Duncan, we were both reaching out, you were digging for memories and I was using my emotional powers, and we were both touching Klaus, it must’ve… sent us all into a- a shared memory.”

“I didn’t remember that, though!” Klaus said. “I was two!”

“Li!” Sunny huffed. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I guess I- I dug up a forgotten memory, then.” Duncan said. “But, holy hell, I’m not doing that again, that was…”

“Weird as fuck!” Klaus yelled.

“Klaus,” Isadora said, surprising them by yawning slightly, “Calm down. If you get too freaked out, you might make things float again.”

“Are you okay?” Duncan asked, turning to her.

“Really tired.” Isadora admitted.
“You’ve been using your powers too much.” Duncan said carefully. “Quigley said that happens, and if you go overboard you could knock yourself out.”

“Nice to know.” Isadora said. “I… did I really do something to us? What could I have possibly done?”

“I don’t know.” Duncan said, curling up slightly. “I don’t… maybe you just calmed us down.”

“I didn’t have empathy powers until recently.” Isadora said. “And if I did, they were so weak I didn’t notice.”

“We can’t have had these powers long, I think I’d have noticed if the telepathy happened before now.” Duncan said.

“And I’ve never…” Klaus paused. “I mean, unless…” he started crying harder, then. “Unless that was me, doing all that stuff, and- and not Violet, what if they took her because of me, and… and…”

“Klaus…” Duncan said, reaching to touch his hand, but Klaus flinched away. Duncan looked a bit sad at that, but he continued, “Klaus, you probably just both have telekinesis. I don’t know about any of the… other incidents, but from what I saw of the- of the fire, that was definitely Violet, she screamed and the cars flew up.”

“But what if-”

“Let’s not think about ‘what if’s right now.” Duncan said. “Let’s figure out how to… how to use this. We were all in the Lab, and they probably arranged for us to get sent here. Maybe… was there something in the memory we could use? The other girl, maybe she- fuck, that was Fiona Widdershins, wasn’t it?”

“The girl who disappeared?” Isadora asked. “Fuck, that-”

“I… I’m sorry.” Klaus was still crying, even as Sunny crawled over and gave him a hug. “I’m sorry, I can’t… I can’t do this. I… I don’t know, I just… I think that… I don’t…”

“Klaus…” Duncan instantly softened, moving over and kneeling in front of him. “It’s okay. I won’t do it again, I’ll- I’ll try not to, I promise.”

“I can’t… I’m sorry, I-”

“Klaus, hey.” Duncan said. “Can you hold your breath for four seconds?”

“What?”

“Just hold your breath, okay?” Duncan waited until Klaus followed his instruction, and then he counted, “One, two, three, four. Now breathe out- one, two, three, four. In- one, two, three four. Now out. One, two, three, four…”

Isadora slowly moved over closer to them as Duncan kept counting, and Klaus slowly controlled his breathing, his shaking starting to slow and his crying ceasing slightly.

“I’ll try not to do that again.” Duncan said. “I didn’t realize how reliving a memory- a forgotten memory- could freak someone out. Keep breathing- one, two, three, four. We’ll make sure that doesn’t happen again. And I won’t let the Lab hurt you, okay? One, two, three, four. We’ll get Violet and Quigley out and then they’ll never hurt us again.”
“How do you know?” Klaus asked quietly, his voice shaky.

“How’re we gonna protect each other.” Duncan said. “We’re in this together, and I think… I think we’ve always been.”

He turned to Isadora, and they shared a look. “We’ve been together since we were toddlers.” Isadora nodded. “We just didn’t know it. But we’re back now, we’re all gonna be here for each other.”

“Everything’s gonna be okay.” Duncan said. “Eventually. We’ll figure it out, okay?”

Klaus nodded slowly, before moving his arm so he could hug Sunny. His baby sister smiled slightly, leaning onto him. “Y-yeah.” he said quietly. “We’ll get Violet back, and Quigley, and we’ll all… then everything will be okay.”

“Yeah.” Duncan nodded. “Are you feeling better?”

“No, but… I’m not crying anymore, so I guess that’s a plus.”

“Good.” Duncan said. “Alright. Do you want to—”

The door opened, then, and they all jumped and turned towards it, hoping they didn’t look too guilty.

Carmelita looked in, and they waited a few seconds for her to say some snarky comment or hurl an insult at them. Oddly, though, she just stared at the ground around their feet, not even meeting their eyes.

They were silent for what felt like forever, all feeling uneasy and waiting for something to happen. Finally, Carmelita said, very quietly, “Hey, listen. Um… my friends, they, uh, aren’t gonna say anything about your dumbass freakout.”

Duncan, Isadora and Klaus all stared at each other, while Sunny just watched Carmelita in confusion. “What?” Klaus finally said.

“Yeah, I told them it was a minor earthquake.” Carmelita started playing with her hair, which she’d moved from a high ponytail to a side at some point.

“And they believed you?” Isadora raised an eyebrow.

“Well,” Carmelita rolled her eyes, “They’re not nerds like you, so it’s not like they know where earthquakes come from.”

“Oh, they probably should.” Duncan said.

“Doesn’t matter.”

“I…” Klaus began. “Wh-why would you… do that?”

“Because,” Carmelita said slowly, “If they tell people, we get the cops called on us, or some ET bullshit goes down.”

“I am very surprised you saw that movie.” Isadora noted.

“-and if that happens,” Carmelita said, “Then CPS comes in to investigate our case, and I…” she started tugging on her ponytail again, looking very unlike herself, “I’d rather not get dragged away
from this place, thanks. No matter how much of a fucking freak my roommate is.”

Klaus whimpered slightly, and Sunny crawled in front of him, growling a bit.

“He’s not a freak!” Duncan said.

“Mutant, weirdo, inhuman monstrosity, whatever.” Carmelita said. “The point is, you shut up about whatever the hell you did, don’t do it in front of people, and you don’t get in trouble either. I’m sure you wouldn’t like to get split up.” They would’ve expected her to say that last sentence cruelly, threateningly. But she used it as almost an afterthought.

“Carmelita…” Klaus said carefully, reaching to put his hand over Sunny’s, “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, freakazoid.” Carmelita said, her bitterness coming back. “I didn’t do it for you.”

She spun around and stormed off, then, leaving the door swinging open.

As soon as she was gone, Isadora said, “You were right, Duncan.”

“What?”

“She’s scared of us.”

They turned towards Isadora, noticing that her nose was bleeding again. She let out a loud yawn, and Duncan said, “Isadora, you’re gonna pass out.”

“No ‘m not.” she muttered, yawning again.

“Aw, Isa, you’re overusing your powers. You’re gonna…”

“I’m not tired.” Isadora insisted, even as her eyes were getting heavy.


“Nu-uh,” Isadora shook her head. “We gotta plan. We’re-”

She leaned over on Duncan’s shoulder, and promptly fell asleep.

Duncan smiled a little, before turning to Klaus. “Uh, the extra blankets and pillows are in the closet around the corner. I can sleep on the floor, you and Sunny can take the bed-”

“No, no, it’s your room-”

“I don’t wanna-”

“Look, just grab a handful, we’ll all sleep on the floor. But we can get some planning done while Isa’s sleeping, we’ll get some stuff mapped out, get some more done with her in the morning, right?”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded. “Sun, are you…?”

Sunny yawned.

“Kay, we’ll catch you up in the morning, too.”

“Nu-uh.” Sunny said. “I want to help, I’m just a bit tired.”
“We’ll work it out.” Duncan said. “We’re gonna get our siblings back, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded. “Yeah. Then I guess we’ll… figure out what happened when we were kids.”

Duncan’s face fell slightly as he nodded. “I’m… Our parents didn’t want us there, that’s why they hid us. They didn’t want us there, no matter… if we were there before. They hid us from these people.”

“I guess.” Klaus sighed. “I just… hope that everything turns out okay.”

“Why wouldn’t it?” Duncan said. “All we have to do is break into a top-secret lab that wants to kidnap us, rescue your sister, drag my brother out of an alternate dimension, figure out how to kill a monster, and convince the police none of us are nuts. Simple.”

“Simple.” Klaus nodded, smiling slightly. “What could go wrong?”
Violet sat up in bed with the music box, turning it on and off without even moving her hands, just letting her mind wind it up and open and close the lid, over and over and over. She hated *Row Your Boat*. She always had. But she kept listening to the music box melody on repeat. Over, and over, and over, and over, and over…

She should probably get some sleep. She’d have a long day of testing tomorrow. But she hated going to sleep here, she was always terrified of what could be happening while she was out. She didn’t want to know what they’d do to her if she slept too long, or went unconscious, or passed out from her abilities being used too much. It would leave her completely defenseless and… she knew there were certain bad things that might happen to her if she couldn’t fight back. She didn’t need her ESP-Klaus to tell her that, to tell her that the way… certain people looked at her wasn’t good in the slightest.

Ugh, she should put the music box away anyway. If they thought she liked it too much, they might take it away.

But it was her friend’s. One of the other numbers, she thought. All of them had been numbers, in the Rainbow Room. Not that they knew that then.

Violet sighed. She needed someone to talk to, but she didn’t know if Klaus would work, the ESP-Klaus was starting to scare her. And she definitely couldn’t talk to Mother again. But… she still wanted to know things.

“They’re probably all dead.” she said.

She looked up, seeing her Father sitting at the edge of her bed, playing with a Rubik’s Cube. He liked to do that sometimes, when he didn’t have anything else to do with his hands.

“You don’t know that. If Quigley survived, the others might’ve as well.” he said.

“The Lab seems to run through kids pretty fast.” Violet said, watching the box wind itself back up again. “You know, maybe if they didn’t torture us, they wouldn’t have this problem.”

“They found out the powers come from fear,” Bertrand’s image said, barely glancing up from the cube, his concentration fixed, “And ran with that. It’s hard to treat people humanely when the best way to get what you want out of them is forcing them into terrifying situations.”

“There must be another way.” Violet said, moving to sit on the edge of the bed, swinging her feet. “My ESP seems to be more triggered by frustration than fear.”

“I doubt it’s as simple as that, Vi.” Bertrand said, glancing at her. “What frustrated you?”

“How awfully they treat me. How much I want to get out. And how much I want to find Klaus and Sunny and hide them from this.”
“You know,” Bertrand said, “That’s all we wanted, too. To hide you from this.”

Violet sighed. She knew her imagination would do this to her. “Shouldn’t I be mad at you, too?”

“You should. You were pretty mad at your Mother. Or, well, her memory.”

“This is her fault.”

“It’s not, and you know that. It’s the fault of the people here.”

“She should’ve told us more. You should’ve told us more- I don’t care if you weren’t marked, you had to know what happened here. You were dropping us off for daycare.”

“Technically, I was the one watching you, back then, unless there was an emergency. Do you remember that?”

“Barely.” Violet shut her eyes. “I really only see the one memory my extrasensory perception woke up. But… I’m getting flashes. You would watch us. You didn’t like how they yelled at us when the alarms went off and we all got scared. You taught Quigley how to play with the puzzle blocks.”

“You got anything else?”

Violet paused, concentrating. It was so frustrating, knowing that something should be there but wasn’t. “You read to Quigley’s siblings- two of them were his siblings, right?”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes. You read books to all of us, but them and Klaus liked them best. I fought with Fiona over the building blocks.”

“You fought with who?”

“Fiona.” Violet froze. “Was that her name? Fiona?”

Bertrand shrugged. “I can’t tell you anything you don’t know, honey.”

“Right, you’re a regular delusion, not the kind that tells me creepy shit.” Violet sighed.

“But what about anything else from the Rainbow Room?”

“I don’t want to think about it. I have a feeling I don’t want to remember.”

“You’d remember more than any of the other kids there, except maybe Fiona. You were four, they were much younger.”

She really didn’t want to her next question out loud, in case they were still listening to her. In case she accidentally gave her sister away.

Does Sunny really have abilities, too?

“Unless your ESP would lie to you, which I’m not sure why it would,” Bertrand said, “Yes.”

“Oh, God.” Violet curled up slightly, turning to the music box to wind it again. “Oh, God.” She took a deep breath. “I should be so mad at you. You lied, too. Why am I more mad at Mother?”

“Do you want me to tell you something you’d like to hear,” asked Bertrand, putting down the
Rubik’s Cube and turning to her, “Or do you want me to tell you what you’re actually feeling?”

Violet sighed. “Just drop the truth bomb, Father. I don’t have the energy to throw things right now, so I’ll just have to listen, yeah?”

“You’ve only seen vague flashes of me in the Lab, and only late in the timeline.” he said. “For all you know, I could’ve been ignorant until the end. You know that your Mother was here for a long time, she was an experiment, too. She knew everything. Everything they’d put you through, everything you’d suffer, and told you none of it.”

“I changed my mind, this sucks.” Violet pushed a strand of hair behind her ear.

“You wanted the truth.”

“Yeah, and whenever I get it everything just gets worse.” Violet said. “I… I wish I would just wake up at home, and this was all a horrible nightmare. I wish I could tell you and Mother that… I’m sorry I messed up.”

“It wasn’t your fault, honey.”

Violet blinked back tears. “I’m sorry we never got to have movie night, Father. And that I yelled at you and Mother. And that I yelled at Mother’s memory yesterday. I… I don’t hate her. I don’t hate either of you, I can’t. I’m… I’m so sorry.”

Bertrand stared at her a moment, and then said, “Do you want another reason you’re so upset with us?”

“I already feel like shit, so why not?”

“Because feeling anger is better than feeling grief.”

Violet stared at the image of her Father, and then shut her eyes, saying, “Can I talk to Sunny now?”

When Violet opened her eyes, Bertrand was gone, and Sunny sat on the edge of the bed, staring up at her.

“I’m sorry.” Violet said, her voice breaking. “I’ll protect you. I promise.”

Sunny just smiled at her. I know you will. That’s what big sisters do.

Violet slowly glanced down at the music box, and used her powers to open the lid.

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream…

“I always hated the part about life being a dream.” Fiona muttered to herself, staring down the aisle.

She’d ducked into a large store, and some kids were at the other end of the aisle, singing that old nursery rhyme while their Mother groaned, asking them to please quiet down. They didn’t listen, instead giggling and pushing each other and singing off-key and looking for something interesting to play with. Since they were in a food aisle, they weren’t finding much of interest.

Fiona finally ripped her eyes away from the small family, focusing on the food she had to grab. She didn’t know how much she’d need, considering she didn’t know how tomorrow would go- or even
if she’d get into Hawkins by tomorrow, anything could happen in the next twenty-four hours. But she really didn’t want to look at those children right now, feel that pang in her chest as she remembered that they were allowed to be kids, to be wild and loud and have fun, that they wouldn’t be strapped to chairs or drugged and force-fed poison to see if they were really immune, or forced to…

*Don’t think about it, Fiona. It’s not your fault, it’s theirs.*

Fiona moved out of the aisle, trying to get far enough away where she couldn’t hear the kids singing. She had enough food in the basket anyway, she thought. Worst case scenario, she could steal more food later. What else would she need? She didn’t need weapons, she was basically a walking deathtrap anyway. She had water bottles in the basket, too, so she was fine there. The kids in the photo looked a bit younger than her… what did kids like? Should she grab toys or something? No, that probably wasn’t necessary. They were going on the run, not on vacation.

She tried to remember the kids from the brief newspaper description, from the small photo of the two Quagmires that had been next to the article, with Squalor and the Spats girl; she remembered that better than she remembered them as kids from before the Lab had gotten to her. She barely remembered the Rainbow Room, barely remembered the last names- which she’d decided were more important to remember than first, there were less to memorize. The girl Baudelaire used to fight with her over toys, she wanted to take them apart while Fiona had just wanted to play. The boy Baudelaire was too young to do more than chew on the toys, cry, and fall asleep while they weren’t looking. She remembered the Quagmires much less, they were identical and mostly played amongst themselves, so she never paid much attention to them. She remembered their last names because her Mother would tell her on the drive home. “I work with the Baudelaires and Quagmires. What do you think of their kids?”

Fiona thought she used to respond, “They’re stupid.”

She remembered her Mother laughing at that, before saying, “Well, their parents are very nice.”

She remembered, vaguely, one drive home, when her Mother had seemed very upset, a little nervous. Finally, she’d pulled over to the side of the road so that she could turn around and look her five-year-old in the eyes, trying to make it clear that this was very serious.

“If anything happens to me or your Stepfather,” she’d said, “And your Brother can’t help you, you find the Baudelaires or Quagmires, okay?”

“Why?” Fiona had asked, feeling a little scared.

“They’ll help you, okay? The Baudelaires or Quagmires. They won’t hurt you.”

Fiona had nodded then, and her Mother turned around and started driving again.

She couldn’t remember exactly when that was, relative to the car crash, but she thought it was pretty close. Because she remembered when her Mother pulled to the side of the road, and she’d thought it was for another talk. Then the car had skidded, refusing to stop, and rammed into a tree. She’d been shaken, but okay. So was her Mother. She remembered that full well, because it was the first lie she’d been told at the Lab. That the crash had killed her Mother.

She recalled that Mother kept looking out the window, and she’d seemed panicked. She was muttering to herself, making Fiona wonder if she’d hit her head wrong when they crashed and it was making her talk funny, like the cartoon characters on TV.
Then Mother had seen something that scared her, and she told Fiona to get out of the car and run and never look back. Fiona had started crying, and she couldn’t get her seatbelt off, so Mother had grabbed a freaking knife out of her pocket and leaned back, cutting it off. Fiona kept crying, and Mother kept saying to run, don’t look back, and find help. Fiona couldn’t get the door open for almost a minute, and when she did, she ran, but they’d caught her and knocked her out and she’d woken up in the Lab, the Lab where she’d stay for seven years. Seven years before she saw the forest again, before she saw the city, or another kid, or a person who wasn’t a doctor or guard or scientist… or her…

“I’m sorry.” she whispered, quietly, and then she wondered how long she’d been lost in thought, standing in the middle of the frozen food aisle. She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, taking a deep breath and looking around, trying to make sure nobody was watching her. It didn’t seem like anybody was, so she just kept walking.

She wondered for perhaps the millionth time, as she checked out her supplies and passed stolen money across the counter, if she was doing the right thing. Throwing herself headfirst into that hellhole on the off-chance those kids were getting targeted. Hell, for all she knew, the government had shut down the laboratories after she escaped. She thought there was only one other experiment after her that they weren’t getting anywhere with, which was why she’d never met them, they kept them in another lab, though she didn’t know, she might’ve misinterpreted that. Maybe all the Labs got closed down. Maybe this was just a wild coincidence.

**But those kids.**

The first few weeks Fiona had been in the Lab, she’d hoped that the other Rainbow Room kids would show up. She thought she remembered, on the first day, one of the nurses telling her that her friends were going to meet them there, but she must have imagined that, because they never showed up. She’d hoped that they’d come, that she’d have breaks from the tests to go play with them, that there would be another Rainbow Room for her.

But she stayed alone, and when she showed her abilities, they put her back in Hawkins. She saw the Rainbow Room on occasion, while being shepherded down the halls, but she never went in again. It might’ve been nice, she thought, to not be alone, to not be the only experiment.

**But you’re finding them now, Fiona. You’re going to save them, and then you won’t be alone.**

That might be nice.
Its an "Everything Goes to Shit" Chapter, Long Overdue

Chapter Notes

Quick heads up: I'm not sure if I'll be able to update tomorrow, seeing as it'll be Christmas and I'll be with my grandparents. I'll try, though! (Although next chapter is probably THE most angsty of this fic and it might not fit in the Christmas mood anyway lol)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

It's an “Everything Goes to Shit” Chapter, Long Overdue

Klaus woke up first, jolting awake from yet another nightmare. It took him a few seconds to breathe, to calm himself down, to remember he was in the Quagmires’ room, and- wait, where was…?

He glanced down, and saw that Sunny had curled up against him, dead asleep. He smiled slightly; she must’ve moved from her own pillow on the floor sometime after he’d gone to sleep. He remembered vaguely that Duncan had straight-up passed out on his notes, trying to work out a more accurate timeline. Klaus had to move him over to his own pile of blankets, and decided he’d better get some sleep, too; it had been about 3AM, and Isadora and Sunny had been asleep for a while.

Klaus found his glasses on the floor, cleaning them with his shirt before putting them back on. He glanced towards the small pile of notebooks and papers that he’d shoved into the corner of the room, wondering if he should wake Duncan and Isadora, so they could talk more before school. Shit, they had to deal with school today, he was not in the mood to have to listen to lectures, not when his mind was back at their research and plans. Maybe they could skip, maybe word wouldn’t get back to Esme if they did, or they could come up with some excuse.

Suddenly the door flew open, and Klaus jumped as Carmelita ran in. Her hair wasn’t brushed yet, and it looked like she’d thrown on the first clothes she could find- though, then again, Klaus didn’t know shit about fashion; maybe a rainbow crop top, bright pink pants, and faded jean jacket was the new style. Maybe having eight slap bracelets on each arm was the cool thing to do. It wasn’t as if he could tell.

“Wake up, cakesniffers!” Carmelita yelled, running to Isadora and yanking the pillow out from under her head. Isadora hit the floor and sat up with a startled yell as Carmelita ran to Duncan and kicked him until he let out a yawn.

“What the hell?” Isadora asked, glaring.

“Esme’s back and she wants to ‘talk to us.’” Carmelita said sharply, running and jumping onto the bed and pulling up a leg warmer. “Pretend I had a sleepover with you, or she’ll ask why you were excluding me.”
Sunny sat up, huffing and upset at the noise having woken her up. “Ga,” she muttered, which meant, “I am not in the mood for this.”

Duncan spent the next minute hurriedly shoving their notes into the closet while Isadora tried to get a brush through her hair. Klaus sat Sunny on his lap, looking up at Esme as she came in, dressed in some kind of business suit.

“Hello, children, I’ve returned!” Esme said. “What are you all doing in here?”

“We were having a sleepover.” Klaus said quietly. “Was that okay?”

“Why, of course! Why on Earth wouldn’t it be?” she said brightly, before sitting on a chair by the door. “Now, I know you must be very upset you’ve been cooped up for so long, but you’re all alive, so none of us are going to get in trouble, yeah?”

Carmelita nodded quickly, so they followed her example.

“Good! Now, I happen to be on break all day,” Esme said, “And, Klaus, I realized I never got you and your sister a welcome-to-the-family present!”

“We don’t need anything.” Klaus said quickly, not wanting to be a bother.

“Oh, nonsense. We’ll take Sunny out shopping at lunch, find something fun she can play with. As for you, Klaus, we’re going somewhere nice this morning.”

“We have school.” Isadora said quickly.

“Klaus can miss a day, I’m sure he’ll be fine.” Esme waved her hand. “He can just borrow Carmelita’s notes.”

“He can just borrow Duncan’s notes.” Carmelita said.

“Right, like I said.” Esme shrugged. “Anyway, Klaus, I was going to take you to the optometrist.”

She said this as if she was announcing a trip to Disneyland. Klaus stared at her for a moment, before saying, “Cool?”

“Yes, very ‘cool.’ We’re going to get you some new glasses. Those old boring ones you have are out, we’ll find you some that are in.”

“Very In.” Carmelita nodded.

Klaus bit his lip, not quite sure how to say that he liked his old glasses and that he didn’t quite like the idea of changing them. “Sounds like fun.”

“Quagmires, we’ll spend some time with you eventually.” Esme said. “Next time I’m on break, we’ll go to the park or something, yeah?”

“Um,” Duncan said, “We were kinda-”

“Excellent. Klaus, put on something more fashionable than your boring uniform and we’ll head right out. Sunny can stay in your room until we get back, I’m sure the optometrist’s office will bore her a little.”

Sunny whimpered slightly, and Klaus said, “She likes to stay with me.”
“She’ll be fine, she’s been alone before.”

Klaus took a breath, glancing at Duncan and Isadora. “I guess I’ll… see you after school?”

“Yeah.” Duncan said quietly.

“Sure.” Isadora shrugged.

“Consider yourself lucky, kid.” Carmelita said, playing with her hair. “You get to skip school today.”

“Well, go on!” Esme said. “We haven’t got all morning, you’ve got an appointment in two hours and I’d rather not be late.”

Klaus hesitantly stood up, lifting Sunny with him as he did. He glanced towards the Quagmires, gave them a small smile, and then left.

Esme turned to the rest of the kids. “As for you lot, after school we’ll all go out to dinner, have a long discussion about what’s In.”

“We’re going to Cafe Salmonella.” Carmelita said, starting to braid her hair.

“Of course, darling.”

Carmelita and Esme left then, and Duncan turned to Isadora, still yawning a little. “Did Esme actually just decide to parent?”

“I dunno.” Isadora said quietly. “Are you sure this is… all okay?”

Duncan thought for a second, then nodded. “It’s just Esme. What could she possibly do?”

“Why do you keep pulling your sleeve down?”

Klaus flinched, glancing up at his foster parent. They’d been driving in silence for a while, and he’d been hoping that she wouldn’t notice, and they’d just be quiet forever.

“It’s, uh, a bit cold.” Klaus said. “It was… warmer where I grew up.”

“Ah, yes.” Esme nodded, and thankfully she didn’t look like she was paying much attention. “Well, we’re almost there. We’ll find you some glasses that are actually In, yeah?”

“So long as I can actually use them to see.” Klaus said.

“Well, of course, that’s why we’re going to the optometrist, not the shopping centers.” Esme said. “I can’t have you walking around blind, you could get hurt.”

Klaus paused. “Oh. Yeah, I guess.” He hadn’t assumed she’d give a shit about that.

Almost as if she read his mind, she said, “Now, Klaus, I know I’ve been quite busy and haven’t seen you a lot, but I hope you realize I do care about you. I’m your Guardian, after all.”

“Yes, of course.” Klaus tried to hide his surprise.

“Now, as your Guardian, is there anything you’d like to tell me?”
Klaus hesitated. It might be nice to tell someone what was happening, to get some adult on his side… but it was a bit long of a story for a drive to the optometrist’s, and from the map he’d looked over as they got in the car, he thought they were getting close. So he pulled his sleeve down again and said, “Just… it’s a bit hard getting used to things being done differently.”

“Well, I’m sure things will get better with time.” Esme turned a bend, and then said, “Oh! We’re almost there!”

Isadora opened her locker, shoving her books back in and struggling not to scream. Something felt wrong. She felt like her stomach was sinking, like there were rocks inside of her, and she’d felt that way all day, starting sometime before the strangely quiet walk to school to first period, feeling even longer without Klaus there to make faces with her.

*He’ll be fine. He’s just with Esme.*

She was probably just nervous because of the memory they’d awakened last night. It had been… jarring, and she wasn’t sure she liked how she felt when she passed out, either. So much was happening, and she was starting to feel distant from everything else. Of all the kids around her, she doubted any of them had such a big secret as they all did. A secret that meant she was in danger right now, they were all in danger, and her brother might be dying. Quigley might be dying; he’d sounded awful from behind the wall. Just seeing him so scared, hearing him cry, knowing she couldn’t get to him… it was almost too much.

“Isa?”

For a split second, Isadora thought that might be Quigley talking. Her mind had jumped to him, since she was just thinking about his situation, but she realized a second later that it was Duncan. She turned, brushing a strand of hair out of her face, and said, “Yeah?”

Duncan looked a bit worried. “Hey, you know how… how I said nothing was wrong?”

Isadora felt her stomach plummet. “Yeah?”

Duncan took a breath. “I… I’m worried. I don’t like him not being here. Maybe we should call.”

“We don’t know the optometrist’s number, and it’s not like she’d just give us information on a patient.” Isadora said.

“Maybe call the house?”

“They won’t be back yet. We just finished first period, and considering the appointment time Esme said they had, they probably only just got to the office.”

“I just… so much stuff happened yesterday, and we’re… connected, somehow.” Duncan said quietly, glancing quickly to make sure nobody was listening. “Isadora, we can’t lose him, too. We already lost Quigley, and the other kids—”

“We didn’t lose Quigley,” Isadora said. “He ran, he’s fine.”

“We don’t know that! He never came back, or at least never said anything to us.” Duncan said, shaking slightly. “What if… what if he never comes back? He was hurt, and the Monster’s hunting him, and…”
“Hey, hey.” Isadora reached out, grabbing his hand. “Do you want me to calm you down?”

“Hell no, I think you’re getting addicted to that.”

“I’m not! I just want to help.”

“I’m fine, thanks.” Duncan insisted. “I just… I’m scared.”

“I know. I’m scared, too.” Isadora said. “But we’ve gotta be… we’ve gotta…”

She trailed off, staring over Duncan’s shoulder. “What?”

“Don’t turn around.” Isadora said. “But doesn’t Carmelita have Science this period?”

“You’re the one who memorized her schedule so we could avoid her.”

“Science is on the other side of the building.” Isadora said.

“Yeah?”

“So why is she here?”

Duncan turned around, looking around the hall. He spotted her quickly, leaning against a locker and looking as if she was staring up at the ceiling.

“Maybe she’s meeting a friend?” Duncan suggested.

“Class is in five minutes, she’d be late.”

“Like she’d care. The teachers love her.”

“Duncan…” Isadora took a deep breath. “I have a really bad feeling. Like… like I’m gonna throw up.”

“Are you sick?”

“No, I… I think something’s wrong, I think…” Isadora closed her locker, leaning against it, starting to feel dizzy. “Duncan, something’s wrong.”

“What, what are you-”

Isadora looked up, and spotted Carmelita, staring at them. They met eyes for a moment, and then Carmelita turned and ran.

Isadora froze for an instant, and then rushed after her. Duncan followed quickly, and soon they were pushing past students, running as fast as they could. Isadora caught up first, reaching out and grabbing Carmelita’s arm.

“Hey! What the-” Carmelita began.

Isadora ran to the nearest door, dragging the girl along with her. She peered through the door’s window, then leaned on it enough to open it, pushing Carmelita into the empty classroom. Duncan ran in, and she shut the door before whipping around.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Carmelita asked, crossing her arms and glaring.

“Alright, you little shit,” Isadora said, her voice dark. “What the hell is going on?”
Klaus bounced his leg, glancing around the white room. Except for the receptionist, it was just him and Esme, and it was cold and quiet. He supposed that was to be expected, everyone was probably either at work or school and wouldn’t have an appointment in the middle of the morning, but it was still pretty surreal.

“You doing alright?” Esme asked, glancing up from the magazine she was reading.

“Y-yeah.” Klaus said nervously. It was too quiet in here. “I just… don’t think I like doctors’ appointments much. Hospitals.”

“Well, it’s not a hospital, technically, it’s-”

“I know, it’s just…” Klaus paused. “My parents were scared of hospitals, and I guess that passed on to me. I haven’t been in one since I was… young.”

“Well, a fear of hospitals is quite rational.” Esme said. “That means ‘without reason.’”

Klaus stared at her in confusion. “I think you mean ‘irrational.’”

“Yes, that’s what I said. Doctors don’t want to hurt you. That’s the opposite of their job.”

“I guess.”

“See? You’ll be fine.”

The door opened, and a woman stepped out, smiling. “Hello, Esme!”

“Hello, Georgina!” Esme waved as she and Klaus stood up, the latter suddenly feeling incredibly anxious.

“And hello.” the woman turned to him. “You must be Klaus.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Klaus said.

“Well, I’m Dr Orwell. You need new glasses?”

“Uh-” Klaus began.

“Desperately.” Esme said.

“Well, then, come on back.” Dr Orwell said. “We’ll get your prescription and find you something.”

“I’m sure we have the paperwork somewhere.” Klaus said. “You don’t need-”

“Oh, no.” Dr Orwell said. “We have new equipment, which should help us find a more perfect prescription for you. Come along, Klaus.”

“What are you talking about?” Carmelita stepped back, reaching to play with her pigtail.

“You’re spying on us.” Isadora said, stepping closer.

“No, I’m not! Can’t I walk down a hallway?”
“You don’t have class on this side of the building.”

“I can take a smoke break.”

Isadora laughed slightly. “Yeah, you don’t smoke.”

“Maybe I do! You don’t know me-”

Isadora grabbed Carmelita’s arm, squeezing tight. She wondered, for a brief second, if maybe she could use her powers a bit. Make her more scared. More compliant. Make her be nice, work with them.

“Isa…” Duncan said behind her.

Isadora glanced at Carmelita, surprised to see a flash of fear.

_Ugh, fine, we won’t mess with her emotions. For now._

“What is going on?” Isadora said.

“Nothing! Piss off!” Carmelita said.

“Look,” Duncan said, moving a bit closer, “If it’s about Klaus, we can explain what happened with the-”

“Oh, I’m sure you can.” Carmelita rolled her eyes.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means whatever you want it to mean, cakesniffer! Fuck off!”

“Were you following us?” Isadora asked.

“Fuck off! I don’t have to…” Carmelita paused, and then turned to Isadora, narrowing her eyes. She spoke very slowly. “I don’t have to do anything.”

Isadora stared for a second, and then said, “Yeah, you do.”

“Damnit.”

“Answer me, you little shit!”

“No!”

“Answer me!”

“It’s not my fault, okay?”

Isadora and Duncan both froze for a moment, which would have been an optimal time for Carmelita to run, if she didn’t look so shocked that she’d let something slip.

“What’s not your fault?” Duncan asked, his voice suddenly growing cold.

“Look, I had to say something.” Carmelita said, and Isadora was surprised to see that she was starting to shake. “I-I had to. It’s you guys or me.”

“What are you talking about?” Isadora said.
Duncan realized first. To the surprise of both girls, Duncan raced forwards, grabbing Carmelita’s arm and ripping her out of Isadora’s grip. Carmelita let out a cry of pain as he pulled back on her arm, managing to get her in a decent hold.

“Duncan!” Isadora yelled. She had never seen him like this, in all thirteen years she’d known him.

“What the hell?” Carmelita shouted. “That hurts!”

“What the fuck did you do to Klaus?” Duncan shouted, sounding both panicked and angry. “Where is he?”

“He’s gone by now, and so’s the stupid baby!”

“What did you do?”

“I had to say something!” Isadora stared, shocked, as Carmelita started to cry. “I had to! It’s my fucking job! I was supposed to make sure you two didn’t leave school early and they’re gonna… when they find out I fucked that up…”

The triplets felt cold. “When who…?” Isadora asked.

“Where’s Klaus?”

“It’s his own fault. He’s the one who started throwing shit in the air!” Carmelita shouted. “All it took to set him off was that fucking bracelet going missing-”

“You took his bracelet?” Duncan was starting to look ready to murder her right there.

“I just had to- it’s him or me!” Carmelita was starting to sob. “If I don’t report what I see… I-I-I can’t go back!”

Isadora stared, paralyzed, for an instant. Then, she said, “Oh my God.”

Duncan turned towards her, and she could tell they were thinking the same thing. Isadora slowly approached, before yanking one of the girl’s arms forwards. She stared at the slap bracelets for a second, wondering how the hell she hadn’t guessed before, and then ripped some of them off, just enough to see it.

012.

“Happy now?” Carmelita asked through her tears.

Isadora and Duncan stared at each other, horrified. Then, slowly, Isadora asked one terrifying question.

“What are they doing to Klaus?”

Klaus sat in the chair, feeling more and more worried as Esme and Orwell chatted. The room was a bit darker than the optometrist’s offices he’d been in before, and he really didn’t like that they were just going to up and give him a new prescription. There was also a dark, sick feeling in his stomach that was getting worse the longer he spent in this building. He really hoped it was just anxiety, but he wasn’t sure.

“Well, Klaus, we’re going to start the tests.” Orwell said. “It’s all very new, so don’t freak out.”
"Wh-why would I-?" Klaus began.

Orwell came forwards and suddenly attached a cuff to his wrist, strapping it onto the chair’s arm. Before he could even react, she reached over and attached the other.

“Standard procedure.” she said simply.

“What?” Klaus pushed up on the restraints, suddenly feeling like his heart had stopped.

“Just in case.” Orwell said. She reached forwards, taking his glasses off. “You’ll get these back in a bit.”

“No, no-" Klaus couldn’t breathe; he felt like he was nearing an anxiety attack, or some kind of shutdown, and now he couldn’t even see. Everything looked just like blurs, and even then, the dim light made it hard to see anything concrete. “No, wait-”

“Klaus, darling.” he felt Esme run a hand through his hair. “Relax. Georgina knows what she’s doing.”

“No, please, stop, I want to go, I need to go.” Everything was too much, it was happening too fast, and he felt like he was going to throw up.

“Don’t panic, darling. Try something new.”

“Please, Esme, I can’t…”

She moved her hand to his face, turning it towards her as if he could still look her in the eye, as if he wasn’t functionally blind at the moment. “Don’t worry, dear. We’ll take care of you.”

“Please…”

He felt his sleeve pulled up, and yelped as he felt a sudden pain in his arm. It almost felt like a needle, but they wouldn’t do that for an eye appointment, would they?

That’s about when Klaus realized what exactly was happening.

“No.” he said quietly. “No, no, no…”

“Don’t worry, you’ll be alright.”

“No, no!” Klaus started screaming. He tried to get up, to move his arms, but the clamps held tight. He started kicking, shouting. “Let me go! Let me out!”

“We can’t do that, darling, you’ve been out for far too long.” Esme sighed, stepping back. “If it were up to me, Eight and Nine would be joining you, but ‘something-something people will notice if all your kids disappear at once.’ But they won’t worry about you, at least. You’ve got an imaginary uncle in the Mountains who’s going to serve as a great excuse.”

“Let go of me! No! Stop! Let me out, please!”

“Georgina, darling, want to give him more sedative?”

“It’ll work fast.” said the doctor nonchalantly. “Besides, the building’s basically empty. Nobody’ll hear him.”

“Please, please! Let me go!” Klaus felt like he was going to explode, like his heart was beating a
mile a minute, like the world was shaking and changing around him. “Please, you’re supposed to help me, why are you-?”

“Settle down!” Esme groaned. “You’re going to help us quite a bit. Your abilities are already much more impressive than we expected.”

“Let me go! No!” Klaus was struggling to keep shouting and pulling on the restraints, desperate to break free. He was starting to feel exhausted, and that was an awful sign. “No, please, let me…”

All of the sudden, he felt like he couldn’t speak, like his throat had closed up. He was still panicking, but his eyes were getting very heavy, and he was starting to feel very, very sick.

“Aw, darling,” Esme said, starting to stroke his hair again. “Don’t you want to say hello to your big sister?”

Klaus shut his eyes, trying to hold back tears, and within a minute, he’d passed out.
Merry Christmas! Sorry this is late, but I wasn't sure I'd even be able to update today lol.

Anyway, major warning for this chapter: You know how this fic is tagged for Graphic Depictions of Violence? Yeeeeeah the end of this chapter gets pretty intense, you should probably be warned beforehand...

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Everything continues to Go to Shit

Isadora pushed Carmelita into a chair, as Duncan locked the door, shoving a desk under the handle.

“Talk.” Isadora said darkly.

Carmelita sniffled a bit, looking like she was calming slightly. “About what?”

“What did you do?”

“Look, it’s my fucking job.” Carmelita said. “If I don’t tell Esme shit, I get sent back.”

“To the Lab?” Duncan asked, moving to stand next to his sister.

“No, to Disneyland.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “Of course the fucking Lab. I assume you learned all about it in your dumb research.”

“Yeah, we did.” Isadora said. “But we didn’t know you-”

“I came in after you.” Carmelita said sharply. “I know because they wouldn’t shut up about how much of a disappointment it was that all their other experiments got loose and how it was just me and Six, who was so much better and less likely to die.”

“You knew we were experiments.” Duncan repeated.

“Yeah. Didn’t know numbers, though, just that Klaus was Eleven because I looked when I took the stupid bracelet.” Carmelita wiped her eyes with her sleeve. “It’s his fault, he should lock his door.”

“If you’re an experiment,” Isadora said, “How did you get here?”

“I’m the Control Experiment, and it took two weeks and me knocking myself out three times to get that approved.” Carmelita said. “I stay in town so they can study how I interact with real people, and in return I say nothing or they take me back. Also, I spy on any other kids they bring in and report suspicious activity to Esme.”

“And try to keep us from finding out too much.” Duncan said.
“Yeah, and if they find out I’m talking to you, I’m fucked.” Carmelita snapped.

“We’re all fucked, Carmelita!” Duncan yelled.

“You’re definitely fucked,” Carmelita said, “I’ve got a chance to make it out, okay? If they study me out here, they can’t study me in there.” Her voice broke slightly, and she glanced down in a feeble attempt to keep them from seeing her tears. “I can’t go back there.”

“Where is Klaus?” Isadora asked again.

“Esme knows his abilities are working.” Carmelita said. “So she’s probably taking him to the Lab. The baby’ll go to another one until she either shows abilities or they get tired of waiting.”

“They’re taking Sunny?” Duncan looked horrified.

“Yeah, Esme’s not gonna wanna deal with a fucking baby, and they’re gonna wanna see if she got powers from her Mom or if they just come from the drugs. Or they’ll just drug her up now so they don’t have to worry about her being normal.”

“We’ve gotta stop them.” Isadora said, turning to Duncan. “Open the window, we’ll climb out and get Sunny out of the house.”

“Yeah, Esme’s not gonna wanna deal with a fucking baby, and they’re gonna wanna see if she got powers from her Mom or if they just come from the drugs. Or they’ll just drug her up now so they don’t have to worry about her being normal.”

“Where is Klaus?” Isadora asked again.

“Esme knows his abilities are working.” Carmelita said. “So she’s probably taking him to the Lab. The baby’ll go to another one until she either shows abilities or they get tired of waiting.”

“They’re taking Sunny?” Duncan looked horrified.

“You can’t just stop them, idiots!” Carmelita said, even as Duncan ran to push open a window. “They’ll just take you, too, and then me for not stopping you. Baby’s probably already gone, anyway.”

“We’re not just going to sit here and let them take our friends away!” Isadora yelled, before reaching out and grabbing Carmelita’s arm again, yanking her up. “Get a move on, shithead, you’re with us.”

“Like hell I am!”

“You said yourself,” Duncan said, turning around. “They’ll just capture you again once they find out what we know. Hell, they’ll probably just take you back to the Lab anyway to see what they can make you do. Come with us, and we’ll all run together.”

“That’s not gonna happen, you’ll get caught in ten seconds.” Carmelita said.

The triplets shared a look, knowing that they couldn’t just let her run off; she’d just call the Lab on them. Isadora hesitated, and then said, “How about a deal?”

“What kind of deal could you make?”

“You come with us, and if- if- we get caught, we’ll say we kidnapped you.”

“Still not gonna work. I’ll get blamed for you idiots going rogue.”

“We’re gonna go rogue whether you like it or not!” Isadora yelled. “We’re not letting them take Sunny, we’re not letting them take Klaus, and we’re not letting them keep our fucking brother!”

“We’re gonna go rogue whether you like it or not!” Isadora yelled. “We’re not letting them take Sunny, we’re not letting them take Klaus, and we’re not letting them keep our fucking brother!”

“Carmelita,” Duncan came closer, waiting until she looked at him to continue. “If you stay with them, you’re never gonna be free. They’ll just keep threatening you until they finally decide to take you back. Come with us, and I swear to God, we can get them shut down. They’ll never hurt us again.”

“You can’t shut them down.”
“Fucking watch us.” Isadora said.

“Here, we’ll have a plan.” Duncan said, thinking fast. “Isadora, I’ll get Carmelita out, you go get your bag. We’ll get all our evidence while we get back to the house, and get it to people who can help us.”

“No one can help you.” Carmelita said.

“Moxie Mallahan said she was going to try and get into the Lab.” Duncan said. “She gave me a list of people we could go to, one of them can get our stuff to her.”

“What about Klaus and-”

“We’ll get them! We’ll get everyone out!” Duncan turned to Carmelita. “And if you want us to promise to protect you, too, we will, so long as you don’t sabotage us. But we’re not helpless, we’re not useless, and we’re going to destroy this fucking Lab.”

Carmelita glanced between them, then looked Isadora dead in the eye. “I’ve been kidnapped. Not my fault.”

“Good.” Isadora said. “Now get out the stupid window. I’ll join you in a minute.”

“We’re going to try something very important, Seven.”

Violet barely glanced up from the ground, kicking the chair slightly. “Yeah?”

She’d been waiting about an hour for testing to start, and she’d almost started to wonder if they’d forgotten her. Or if she was going to be punished for sneaking the EF locket around her neck. It was near impossible to tell under her dress, and she wasn’t even sure why she’d put it on that morning, but she felt… better with it on. Even if they couldn’t see it.

“Yes.” said the doctor. “Your extrasensory perception is quite powerful for having only just awakened, but we’d like to see what happens when it’s combined with your ferrokinetic abilities.”

“Combined?” she asked.

“Yes. We would like to know what would happen if your kinetic abilities fused with an… understanding of the abnormal senses.”

“I don’t think I get it.” Violet said.

“Well, we’d like to try sensory deprivation first.” the doctor said. “And then if that works, we have an important task for you to complete.”

Violet continued to stare at the ground. “Okay.”

“Good girl. We’ll just need-”

Violet jumped as the door suddenly opened, then, and a guard rushed in. She glanced up, shrinking slightly, wondering if they’d found something in her room, she’d hidden the whale again, would they have dug through her drawers and found it…? Did they know she had the locket and they were here to confiscate it?

“We’re gonna need to put a hold on her for a moment.” the guard said, lifting her to her feet.
“What’s happening?” the doctor asked, looking a bit confused. That wasn’t good, that wasn’t good.

“First of all, the Gate’s acting up.” the guard said. “And any personnel who aren’t on that are going to need to deal with the other thing. We’re taking Seven back to her room until she’s needed.”

Violet tried not to stare, to look anywhere in the room but at the guard. She hoped to God he forgot she was there, that he’d say that the Other Thing was. She had a very, very bad feeling about what it could be, and she definitely needed to know, or else she might drive herself mad wondering.

The doctor nodded quietly, and the man led Violet into the hall, where the other guard was waiting. She let them take her arms, walking with them, wondering why they were going so fast. What could possibly be happening? It couldn’t be that bad, the alarms weren’t going off…

They turned another bend, and someone stopped the guards in the hall. “We’re going to need more hands on deck for the new experiment.” she said, barely even glancing at Violet.

New experiment? Oh no… No, no, they wouldn’t…

“He’s fighting already?”

“No, but he’s knocked off the sedatives twice. We’re going to need more guards in case he shakes it off; his powers are apparently destructive.”

No, no, no, they wouldn’t, I’m still a good experiment, they wouldn’t… No…

“Just take Seven back to her room and meet us for the initial blood tests, hopefully Eleven’s healthy enough we can start as soon as possible.”

Eleven.

No.

No.

No, no, no…

“No.” Violet gasped, just quiet enough that the adults didn’t notice at first.

“Seven’s room is just down the hall, we’ll be there once-”

“No,” Violet said, and they finally noticed her as she started shaking uncontrollably, starting to feel as if she might throw up. “No, no, no…”

“Oh, god, not again.” one the guards groaned.

They moved faster, still dragging her down the hall, but she barely noticed, because she suddenly felt dizzy, she felt sick.

“No!” she started screaming, kicking, trying to break away from them. “No! No! Let him go! Let him go! He’s done nothing, let him go!”

Klaus was here. Klaus was here and they were going to hurt him, they were going to kill him, she’d failed, he was here and she had to get him out, where was Sunny, what did they do with her? She had to get them all out of here …
“Let him go!”

She realized they’d reached her room a second before her door opened, and she felt that panic rising again, that panic that she couldn’t breathe and that everything was going too fast and bad things were about to happen.

*Klaus is HERE.*

“Let me go! Let us go!” she managed to scream, but they just dragged her into her room.

“Just sit down and stay put, we’ll come back for you soon enough.” a guard said, pushing her back. She stumbled, falling onto her bed and still struggling to breathe, and they turned to leave.

*Get him out of here. Get him out.*

Violet shut her eyes, letting her fear turn into pure rage.

*They’re going to torture him. They’re going to kill him.*

She looked up at the door, which had barely closed a half second ago.

*Get him OUT.*

Violet leapt off the bed, throwing out her arm.

The door swung open, knocking a surprised guard back. The other turned towards her, and, barely thinking, Violet cocked her head, breaking the doorknob off the door and sending it straight into the guard’s face. As he stumbled back, she ran to the guard on the floor, spotting his gun in his belt and ripping it out. The guard sat up, looking about ready to hit her, but Violet just swung the gun, knocking him on the side of the head with it.

The other guard reached into his own belt, grabbing for his weapon, but Violet just glared at it, thinking quickly, *heat up.* The man yelled as his hand came in contact with the suddenly overheated metal, and then Violet thought, *Keep heating up.*

In a moment, the gun burst, suddenly melting. Violet waited until it fell before tearing off down the hall, turning around only to wave her hand and direct the door off its hinges and into the guards again.

She turned down the halls, fumbling with the gun; she knew how to load and shoot one, but she wasn’t sure if the safety was off, or if it was loaded at all, or if she could even use it if necessary.

*If it means saving Klaus, you can.*

Violet thought she heard footsteps coming, so she pushed open a door and rushed in, hiding for a moment inside a broom closet, breathing hard and still messing with the gun. If worst came to worst, she could probably just swing it around with her powers, knock someone out that way.

*If worst comes to worst, you can shoot someone.*

Violet took a deep breath, closing her eyes and letting herself reach out for a moment. She felt the pings of metal all around, and, after a minute, she felt something else.

“I know the Call’s to the Gate.” she whispered, keeping her eyes shut tight. “But I need to find Klaus. The real Klaus. Help me find him.”
She opened her eyes, but she didn’t see an imaginary Klaus beside her.

Her Mother knelt down, looking her in the eyes. They stared at each other for a long moment, and then her Mother said, “I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry.” Violet said.

There was another moment, and then her Mother said, “You’re going to protect them?”

“Yes. I’ll do anything and everything.” Violet promised, tears at the edge of her eyes.

The image of Beatrice stared for a moment, reaching up as if to touch her face, before shrinking back. Violet wilted slightly, forcing herself to remember that this was just her imagination, or her ESP, or some shit, that her Mother wasn’t here.

“Follow me.” Beatrice said, and Violet nodded, opening the closet door and following the image into the hall.

It took her three more hallways before the guards found her.

The vision of her Mother stopped at the edge of the hall as Violet froze for an instant, before ducking down and throwing out her arms, throwing two doors off of their hinges and shooting them at the men running at her. She needed a better weapon than those, but did she want to waste her bullets before getting to Klaus? She didn’t even know how many she had.

She let herself take a second to search for metal, and then shut her eyes as she lifted several items from one of the rooms she’d just opened- she didn’t focus on what they were, but they were small enough that she expected them to be some kind of medical tools. She lifted them in front of her, and then tossed, before taking off at a run, still shutting her eyes and using her senses to avoid the metal she could run into, desperately trying not to pay attention to the guards around her, whether they were yelling in surprise or pain, whether they were still running after her or if they’d stopped or if she’d just hurt them enough that they’d never bother her again.

She opened her eyes at the end of the hall, and Beatrice just nodded at her before turning the bend. Violet gripped the gun until her knuckles went white, suddenly feeling incredibly cold, trying to breathe slowly as she rushed along with her vision.

After a few minutes, though, Beatrice slid to a stop at the end of the hall.

“What? What’s going on?” Violet asked, itching to keep running.

Beatrice paused, her face blank. Then, she said, “You’re in danger.”

“I’m in danger every second I’m here.” Violet protested. “That’s why we need to get Klaus out of here. Keep going.”

“There’s something…” Beatrice said, almost not paying attention. She paused, then announced, “Violet, you need to get to the Gate.”

“What? No! No, Klaus-”

“Quigley’s dying, Violet. He’s going to die, you need to-”

“What?” Violet began, only to cut herself off with a cry; she suddenly felt a pain in her stomach
that spread across her body, and in a second she was doubled over, barely holding onto the gun. And even after the pain numbed, she just felt cold.

“Something’s very wrong.” Beatrice said again, her voice still blank. “With all of you. Sunny’s waking up, and Klaus is knocked out, and Quigley is dying, and you’re…”

“Mother, please, we have to keep going.” Violet said desperately, slowly managing to get back to her feet. “They’ll be coming after me, and God knows what they could be doing to Klaus. We’ll get him out and then go to the Gate for Quigley, we just…”

“People are coming.” Beatrice interrupted.

Violet stared at her. “Which way do I run?”

“They’re… both sides, there are less to the right, Klaus is downstairs-”

“Then we’re going to get Klaus.” Violet said, shutting her eyes and taking a deep breath. No turning back now, Vi.

“No, no, wait-”

Violet simply turned down the hall, running, not looking back to see if her Mother would follow her.

It’s not Mother anyway. It’s just your stupid hallucination. Just get Klaus and then see what you can do about the Gate.

She turned a bend, and stopped dead in her tracks as several doctors turned to look at her.

She recognized Olaf immediately, and before she could even think, she held the gun up, staggering backwards.

Fuck, fuck, fuck…

“Seven, what are you-”

“Come any closer and I shoot your fucking head off!” Violet screamed.

The doctors froze, looking a bit more upset than concerned. Violet didn’t like that. She didn’t like the fact that they weren’t scared of her. They should be; they were keeping her away from Klaus.

Olaf stepped forwards, giving her a dark look, not even looking worried. “Seven. Put that down this instant.”

“I’m not fucking kidding!” Violet warned, stepping back slightly, hoping to God they didn’t notice her shaking.

“Seven, you’re clearly under some distress-”

“Of fucking course I am!”

“-but you need to put the weapon down or we’ll have to hurt you.”

“Come closer and I kill you.” Violet said again, eyes locked on the man.

“Don’t be a problem again, Seven. We may have an important job for you, and we don’t need you
messing it up with your rebellious behavior.”

“I’m not doing shit for you!” Violet yelled. “I’m not!”

“That’s not your choice to make.”

“You killed my fucking parents!” Violet was fighting back tears, still holding up the gun, getting more and more ready to use it.

“Seven-”

“I want my fucking brother!” Violet’s voice broke as she screamed. “You took my fucking brother and you can’t have him! I’m getting him back!”

“Seven,” Olaf said, very darkly, “I will give you one more chance to put the gun down, or we’ll have to punish your misbehavior.”

“I want my fucking brother!” Violet screamed, and she raised the gun higher, aiming it right at him. “And I’ll kill all of you if I have to!”

It probably should have scared her, the fact she meant every word of what she’d just said. But it didn’t, because these people were going to hurt Klaus, they were planning on taking her brother and drugging him and torturing him and stripping away his mind, bit by bit, and she couldn’t live through that. He wasn’t like her, he couldn’t adjust to chaos, he was too honest and sensitive and didn’t know when to back down, and this place would break him. This place would destroy him, and she wasn’t about to let it.

“There’s no need for violence, Seven.” He was too calm. She could show him. She could just shoot him now. She should.

“I will kill you.” she said, dropping her voice so it was as emotionless as possible. “Give me one more fucking reason and I will kill you.” He was silent, staring at her, probably wondering if she would actually do it. She stared back, and then said, as bravely as she could, “I’m getting my brother back.”

That’s when she felt a jolt of pain in her arm.

She gasped, staggering back, looking down to see what looked like some kind of needle shoved into her arm, but small, too small…

No…

Violet turned, seeing a guard on the other end of the hall, gun pointed at her, about to shoot again. It wasn’t a lethal gun, though, not like hers. It was loaded with darts, she thought, darts like the one in her arm.

No, no, no…

Before she could think, Violet turned the gun towards the guard and shot.

The second the gunshot rang out, her head went numb.

For an instant, she remembered the sound of the shot as she was running from the house, the fire behind her, soldiers ahead, the sound of more shots ringing out as her Mother crumpled in front of her.
She was almost trapped in that feeling, that feeling she had while staring at her Mother’s body, waiting for her to get up, refusing to believe something bad could happen. Feeling a hope that was already crushed. She was just experiencing a delayed reaction to the hurt she was about to feel. She was stuck in that emotion, that moment, expecting the pain but not yet feeling it.

She heard the doctors gasp or scream, she heard people moving towards her, and she only barely reacted in time. She lowered the gun, ducked down, and shut her eyes; she didn’t think she could handle seeing what was happening. She sensed the metal, the pings all around her, and ran to avoid it; ducking, leaping, spinning. She knew they were reaching for her, but she could fix that; just a tug on their belts with a tilt of her head, and they were pulled aside, away from her. She didn’t look back, barely opened her eyes to know where to turn in the hall. And once the doctors were behind her, she kept her eyes open and kept running.

You should have shot more. Killed more. Couldn’t have at least gotten Olaf?

That wasn’t necessary.

The less of them there are, the less can hurt you.

It doesn’t matter now. I’m finding Klaus. I don’t want to waste my bullets until I have him with me. Or they might hurt him, too.

Or maybe you’re just too weak to kill them all.

She managed to find the door to the stairwell, throwing the door open and almost leaping down the stairs. She could probably get Klaus through the Gate; whatever was on the other side had to be better than this, and the Lab couldn’t get to them there. They didn’t seem to like going near the Gate, so they’d leave her alone inside. Then she could find Quigley, they could escape somewhere else, and find help.

“IT won’t be that easy, darling.” Beatrice said, waiting on the landing to the next floor, looking up as her daughter ran down, still gripping the gun like a lifeline. “That tranquilizer’s gonna kick in sooner or later.”

“I just have to get Klaus and get out; so long as we’re gone from here I can pass out wherever the hell I want.” Violet said, briefly reaching up to yank the dart out of her arm, throwing it behind her.

“Darling, you shouldn’t be here.”

“I don’t care.” Violet yelled, reaching the landing. “I just shot someone. I think I killed him. And I don’t care. I’m getting Klaus back. Are you going to help me or not?”

Beatrice stared at her sadly. “Two lefts, a right, third door.”

Violet nodded, moving towards the door that would lead her into the hall.

“I never wanted this for you.” Beatrice said quietly.

Violet briefly glanced over her shoulder, looking at the illusion of her Mother. “I know.” she finally said. “But it’s what’s happening right now, so I can get Klaus out now and worry about what… about everything else later.”

Everything. Like what the fact she’d just shot someone meant for her.
She ran into the hall, as the alarms started to sound.

Two lefts and a right. And then when she turned, there were two guards waiting. They raised their guns, and Violet knocked the door of its hinges, letting it fly into them. She ran into the room before they could recover, gripping the gun, prepared to use it the second they got up.

But then she entered the room, and everything suddenly felt wrong.

Violet only barely managed to keep her hold on the gun, but her arms dropped to her sides in complete shock, and she felt like the world around her had just frozen, had just changed. Changed into something horrible.

“Klaus…”

Every aspect of what she saw was terrifying. He was lying on some kind of hospital bed, his arms strapped to the sides by those awful metal clamps—yes, she could open them, but how long had he been there? He was passed out completely, breathing too slowly, looking much too weak. His hair was a mess, some kind of tube was strapped to him, looking like it was drawing blood. His glasses were gone, and Violet couldn’t see them anywhere; he’d be blind without those. And he’d already been changed into a hospital gown exactly like hers.

“Klaus, no…” Violet stepped forwards, her eyes and mind completely fixated on her brother.

He was too still, too quiet. Klaus was always moving; even when he sat to read a book, or was trying to sleep, he’d always be bouncing his leg or rocking or biting his lip or humming or swaying. She didn’t think she’d ever seen him that still. If she couldn’t see his slow breathing, or distantly hear some kind of monitor beep in a rhythm, she might’ve thought they’d killed him.

She had to get him out of here, away from this awful place and these horrible people and… and…

Wait.

Horrible people.

Shouldn’t somebody be in this room with him?

Violet realized this a second too late, as she felt a rough hand grab her shoulder, yanking her back. While she was off-balance, another needle was shoved into her arm, and in her shock, the gun clattered to the ground.

She was off-balance for an instant, as she was shoved into the hall, and she felt a pang of pain as she was thrown against a wall. She started screaming sometime around then, kicking and screeching and bawling.

“No, no!” she screamed. “That’s my brother! That’s my brother! Let him go!”

People were yelling at her, screaming at her. It took her a minute to realize she was being hurt, that someone had punched her in the stomach, and that’s why it was so hard to breathe. The second she processed this, someone threw her to the ground, and she felt a sharp pain in her back again, and on her face from where she’d landed. She kept screaming, kept sobbing. She only stopped after someone electrocuted her again, because after that piercing shriek, after that feeling that her entire body was caving in, that she was going to shatter, her voice felt completely broken.
She breathed raggedly on the ground as doctors around her kept yelling at her, and she felt more pain in her sides, and alarms were blaring louder and louder. She felt sick, dizzy, weak. And Klaus was so close, so close, and she’d failed him. She’d failed him. He was going to die here with her. She’d lost.

“You’re not done yet, Vi.” she heard her Mother’s voice, sounding blankly behind her. She could see, out of the corner of her eye, the vision of Beatrice, but she couldn’t respond. “You’re not done yet, dear. You can still save them.”

I can’t.

“You’re not dead yet. You can save them.”

I CAN’T. She couldn’t even get up.

More doctors were coming in, and she spotted Olaf the second he turned the bend, talking into a handheld radio. He noticed her quickly, too, staring down at her with a very dark look.

If Violet wasn’t in such pain she could barely think- and if the tranquilizers weren’t starting to work, making her feel a bit more tired than should’ve been comforting- she might’ve been surprised by the image of her Mother suddenly growling, “Don’t fucking touch her.”

You knew him. You were family. She was starting to feel exhausted.

“Barely.” her Mother’s image slipped back into that emotionless territory again. “Barely.”

What does that… mean…?

Beatrice considered. “I think… Beatrice Baudelaire did something horrible.”

Violet instantly felt a flash of fear as she saw doctors walk past her, moving into Klaus’s room. No, no, don’t go in there, don’t touch him, don’t you dare…

She gasped as someone grabbed her hair, yanking it back, forcing her partially upright, holding her there, either not knowing or not caring how much that hurt. She struggled to breathe, to stay awake, as Olaf stopped in front of her.

“I don’t know what you were hoping to accomplish by this.” he said, sounding very pissed. “But I don’t think it’ll matter much longer.”

Violet stared at him, her body getting cold. “Don’t…” she tried to say, but her throat hurt, and her chest hurt, and her eyes were getting heavy. “Don’t…”

“You’re much more trouble than you’re worth. If you fail this next test, you may lose the protection of your experimental status. You’re only valuable to this Department so long as you behave. Otherwise, your life is in my hands.”

Violet wanted desperately to throw up, or to cry or scream, but she could barely even keep her eyes open.

She only said one thing more, before the tranquilizers and pain finally knocked her out. She didn’t know why she said it, or how she managed to find the strength to, but it came out before she could even think.

“Mother says she’s sorry.”
The absolutely furious look on his face was the last thing Violet saw before the world went black.
Sunny was rocking back-and-forth, watching the lamp.

She really hoped Quigley would come back, because she’d like to actually talk to him this time. And wouldn’t his siblings be happy if she could show them that their brother was back? She’d like to see everyone happy, at least for a little while; the last few days had been very stressful, and, honestly, she hadn’t understood half of it. She was just glad things were finally coming together.

She flipped through one of the books she’d managed to find that had pictures in it. She kept looking at the letters, struggling to remember how Klaus had said they’d fit together. C … A… T… Cat! Like the animal! That sounded right! It matched the picture, too. CAT. Cat. “Felis.” Sunny muttered, giggling.

That’s when she felt cold.

She sat up for a moment, glancing towards the lights, wondering if Quigley had come back. Duncan said that you felt cold when he was touching you, right? Maybe he’d just arrived.

“Quig?” she called out, but the lights stayed still, and the cold didn’t go away.

Now that she focused, it felt less like a… physical cold, and more like the chills she’d sometimes get when something scary was happening. She didn’t think that was what Duncan had meant by the “cold”...

Something was wrong.

She didn’t know how she knew, but she could just suddenly tell that something had gone wrong, and it wasn’t hard to guess what. Klaus had gone off alone with Esme, and now she was feeling so scared, so something must’ve happened to him. Maybe Esme, too. Maybe the Monster had gotten them, or the Lab. Maybe someone was taking him away like Violet, or making him go away forever, like Mother and Father.

Either way, Sunny was terrified.

She let out a small cry, before crawling across the floor, moving to the window. She couldn’t quite reach it, so she managed to find a chair in the corner and shove it enough that within a minute it was underneath the window. She clambered on, peering over the seat and staring out the window, looking towards the street. For a minute or so, she saw nothing, and she was just nervously bouncing and struggling not to cry. Don’t cry, Sunny, you’re not three months old anymore, you need to make sure everything’s actually okay.

And after a minute of staring out the window, she saw a white van pull up outside the house.
Bad. She didn’t know why that was her first thought- it was probably just people who were hired to clean the place, or someone stopping by for a moment to grab something.

No, it’s bad. Bad van. Bad men. Bad men are coming. The Bad Men are coming.

Someone got out of the van, coming up towards the house, dressed in dark clothes.

Bad Man.

Sunny slid off the chair, her mind buzzing, not sure what to do, or what was going on. When she finally thought to move, all she could think to do was crawl under the bed, pulling the covers down and huddling in the corner, hugging herself. Tears sprang to her eyes, as every bad thought came to her head.

They took Klaus. They took him away. He can’t help me. He’s gone. Just like Violet. Just like Mother. Just like Father. They’re all gone. Isadora and Duncan don’t know- or they’re gone, too. If they knew, they’d come find me. Esme’s with Klaus- she either took him away or she’s been taken, too. Carmelita wouldn’t be any help even if she wasn’t at school. Klaus is gone. Everyone’s gone. I’m alone.

I’m alone.

Sunny heard the door open downstairs, and let out a whimper, curling up. They were going to take her away, too. She wondered if they’d take her like Violet or kill her like Mother and Father. They didn’t seem too concerned with keeping her alive before now- if she’d caused problems back at home they probably would’ve just let her burn. Maybe if she didn’t cause problems now, they’d leave her alone. Or take her to Klaus. Maybe if they found her and she acted cute and sweet they’d be nice. Maybe they’d bring her to her siblings.

Or maybe they’d just hurt her anyway.

When Duncan had listed the things that the Lab was doing to their siblings, and would do to them all, she couldn’t say she understood all of it. She didn’t know what hallucinogenic drugs were, or what Duncan meant by sensory deprivation, but everything sounded terrifying, and everyone else had reacted like he’d just said horrible things. Whatever they were doing, they were hurting Violet, and they were going to hurt her and Klaus if she let them.

Klaus might not be able to protect her now. But she could go find him. She could protect him.

Be brave, Sunny. Be strong.

She heard footsteps in the hall.

Be strong, Sunny.

The door swung open, and someone walked inside.

In that instant, Sunny suddenly felt calm. She felt still. And she felt like she could hear her Mother’s voice in her head. You know what to do, Sunshine.

Somehow, she did.

Reacting almost entirely on instinct, Sunny threw up her arms, putting her small hands beneath the bed. And as the Bad Man stepped farther into the room, Sunny shut her eyes and pushed forwards.
The bed was thrown across the room, and Sunny caught a glimpse of it knocking the man out the door before crashing in front of it, blocking it almost completely.

Sunny paused for an instant, curiously starting at the bed, hearing the man outside the room let out some curse words and try to stand up. She didn’t think *that* was normal. She could barely lift herself into a chair, she seriously doubted throwing a bed was something she could do, at least at her current age.

*You have to run, Sunny.*

Okay, fine, she’d worry about that later. She didn’t see a way out of the room except through the door, which was blocked by a bed and had a Bad Man behind it. She didn’t know how far she could get if she jumped out the window, someone else might be in the van…

Maybe she could get out another way.

Sunny glanced down at her hands, shrugged to herself, and punched the ground.

The floor creaked.

Sunny punched it again, and she heard a rumble. She kept hitting the ground, narrowing her eyes in focus, and eventually there was a crash as part of the floor gave way. Sunny jumped back, and then peered forwards, seeing that she’d broken a hole big enough for her to slip through. There was rubble underneath that she’d have to try to avoid, and she probably shouldn’t be jumping from this height…

She turned back towards the door, and saw a man standing outside, looking over the bed in shock.

Sunny gave him a glare and then jumped.

“*You know,*” Carmelita said sourly, “*You’re going to fucking kill us all.*”

“*Shut up!*” Isadora yelled, glaring at the girl. “*We’re not going to die.*”

They’d left school as quick as possible. Isadora has mandated that Carmelita be no more than a few feet from them, just in case she decided to run and tattle on them, so she was holding hands with Duncan (who looked like he’d rather be doing anything else), stomping along and complaining quietly whenever she thought nobody else on the road was close enough to be listening. They occasionally got odd glances from adults going down the street, which was starting to worry the triplets, but nobody stopped to talk to them, so that was good. They were almost to the house anyway.

Just as they turned the bend, though, Carmelita slid to a halt, staring wide-eyed ahead at the house. Duncan and Isadora turned to her, confused, and quickly she dragged Duncan’s arm back, pulling them back around the corner.

“The fuck’s happening?” Isadora asked.

“Look at the street in front of the house.” Carmelita said.

Isadora looked around. “There’s a van parked in front.” she noted quickly, before reading the words on the side. “*Hawkins Power and Light.*” She turned back, taking a deep breath. “It’s not an actual electrician, is it?”
“Of course not, asshole, Esme’s not gonna send electricians to the house while she’s shipping kids off to the Lab.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “It’s just their way to get around town if need be. More’ll show up if they need backup, they’re probably nearby anyway. I think our best bet is to go back to school and pretend this never happened.”

“No fucking way.” Duncan said.

“If they’re already here, it means they’re in the house.” Isadora muttered. “I think we should go in through the back, I’ve got the key. Duncan, you get to our room and get all our evidence. Carmelita, you’re with me, we’re going for Sunny. You use those persuasion powers and get the men to leave us alone, at least for a few minutes.”

“Then where are we going?” Carmelita asked. “Your Mallahan friend?”

“She’s an Investigative Journalist.”

“Mm-hmm, and what’s that?”

Duncan stared at her. “Oh… my God.”

“We could steal the van.” Isadora considered. “And take that to the Lab. We’ll find a place to hide Sunny and Carmelita, then we’ll go in for Klaus and Violet, find the Gate-”

“Yeah, I really don’t think you should be breaking into the Lab.” Carmelita said. “That’s basically suicide.”

“We can’t just leave-”

“Isadora,” Duncan said, “We need to get to the house first.”

“Right, yeah.” Isadora said. “But we need to get past the van… Carmelita, how many people’ll have shown up?”

“I dunno.” Carmelita considered. “It’s just a stupid baby, but she might have powers, so… maybe two or three? There’ll be at least one in the van.”

“Someone who can spot us?”

“You know, this is your fault.” Carmelita sounded a little scared. “We’re all gonna die and it’s your fault.”

“Calm down, I…” Isadora paused. “We’ll go in the back way. Hopefully they won’t see us. We just need to get Sunny and get out.”

“Your funeral.” Carmelita muttered. “I’ve been kidnapped, remember?”

“Course we remember, now move your ass.”

Isadora led her and Duncan inbetween two houses, hoping that they could reach the yard before whoever was in the van could spot them. She didn’t pause to look, just breaking into a run and heading for the back door, sliding to a stop and fumbling in her bag’s pocket for a key. Duncan and Carmelita rushed up behind her, with Carmelita glancing towards the shed. “We could always hide in there.” she muttered.

“That’s the first place they’d look.” Duncan muttered. “Isa, can you-”
“I’m hurrying,” Isadora snapped. “I hate unlocking doors, it always takes too long to-”

“Hey, kids!”

They all froze over, before whipping around to see a man standing behind them, dressed in an electrician’s uniform. Carmelita instantly squealed, backing up.

_Oh shit. Oh fuck. Oh shit._

The man looked between them, and then said, a bit darkly, “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

As Duncan started stammering, Isadora stared at the man, feeling a burst of anger in her chest, growing the more she glared at him.

“W-e-we, uh, we were coming back for our- our science books.” Duncan said. “We l-left them in the study. Are… sorry, were there… repairs scheduled?”

Isadora slowly stepped in front of Duncan, still looking the man over. He didn’t notice her, instead saying, “Children, you should really-”

Isadora flicked her hand, and in a second, the man crumpled to the ground.

Carmelita screamed, leaping back, and Duncan yelped in surprise. Isadora just stared, before turning back to the lock.

“Wha-what just… what did…?” Duncan began.

“I made him tired.” Isadora said simply, barely paying attention to her nosebleed or the fact she was starting to feel a little tired herself. “He’ll sleep for a bit. Wonder how long he’ll be out.”

“Isadora!” Duncan yelled. “You can’t just-”

“Can and did.” Isadora said, pushing the door open. She turned to Duncan and said, “Remember. It’s for Quigley. And Klaus, and Sunny.”

Duncan stared at her for a moment, then nodded. “Right.”

“Carmelita, you’re with me.” Isadora reminded her, then turned to Duncan. “Get our notes, hopefully we’ll find-”

They heard a crash, from somewhere above them. They all stopped for a moment, and then Isadora said, “Change of plan. We follow _that._”

Sunny landed on the floor, feeling a jolt of pain for only a second. She stiffened, and then rolled over, crawling away from the rubble and crawling as fast as she could down the hall. She had no doubt that other Bad Men were in the house, and she didn’t want them to catch up to her, even if she could now punch through floors and throw beds. They might have whatever weapon they used to take away Mother. She might lose whatever sudden strength she had. They might be able to find another way to threaten her.

Her original plan was to go down the stairs, punch a hole in the wall, and hide in the shed until Isadora and Duncan got back, but as she raced through the hall, she suddenly had a different plan. She didn’t know _why_ , really, she just suddenly felt a pull when she passed one of the rooms. She stopped, turning around and staring up at the door.
Sunny pushed open the door, crawling inside and peering around. She’d been in this office before, just a few days ago. She’d sat on the spinny chair and then the lights led her away. What had she been doing in here before? Just playing with the chair. Why did she need to be here, then? Maybe she could jump out the window; she seemed to be fine jumping from the broken floor. Maybe…

She heard footsteps rushing up the stairs, and, thinking fast, she crawled under the desk, pressing herself against the drawers and putting her hands on the wood, prepared to push if need be. She breathed hard, shutting her eyes and biting her lip, waiting.

“Sunny!”

Was that…

“The crash came from this way, cakesniffers!”

“Sunny! Are you here?”

“She’s not gonna answer, idiots!”

Sunny let out a quick scream, and after a second, she heard the study door swing open as Isadora yelled, “Sunny? Was that you?”

Sunny punched a hole through the desk, leaping through it and clapping her hands once she landed. “Issi! Dun!”

Isadora and Duncan were standing just past the doorway, still in their school uniforms, and they both stared at Sunny in complete shock. Carmelita was waiting just behind them, looking a bit surprised, though she covered it quickly and said, “Great. Now the baby’s showing abilities.”

“Sunny…” Duncan said slowly. “Did you just…”

“Doesn’t matter.” Isadora ran forwards, picking up Sunny. “We have to get the hell out of here. Duncan, we gotta get to our room for our notes, we’ll run out the back again, hopefully nobody’s noticed we knocked a guy out.”

“Arco!” Sunny yelled. “There are Bad Men in the house!”

“Do you guys know what she’s saying?” Carmelita asked.

“Uh, we could guess?” Duncan said.

Sunny sighed and put a hand on her forehead.

“Let’s get upstairs-”

“No!” Sunny yelled.

“Oh, thank God, she can say some English.” Carmelita sighed.

“Why can’t we leave?” Isadora asked.

Sunny shut her eyes, considering. Why did she go in this room? She felt a pull. Where was the pull
leading her? She turned, pointing up to a high shelf in the office, realizing quickly that she was pointing at a safe.

Isadora and Duncan shared a glance, and then Isadora moved to the desk chair, pushing it under the shelf and standing on it to reach the safe.

“I don’t know the combination.” she said, looking at it.

“Try guessing?” Duncan said.

Sunny reached forwards, grabbed the handle, and ripped the safe’s door off, tossing it over her shoulder.

“That works, too.” Isadora said.

Duncan and Carmelita walked over, too, as Isadora reached into the safe, pulling out what looked like an office file. “That’s all there is.” she said.

Duncan took the file while Isadora got off the chair, and he flipped it open and instantly paled. “Oh, holy fuck. Isadora, it’s us.”

“What?” Isadora peered over his shoulder and Carmelita, unusually quiet, barely glanced at the pages before moving to the window.

Duncan put the file on the desk, laying out four papers so they could see them all. They were files, three of them with photos of young children, barely toddlers, and the fourth with Carmelita, maybe two or so years younger.

“Oh my God.” Isadora said. “It is us.”

“Whazzit?” Sunny asked, this time meaning, “What does it say?”

Isadora paused, and as she did, Sunny leaned over, putting a hand on the first paper and staring at it, frowning, struggling to decipher the words.

As she focused, words suddenly appeared in her head.

**EXPERIMENT 008 - LEGAL NAME: DUNCAN QUAGMIRE**

**BORN | 8 AUGUST 1970**

**EXPERIMENTS BEGAN | 12 OCTOBER 1973**

**ABILTIES CURRENTLY UNMANIFESTED**

**PARENTS | ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION, NO SEEN ABILITIES**

Sunny narrowed her eyes, retracting her hand. She didn’t quite think that was how reading worked; she didn’t think words just *appeared*. And a lot of those words were pretty big, she wished Klaus was here to define them for her.

“Sunny?” Duncan looked up, suddenly worried. “Sunny, your… your nose is…”
Sunny reached up, starting as she felt blood. Huh, that was a new development.

“We should go.” Isadora said, shoving the papers back into the file and pushing it into Duncan’s hands. “Put that in your bag, we’ll get the rest of our- Carmelita?”

Carmelita was staring out the window, but she didn’t look okay. She looked paralyzed, actually, and very pale, and her eyes were wide. Duncan and Isadora raced over to her side, Sunny gripping onto Isadora’s arm, and as they looked out the window, they saw what was scaring her.

There were a lot more vans than Sunny had seen before. She didn’t have time to count before Isadora turned away from the window, saying, “Shit. Goddamnit it. Fuck. We have to hurry.”

“Isadora, we might have to ditch the notes.” Duncan said. “This might be enough on its own-”

“Can we risk that?”

“Can we risk getting caught?”

Isadora took a deep breath. “You’re right. You’re on Carmelita duty, we’re going back out. Sunny, they have Klaus, but we’re going to rescue him, stick tight.”

“Wa.” Sunny said, though she shook slightly. “Roger that.”

Duncan grabbed Carmelita’s arm to get her to move, and they ran out of the room, racing down the hall. Sunny gripped onto Isadora, leaning over onto her shoulder and yawning slightly, trying to focus just on their current situation, not at all on what might be happening to Klaus, or if he was with Violet, or if she’d see either of them anytime soon.

Unfortunately, as they reached the bottom of the stairs, they saw the door swinging open. Sunny turned, burying her head in Isadora’s shoulder, now shaking a lot, and she heard Isadora say, “Run, run, run!”

They were racing, then, and Sunny didn’t dare look up, grabbing tight onto Isadora’s jacket, her heart beating fast, terrified that she was going to feel heat or smell smoke at any second, that she was going to hear that horrible loud noise that had sounded right before Violet screamed and Sunny realized their Mother was hurt and people were taking her sister away.

She felt Isadora slide to a stop, and heard Duncan yell, “Fuck!”

“This way, go!” Isadora yelled, as Carmelita let out a screech, and Sunny suddenly heart some adult let out some kind of yell.

“Kluh!” Sunny yelled. “Put me down, I can throw something big at them, get them to leave us alone!”

Nobody could understand her, she knew, but it was worth a shot. Though, then again, she didn’t know how well she could throw something with how terrified she felt.

When Isadora suddenly slid to a stop, Sunny turned her head and looked around. They’d stopped in the living room, which had been barely cleaned- the wallpaper was still ripped apart, the broken lights had just been pushed into a corner, and she could still see the paint where the letters had been. Duncan had run to a window, fumbling with it, trying to push it open.

“This is your fault!” Carmelita shouted.
"We’re not gonna get caught, just shut up!" Isadora yelled. “Duncan, I’ll get the window, you hold Sunny! Carmelita, don’t go anywhere!"

Isadora passed Sunny to Duncan, and Sunny stared at the door, hearing footsteps coming.

“We’re all gonna end up back there!” Sunny was shocked to realize that Carmelita was crying. “They’re gonna take us away!”

“Shut up!”

Sunny let out a scream as several darkly-clothed men ran through the door, pointing things at the children, things like the man had pointed at her in the bookstore. Duncan instantly turned, shielding Sunny with his body, and Isadora rushed in front, pushing Carmelita and Duncan behind her.

“Get away from us, you bastards!” Isadora yelled. “Carmelita, help-”

Carmelita screamed, putting her hands over her face, trembling and crying. Duncan started hugging Sunny tightly. “It’s gonna be okay.” he said, his voice shaking. “Sunny, don’t worry, it’s gonna be okay.”

Men were rushing forwards, and Sunny shut her eyes, turning her head into Duncan’s chest, trying desperately not to sob. Isadora pushed them back some more, yelling, “Get away from us!”

Sunny wasn’t sure what happened next, but suddenly everything sounded very quiet.

Slowly, she turned her face back, opening her eyes and staring at the room, as Duncan’s hold on her stiffened slightly.

The men had all almost completely frozen in place.

“Whose power is that?” Isadora asked quietly, and Sunny realized she looked very disturbed. Even Carmelita had stopped crying, staring in confusion and horror.

All of the sudden, the men crumpled to the floor, and Sunny let out a quick shriek as they all fell.

Once they dropped, though, they could all see a girl, not much older than them, standing in the doorway. She was dressed in black, with pointed glasses and her hair tied back, surveying the room with a blank expression. And her nose was bleeding quite a bit.

Her gaze landed on the kids huddled in the corner, and she softened slightly. Sunny watched carefully as she stepped over the bodies on the ground, and Isadora stiffened slightly, raising her arms in case this new girl tried to hurt the people behind her. Duncan tightened his hold on Sunny, too, while Carmelita just stared, very silent.

The girl stopped just a few feet from them, looking them over. Then, she said, “Batrachotoxin.”

“What?” Isadora asked.

The girl smiled. “What I used on them. Batrachotoxin. Deadly poison. They won’t bother you anymore.”

Duncan pressed Sunny against him, while Carmelita let out a squeal. Isadora, however, just widened her eyes.

“That’s my ability.” the girl said. “Poisons. Manipulation and creation. Sometimes I can make my
skin poisonous, too, but that gets a bit nerve-wracking.”

She pushed the edge of her glove down, turning her wrist to show them the 006.

“You’re Fiona Widdershins.” Duncan said hesitantly.

Fiona’s face brightened a bit. “Been a while since I’ve heard someone else say that name. Yes, I suppose I am. You’re Quagmires?”


“Twelve?”

“And Sunny Baudelaire. She hasn’t got a number.”

“She’ll be Thirteen if they catch her.” Carmelita muttered.

“Shut up.”

“Baudelaire.” Fiona’s smile dropped. “Where’s the other one?”

Isadora took a breath. “They got him. And Violet. And Quigley.”

Fiona let out a groan. “God, okay, guess we’re busting them out. Fuck, I was… I’ve got a plan, just was hoping we wouldn’t… Get whatever you can pack in one bag, and meet me outside. We’re stealing a van.”

They glanced at each other, and then Isadora said, “Can we trust you?”

“I sure hope so.” Fiona said. “I’m the one saving your asses. Come on! Let’s not hesitate.”

Chapter End Notes

Because there might be a bit of confusion: Sunny's powers are super strength as well as a heightened extrasensory perception (like her big sister) which can evolve into information absorption (hence the file).
Fiona pulled the van over to the side of the road after several minutes, before getting out and sitting in the back with the others.

“Alright.” she said. “What’ve you got?”

Duncan, Isadora and Carmelita looked up at her, while Sunny continued biting into a stick she’d grabbed off the ground while Fiona started the van. They were all a bit shaken up; Fiona drove quite fast and they didn’t have seatbelts in the back, instead just sitting on the floor where they assumed supplies were supposed to have been, and desperately hoping they weren’t going to hit anything too hard whenever she took a sharp turn. Duncan had Sunny in his lap, his arms around her tightly, as if he could act as a seatbelt himself. Sunny barely looked up from her stick, biting into it.

“Got?” Isadora asked, while Carmelita curled up a bit; she seemed to be a little in shock.

“Let’s start from the beginning.” Fiona said. She pulled up her glove again to show the tattoo. “Fiona Widdershins, experiment number six. Was in a Lab at age five after my Mother was murdered, showed powers and transferred to Hawkins at age six, escaped at age twelve, been on the run for three years. I can manipulate and create all kinds of poisons, though I’ve gotta focus and remember which toxins I want. I’m also immune to them, and I think I remember the doctors hypothesizing I might have a high alcohol tolerance, but I haven’t tested that.”

“We… we did find some stuff about you.” Duncan said. He reached into his bag and pulled out his commonplace book, flipping through. “Yeah, I wrote down your Mother’s obituary, we found it in the newspaper archive at the Library.”

Fiona paused, and then asked, “Can I see that?”

Duncan hesitantly passed her the book, and she stared at the writing for a good minute. When she finally passed it back, she said, “Oh.”

“I remember you.” Carmelita said after a moment. “I mean, we never met, but they kept talking about Six. You were better than me.”

“No, it means you had cool lethal powers they could use against the Russians,” Carmelita said, “And all I could do was talk to people.”

Fiona turned to her. “You were in the Lab?”

“I was about five, too.” Carmelita said, playing with the slap bracelet she’d grabbed. “Parents needed money, Lab needed baby. Not like they cared much about me anyway.”
“What’s your name again?”

“Carmelita.”

“What can you do, Carmelita?”

“Persuasion.” Carmelita said. “I can make anyone do anything just by asking or suggesting. It’s super easy, with a few… exceptions.”

“Like what?”

Carmelita sighed. “Making them do something super against their personality or morals is hard. Difficult to make people hurt themselves, too, cause self-preservation instincts kick in. And it’s near impossible to manipulate other experiments; only worked with that one guy in the Lab until I focused so hard I passed out, and these two didn’t listen to anything I said.” She gestured to Duncan and Isadora. “I can do it, but it hurts. You all have better…” she considered. “Mental shields, I guess.”

“How’d you get out, then?”

“noticed they seemed to be running out of things to experiment, got worried about what that’d mean for me.” Carmelita shrugged, not meeting anyone’s eye. “So after a few weeks of trying to do some subtle manipulation, I convinced them to let me the Control Experiment. See what happens to me out in the world. Catch was I had to live with an employee, be under constant supervision and report everything in, including… any other powers I saw.”

Fiona looked at her sadly. “I’m assuming that’s how the Baudelaire boy got caught?”

“It’s not my fault, it was him or me.”

Fiona sighed. “You do what it takes to survive, yeah? Still… you know, fuck it, we can talk about this later.” She turned to Duncan. “What about you… Duncan, right?”

Before he could think about it, Duncan said, “You were in the Rainbow Room.”

Fiona stared at him. “You… remember that?”

“Uh, not… not exactly.” he said, bouncing his leg a bit. “I… one of my powers is I can… read memories, when my telepathy’s working- I mean, it might work outside of my telepathy, I’ve never tried, and it’s only happened twice and only once on purpose, I still don’t quite… but I dug up a memory of us. In the Rainbow Room. With our brother and Sunny’s siblings, too. We were… three?”

“Yeah.” Fiona smiled slightly. “Either you or your brother liked to hit me when I fought with the Baudelaire girl.”

“Probably Quigley, Duncan physically can’t hurt anything.” Isadora said.

“That’s not true!”

“So you’re a telepath,” Fiona recapped quickly, “And memory manipulator.”

“I-I don’t think I can manipulate them, and I’m not sure I wanna find out, but I can… see them. Experience or- or re- experience… it’s a bit weird. I don’t… know if I like it much? But, sometimes my telepathy turns on, a-and I can hear people’s thoughts. But it only turns on when I
get overstimulated, and that’s not… nice.”

“We can work on that.” Fiona told him, before turning to Isadora. “You were Isadora?”

“Yeah.”

“And you have some kind of emotional powers, right?”

Isadora narrowed her eyes. “How’d you know that?”

“Rainbow Room was interesting.”

“You did do something.” Duncan said, turning to Isadora.

“I didn’t… I don’t remember!”

“Of course she doesn’t, she was three. I’m not entirely sure I know exactly what you did.” Fiona said. “But do you know the specifics of your powers?”

“I can feel other people’s emotions.” Isadora said. “And change them. I knocked a guy out when we got to the house by making him tired.”

“Very powerful.” Fiona said. “But neither of you two have been in the Lab?”

The Quagmires shook their heads. “Quigley’s there… sort of.” Duncan said.

“Sort of?”

“He opened a portal to another dimension.”

There was silence for a moment, before Carmelita said, “Oh, that’s why you were hanging up lights and shit. He can change those from the other dimension?”

Surprised, Duncan nodded. “You figured that out fast.”

“Been a weird day, and I’d like to get this discussion done quickly, so I’ll keep the quips to a minimum.” Carmelita shrugged, curling up a bit more.

“Huh.” Sunny grumbled, which meant, “Thank God.”

“Is…” Fiona looked very confused. “Is his power opening up portals to alternate dimensions?”

“It’s teleporting.” Duncan said. “But something went wrong and he opened up a Gate in Hawkins Lab. He can talk to us through the lights, but we haven’t heard from him in a day.” He shuddered slightly. “We’ve gotta get him back.”

“And the Gate’s in the Lab?”

“Yes. But there’s also a Monster in the other world, and it’s trying to kill him.” Isadora said. “It can open up temporary gates, but only when it’s nearby. This Gate disrupts the magnetic field, so that might be a way to track it.”

Fiona took a deep breath. “Okay. Okay… okay, listen, I don’t know if this is normal—”

“It’s not.” Carmelita said.

“And this is not a prank?”
“We wouldn’t joke about this. That’s our brother.” Isadora said.

“So the Gate’s in the Lab, we can find it with magnets…” Fiona considered. “And the older Baudelaires are already there?”

“By this point, definitely.” Carmelita said.

“Eek.” Sunny muttered. “Oh, I hope they’re alright!”

“And your parents are dead?”

Isadora and Duncan flinched, but nodded.

“The Baudelaires, too?” Another nod. “I mean, I expected as much…”

“I contacted someone who can help us.” Duncan said. “Moxie Mallahan, she’s an Investigative Journalist, I think she said she’s going to look into the Lab-”

“That could take months.” Fiona said. “We haven’t got time, we want to get your friends out before the Lab figures out you’re with me.”

“We’re going in?” Isadora asked, both nervous and excited.

“I’m not!” Carmelita said.

“You’ll have to; if we leave you in the van, you’re more likely to get caught.” Fiona said. “Can’t stay in one place long. My plan was to just go in, poison everyone, and drag the Baudelaires out, but this whole ‘alternate dimension’ thing is a bit of a surprise.”

“Don’t your powers tire you out?” Isadora asked.

“Hell yeah, but I’ve been using them constantly for three years, I can last quite a bit.” Fiona said. “Worst comes to worst, you guys can drive the car on the way out.”

“None of us can drive.” Isadora said.

“You can learn. Not that hard. What can the Baudelaires do?”

“Telekinesis, both of them, we think.” Duncan said.

“Interesting.” Fiona then knelt down a bit, so she could be eye-level with Sunny. “And I’m assuming you’ve got super-strength and advanced intelligence, huh, sweetie?”

“What?” Isadora asked.

“Yeah.” Fiona said. “She’s been speaking her own little language, though it’s a bit hard to understand, and seems to be fully cognizant of our entire conversation, as well as the gravity of our situation. And she also bit through that entire stick while we were talking.”

They glanced down, seeing that Sunny had indeed bitten through the stick, and was now clapping the halves together. She giggled slightly at Fiona, while Duncan said, “Do… do babies… not do that?”

Fiona glanced between them all. “When was the last time you all interacted with a baby?” Dead silence. “No, most babies just cry and eat and forget people the second they’re out of sight.”
“Poppe!” Sunny said. “Hey! That’s a bit mean!”

“Sorry, sunshine.” Fiona said, though she sounded like she only barely understood. “Anyway, your super-strength could be a great help. Would you like to help out a bit?”

“Yes!”

“She’s a baby!” Duncan protested.

“A baby with super strength.” Fiona shrugged.

“How do we know you’re not still working with them?” Isadora asked carefully.

“Cause I would fucking know.” Carmelita said. “And I’d rather not get dragged back to the Lab, so I’ve said something by now.”

“And I did just kill those guards.” Fiona said. “Though I admire your caution. Here.” She held out her hand, and Isadora stared at her, confused. “You said you can sense other people’s emotions, yeah? Sense mine.”

Hesitantly, Isadora reached out, touching Fiona’s hand and shutting her eyes. Then, after a moment, she said, “You’re not lying.”

Fiona smiled. “That good for you?”

“And you do know us.” Isadora said. “You really want to get out of here, but you’re not leaving while knowing there are kids in the Lab.” She paused, and then said, “They hurt you. They killed…”

Fiona yanked her hand back, and Isadora gasped, quickly reaching up to wipe her nose.

“That’s enough.” Fiona said. “Rather not think about that, thanks.”

“I…” Isadora was staring at the wall. “I’m sorry, I just… they hurt you so much.”

“Did you see something?” Duncan asked.

“Felt.” Isadora reminded him. “I felt…”

“Rather not think about that, thanks.” Fiona repeated.

Isadora hesitated, then said, “I’m sorry, I…”

“It’s fine, we’ll just move past it.” Fiona said quickly. “We need to get in there and get our fellow experiments back, yeah?”

After they hesitantly nodded, she said, “Now, listen. We’ll go in through the pipes; that’s how I got out, but they don’t know that, cause I escaped while the cameras were out. The building is huge, but the actual labs are on lower levels, testing in the middle, and the children will be kept at the top. But we can’t rely on that, they could be moved anywhere. We’ll have to find a way to track them down.”

“We could just follow Sunny.” Duncan said. “She’s good at finding things.”

Fiona narrowed her eyes. “Is she?”
“Adh.” Sunny shrugged. “I’m just lucky and find relevant things very fast.” She paused, and then muttered, “Gnath,” which meant, “Wait. I find relevant things very quickly. That’s not normal, is it?”

“No, Sunny, that’s not normal.” Fiona said. “You must have some form of ESP… I’ve got a bit too, but only enough to know when something bad’s coming. What’s she done?”

“She found, like, three relevant articles for us.” Duncan said.

“And spotted the Monster before we did.” Isadora added.

“You have very advanced powers for your age.” Fiona said, smiling at Sunny. “Might be caused by your intelligence levels, or maybe the stress of the situation.”

Sunny shrugged.

“Alright, that’s the plan, let the baby loose and hope she finds her siblings before the doctors murder us all.” Carmelita said. “Super.”

“Once we’ve got the kids, we find the Gate. If the Monster can open up temporary portals, hopefully we won’t have to exit through the Lab again.” Fiona said. “But if we do, we can get out through the pipes again— they go under the fence and into the woods. Easy to get into town that way, and while the police likely will not be any help, if we can hop a bus to someone who can get the story out—”

“Or if enough people see Quigley and Violet.” Isadora said. “They’re legally dead.”

“Good to know.” Fiona said. “I can steal us basically any car, but we’ll need one big enough for travel with all of us.”

“This car seems fine.” Carmelita shrugged.

“Too noticeable. We’ll get something.” Fiona smiled. “We seem like quite the fortunate bunch.”

“I don’t-” Duncan began, but he was cut off by Isadora letting out a scream.

It was incredibly sudden and incredibly loud, but in a flash, Isadora had gone from nervously listening to the conversation to screeching in terror and hurt, reaching to hug herself, backing up into the van wall, suddenly shaking.

“What the fuck?” Carmelita yelled.

“What’s wrong with-” Fiona looked panicked, and Duncan shoved Sunny into the corner, about to run to his sister, when suddenly something else happened.

Both Duncan and Fiona flinched back, letting out shouts, as they felt a sudden pain spreading through them. Duncan screamed, his hands instinctively shooting up towards his face, while Fiona just curled up in on herself, struggling to breathe, to regain her composure and ignore the pain as long as she could.

“What the fuck?” Carmelita asked.

“What’s wrong with-” Fiona looked panicked, and Duncan shoved Sunny into the corner, about to run to his sister, when suddenly something else happened.

Both Duncan and Fiona flinched back, letting out shouts, as they felt a sudden pain spreading through them. Duncan screamed, his hands instinctively shooting up towards his face, while Fiona just curled up in on herself, struggling to breathe, to regain her composure and ignore the pain as long as she could.

“What the fuck?” Carmelita asked.

“What’s going on? What happened?”

As soon as Duncan could move, he rushed towards Isadora, who was still screaming loudest, tears springing to her eyes as she kept shaking uncontrollably. “Isadora!” he shouted, his voice breaking
slightly, “Isa, what’s wrong?”

Isadora didn’t respond for a moment, long enough for Fiona to recover herself and sit back up, and then she let out a gasp for air, eyes shooting open, clearly panicked.


“Something is wrong.” Fiona repeated.

“Isa, what’s going on?” Duncan asked, reaching out a hand to touch her shoulder.

“Don’t touch me!” Isadora flinched back. “You’ll feel it, too, you’ll-”

“Isa, what-”

“I…” Isadora could barely speak through her tears. “I think it’s… Duncan, I think something happened to Quigley!”

Quigley was going to die.

He knew he was. He’d run from the house and into the woods, and after wandering for what felt like forever, he’d just… collapsed. Started coughing and fallen over, and never bothered to get back up.

It wasn’t like it mattered anyway.

He couldn’t get out, not unless he went through the Lab, and he’d rather die. He’d rather die here and let the Monster rip him to shreds. It was better than living in there. It was better than letting them win.

I’m sorry, Mother and Father. I’m sorry that they hunted you for years just to find us. I’m sorry I couldn’t keep them away from Duncan and Isadora, they’re nearby, and the Lab’ll find them soon. I’m sorry you went through all of this for nothing.

I’m sorry, Duncan. I’m sorry, Isadora. I couldn’t help you. And you’re going to look for me forever, and you won’t find me. I’m sorry I couldn’t help your friends, either. Sorry I couldn’t help Klaus or Sunny, or their sister. Violet. I’m sorry I couldn’t help her, I’m sorry she’s the Lab’s new pet project.

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry I couldn’t make it…

He started singing then, softly. Anything to pass the time until he finally died. He’d heard the song in classes, when he was in the theater, bored of doing schoolwork in the back row while the directors went through a scene with the kids on stage, or when the adults got annoyed and went to take a smoke break in the back. One of the boys would bring in records, they’d use the record player in the other room and blast the songs he’d stolen from his sister’s room. It seemed so simple, then. He didn’t know, he didn’t know those classes would be why he was out of the house, why his parents left to pick him up, to pick him up and try to drive him home, which gave the Lab plenty of opportunity to… to…

“If I go, there w-will be trouble…”

“If I stay, it wi-will be double…”
“So-so come on, and I-let me know...”

It’s my fault. I’m sorry.

He heard footsteps behind him. He didn’t even look. He just let out another painful cough and curled in on himself, wondering if maybe death would be a bit warmer.

“Sh-should I stay...”

“Or should I go?”

He heard the Monster screech, and he felt a sudden pain as it finally reached him.
“Okay,” Fiona said, staring through the trees, “We’re going to need to hurry.”

The Lab was up ahead, and they all felt very, very nervous. Duncan and Isadora were shaking, holding each others’ hands and scanning the Lab, knowing that the path to their brother was inside, and that they’d need to get there fast. Carmelita was staring ahead, frozen over, looking very pale and incredibly distressed. Sunny was peering through the bushes, clenching her fists and trying to hold back her anger at the people inside that place, the people that took away her entire family. Fiona, meanwhile, just pushed her feelings down as far as she could. She could panic later. There were people in there who needed her.

“We’re going in through the pipes.” Fiona reminded them. “Sunny, Isadora, you’re in charge of tracking Klaus first. Then we find the others, okay? We have to make sure we’re all together before we go into the other world, we don’t want them to lock up their prisoners somewhere we can’t get to. Take your bags, we don’t know if we’ll be able to get back here.”

“Quigley’s in trouble.” Duncan said quietly. “We have to-”

“We’ll get him.” Fiona assured him.

“We’ll get them all out.” Isadora said, her voice a bit quieter than usual. “No one gets left behind.”

Klaus was very confused.

He’d woken up from some kind of sudden pain- in his chest, that spread across his body. It all but went away as he drowsily managed to pull his consciousness together, but when he opened eyes, he got very concerned.

His room looked different. It was too white. They’d painted his room blue, just recently. It was pretty, it was calming, it reminded him of the sky. The sky outside. He liked sitting outside with a book, while Mother and Father chatted on the deck and Violet tinkered with something beside him, or put flowers in his hair, or tried to get into the Shed. He wondered what was in the Shed. Couldn’t have been that important, right?

But why was the room so white?

He tried to reach to the side for his glasses, but his arm wouldn’t move. Why wouldn’t his arm move? It felt like he’d fallen asleep in the bracelet, but his bracelet was really heavy. He could barely see anything… although, these blurs didn’t look much like the furniture in his room…

He spotted someone walking in, and he shut his eyes, pausing his breathing for an instant. He’d only seen a blurry vision, but he knew one thing, almost instantly. That wasn’t Mother. That wasn’t Father. It wasn’t Violet. It was someone else, someone he didn’t know.
He didn’t think he was in his room.

It all came back very, very slowly, while someone else came in and the two adults started chatting, talking about how “the Gate is getting bigger” and “you don’t think she can actually affect it, do you?” The first thing he remembered was that Violet was missing, Violet was gone, he had to find Violet. Everything came back pretty fast after that, and before long, Klaus was desperately trying to remain calm, struggling not to scream or panic. If he pretended to be asleep, maybe they’d think he was still sedated. He’d gotten incredibly good at pretending to be asleep when he was a kid, because then sometimes Mother and Father would let him “sleep” in the chair in the study room, and once they were gone he could get up and read some more. But was being forcibly sedated different than regular sleep? How long would it take these people to realize he was awake and knock him out again? It didn’t help that his head still felt a little fuzzy, and his heart was pounding and it was only a matter of time before these people noticed.

He wondered briefly if they should pay more attention to what the doctors were saying- at least, he thought they were doctors, since they were in a Lab, and he thought he could hear some kind of monitor beeping. Maybe he could hear something that’d help… but then again, it might just scare him more. If he got too scared, something would slip, he’d flinch or gasp or start to panic, and they’d notice and he’d get knocked out. He had to stay awake and find a way to slip out of the room. He’d have to run, have to find Violet. Violet could fix this, she always could. How was he supposed to find Violet, this building had to be huge, and he didn’t have his glasses, and…

Wait… he felt weird. He was in short sleeves- he’d never worn short sleeves. Wait, was he in a dress? Shit, wait, he was in a hospital gown, wasn’t he? Some kind of hospital gown…

He also realized, about then, that his hands were clamped to the side of the bed he was on. He tried very hard not to panic, tried to remember how to slip out of handcuffs. These seemed a bit tighter than handcuffs, but it should work similarly… maybe. Hopefully.

Unless… he could use his powers.

He’d thrown things across the room, right? Telekinesis. Maybe he could use that to open the cuffs. Maybe he could just… think really hard, and open them, and then run.

Goddamnit, he should’ve spent last night figuring out how his telekinesis worked. That would’ve been useful, goddamnit. He had no idea how that power worked and now he was trapped in the Lab, which would- no, no, don’t think about all those awful things Duncan said, that’ll freak you out and they’ll notice…

_Duncan._

He was back home, back with _Esme_, he and Isadora were alone, they were going to think he abandoned them- no, no, they’re too smart for that, they’ll know what happened. They’ll… _Sunny_! Where was Sunny? What did they do to Sunny? They must’ve taken Sunny, she must be all alone and so scared…

_Keep it together, Klaus. Keep it together…_

_Were is Sunny?_

“Hold on.” one of the doctors said carefully, and Klaus felt a flicker of panic. “Think the kid might be waking up.”

_Fuck, fuck, fuck…_
“God, how many times can those sedatives wear off?”

Had he been awake before? He didn’t remember that.

“Are you sure he’s awake? Might just be having a bad reaction to something.”

“We should probably sedate him again, to be safe.”

“We don’t want to use too much, though. What happens if he overdoses?”

Klaus started trying to plan in his head. Once the clamps came off, he’d need his glasses. He couldn’t see shit without them, and he couldn’t just run around blind. He wondered where they were keeping his glasses. Probably not here. Goddamnit it, why’d he have to be so useless?

*Just focus on finding Violet. Find Violet, she can fix it.*

“Naw, kid’s definitely awake. We don’t want him freaking out; if Squalor’s report was accurate, he might be just as destructive as Seven.”

*Seven?*

*Violet. Violet’s here. They have her. They’re calling her Seven. Why would they do that? Her name is Violet.*

“Just knock him out. If Seven can’t manage to work with the Gate, we’ll start with him. Hopefully he won’t cause as many problems as her.”

Klaus tried not to smile at that. Nice to know Violet wasn’t going quietly.

“You think she’s right about Ten?”

“If she is, Ten won’t last much longer. Our men can’t last a few minutes past the Gate, there’s no way that kid can get this long and still be alive, especially with the toxic atmosphere. He wasn’t very tough even without—”

Klaus heard the sound of a distant alarm, and got a dark, sick feeling in his chest.

“Seven can’t have gotten out again.” one of the doctors remarked. “No way she’s moving yet.”

*Moving yet? Wh-what did they do to her?*

There was a buzz, and Klaus heard a voice over some kind of radio. “*Something’s gone wrong, extraction team’s not responding, and reports are saying Eight, Nine and Twelve left the school.*”

“That doesn’t sound good.”

“What do you want us to do about it?”

“*Keep Eleven where he is. Can’t have them all running amok.*”

Klaus struggled to remain calm, to keep his breathing slow. They might know he was awake, but maybe if he feigned sleep enough they’d consider him calm enough they wouldn’t drug him.

“He keeps on waking up.”

“We’ll just keep him down until we’re finished with Seven.”
Finished with Seven. That sounded bad. Very bad.

He had to stay calm. He had to use that ability, he had to open the clamps and run. He might be mostly blind, but he could see blurs, he could probably move well enough that he could hide himself. Or find Violet. He needed to find her, needed to help her, and then they could get out, find Duncan and Isadora and Sunny and Quigley, and run. They could all run, together.

Klaus focused on the clamps on his hands, the cold metal feeling all too familiar. Violet had done this, back home, on the last day they’d all been together. She’d knocked the bracelets off. Surely he could do that with clamps.

“God, Seven’s caused enough problems. Hopefully we won’t have to deal with her.”

“You weren’t here before. We had to deal with six of them running around, thinking they owned the world.”

“Six of them at once? Must’ve been a busy place.”

“It was. Then Four and Feint’s daughter had to go fuck everything up, and now we’re stuck with a bunch of temperamental brats who seem to think they belong somewhere else.”

Klaus tried to block out the conversation, tried to focus only on the clamps.

“Feint’s daughter?”

“She didn’t get a number, they didn’t want a tattoo affecting her abilities. Then after they fucked off, Three had her little revolt and we lost One-”

“Yeah, I know that, and apparently Three spoiled Seven enough that she thinks she can do whatever she wants.”

It hit Klaus, about then, who Three was.

No. No, no, no- that’s wrong. That’s wrong.

“Hopefully she didn’t treat this boy the same.”

No, no, no…

The clamps sprang open.

“What the-”

Klaus didn’t want to waste any time, so the second he got slightly over his shock, he sat up and opened his eyes, trying to focus the blurry images that made up the world around him. That shitty vision would have to do for now; they probably didn’t have his glasses anywhere nearby.

He felt a hand grab his arm, and he tried to pull away; unfortunately, he wasn’t very strong, so he just struggled slightly before shutting his eyes and trying to access his telekinesis again. Maybe he could throw the person across the room, toss them away from him, like he’d done to Carmelita. He only had a few seconds, he knew. They would try to sedate him again, and he wasn’t sure how long he’d be passed out if they had the chance- depended on the sedative they used, but he really didn’t think they’d tell him.

Klaus thought back to that shock he’d just felt, the sudden flash of realization and hurt, and tried to recall the fury he’d felt when he pushed Carmelita and destroyed the living room. Bring that all
together, and hopefully throw someone into the air.

_You have to do this Klaus, you have to find Violet. And then you have to find everyone else._

Klaus turned towards the direction that the doctor was in, and flexed his hand, thinking, _Get away from me!_

He didn’t know exactly what happened, but the grip on his hand was gone and he heard a crash, so he could reasonably assume that had worked. Still, he couldn’t rely on it, so he’d just have to get the hell out of there.

He saw a blurry image of a doorway across the room, and so he managed to leap off the hospital bed and run that way, his legs feeling a bit numb and his arms hurting slightly. One he was out of the room, he picked a direction at random and took off, his hands slightly in front of him so he’d be able to tell if he was going to run into something. He was sure he looked ridiculous, but it didn’t matter, so long as he got out.

Someone was definitely chasing him, and he heard a muffled yelling- shit, they were gonna tell everyone where he was. He was sure there were cameras, too, so people were going to come. Maybe if he found somewhere to hide… where could he hide? Where wouldn’t there be cameras? More importantly, where would Violet be?

He could really only see blurs, but he could make out enough shapes to figure out what was ahead- there were lots of doors, which Klaus assumed were probably places he didn’t want to go. Maybe he could find a stairwell or something, or…

As he passed one of the doors, he realized that it looked like it hadn’t closed all the way, and he paused outside it for only a second before rushing in. It was very dark, so he assumed that meant he was alone inside it. He closed the door behind him, backing up a few steps before he hit a wall; he must be in a closet of some kind. He waited until he heard footsteps rush past before he went back to the door, putting a hand on the knob and shutting his eyes.

_Alright, Klaus_, he said to himself, _take a deep breath, and then run again. Run, and find your sister._

“Is this… it?” Duncan asked, feeling very scared.

They’d gotten inside the building, into some kind of hallway, and the Lab was about as chilling as they’d all expected. Isadora was shaking quite a bit, looking as if she might pass out any second, gripping onto Duncan’s arm as he looked around, feeling just as nervous. Carmelita kept tapping her foot and fiddling with her hair, looking ready to bolt at any moment. Fiona was holding Sunny, who was glancing down the halls, eyes narrowed, listening to make sure nobody was coming.

“Alright, the cameras will spot us soon.” Fiona said. “So we’re going to have to move fast, unless anyone has invisibility of any kind.”

“Fraid not.” Duncan said.

“I want to die.” Carmelita observed.

“So do we all.” Fiona said. She glanced down at Sunny and said, “Alright, sweetie, think you can find your siblings?”
Sunny hesitated, feeling a flash of fear. What if it didn’t work? What if her abilities went away like Duncan’s, and she was useless and their plan failed and everyone got captured?

Somehow, Fiona seemed to sense her anxiety, and said, “It’s alright, Sun. Just try your best, yeah?”

Sunny took a deep breath and shut her eyes. “Oh-ay,” “Alright. Let’s try this.”

She shut her eyes, focusing, losing herself for a moment. Then, slowly, she raised an arm, pointing down a hall.

“You got something?” Fiona asked.

Sunny nodded. “Rhine,” she mumbled, which meant, “I feel something, down that way. I’ll keep pointing at where to go, you follow me.”

“Are you sure there’s no way to avoid the cameras?” Duncan asked nervously.

“Unfortunately, yes, unless we find a way to cut the power.” Fiona said. She shut her eyes, clenching her fist, and saying, “But don’t worry. I’ll take care of anyone who goes after us.”

Klaus had managed to make it to a stairwell- which he figured out because he opened the door and saw the blurry stairs ahead- but he absolutely did not trust himself to run down the stairs without being able to see much, so he managed to find the railing and gripped it as tightly as possible as he slowly went down, feeling that dark ache in his chest that he got whenever his anxiety got to be too much. But it wasn’t as if he could sit down and find a way to calm himself; he had to keep moving, or they’d find him before he could find his sister.

When he reached the bottom of the first set of stairs, he breathed a sigh of relief, and scanned the surrounding area for a second before finally spotting the blurry door. He ran forwards and leaned against it, listening for a minute. He shook slightly, shutting his eyes and trying not to cry. He was so fucking useless. He didn’t have any weapons, he was basically blind, he didn’t know where he was going …

He thought he might’ve heard footsteps, and he didn’t waste time trying to decide if it was his imagination or not. He turned, running, reaching out his hand for the railing. That was about when he made the mistake of looking ahead instead of focusing on the floor beneath him; he didn’t realize the stairs were so close, and before he knew what he was doing, he was falling.

Klaus landed at the bottom of that set of stairs, on a landing inbetween floors, and the second he hit it, a sharp pain jolted through his back and leg, which touched the ground first, and the breath was knocked out of him. He struggled not to let out a cry, tears springing to his eyes. He took a few deep breaths, though his chest felt a bit pained. When he finally could move, he managed to put his hands down, pushing himself up, stumbling to his feet. His leg ached the worst, he thought, but he didn’t think anything was broken. He didn’t know if he was bleeding or bruised or wounded at all, he just knew he felt some immense pain.

*Keep going. Keep going, they’ll catch you.*

He gripped the next railing like a lifeline, moving down the next stair as slowly as possible. He could do this. He could move. Get to the next floor, find Violet.

Wherever she was.
Sunny figured out pretty quickly that her baby language was a waste with these people. As much as Duncan and Isadora tried, they only knew a few terms, Carmelita didn’t care enough to try, and while Fiona seemed to understand a bit more than expected, she still got very lost. So she had to resort to simple “Ye”s and “No”s and hand gestures. They moved pretty quickly, though, rushing down halls with their heads low, listening intently for someone who might approach. Sunny could tell that Fiona was tensing up the farther they ran, expecting for someone to come. Sunny wasn’t worried; she knew Fiona could destroy anyone who attacked them… at least, for a while. But their plan wouldn’t take long, would it?

Sunny shut her eyes to think again, and then let out a small cry. They slid to a stop.

“What is it?” Fiona asked, looking down at her.

Sunny pointed to the right, and they turned to see a door. Duncan approached it, dragging Isadora with him- she wouldn’t let go of his hand, and she kept shaking. He reached out his free hand, trying the handle. “Locked.” he observed.

“Obviously.” Carmelita said bitterly, staring at her feet so she wouldn’t have to look around her. “You need a card to get in, and only the guards have those.”

“Why couldn’t it just be a normal lock? They used to have those.” Fiona groaned.

“Still do, I think, just not on important doors.” Carmelita said. “I think they said… Lab tech, security storage, research areas-”

“What’s in there, Sunny? Is it Klaus?” Duncan asked. “Violet? The Gate?”

“Not the Gate.” Isadora muttered, sounding distant. “We’d know. Quigley’s there.”

“What’s in there?” Fiona asked.

Sunny paused, before shrugging. *It’s important, that’s all.*

Duncan pounded on the door, calling, “Klaus?”

“He’s not gonna answer, dipshit, and now you just gave away that we’re here!” Carmelita groaned. “God. I’m gonna get thrown back into this mess, and the second I see you in the hallway I don’t care how much I pass out, I’m gonna make you jump off the fucking roof-”

“Shut up, we’re busy.” Fiona said. “Sunny, is there a way to get in?”

Sunny rolled her eyes. *Not how this works.*

“I could try to summon some kind of poison to melt it,” Fiona suggested, “But that might knock me out, I’m not too good at melting stuff. Maybe we could-”

“Stop right there!”

Carmelita screamed as they turned to see a guard standing at the end of the hall, pointing a gun at them.

Fiona stared for a moment, then cocked her head, and in a second, he’d fallen to the ground.

“Oh my God.” Duncan muttered, staring.
“Carmelita, get his card.” Fiona ordered. “The alarms’ll go off soon, we’re going to have to hurry.”

Carmelita hesitated an instant, than took off at a run, going up to the guard and taking some kind of lanyard from a round his neck. She ran back, fumbling with a card on the end of it, and she swiped it through some slot on the wall. After a moment, they heard a click, and a small light beside the slot turned from red to green, and Carmelita opened the door. “There you go, cakesniffers.”

They peered in, and Fiona stepped in first, flipping on a light. It seemed to just be some storage room, with shelves of boxes across the walls.

“Sunny, what is this?” Duncan asked. “We’re supposed to be looking for our-”

Sunny groaned and gestured towards a shelf, feeling a pull towards that direction. Fiona carried her over, while Isadora and Duncan wandered to a shelf in the corner. Carmelita hastily followed them, not wanting to be left alone.

“Sunny,” Fiona began, lifting the lid of the box, “I’m not sure-”

Sunny reached in, and realized what was inside the second she grabbed it.

Slowly, very slowly, she pulled out a pair of glasses.

“What are these?” Fiona asked.

Sunny didn’t respond, instead staring at the glasses in her hand as alarms started to go off.

Her stomach sank into her chest, and she started to cry.
Isadora was the first to turn around and see what Sunny had. She’d looked towards Fiona as the alarms went off, opening her mouth to ask what they should do, if they should hurry it up or find somewhere to hide, but as soon as her eyes fell on Klaus’s glasses, she suddenly felt even worse than she already did. That was quite the achievement, because ever since something had happened to Quigley, she’d felt nauseous and cold and couldn’t stop shaking, continually feeling like she was on the edge of a crying fit but not-quite-there. But seeing the glasses in Sunny’s hands was putting her very close to that edge.

“Oh my God.” she whispered, staring in horror.

Duncan and Carmelita turned, too, and while Carmelita just froze in shock, Duncan let out a gasp, turning white as a sheet.

“What is it?” Fiona asked.

“Klaus’s glasses.” Isadora said quietly, hearing Sunny start to sniffle slightly.

“He can’t see without them, he told me he’s basically blind without them.” Duncan added, his voice breaking a little. “He’s blind, they have him trapped here and-”

“That makes sense, actually.” Fiona said, and Isadora noticed she barely reacted at all to this revelation. “I think I remember not having my glasses for the first few months of testing, but it was so long ago I forgot… I guess it’d make sense, they’d want him to be relatively helpless until they were reasonably certain he wouldn’t run.”

Duncan looked about as bad as Isadora felt, and even Carmelita looked very uneasy.

“We better keep going.” Fiona said. “It’s a good thing we found these, otherwise your friend would still be blind when we got out. Sunny, can you point us to- Sunny?”

Sunny hadn’t removed her eyes from the glasses, and her cries were getting louder. As they watched, she started fully sobbing, before clutching the glasses to her chest like they were a comforting stuffed animal or blanket.

“Sunny, what-” Fiona began.

“She’s having trouble processing, I think.” Isadora said before she could stop herself, not even noticing how blank she was sounding nor how alarmed everyone looked as they turned to her. “She barely understands the concept of death, let alone everything that could be happening here, but in finding out that Klaus’s glasses were taken away, leaving him without one of his senses, it’s starting to dawn on her just how much danger we’re all in, especially her siblings.”

Everyone gave her concerned looks (except for Sunny, who was still wailing), and, carefully, Duncan said, “Isa, are you using your empathy?”
Isadora considered, before saying, a bit shakily, “I… I don’t know. I think so.”

“You mean you didn’t do it on purpose?”

“Guess it’s… acting up,” she mentioned, and very quickly the feeling of nausea got a bit stronger. “God, we’re all terrified.”

She shut her eyes, and her legs gave out. Duncan caught her quickly, putting an arm under her. “Isa! Isa, holy shit, are you okay?”

Isadora kept shaking, feeling colder and colder. “We need to find Quigley.” she said. “And Klaus. We need…”

“Isadora, are you hurt?”

She heard a pounding in her ears. “N-no, I… Quigley’s hurt, we need-”

A sharp pain suddenly spread through her back and leg, and she let out a gasp.

“What? Isadora-”

“We need to go.” Fiona said, a bit concerned. “Someone calm Sunny, we need to find the other kids and get the fuck out of here.”

Isadora struggled to breathe, but as Fiona approached, she reached out a hand, managing to put it on Sunny’s shoulder. “Sunny.” Isadora gasped out, shutting her eyes and focusing on cloudwatching and sleeping and other calming things. “Calm down.”

It took a second, but slowly, Sunny stopped crying. She still sniffled a bit, and looked at Isadora with a strange expression.

“Get us to them.” Isadora said, feeling very exhausted and incredibly pained. “Please. Focus.”

Sunny stared for another second, and then shut her eyes and pointed out the door.

“I’ll take care of the guards.” Fiona said quickly. “Isadora, can you run?”

“Yeah.” Isadora said, only to almost fall again when Duncan tried to move his arm.

“Shit. Duncan, you’re in charge of your sister.” Fiona said. “If things get too bad, you leave with her, got it?”

“Quigley-” Isadora began.

“We’ll get him, but you’ll be no help to him if you can’t move.” Fiona said sharply. “Carmelita, stick with me.”

“Whatever.” Carmelita said, though Isadora could tell she was terrified. “Sure.”

They followed Sunny’s directions, then, running down the halls as she gestured and let out occasional cries. Occasionally they’d run into another person, but Isadora would just shut her eyes and lean into her brother as Fiona waved her hand and took care of them.

“You know,” Carmelita said, as they reached the end of the hall, “Eventually they’re gonna figure out you’re killing their men, and just shoot you before you can poison them.”
“You’re a ray of sunshine, aren’t you?” Fiona shot her a glare. “Anyway, we’ll be in and out soon enough.”

“This was a horrible plan.” Carmelita rolled her eyes.

“You’re a horrible plan.” Duncan snapped, and Isadora realized he was struggling a bit, trying to support her as they ran. She felt a bit bad about that, but there wasn’t much she could do; the ache in her leg and back had dulled slightly, but her feet felt too heavy, and she still felt sick and cold, and she was starting to feel a pain in her chest every time she breathed out.

Sunny let out a cry, and they all stopped dead in their tracks. They waited only a second before she pointed to a doorway, and Fiona opened the door to see a stairwell.

“Okay, Sunshine, get us there.” Fiona said, as Sunny clutched Klaus’s glasses tighter.

Fiona and Carmelita rushed up the stairs, the latter following very close to the older girl’s heels. Duncan gripped harder onto Isadora, saying, “Will you be okay?”

“I’m fine, you all are… overreacting.” Isadora lied.

She flinched as they raced up the stairs, every step giving her the pleasant feeling of someone stabbing her in the legs. She shut her eyes, trying not to show Duncan just how shitty she was feeling, or they’d make her leave, and she had to find Quigley, he was hurting so much, she had to… she had to find him, help him…

“Stop.” Fiona held up a hand, and everyone froze, staring at her in confusion.

Then, after a second, they heard it, too.

Screaming.

It was pretty distant, but the second they processed what was happening, Duncan yelled, “Klaus!”

He gripped harder onto Isadora and ran, pushing past Fiona and Carmelita, as Sunny started crying again. Isadora flinched but didn’t ask Duncan to slow down, even as the other kids behind them started yelling for them to stop for a moment.

“Klaus!” Duncan started yelling again. “Klaus!”

“Shh!” Isadora finally managed to say, as they neared the screaming. “Shh, they’ll hear us-”

“Isadora, he’s in trouble, he-”

The screaming stopped, just as they reached the door that sounded close to it.

Duncan didn’t hesitate, reaching forwards and almost throwing the door open, pulling Isadora out with him. She shut her eyes and tried to ignore the pain and fear and cold she was feeling.

Focus on Klaus. He’s in trouble. Find Klaus.

The alarms had been going off a while now, and Klaus didn’t like it one bit. He’d been moving down the stairs as slow as possible, terrified he’d fall again, but his nerves were skyrocketing as the loud noise pierced the air. At this point, everyone in the Lab must know he’d escaped, and now everyone would be on the lookout. Well, at least he’d reached a landing to another floor.
Klaus stumbled to the next door, fumbling with the handle. God, he was so useless! He couldn’t see more than a few feet ahead of him. How was he supposed to find Violet if he couldn’t even fucking see? Why couldn’t they just let him have his glasses, would it really be that much of a problem for them? Well, at least the pain from the rough fall was starting to numb a little. Not much, of course, he wasn’t that lucky, but he managed to move fine, which was good, at least he could do that. If all else failed, he could probably find a way out of the building and get through the woods; so long as he followed the path, he’d make his way back to Esme’s house, wait in the shed until the Quagmires got there, and then they could go back together. Maybe Esme brought his glasses back to the house and they could find them… no, no, he couldn’t leave Violet here for any amount of time, she might get moved or hurt, and what about Sunny, what if she was here? He couldn’t leave them. And he couldn’t drag Duncan and Isadora into here when he had no plan, could he?

He should probably find this… Gate. They’d said Violet was going to be working with the Gate. That would probably be on ground floor, maybe they were going to be testing her with a gate to a fence outside the building? In that case, he should keep going down the stairwell, find the last floor, go out that way, maybe hide in some closets and listen to doctors passing by. It shouldn’t be hard. So long as they didn’t catch him.

Before he could try to move down the stairs again, though, he thought he heard a door slam above him. Shit, shit, shit! Well, okay, he wasn’t going to be able to get down the stairs fast enough. He’d just duck into the hall, and he could hide there until the people passed.

Klaus pushed the door open and rushed into the hallway, shutting it behind him and pressing up against it, straining to hear footsteps on the other side.

He didn’t hear anything for a few seconds, except for his own ragged breath and those stupid, loud alarms. He bounced his leg as he leaned against the door, wondering if maybe whoever had entered the stairwell had run up the stairs and didn’t even pass his hiding spot. Maybe he could just go back in. Get downstairs, towards wherever Violet was, get out from there. Then everything would be okay-

A hand shot over his mouth, and Klaus felt his stomach drop as someone yanked him backwards.

“For fuck’s sake, you little shit!” yelled some voice Klaus didn’t recognize, as he started to try to shake off the hold the stranger had on him. “What the hell were you doing?”

Klaus responded by biting the man’s hand. The man retracted it, letting out another string of curse words, and Klaus started screaming, his instincts kicking in before he could even think about what he was shouting.

“Violet!” he screeched, trying to kick out his legs, trying to hit the guard holding him. “Violet! Vi!”

He heard more footsteps rushing in from down the hall, and he let out another scream, still trying to get away from the man holding him. “Let go! Let go! Vi-”

Someone managed to slap him, which shut him up for a second. He felt someone else grab an arm, and the pain from his fall flared up again. He let out a small cry, trying to remember the self-defence lessons Mother had given him, but just like the last time he’d been attacked, it was all slipping away.

“Sedate him, fast, before he pulls some shit again.” someone said.

No, no, no-
“Don’t touch me! Let go! Violet!”

He felt another hand on his arm, and he lost it.

“Don’t touch me!”

Klaus wasn’t entirely sure what happened then, but he felt something burst, and then the hands on his arm were gone, and he heard thumps against the wall.

Thank God, it looked like his telekinesis had kicked in again.

He only allowed himself to be surprised for a moment, before he turned around and started running in the direction with the least amount of blurry images that were probably other people, covering his ears as he started to hear shouts in addition to those fucking alarms.

People were yelling, running after him. He turned around a bend in the hall, and then another, only barely able to tell where the walls were, not really caring where he was going anymore, just feeling desperate to outrun his pursuers.

He turned a corner and saw a flash of color. He skidded to a stop, managing to pause right in front of some kind of door. He pushed it open, grateful beyond belief that it was unlocked, and that he didn’t see or hear anything that might be a person inside. He shut the door quickly and backed up until he was against the wall, his heart pounding and his hands shaking. He held back more tears, sliding to the floor, wondering if he could hide here. He didn’t see anything else in the room, it seemed empty, but he didn’t know because he couldn’t see.

He curled up, starting to cry. He didn’t want this. He just wanted this all to be over- no, no, he wanted this to have never begun. He wanted to be hiding in the back of the library with a new book instead of hiding in this hellhole. He wanted his sisters back, he wanted Sunny to curl up beside him and complain about not wanting to read, he wanted Violet there to hug him and tell him everything was going to be okay, he wanted… he wanted his parents back.

He buried his head in his knees and kept sobbing.

Duncan slid out into the hall, and froze in place.

“Fuck.” Isadora managed to say.

Several guards turned, shocked to see them.

There was a long, long pause, as Duncan felt several things in very quick succession- dread, then fear, then panic, then cold fury.

He pushed Isadora behind him, and then yelled, “What did you do to Klaus?”

“Duncan!” Isadora warned, gripping his arm.

Fiona raced out, then, throwing herself in front of the triplets and tossing out her hands. “Stay back!” she yelled, as Carmelita ran out, too, holding a shaking Sunny (and looking like she had no idea how to hold a baby at all).

“No! They have Klaus, they-” Duncan began, but the men were already down.

Fiona whipped around, a flash of anger in her eyes. “Duncan! What would’ve happened if that
hadn’t worked on time? What would’ve happened if they’d shot you, or me, or your sister? What-”

“Klaus was up here!” Duncan yelled. “They must’ve taken him somewhere, they-”

“They would have killed us all!” Fiona shouted, and Duncan realized then that she sounded terrified. “They would’ve killed you! They’ve killed before! They killed all of our parents, they killed my brother, they’ll kill you the second they think you won’t cooperate!”

They stared for a second, shocked, before Carmelita said, “You had a brother?”

Fiona froze up, then shook her head. “I’ll… it doesn’t… yes. Yes, I did, but he’s… we don’t have time for this.”

Sunny let out a yawn, and then pointed down the hall. “Ye.” she muttered.

“Are you okay?” Duncan paused, glancing down at the infant.

Sunny shrugged, before reaching to wipe away a nosebleed- how long had she been bleeding?

“Okay, okay.” Fiona said, slowly taking Sunny from Carmelita. “Take us to your brother, we’ll deal with all this later.”

Sunny nodded, yawning again, and they ran in the direction she gestured towards.

Klaus hugged his knees, still sobbing, starting to rock back-and-forth. Everything was going so wrong, and he could barely think straight. He couldn’t do anything, he was going to die here, and he was never going to see his sisters again, and he’d never see his friends, and he was never going to get out of here.

He was going to die. He was going to fucking die.

He heard loud footsteps in the hall, and he shot to his feet, running to the far wall, managing to find the door and pulling the handle, doing his best to hold it closed.

The footsteps slid to a halt as he heard a familiar cry.

No… no, that had to be my imagination. That couldn’t be…

Someone tried to open the door, and Klaus pulled it back, keeping it shut.

“Goddamn.” he heard someone say, someone he didn’t recognize. “Of course one of them’s here.”

“Why?” that almost sounded like Carmelita, but she couldn’t be here. “What’s so special about this room?”

“Klaus!”

Duncan.

“Klaus, is that you?”

Klaus could barely breathe. He desperately wanted to open the door, but… what if this was some kind of trick? Maybe someone was imitating voices. He couldn’t see why Duncan would be here, he and Isadora would be back at the house, getting told he’d been shipped off to a relative
somewhere else. And if Sunny was here… Sunny shouldn’t be here. She couldn’t be here.

“Klaus? Is that you?” Duncan’s voice called again. “Please, please, tell us.”

Klaus shut his eyes and took a deep breath. It could be a trick.

“Is…” Klaus was surprised at how shaky his voice sounded. “Is that actually you?”

He heard what sounded like a sigh of relief. “Klaus! Klaus, we’re here! It’s me, and Isadora, and Sunny! And Carmelita and Fiona, but-”

“How do I know?”

Pause. “Klaus?”

“How do I know this isn’t-” he was a bit choked up as tears streamed down his face. “This isn’t- some-kind of trick? You sh-shouldn’t be here, you shouldn’t be here, you’re not… is it you, or are there p-people with you-?”

“Klaus-”

“What if they’re threatening you, making you do this? What if you’re not even here?” Klaus could barely speak. “What if- what if-”

“Klaus.” Duncan said. “Breathe in, okay?”

Klaus froze.

“One, two, three, four. Breathe out- one, two, three, four.”

Klaus shut his eyes, trying to stop the tears for a moment.

“Everything’s okay. Are you doing okay?”

Holy shit…

“Klaus? Are you okay? Are you still there?”

Klaus stepped back, hugging himself slightly. “Open the door.”

There was a brief pause, and then the door swung open, and within a second, Klaus felt two people hugging him, almost throwing themselves onto him.

“Klaus!” Those were Duncan and Isadora’s voices, definitely. Isadora sounded like she’d been crying a lot.

Klaus didn’t hug them back, still feeling shaken and terrified, especially as he heard that unfamiliar voice again, saying something from the doorway- “Look at us, Rainbow Room kid reunion.”

The triplets pulled away, and Duncan said, “Holy shit, what did those fuckers do to you?”

“I…” Klaus blinked back tears, still shivering. “I don’t know. I don’t know, they- they tried to sedate me and I ran, and- and I can’t f-f-find Violet, and- is Sunny here?”

“Yes, she’s-” said the other voice. “She’s right here.”

“I can’t see.” Klaus said. “I can’t- my glasses are- I can’t- can’t-”
“Klaus, breathe.” Duncan said. “It’s okay. Sunny found them.”

“What?”

That’s when he heard a quiet, “Kla?”

The crying got a bit worse there. He tried to wipe his eyes with his arm, but that wasn’t helping much. He just kept crying, and he held out his arms, and felt his baby sister put her arms around him, and then he was holding her. She put her head on his shoulder for a second, and then pressed something into his hand.

She did find them.

Klaus struggled to get his glasses on without putting Sunny down, but once he did, he saw her looking up at him, tears at the edge of her eyes and a bit of dried blood on her face. It was a bit blurry, because the glass was smudged beyond belief, but it was better than nothing.

“Sunny…” he said, holding her closer. “Sunny, I…”

“Amo.” Sunny muttered. “I love you.”

Klaus struggled not to sob as he kept holding her. He glanced down at himself- he was in a hospital gown, yes, and there looked to be a bit of bruising around his wrist- clamps must’ve gotten too tight. He looked up, seeing that Duncan and Isadora looked about the same as he saw them that morning, if not a bit dirtier and more winded and worried. Isadora also looked exhausted, and definitely like she’d been recently crying. Carmelita was indeed there, and she kept glancing towards the door and fiddling with her hair. He glanced towards the new girl, then, briefly scanning her; she had a dark look as she scanned the room.

“That’s Fiona.” Duncan said quickly. “She was in here with us.”

Fiona waved a bit.

“And Carmelita’s here, too.” Duncan added. “She’s another number. Twelve.”

“I hate you all.” Carmelita said.

“What?” Klaus stared at her. “Wait, you’re-”

Fiona interrupted him. “We need to hurry. If we want to get Violet and Quigley out, we’ll have to move fast.”

“You kn-know where-”

“Sunny does.” Fiona said, gesturing to the baby in his arms.

“What?”

“She’s… got powers, too.” Isadora said carefully.

“No, she doesn’t.” Klaus said instantly.

“It’s how she kept finding relevant articles.” Duncan said. “She’s got some kind of… perception.”

“We don’t have time for this!” Fiona almost shouted. “Look, we can discuss this all later. Sunny, where are we going next?”
Sunny shut her eyes, and Klaus looked down at her, feeling his stomach drop as she muttered, “Etag.” “Get downstairs. I’ll lead you from there.”

“You’ll lead us from downstairs?” Klaus asked. “I… Sunny, no–”

“We can do that.” Fiona said. She turned towards the door, which had swung shut again, reaching for the handle.

That’s when the lights dimmed slightly, and they heard a loud click.

They froze for an instant, and then Duncan said, “What was that?”

“That,” Fiona said, “Was not good.”

“I’ll tell you.” Carmelita said, her voice sounding both scared and angry.

They turned to her, and finally, Isadora said, “What?”

Carmelita shot her a glare. “They just went into lockdown.”
“Lockdown?” Duncan asked.

“Yeah, idiot!” Carmelita yelled. “It means that everything’s locked! We’re stuck in this fucking room, they’re gonna come and get us in here once they’ve got something that can stop her—” she gestured to Fiona here, “—and then we’re all gonna be dragged back to testing!”

“We’re not. We’re not trapped, and we’re not going back.” Fiona said sharply. She scanned the room, then raced to Duncan and Isadora. “What’s in your bags?”

“Clothes and evidence.” Duncan said.

“Some food, some clothes, and a box of tampons.” Isadora said.

“What food’ve you got?” Fiona asked. “Anything canned?”

“Yes, I’ve got this.” Isadora slowly reached into her bag, pulling out a can of something, flinching a bit as the bag bounced against her leg—shit, what happened to her? “Why do—”

Fiona grabbed the can and turned, hurling it into an upper corner of the room. They all turned just in time to see it hit a security camera, smashing the lens.

“That’ll give us a minute.” Fiona said. She looked around some more, and then went towards a table in the corner that Klaus hadn’t noticed, probably because it was the same color as the wall and thus would’ve been hard to distinguish while he was functionally blind. “Someone help me push this.”

“Why?” Duncan asked.

“Just hurry it up!”

Hesitantly, Duncan ran over, grabbing the other end of the table. Klaus stared at Isadora for a second, noticing that without her brother next to her, she looked like she was about to topple over. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“No… exactly.” Isadora admitted, shaking slightly as she pushed some hair behind her ear. “I… something… did you feel a- a pain? In your chest? Or feel cold?” Klaus hesitantly nodded. “I think… Klaus, I think something’s wrong with Quigley. I think… I think it got him, in- in the other world, and I can feel too much of it…”

Klaus moved over and gave Isadora a hug. She flinched at the touch, but hugged him back after a second, and Sunny also put a hand on her shoulder and whispered a little.

“Klaus!” Klaus jumped as Fiona called his name. He turned, seeing that she’d managed to push the table against the other wall, and Duncan looked a bit confused about why they’d just moved it.

“Yeah?”
“How injured are you?”
“I… don’t know?”

Fiona paused. “Duncan, you said you had clothes, give him something, we’re going to be running soon, possibly in the cold, and the hospital gown won’t be helpful.”

Duncan nodded, running over to Klaus. “I’ll take Sunny, you get changed into something.”

“Are you su-”

“Fiona knows what she’s doing.” Isadora said, her voice almost blank.

“Just throw on some pants and stuff the hospital gown into it like a shirt, you’ll be fine.” Carmelita said, as Klaus took Duncan’s bag into a corner of the room. “We can make it look good later.”

“Throw on a jacket, it’ll help with the temperature.” Fiona said. She turned to Duncan, saying, “I need to borrow Sunny for a moment.”

“What are you going to do?” Klaus asked worriedly as he threw on a jacket, and Duncan also hesitated slightly.

“I just need her to do something real quick.” Fiona said.

Duncan carefully glanced at Sunny, who shrugged, and he handed her over to the older girl. Fiona ran back to the table, lifting Sunny up, and they finally noticed what she had noticed before; an air vent.

“Rip that cover off, kay?” Fiona asked.

“Idiot,” Carmelita said, “That’s not-”

Sunny reached up and gripped a bit of the grate, then tossed it over her shoulder.

Klaus stared in shock and a bit of fear, while everyone else did their best to pretend that was a normal thing for a baby to do.

“We can probably fit in here.” Fiona said, turning around. “Sunny goes in first- sweetheart, can you lead us to somewhere safe?”

“Ye.”

“Kay. We’ll get out of the vents, break some cameras, take the stairwell and find your sister there. Okay?”

“Ye.”

“Klaus, you go in after her, then the rest of you. I’ll bring up the rear. It’ll be a tight squeeze, but we need to make sure to stick together. If we get split up, we’re fucked.”

“There’s no fucking way I’m going in there.” Carmelita said.

“Would you rather they catch you?”

Carmelita sighed dramatically. “Fine.”
“Klaus, you ready yet?” Fiona asked.

Klaus felt very uncomfortable, having thrown on the first pair of pants he could dig out and stuffed his hospital gown into it. It was a bit nice wearing Duncan’s jacket, though; it was very comfortable and felt like a warm hug, which he desperately needed at the moment.

“I… guess?” he finally said, walking over to Duncan and giving him his bag back.

“Alright.” Fiona lifted Sunny into the vents. “Okay. We get Violet, then go into the Gate.”

“The Gate?” Klaus asked.

“Sunny’ll be able to find it.” Isadora said. “We’ll get Quigley and find a way out.”

“Violet’ll need some of your clothes, Isadora.” Fiona said. “Klaus, get in the vents before the guards get here.”

“You go in next, Isadora.” Duncan said, as Klaus got onto the table to crawl into the vent. “I’ll be able to… catch you if you pass out.”

“I won’t pass out.” Isadora said, shaking slightly. “I’ll be fine.”

“Isadora.”

“Fine, okay.”

Klaus tried his best not to panic once he was in the vents; it was small and cramped and giving him quite a bit of anxiety. Sunny didn’t seem bothered, though; she was already crawling off, and Klaus hastily followed her as Isadora started climbing in, too.

“Sunny?” Klaus said carefully. “Are you okay?”

“Mox.” Sunny called back. “I will be.”

“Cause if you’re not,” Klaus said, “I… I’ll protect you, okay? I’ll-”

“Shh.” Sunny said. “Be quiet. We need to move.” Though she did glance over her shoulder sympathetically, and mutter, “Praesidio,” which meant, “I understand. I love you, too, but let’s worry about us later, okay?”

“Okay.” Klaus held back some more tears, and nodded, and crawled after his sister.

Sunny stopped after several feet.

“Is this the safe spot?” Klaus asked. “Sunny?”

Sunny had her eyes shut, humming slightly.

“Are we getting out?” Isadora asked, stopping behind Klaus. “I really want out, this place is too small. Worse than the pipes we went through to get in.”

Sunny turned towards Klaus, suddenly looking very serious. “Vi.”

“What? What about Violet?”
Sunny shut her eyes again. “Sentio,” she murmured, which meant, “I can feel her. I think people are talking about her. They… they want her to play with the Gate.”

“Play?”

“Klaus, are we moving or not?” Isadora asked.

Hesitantly, Sunny kept crawling, still babbling as she did, scanning the vents for an opening. “Porta,” she called back, saying, “They want her to close it.”

“Close the Gate?” Klaus asked. “Why would they want her to close it? Well, I mean, monster’s there, yeah, but wouldn’t they want Quigley back?”

Sunny shrugged.

“How… are you seeing these things, Sun?”

Sunny shrugged again, then said, “Vid,” which probably meant, “Since I threw that bed back at the house, I’ve been feeling things, sometimes just knowing things are important like normal, and sometimes just sensing stuff. I just heard those voices in my head, but since all my other powers are working, the people talking are probably not imaginary.”

Sunny finally found a grate, and after a moment, she punched it, letting the cover fly off.

“I’ll go out first,” Klaus said shakily, “And catch you, okay?”

“Eh.” Sunny said. “I’d be fine, but you can go if you want.”

Klaus nodded, and jumped out of the vent.

He stumbled to his feet, and managed to catch Sunny as she leapt out, giggling. Isadora climbed out, then Duncan and Carmelita. Fiona waited a moment before joining them, still glancing over her shoulder.

“Sunny, get us to the stairwell.” Fiona said. “We shouldn’t be too far, but if we’re going to find Violet-”

Sunny let out a tiny yawn, but nodded and gestured to the right.

“Alright, now,” Fiona said, as they started running again, “The Gate’ll be hidden somewhere, but hopefully Sunny can find it.”

“If not,” Isadora said carefully, and Klaus noticed with alarm that Duncan had to hold her up as they ran, “I can probably- I can try to… to trace Quigley, I don’t know if- if I can, but I’m feeling a lot of-”

“Isadora, you’re exhausted enough as is.” Duncan said. “We’re not gonna let you overuse your powers, kay?”

“But-”

Fiona turned the bend and opened the door to the stairwell. “Move your asses!” she called. “Come on, go!”
Sunny let out a cry when Klaus stepped onto one of the landings, and everyone stopped.

“Is this the right floor?” Duncan asked.

Sunny nodded, before leaning against Klaus’s shoulder and shutting her eyes, sighing.

“You can’t fall asleep yet, sweetheart, we need you.” Fiona said. “Klaus, do you want me to carry her?”

“No!” Klaus said, backing up as if she might take her by force.

“Okay.” Fiona backed off slightly, nodding carefully. She listened at the door for a moment, then held it open for them. “Sunny, stay in the lead. We need to find Violet.”

Sunny nodded, struggling to sit up.

“She’s tired!” Klaus said.

“She’s the only one of us who can track your sister.” Fiona said. “She can sleep once we’re out of here.”

Klaus glanced down at his sister. “Sunny, is that okay?”

She nodded. “Vi.”

“Okay.” Klaus muttered. “But you let me know if-”

“We don’t have time for this!” Carmelita yelled. “Get a move on!”

Sunny pointed, and Klaus nodded, bringing her into the hall.

Fiona stayed next to him as Sunny directed the group, looking very tense. Klaus assumed she was preparing to fight, and he really hoped she could do that well, because he couldn’t fight for shit. He also really hoped she knew what she was doing, cause he wasn’t entirely sure himself. All he knew was that he was absolutely terrified, and he desperately wanted to find Violet, and that he was scared for Sunny and his friends. And also that he might break down if anything else went wrong. And that the alarms were getting too loud, on top of everything else.

Sunny nudged him as they neared a bend, and Klaus skidded to a stop before they could turn the corner.

“What?” Klaus asked.

Sunny paused, gesturing down the hall, but Klaus threw out a hand to stop Fiona from going. She didn’t look… good. Her eyes kept darting in different directions, and she was starting to breathe fast.

“Sunny, what’s wrong?”

She shook her head, tearing up slightly.

“Sunny?”

“Mal.” she said quietly. “Bad. There’s something bad over there.”

“She…” Klaus paused. “She… she says there’s something bad.”
“But is that the way to Violet?” Duncan asked.

Sunny hesitantly nodded.

“Okay…” Fiona paused. “Klaus, how good are you with your… telekinesis?”

“Not great.” Klaus admitted, holding Sunny closer.

“None of the rest of you have offensive powers.” Fiona muttered. “Carmelita, up front, you’ve got persuasion, can you talk people with guns into not shooting them?”

“Depends on the person.” Carmelita said. “Pacifists are easy to win over, assholes who just wanna get paid to scare kids are harder- of course, if Five is there, we’re fucked, it was near impossible to get him to do anything, experiments are-”

“Did you say ‘Five’?” Isadora asked.

“Yeah. Olaf something-something.” Carmelita waved a hand. “In charge of this shit, he used to be-”

Fiona looked incredibly uncomfortable, and Klaus was surprised to see she shook slightly as she said, “Shut up about him. Duncan, Isadora, stick to the middle- Isadora’s not looking too good and I doubt you’ll be much use in a fight like that.”

“I’d be fine.” Isadora said stubbornly.

“You can’t even stand up.” Carmelita hissed.

“Klaus, can you translate Sunny’s directions?”

“If she gives them.” Klaus said, tightening his hold on her.

“Allright. We’re moving out. If you hear gunshots, fucking run.” Fiona said. “Okay? They’ll know it’s me by now, so they’ll bring out lethal force if need be.” None of them were quite sure how to respond to that, so she just said, “Alright. Let’s move.”

She took a deep breath, and peered around the corner.

“Sunny…” she said after a moment. “I don’t see anything.”

“Thank God.” Carmelita said, but nobody else felt very relieved.

Slowly, they turned the corner, seeing that it was, indeed, basically empty. Klaus glanced down at Sunny, to see this had not calmed her at all, and instead she seemed even more scared. She buried her face in Klaus’s jacket, struggling not to cry. They moved a bit more slowly, just waiting for something to happen. And about halfway down the hall, Sunny said one word, so quietly that only Klaus could hear.

“Vi.”

Klaus stopped dead in his tracks. They’d just stopped in front of a door, and he turned towards it, shaking and suddenly feeling terrified.

“Klaus?” Duncan noticed that he’d halted first, and the group turned to stare at him. “What is it?”

Klaus moved to the door, touching the handle. He knew it was locked; that’s what lockdown
meant, obviously. But…

“She’s here.” Klaus said.

“Violet?” Isadora asked, as Fiona moved to the side of the door, pulling out some kind of keycard.

“They’re hiding her.” Klaus said numbly, not knowing why he was saying this. “Until we’re caught and they can take her away again.”

“Goddamnit.” Fiona muttered as she swiped the keycard into a slot, only for a light to flash red.

“During a lockdown, doors can only be opened from the inside.” Carmelita said. “You’ve gotta know this.”

“I just hoped-” Fiona began.

“Stop hoping and start fucking moving.” Carmelita rolled her eyes, pushing Klaus to the side.

“Lemme handle this.”

“Carmelita-” Duncan began.

To their surprise, Carmelita then started shouting. “Let us in, bitches! Hey! Let us in!”

“What is she doing?” Klaus asked, suddenly feeling panicked.

“Come on, let us in!”

“I think,” Duncan said, “She’s using her power.”

“Unlock the door, kay?” Carmelita yelled, leaning against it. “It’s your darling Twelve. She’s back, ready to smile and be a good girl. So unlock the door.”

Klaus noticed, with a start, that she looked almost pained. Her eyes were shut tight, as she breathed slowly, still repeating her order in a variety of ways. Her nose started bleeding, as she said, “I know you don’t want to! But, come on, you’ve gotta open the door. We’ll play nice. Come on. Unlock the door.”

As soon as they heard a click, Carmelita stepped aside, gesturing towards the door, and Fiona raced forwards, pushing it open and rushing inside.

Klaus stepped backwards, shocked by the yells he heard. Carmelita ran in after Fiona, but he just kept moving back, hearing what sounded like some kind of a fight.

“Klaus, are you okay?” Duncan asked, as him and his sister turned towards him.

She’s in there.

She’s in there.

She’s actually there.

“Klaus?”

“I…” Klaus took a breath. One, two, three, four. “She’s in there.”

Duncan and Isadora gave him a sympathetic look, and Duncan slowly reached out a hand towards
“Wanna go in together?”

Klaus glanced down at Sunny, who still seemed terrified; he wondered if she even knew what was happening. He glanced at Isadora, who still looked sick and terrified, feeling whatever was happening to her missing brother, probably desperate to hurry up so they could find him. He looked at Duncan, who looked just as scared as they all felt. And he looked at the doorway, where the noise had quieted temporarily.

Violet’s in there.

Slowly, he reached out and took Duncan’s hand, using his other arm to hold Sunny closer to himself.

“Hey, idiots! Come get your sister!” Carmelita called from inside. “Fi’s waking her up!”

Klaus gripped Duncan’s hand, and they walked into the room.

There were a few doctors on the floor, and Klaus didn’t dare look at them for very long. He saw Carmelita digging through drawers, and Fiona was over in the corner, her face scrunched up in focus, as she touched hands with…

The second he saw his big sister, Klaus started crying.

Sunny turned and cried, too, as Klaus let go of Duncan’s hand and ran forwards, stopping just short of Violet, putting his hand on her shoulder, his body shaking with sobs.

She had bruises on her arms and face, her hair was tangled and knotted, her skin was much too pale, and had a sickly color. Part of her hospital gown looked a bit burned, too, as if they’d pressed something hot against her - fuck, would they punish her like that? - and he thought he could see bits of blood on her clothes, but he didn’t want to look too closely, he didn’t want to see this.

She looked horrible.

“What did they do to her?” he heard Duncan ask, while Isadora let out a terrified gasp.

“She obviously fought back a lot.” Fiona muttered. “I’m trying to wake her up.”

“How?” Isadora asked, as Carmelita moved to shut the door in case more guards came by.

“It’s difficult, so I’m going to need you to shut up.” Fiona said. “It involves just enough poison to freak her body out that it starts to awaken, but not enough to kill her, and then I’ll have to drain it out again so she doesn’t die-”

“Will that work?” Carmelita asked.

“Probably.”

“Have you done this before?” Duncan asked.

“Hmm, let’s not talk about that now.” Fiona replied.

Klaus barely heard this, as he reached down to grab Violet’s hand. Sunny, who was sobbing about as hard as he was, leaned over as if to sit beside her, putting her tiny hands on her arm.

“Violet.” Klaus finally managed to say. “Vi, please. Vi, wake up, please. Violet! It’s us, we’re
here! Violet!”

She was barely moving.

“Violet!”
Quick head's up -

I will not be posting a chapter tomorrow, due to the fact that not only will I be out of the house for a cousin's birthday party, but the final ASOUE season drops tomorrow and I'm sure we're all going to want to scream about that. (Lord knows I will be.)

Secondly, this fic only has forty-four chapters, but there'll be a second fic very soon that'll cover ground from Stranger Things Season Two. It won't be posted until January 13-ish, however, because my family and I are going on vacation before then and I won't be able to update regularly like that. (Though I'll definitely have time to complete this part before then.) I'll let you know on tumblr whether it'll be published on the 12th or 13th.

Also, other warnings for this chapter: while nothing gory is described, a lot of pretty violent stuff happens offscreen. I don't describe it, but you should probably be warned it happens.

Thanks y'all!

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Violet wakes Up

“When was the last time you were in the rain?”

Violet glanced up at Mother, her hand fiddling with a dandelion beside her. They were sitting outside, waiting for the sun to rise. She was rarely ever outside when it was dark, and she liked watching the stars, so they’d come out early with Father. He’d just gone inside to get Klaus so he could see the sunrise, too; he’d said he’d rather read up on tide pools than stare at the sky and pretend to be okay with sitting in silence, but he’d asked them to wake him up on time. Mother promised it’d be beautiful.

“What?” Violet asked, a bit confused.

“When was the last time you went outside while it was raining?” Mother asked, pushing a short strand of hair behind her ear as she watched the sky.

“I don’t understand.”

“We don’t like you going outside at all. And Klaus is scared of thunderstorms.” Mother said. “You know… I don’t think you’ve been outside in the rain since you were…”

She shut her eyes, and Violet stared at her. Something felt wrong. It almost felt like… like they weren’t having this conversation. Like they never had. But that was wrong, they were talking right
now, weren’t they?

“You know how old you were? You were four. Getting close to five.” Mother said. “We hid in the back of a truck that was going to California, but we got off after about twelve hours. It was raining then. Klaus didn’t like that, he kept crying, but you didn’t even react. You were so... so scared. You hadn’t made a noise since I set that fire. You didn’t for weeks, we were scared you’d never talk again. But you finally bounced back after a while, finally started laughing and playing again. We were hoping you’d just forgotten about it all. But you had nightmares for years. You used to- to wake up crying, about fire and shadows and needles on your skin. I always wondered if you really remembered why those things scared you so much. I think part of you still remembers, you’ve just… pushed it down.”

“What are you talking about?” Violet asked, a bit frightened.

“It’s a bit hard to completely forget something like that.” Mother said, sounding distant. “I mean, Klaus did, of course, but he was two years old and asleep through most of it. You were much older, you were able to tell what was happening to you.”

“Mother...?”

“We shouldn’t have split up.” Mother said quietly. “We thought it’d be safer. Harder to find you all if you weren’t all together. Especially since we weren’t too sure what little Isadora did. She seemed to do something to all of you, but we didn’t know if that could enable the Lab to track you through poor Fiona.” Her voice broke slightly there. “We would’ve saved her, too, if we had enough time to find her. But we had to protect you first. All those years... we felt so horrible, your Father and I. That we hadn’t been able to find her.”

Violet stared at her Mother, fear gripping her. She felt something cold against her chest, then, and slowly reached to pull out a locket around her neck. Was she supposed to be wearing that?

Mother leaned over, opening the locket and running a hand over the second picture, the one of six children. “Ellie didn’t get a number.” she said quietly.

“What?”

“Ellie. She always felt left out, so I got the others to call her Zero. So she felt like one of us. But she never got a tattoo. It might interfere with her shapeshifting.”

“Shapeshifting?” Violet asked.

“Mm-hmm. She could change her hair, her skin, her height, her weight, her age. Could never quite get the eyes, though. She was always upset about that. They stayed green. Green as a sage leaf. But they weren’t sure if she could change a tattoo, so they played it safe and never got her one. Besides, she was Feint’s daughter, and I’m sure he didn’t want his real child to be branded like us.” Mother sounded a bit bitter at that, and then she shut her eyes, her voice going sad. “She and Lemony ran. Before I found out I was having you. They were the first ones to get out- well, Lemony ran when he was fourteen, but they brought him back within a few months. When they left as adults, nobody ever found them. Or they did and killed them. I was never sure.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Bertrand was never like us.” Mother didn’t look like she was listening, lost in her own thoughts. “But he loved them, too. Did I tell you how we met? His foster mother did some work for the Lab and didn’t have anyone to babysit, so they let him hang out with us whenever we weren’t testing
and he wasn’t in school. He didn’t deserve to get dragged into this. It’s my fault, I…"

She looked back at the locket, and started pointing to other children in the photo. “Jacques is dead. At least I’m pretty sure he is. Not sure what happened to Kit. She might’ve gotten out after we left, but if she did, she never contacted us.” Mother paused, then, staring at the last child. “Olaf’s still there. I got him stuck there, and he decided to stay and keep things just as bad.” She sighed. “Man hands on misery to man.”

“Mother?”

Mother took a deep breath, then shut the locket, letting it drop back against Violet’s shirt. “You have to wake up now, dear.”

“What are you talking about? I’m awake.”

“No, you’re not. You need to wake up. Your brother’s waiting for you.” Mother looked almost like she was holding back tears. “He’s going to have to wait a bit longer, darling.”

“What does that mean?”

“You take care of them, okay?”

Violet put a hand on the locket. “I…I don’t hate you.”

The vision of her Mother leaned over and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “I know, dearest. I loved you so much.”

Violet took a deep breath, and then asked, “Are you really here?”

Mother gave her a pained smile. “I’m dead.”

“So this is just the ESP?” Violet shut her eyes. “Or my imagination? You’re not here. You’re not really saying these things. I still don’t know what you thought. What you actually wanted.”

“I guess that’s true.” Mother leaned back, looking at the sky. It was almost day, and they could see the sun. “But you’ve still got hope. Hope that I was a good person after all, that I did love you and try to do what was best. You’ve still got hope, Violet. That’s all we can ever ask for.”

Violet turned towards the sun and shut her eyes.

Everything was spinning.

Violet blinked open her eyes, her mind fuzzy and her vision blurry. She thought she saw people moving, thought she heard shouts and calls, but it was hard to tell. She started feeling pain first; in her back, her arms, her chest. Her breathing was ragged, and she could feel tears at the edge of her eyes. It almost hurt to move.

She thought she heard a distant voice- “They’re outside! Shove something under the door!”

“We need to get out!”

“Not if they’re outside! Let me try to handle them, you keep the door shut!”

It was almost going in one ear and out the other. Violet tried to focus her vision, but it just got more
blurry. She had an awful headache now, too.

“Violet? Violet, please, please tell me you’re awake.”

Hold on… she recognized that voice.

Violet finally managed to focus in on an image—Klaus’s face, looking down at her.

Ah, of course.

“Violet!” he sounded relieved. He looked a bit weird, but that was probably just her mind being all fuzzy. “Violet, oh my God!”

Violet sighed, glancing up at him. “What are we gonna do now?”

“We- we’re trying to- Vi, I-”

“Just let me- ow! Fuck.” Violet tried to sit up, but when she moved her arm to push herself up, she just felt a sharp pain. She still wasn’t quite sure what was going on, and she strained to remember what had happened last. She’d gotten knocked out… Klaus was… “You’re here. We need to get you out.”

“We’re getting you out, Vi, we’re getting everyone-”

“Yeah, I know. But you’re here somewhere.”

“Violet, what are you-”

“I don’t know if I can move much, but Mother said I can still get to you.” Violet struggled to sit up again, finally managing to get up a little. “I… I need to get you out, before they come back for me.”

“Violet…” Klaus was staring at her. “Violet, can you even hear me?”

“Course I can.” she groaned. Well, she could hear him a bit. There might be other voices around, other noises, maybe some alarms, but everything was still… dizzy. “But we need to find the real Klaus. Can you help me with that, or am I…”

He looked upset. Violet paused. Her ESP-Klaus had never really shown emotion. Maybe she was still hallucinating? She took a breath, trying to ignore the spurt of pain she got when she did. “I… they’re going to kill me, Klaus. They’re gonna…”

“No, no, I won’t let them. We’re getting out.”

“I need to get you out first. I can’t let them kill you, too.”

“Violet, listen to me, we’re getting you out!”

“I’m not leaving without Klaus.”

“Violet, I’m right here! Please, please, I’m right here!”

“The real Klaus, he’s here somewhere.” Violet sat up straighter. “And so’s-”

She cut herself off as she glanced down towards her feet, wondering if there were some kind of restraints she might have to cut.
Instead, she saw Sunny.

The baby was sitting at her side, and Violet wasn’t sure for how long. Her face was red and she was looking up at her with teary eyes.

Violet, very slowly, glanced between Sunny and Klaus.

“Violet, please. It’s me.” Klaus said.

Violet looked between her siblings again. She’d never hallucinated two of her family members at once. “You…”

She looked up at Klaus again, as her vision started to get less blurry. His face didn’t just look weird, it looked… hurt. He had some kind of red mark on his face, maybe a fresh bruise? He looked pale, and shaken, and he had some kind of desperate look in his eyes. Her ESP-Klaus wouldn’t emote this much. And her Imaginary-Klaus wouldn’t look like this. And she’d never imagined two people at once.

She looked to Sunny, and then back to her brother.

Oh.

The world was still spinning, but not because she was still struggling to stay awake. Now it was because her brother was here. He was right here in front of her. So was Sunny. They were… they were here.

“Klaus?”

Klaus reached up, wiping tears from his face with a jacket sleeve- where’d he get that? “Vi. Violet, it’s me.”

“Klaus?” she could barely breathe. “Sunny?”

Sunny let out a whimper and leaned forwards, trying to hug her sister. Violet slowly put an arm around her, feeling the back of her sister’s little onesie. She was real. She was here.

“Sunny.” she repeated. She was crying now, she knew, but she didn’t care.

Klaus leaned forwards, a bit hesitant, still scanning her. “Shit, Violet, who did this to you?”

Violet just reached out her other arm, touching his shoulder. He was there.

She pulled him closer, ignoring the pain that came when she dragged him into a hug. Klaus immediately hugged her back, burying his head in her shoulder and starting to cry.

“Klaus, Sunny, I-I’m sorry.” Violet managed to say, shutting her eyes and just holding her siblings for a moment. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m-”

“Shut up.” Klaus managed to say. “Shut up, Vi, you don’t have to- you’re here. You’re here, and we’re getting you out.”

“Amo.” Sunny mumbled, pressing up against Violet and crying into her hospital gown. “Amo.”

“Vi, who did this to you? What did they do?” Klaus asked.

Violet pulled out of the hug slightly, reaching up to touch the bruise on her brother’s cheek, feeling
a flash of anger. “Who did this to you?”

“It doesn’t matter. We’re getting out of here.” Klaus said.

“Klaus-”

Violet suddenly heard a crash and started, instinctively backing up and throwing her hands over her face. Klaus stepped back, quickly lifting Sunny. After a moment, Violet lowered her arms and looked into the rest of the room.

Huh. There was a lot more going on than she’d thought.

The doctors who must’ve been with her were on the floor, and four unfamiliar kids were racing around the room. One with bright red hair was digging through drawers, while a teenager a little older than her leaned against the door, waving her hand and muttering while her nose bled. Then there were two children in the center of the room, maybe a bit older than Klaus; the boy was supporting the girl, who looked so much like him that they had to be siblings. They were both watching her carefully.

“Klaus… what’s happening?” Violet asked carefully.

“Uh, Violet-” Klaus stuttered, turning around. “These are the other numbers. Fiona’s Six, Duncan’s Eight, Isadora’s Nine and Carmelita’s Twelve.”

Violet stared at them, eyes wide. “You. You’re… here.”

“Hi!” Duncan waved awkwardly, while Isadora just stared at her, looking a bit distant.

There was a thump on the door, and Fiona swore. “Damn it! They keep sending more guards!”

“Because you’re killing them all, idiot.” said Carmelita. “They’re gonna come in and kill us because we won’t stop poisoning them.”

“Poison?” Violet asked.

“Fiona manipulates poison.” Klaus said quickly. “Uh, Duncan’s a telepath, but only sometimes? Isadora’s an empath, Carmelita’s very persuasive, and…” he took a deep breath. “I’m telekinetic.”

Violet’s stomach dropped. “You are?”

Klaus bit his lip and nodded. “Yeah. And… Sunny’s got super strength and some kind of… ability to tell where we need to go and what we need to find-”

“Extrasensory perception.” Violet said, staring at Sunny, who was looking a bit tired but wouldn’t take her eyes off of her older sister. “You figured that all out?”

“Yeah.” Klaus nodded. “We’re both telekinetic, right? You made stuff fly-”

“I can only move metal.” Violet said, struggling to sit up some more, still not feeling well at all. “I can control metal.”

“You-”

Isadora suddenly screamed, “Fiona!”

They turned towards the girl at the door, who had just doubled over, breathing hard. Duncan and
Isadora raced over towards her, while Carmelita yelled, “Damn it, not now!”

“I’m fine!” Fiona yelled.

“You’re not, you’re gonna knock yourself out!” Duncan said.

“That door’s not going to hold much longer.” Isadora said.

Violet bit her lip, turning to Klaus, and then she shut her eyes. “I can fix this.” she said. She made an attempt to stand up, only to feel a flash of exhaustion. She dropped a bit, and Klaus ran forwards, putting his hand on her shoulder.

“No, no, don’t get up, you’re still kicking off the sedative-”

“I can fix this. I just…” Violet paused, glancing down at her pocketless dress. “Nobody happens to have a ribbon, do they? I left mine in my room.”

Klaus let out a swear under his breath. “I would’ve brought one if I-”

“If you knew you were coming here, you wouldn’t’ve gotten caught in the first place.” Carmelita rolled her eyes. “Can you use a slap bracelet?”

“No?”

Sunny tugged on Klaus’s shirt, muttering something. Carefully, Klaus put her down next to Violet and pulled on the bottom of his shirt- oh, oh shit, it was the hospital gown. Klaus held out the end, and Violet could tell in a few seconds that he was struggling to rip off an edge. Sunny noticed, too, and let out a sigh before reaching forwards and ripping a bit off herself. While Carmelita finally moved enough to help Fiona to her feet, and Duncan and Isadora stepped back, Klaus ripped off the rest of the bottom of the hospital gown, handing the strip of fabric over to his sister.

“Thank you.” Violet said, watching as he stuffed the gown back into his pants like a shirt.

“Where’d you get those clothes?”

“Duncan packed some. Isadora has some for you once we’re not about to die.” Klaus said.

Violet slowly used the strip of fabric to tie back her hair, flinching as she noticed how tangled it had gotten, but feeling a bit of relief as it got pulled back. She shut her eyes, and let herself sink into the room around her. It didn’t take long for her to feel the pings, all around them. There was so much metal, the room was full of it.

This would be easy.

She opened her eyes, determination settling in.

“Get behind me.” she said.

Klaus nodded, rushing towards Duncan and grabbing his forearm, pulling him a bit. “Behind Violet!”

“Why?”

“Just do it, go!”

Duncan dragged Isadora behind Violet’s table, as Klaus pushed Carmelita and Fiona back, too. He ran to grab Sunny, moving as Violet sat up a bit more, staring at the door.
“That’ll open in a bit.” Fiona warned, sounding worryingly tired.

“I can work with that.” Violet said.

“We need to hurry.” Duncan said. “We still have to get to the Gate.”

The world froze again.

Violet slowly turned. “The Gate?”

“To the Upside Down.” Duncan said, as Klaus flinched a bit.

“We need to find our brother.” Isadora added, her voice sounding a bit pained. “He’s in there, he-”

“Quigley.” Violet said.

Everyone stared at her. “You know our brother?” Duncan asked, sounding almost desperate.

Violet glanced back towards the door. It’d break soon. “He’s behind the Gate. He was here before me. He’s number Ten. He’s…” they probably didn’t need to hear that he was dying. “Hurt. We’re going to find him. I… I have to find him. He’s calling.”

“Violet.” Klaus began.

“Shh.” Violet sat, sitting up straighter and shutting her eyes. “Door’s about to burst. I’ll take care of the guards.”

“How?”

Violet slowly raised her arm.

The drawers for all the desks and tables flew out from their holding spaces and paused mid-air, as all the metal tools and equipment rose out, pointing themselves at the door.

“Holy shit.” Carmelita muttered behind them.

Violet glanced behind her, seeing that the reactions of the new kids seemed to range from shocked to vaguely impressed. Klaus and Sunny, however, looked scared. She fixed her eyes on them as she said, “The second the door opens, it’s going to be messy. Don’t look.”

“Violet?”

“Don’t look.” She glanced at Fiona. “Soon as they fall, find the elevator. That’ll take us to the Gate.”

Fiona nodded, pushing the others a bit more behind her.

Violet glanced over the other kids, and said, “Shut your eyes.”

Carmelita bit her lip and stared at the ground, while Isadora and Duncan obeyed, turning away from the door. Fiona stared ahead, but she had a dark look in her eyes that told Violet that this wouldn’t be the worst thing she’d ever seen.

Violet turned towards the door, waiting for it to burst open.

When it did, she sent the tools flying.
The yells and shouts and other distressing noises that followed didn’t shake Violet. Those men were coming to hurt her siblings. She wasn’t about to let that happen.

What did shake her was the way Klaus flinched back, suddenly looking horrified, squeezing his eyes so tight it looked painful, pushing Sunny closer to himself, as if he was worried she might get hurt.

*I have more control than that.* Violet thought. *Don’t look so scared, I’m doing this for you! I’m not hurting innocent people, they’re going to kill you!*

Violet herself didn’t look for long, instead yelling as loud as she could manage, “We need to go! They’ll send more-”

As she tried to sit up, she felt a pain in her chest, and she fell back onto the table, flinching as she hit the metal beneath her. *Metal…* she could probably push herself down the hall if need be…

“I’ll push your table,” Fiona said, startling Violet slightly, “But you’ll have to run eventually.”

“I can walk! I just need a second-” Violet protested.

 Barely listening, Fiona turned towards the others, and said, in a very commanding voice, “Duncan, keep a hold on your sister, she looks like she’ll pass out any second. Carmelita, hold my hand and don’t look at the ground. Klaus-”

“I’ll push the table.” Klaus said, though he still was shaking quite a bit. He placed Sunny at Violet’s feet, as he continued, “Fi, you’re gonna knock yourself out if you keep poisoning people. Try to stay awake, or we’re all in deep shit.”

“Carmelita,” Duncan picked up, “You’re going to have to step the fuck up.”

“What?” Carmelita sounded almost offended.

“You did a good job getting us in here,” Duncan said, “But you might need to use that persuasion power some more, since Fiona’s losing energy and Violet can barely move.”

“Fine, whatever.” Carmelita said, still keeping her eyes shut and reaching to grab Fiona’s hand.

“Klaus?” Violet began, watching him move behind her, still looking terrified. “Klaus, I-”

“Which way do we go?” Klaus asked, gripping the edge of the table.

“Klaus-”

“Elevator would be to the… right of here. Then a few more turns.” Carmelita said, thinking hard. “Unless they moved it.”

“You can’t move an elevator shaft.” Isadora said, her voice quiet, gripping her brother so hard her knuckles were white.

“Hurry it up and get a move on!” Fiona said, wiping her nose with her sleeve. “Come on!”

Klaus took a breath and then pushed, and Violet jolted a bit as she processed the fact her table was on wheels; they must’ve been moving her before the alarms went off. Sunny sat up a bit straighter at Violet’s feet, putting her hands over her eyes as they ran out of the room. Klaus only glanced at the ground enough to know how to maneuver the table, but as Violet scanned his face, she noticed he looked sick.
“Klaus-” she began.

“Don’t talk, just run!” Fiona yelled, pulling Carmelita behind her.

Violet bit her lip, shut her eyes, and watched as they turned a bend in the hall.

She really, really hoped they could get to the Gate.

And she really, really hoped nobody would find them first.
“Where are we going?” Isadora asked.

Violet glanced back at her, sitting up straighter; she still felt very hurt, and slightly tired, but she figured she could probably run if need be. No, she could definitely run, this table was so unnecessary. She leaned forwards, putting a hand on Sunny’s shoulder, trying not to flinch as her arm ached. “Sunny? Are you okay?”

Sunny looked very frightened, and Violet thought she might be shivering a little; it was a bit hard to tell with the way they were moving down the hall. Sunny shook her head as Carmelita yelled some more directions, and Fiona muttered something to herself.

“Hey, uh, quick head’s up?” Duncan called about then. “There’s a lot of things happening right now, and the alarms are really loud, and everything is very stressful, and when I get stressed my telepathy acts up, so if I start.”

“Duncan, accidental mind-reading is the least of our problems right now!” Klaus called, his voice shaking a bit.

“Just figured you should know!”

“Duncan, please shut up.” Isadora mumbled. “Everything’s too loud.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, let’s find Quigley.”

They turned a sharp bend, and suddenly Sunny screamed.

Klaus stopped the table. “Sunny? What is-”

She just pointed at the wall, and then reached to cover her eyes.

“Sunny!” Violet lifted her up, holding her as tight as she could. “Sunny, what happened?”

“Sunshine?” Fiona moved over, dropping slightly. “Is it your ESP? What’s happening- or going to happen?”

Sunny didn’t respond, and she just screamed into Violet’s hospital gown.
“Fuck it.” Violet said. “Ditch the table, I can run. We need to move fast and get the fuck out of here.”

“We have to get to Quigley!” Duncan said, as Violet tried to slide off the table.

Violet almost fell as she hit the ground, and Klaus immediately pushed the table away and reached out to grab her arms, steadying her. Violet shut her eyes, taking a deep breath as she held her screaming sister and tried to keep herself from toppling over. She took a step, and then said, “Okay, okay, let’s go.”

“Violet…” Klaus sounded a bit scared, and Violet didn’t want to think about if he was scared for her or of her. “Are you sure? I can take Sunny.”

“I can-” Violet hesitated, turning to Klaus. “I’m fine. I can deal with a bit of pain.”

That seemed to not be comforting; Klaus looked downright horrified, and he quickly moved to take Sunny. “Look, I’ll take her,” he said, as she tried to keep a hold on her sister, “And you focus on running, okay?”

“But…” Violet trailed off, still gripping onto the infant.

“Look, just let Klaus hold her for a bit. You’re hurt.” Fiona said, giving her a pitying look. “She’ll be alright.”

Violet knew that was true. She’d be safer with Klaus, and Violet wasn’t sure how long she keep a hold her sister, as her arms were already aching a bit. But she’d only just gotten her back, she didn’t want to let her go so easily.

Hesitantly, Violet let Klaus take Sunny, feeling as if her crying sister had been ripped from her instead of gently passed to her brother. She watched for a moment, and then shut her eyes, trying to blink her tears away before her brother could see.

“We have to keep moving.” Duncan said after a second.

“Yeah, can we get a move on? Do you want to get caught?” Carmelita said.

Violet bit her lip, and then felt a hand slip into hers.

She looked over, and saw that Klaus was managing to hold Sunny with one arm, using his other hand to grip onto her.

Violet held back more tears, and said quietly, “Klaus, I-”

“Let’s get out of here, yeah?” Klaus said quietly.

She shakily nodded, and they started running again.

Violet got a very bad feeling as they approached the elevator. At first she convinced herself that it was just because they were going to the Gate, but that didn’t track; she’d felt that call to the Gate for a while now, so why would she get upset as she approached? Maybe it was because all these other kids were with her, including her siblings. Maybe it was the fact she didn’t know what they’d managed to do to Klaus before the other numbers arrived, or the fact she didn’t know anything about most of these children she was running with, or maybe it was just Sunny’s cries. Yeah, that
was probably it. She just didn’t like seeing her sister upset.

And she was probably also starting to feel bad about shooting a guard and sending several very sharp medical tools flying into a bunch of others. That was a bit likely.

*Stop it, Vi. You don’t have time to feel bad about that. Get your siblings out of here first.*

“Turn left up here, then it’s another right, then there’s the elevator.” Carmelita called. “Nobody ever uses it, though, so it might not work.”

“It works.” Violet said. “Bottom floor’s the Gate.”

“How many guards are there?” Fiona asked.

Violet tried to remember. “A lot.”

“Shit. I’ll handle that.”

“You’re gonna knock yourself out.” Isadora said.

“No, I won’t.”

That sense of dread was growing. Violet tried to keep breathing normally, but a panic was starting to build in her chest. *No, no, not now, I can’t feel that now! Don’t freak out, keeping running, get everyone safe…*

*Something’s going to happen.*

Violet tried to slide to a stop, but behind her, Duncan pushed her forwards, probably thinking she was just stopping from pain or exhaustion. “Wait! Wait, something-” Violet called.

“We don’t have time to stop!” Fiona said. “We can’t let anyone catch up to us!”

“No, no-” Violet pulled on Klaus’s arm, and he turned towards her and stopped, still holding a screaming Sunny.

“Come on, guys, we have to move!” Carmelita yelled.

“No, there’s something bad!” Violet said, her heart pounding in her chest. “Klaus, we can’t go-”

“We have to get to the Gate!” Duncan said, looking panicked.

“Quigley’s there! He’s hurt!” Isadora added, trying to raise her voice as best she could, even though she looked like she might pass out at any moment.

“We-” Violet began, as Sunny’s screams somehow got louder. “We can’t- there’s something wrong-”

Klaus looked absolutely panicked, as he held Sunny closer and squeezed Violet’s hand tighter. “What’s wrong? What’s happening?”

“We have to move-” Fiona began, and it didn't help Violet's panic to see she was also shaking slightly.

“Shut up! Something’s wrong with Violet!” Klaus yelled.
“Ugh, we should’ve kept the table.” Carmelita said.

“No, no- I-” Violet struggled to breathe. “I can- I-”

“Okay, fuck it, we need to get you out of here.” Fiona said. “Duncan, get Isadora and Violet-”

“I’m not going anywhere!” Isadora yelled.

“We have to find Quigley!” Duncan shouted.

“The Gate’s so close, let’s just get there already!” Carmelita said. “Why are we stopping?”

“Klaus, you have to get out of here.” Violet begged, barely thinking about what she was saying. “Go, I can get Quigley-”

“You can’t even move!” Klaus said. “Vi, I’m not leaving you-”

“You’ll have to!”

“No! I’m-”

Carmelita screamed, and started pushing Fiona and Klaus, who happened to be nearest to her. They realized why after a few seconds, as they glanced behind them to see that two men had stopped at the end of the hallway; one was just staring at them, while the other pulled out a handheld radio and started speaking into it, giving their location. Violet instantly felt a clench in her stomach, as her breath caught in her throat, and she gripped tighter onto her brother’s hand.

“Go! Go! Run!” Fiona called, and suddenly Violet had no choice but to race away with the others, even though her entire body was screaming at her to get away, to go somewhere else. Sunny was sobbing quite a bit, which was very alarming. Violet tried very hard to keep herself from crying, too.

Then they turned the bend, and Violet completely froze over.

Almost as if he’d been expecting them, Olaf was waiting at the end of the hall.

She was paralyzed for an instant, time standing still as she spotted him. The world seemed to slow, to pause. She barely even noticed other guards there with him, with weapons and radios, calling for backup. She could barely even process her own panic.

But she managed to process everyone else’s reactions first.

Sunny kept screaming, while Duncan and Isadora skidded to a halt, looking at everyone else in shock and confusion. Carmelita screeched and jumped behind Fiona, covering her face with her hands. Fiona, to Violet’s horror, had also completely frozen over, looking as if someone had just punched her in the gut. She stumbled backwards, suddenly looking like her mind had temporarily slipped away from her, and she was completely lost. “Fiona-” Duncan began, but the poor girl just grabbed her stomach and stumbled slightly, shaking and looking like she was about to lose her balance. Her eyes were distant, and she looked like she was having some kind of a shutdown.

Then Violet saw Klaus- poor Klaus, who looked confused and scared and concerned and even a little angry, holding Sunny closer to himself as she wailed- and the world caught up to her.

In an instant, Violet raced forwards, throwing herself in front of her siblings, trying to block them from view, tossing out her arms as if she could shield them all by herself.
She didn’t say anything, instead staring ahead at Olaf and meeting his glare, trying to look brave but only succeeding in shaking uncontrollably and struggling to hold back tears, feeling as though she might collapse.

“Violet?” Klaus asked shakily.

Fiona stumbled back again, as Duncan hugged his sister tighter, and Isadora shut her eyes, breathing raggedly, looking close to a breakdown herself. Carmelita kept standing in place, and slowly, Violet said, “Klaus. Go.”

“No.” he shook his head. “Vi-

She heard footsteps behind them- quite a lot of footsteps- and in response simply turned and threw her arms around her brother, clutching him and Sunny to her as tight as she could. She knew, somewhere in the back of her mind, that that was a bad reaction; there was metal everywhere, she could still feel it, she could just use that to attack. But for some reason, she almost felt like she shouldn’t, that something worse would happen to them if she did, and she didn’t know if it was an actual warning from her perceptions or just a part of the panic that was gripping her. She was too scared to think about it, and now the only thing on her mind was to protect her siblings.

She heard the other kids yell and scream, but it sounded distant. Guards had arrived, and as she glanced over, she saw the others being grabbed- no, no, no, no, no…

“Let go of her!” Duncan had been torn away from Isadora, and the two of them had both started screaming and sobbing, and Isadora had almost completely doubled over, grabbing at her chest as if someone had struck her; someone might have. “Leave her alone!”Carmelita was sobbing, and the second someone put their hands on Fiona, she started crying, too, shutting her eyes and throwing her hands over her ears.

Someone grabbed Violet’s arm, and she started screaming, clutching to her siblings like a lifeline, refusing to let go. Klaus moved an arm around her, too, holding Sunny with the other, and she could feel him start to sob, terrified. She gripped him, screaming and crying, “Leave them alone! Get away from us!”

More guards were yelling, now, shouting at her, and someone finally managed to pull her arm back enough that they could rip her away.

“No!” she screamed, as Klaus screamed, only able to throw his other arm around Sunny before a guard dragged him back. “No! Let them go!”

Someone slammed her into the wall, and she let out a cry, her ears ringing slightly.

“Violet!”

Everyone was screaming, the alarms were still blaring, Sunny’s cries were getting louder, and everything was wrong.

“Let them go!” Violet screamed, trying to shake off the hands that were now pinning her to the wall, refusing to look away from her siblings. “Let them go, please!”

“Violet!” Klaus yelled. He turned slightly, yelling, “Fiona, can you-”

Fiona didn’t respond, still looking like she’d completely shut down. Violet could hear Duncan still screaming for his sister, could see Carmelita and Fiona still sobbing and shaking, and Isadora only remaining on her feet because a guard was holding her there. Klaus was still desperately gripping
onto Sunny, trying to keep them from taking her away from him.

Her voice broke. “Please, let them go! I’ll do whatever you want, I’ll do anything, let them go!”

She could hear Olaf, then, and she didn’t dare look away from her siblings to find out how close he was to her. “It’s far too late for that, Seven.”

No, no, no…

Violet let out a gasp as someone punched her in the gut, and she felt tears stream down her face.

“Violet!” Klaus was screaming. “Leave her alone! Leave us alone!”

Violet was pushed back into the wall, and a guard forced her head up, so that she had to look at them. Olaf came closer to her, and she tried to struggle against the guard’s hold on her, only succeeding in making herself cry more.

“You’ve finally caused too many problems for us to ignore.” Olaf said, and Violet’s stomach plummeted. “And we don’t seem to need you anymore; our other experiments just walked right in, and I have a feeling your brother might be more useful in regards to the Gate than you.”

No, no…

“Would you like to be an example for your siblings? Of what could happen to them?”

“Let her go!” Klaus sounded terrified, and Sunny screamed even louder. “No!”

They were both very surprised, then, when Duncan screamed, “Five!”

Violet felt a jolt of terror as Olaf turned towards him, suddenly realizing just how terrified the boy looked… and also suddenly noticing that his nose was bleeding.

Duncan didn’t seem to notice everyone’s shocked reactions, and he just kept screaming. “You’re Five! You’re one of us!”

“Duncan, stop it!” Carmelita suddenly looked very, very panicked.

“Duncan!” Klaus stared at his friend, shaking and still gripping onto Sunny.

He either didn’t hear their warnings or didn’t care, instead starting to scream out any thoughts he could hear. “You remember us! You know us, you know what we can do! that’s your power! You know things, you know what we can do, even though you’ve never seen our abilities! You knew our parents! Our parents broke us out, and you—” His face suddenly went pale, and he screamed.

“Duncan!” Isadora looked towards her brother, eyes going wide.

Duncan didn’t respond, instead struggling against the guards holding him, shutting his eyes and shouting.

Suddenly overcome with terror, Isadora let out a piercing shriek, and something happened. All at once, everyone was paralyzed.

It took Violet only a moment to regain herself, but for just a second, she felt pure terror—but it didn’t feel like the fear she’d been experiencing herself. It felt like someone had shoved their own fear into her.
Shit. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Isadora probably had.

Everyone else reacted similarly; Fiona and Klaus froze up, while Carmelita paused her cries for a moment to let out a scream. Duncan managed to stop shouting, but he still stared ahead, his eyes blank.

What was incredibly lucky, though, was that the guards all stopped for a second, too.

Which gave Violet enough time to collect herself, shut her eyes, and search for metal.

Before the man holding her could break from whatever Isadora had done, Violet lifted the gun from his belt and tossed it right into the side of his head.

He yelled, and as his grip on her slackened, she managed to throw him off, stumbling away from the wall. She only took a second before throwing out her hand, and a door flew off its hinges, knocking back the guards to her left.

Violet could hear her brother yelling her name as she dropped to the ground, managing to avoid a guard who got close enough to try and grab her. She ducked out of his way again, and then shut her eyes and focused until his gun exploded into hot metal. She then waved a hand and sent the liquid right into the face of the guard holding Klaus.

Klaus flinched and ran up against the wall as his guard shouted; extremely hot liquid to the face wasn’t a pleasant feeling. Violet leapt in front of her siblings, then, raising her hands and sending the burning metal into the air, before taking in her surroundings and deciding the best course of action was to bring it in front of her and solidify it as a shield, because within a few seconds, the guns went off.

“Violet?” Klaus sounded scared.

“Stay down, I’ll protect you.” Violet said quickly.

“Violet, something’s wrong with-”

As she focused, the guns exploded in the guards’ hands, and Violet sent the remains of those at the men who were now trying to drag the triplets back. As Isadora let out a yell, Fiona seemed to regain herself, because she stopped breathing so heavily, and instead she shut her eyes; Violet wasn’t quite sure what she was doing, but after a moment, the guard holding her shouted and leapt back, so that was something; Fiona then rushed towards the guard holding Carmelita, grabbing his arm and trying to pull him back.

“Violet!” Klaus finally yelled. “Something’s wrong with Sunny!”

Violet froze, and then whipped around, staring at her baby sister.

Sunny had stopped crying, and she was staring, frozen, at the wall.

Then, only just loud enough to hear, she whispered, “Sangue,” which meant, “It smells blood.”

“What?” Violet felt her heart stop.

“Demogorgon.” “The Monster’s here.”

Violet barely managed to hold up the heated metal long enough to form another shield as more bullets were shot at her, but she didn’t have to hold it up long, as everyone was quite distracted by
what happened next.

It began with the lights flickering.

Duncan and Isadora, who’d run to each other the second the guards let go of them, tensed up, staring at the ceiling. Fiona finally managed to knock down the guard holding Carmelita, and pushed the girl behind her, stiffening and holding out her hands.

Violet scanned the area; while several guards were still standing, several more were on the ground, a lot of them bleeding- the door flying at them must’ve knocked quite a few out- or suffering burns from her heated metal attacks. She thought she saw Olaf behind several people, but she didn’t look closely, instead her eyes drawing to the far wall, which had started to thump.

There was a pounding, and then part of the wall pushed forwards, starting to crumble, almost as if someone or something on the other side was trying to demolish it.

The guards temporarily forgot about the children, turning towards the wall. The guns Violet hadn’t melted were pointed in that direction, and this nice distraction gave Fiona enough time to grab the triplets and push them behind her, too.

The wall thudded again, starting to crumble.

“Demogorgon.” Sunny said again.

The wall broke, and the Monster burst through.

Violet only caught a quick glimpse before Klaus managed to grab her wrist and drag her away, but it was definitely the creature she’d seen just a few days ago; the creature from the Upside Down.

It let out its terrifying screech, and the guards shot or called for backup, and none of them paid much attention to the children who were running.

“Go, go!” Fiona yelled, staring at the monster as if she could barely believe it existed, pushing the kids near her down the hall.

“Wait, that thing-” Duncan began, but then Isadora, staring at the creature with a look of horror, collapsed onto the ground.

Duncan screamed, and Fiona raced forwards, lifting the girl in her arms and yelling, “Keep running! Go!”

Violet only briefly glanced behind her, but she wished she hadn’t. Because the Monster was tearing people apart.

She couldn’t even scream, she was too shocked by what she saw. So instead she pushed Klaus more ahead of her, and ran.

Fiona raced into the first open room she could find, which looked to be some kind of meeting room. She laid Isadora on the table, yelling, “Barricade us in!”

“What’s going on?” Carmelita asked, even as she and Violet grabbed chairs to shove under the door. Klaus and Duncan ran to Isadora, checking her over worriedly.

“That thing’s going to kill them,” Fiona said, breathing hard; shit, she didn’t look good. She also
still looked a bit panicked from whatever shutdown she'd just had. “But we’re not going to be able to get out through the doors, they’ll be waiting for us, and we’re still under lockdown, so we’ll have to go through a window-”

“What about Quigley?” Duncan asked, gripping Isadora’s trembling hand.

Fiona didn’t meet his eyes.

“No.” Duncan shook his head. “No, we’re not leaving him-”

“Would you rather we all die?” Fiona asked. “Your sister can’t even move!”

“I…” Isadora struggled to speak, only half-awake. “We have to… he’s hurt, he’s dying-”

“Isadora, you’re dying!” Fiona yelled. “You’re losing energy too fast-”

“So are you!” Duncan yelled, tears in his eyes. “We’re all losing energy, and Sunny’s gonna pass out, and Carmelita’s about to have a breakdown-”

“Am not!” Carmelita yelled.

“Yeah, you are, and I know cause my telepathy won’t shut the fuck off!” Duncan yelled.

“Everyone stop arguing!” Violet screamed, and everyone shut up, turning to her. “Nobody is dying tonight, okay? None of us!”

“Violet…” Violet flinched as she turned towards Klaus, not wanting to see the fear on his face. She was surprised, though, when he asked, “Are you okay?”

Violet bit her lip, looking between Klaus and Sunny; they were both watching her, hoping she was alright, hoping she had a plan.

“I will be.” she said. She felt for her makeshift ribbon; her hair had fallen out of the ponytail, but the ribbon was still tangled in it. She ripped it out and tied her hair back again. “What do we know about the Monster?”

“It can create temporary gates to the other world it inhabits.” Klaus said quickly. “It’s a hunter, it’s killed people- it’ll kill Quigley if he stays there.”

“He’s in this other world.” Violet said, thinking hard. “And the Gate is the way to access it, unless we can get through one of the Monster’s temporary portals.”

“We can’t get through.” Fiona said, surprising Violet with the fact she looked on the edge of tears. “We’re gonna pass out, the Monster’s outside with the guards, and Klaus can’t even control his powers yet.”

“I…” Klaus began.

They heard a screech from the hall, a very inhuman screech, and after a moment, they rushed to the back of the room. Duncan grabbed onto Isadora, holding her up slightly and hugging her close. Klaus clutched Sunny to his chest, as she started screaming again. Carmelita grabbed onto Fiona’s arm, and the older girl raised her hand, shaking slightly as she stared at the door.

“You can kill it, right?” Duncan asked.

“I… I don’t know.” Fiona admitted. “I don’t know what poisons kill it, if it’ll react to anything,
how much I’ll need… and I won’t have *time* to figure that out!”

“Just hit it with *something!*” Duncan yelled.

Violet stared between all of them again; everyone was either crying or about to start, and it hit her right about then how small they all looked.

That thing was going to kill them. Even if it didn’t, they weren’t going to leave without Quigley, and she doubted all of them could survive that trip. She thought they all knew that, deep down. The only way they could survive would be to leave him, but then what? The Lab would be tracking them, they wouldn’t just let her run off with the other experiments. And they’d have left a child to die, a child who was connected to them.

A child who’d been calling to *her*.

She shut her eyes, slipping away for an instant, feeling the metal around her, but she wasn’t searching for that; if bullets weren’t stopping this thing, she wasn’t sure it’d be easy to stab or crush it with anything. No, she was searching for something else.

She opened her eyes, and saw her Mother leaning against the wall. She didn’t say anything, instead staring at Violet. She didn’t need to say anything, really.

Because Violet knew what to do, even though she really didn’t want to.

*I can’t just…*

*If they stay here, or go to the Gate, they will die.*

*They need to run.*

She felt a calm settle over her, a calm she shouldn’t be feeling in such a stressful situation. She blinked, and Beatrice was gone, but that calm was still there.

She turned towards Klaus, and said, “Do you remember when Sunny was born?”

Klaus stared at her in confusion. “What?”

“When we could finally see her,” Violet continued, a little surprised that her voice was getting choked up; was she crying? “Mother and Father made me promise to look after you two. I’m the eldest, it’s my responsibility to make sure you don’t get hurt.”

“Violet-”

Violet pulled her makeshift ribbon out of her hair, and unclipped a chain from a round her neck. “I have to keep my promise.”

Klaus and Sunny both looked terrified, and beside her, Violet could see the others stiffen. “What… what are you…?” Klaus began.

Violet threw herself forwards, hugging Klaus and Sunny as tight as she could. Klaus was too shocked to move much, while Sunny started crying harder. Violet didn’t care, though; she hugged her siblings until she thought she might break, until she heard the screeching get even closer, and until she heard any gunshots following it start to die down.

She pulled away, and kissed Sunny on the forehead. Now she was definitely crying; she could barely say, “You take care of her, okay?”
“Violet?” Klaus looked more terrified than she’d ever seen him.

Violet glanced to the side, seeing that Duncan had pulled Isadora off the table, and was now leaning her against the wall, standing in front of her protectively. Fiona and Carmelita were staring at her, shocked and bewildered. She turned back to her siblings, and took Klaus’s free hand, slowly putting something onto it.

Klaus looked down to see the locket.

“You run as far away from here as you can.” Violet said. She glanced towards Fiona. “Protect them, got it?”

“Violet-”

Violet looked back to Klaus. “I’ll find you if I- if I can. I promise, I’ll find you. But you just keep running, okay? Get away from here. Don’t let them take you. Even if it means leaving me behind.”

It suddenly dawned on Klaus what she was about to do, and his eyes widened. “No.” he said. “No, no, no-”

Violet tore herself away.

“No!” Klaus started to run after her, but Violet threw out her hand, flipping the table behind her, landing right in front of her brother. She pushed it back, which knocked him to the ground.

She heard the screech, almost right outside the door, but she wasn’t worried now.

She shut her eyes, finding every inch of metal in the room, and she raised her hands, feeling it move towards her, surrounding her, leaving only the table on the ground for now. Chairs, tools, drawers, trash cans- everything was soon spinning around her in the air.

*Melt.*

She could feel the heat, then, the heat of the melting items around her. She could hear Klaus shouting; he couldn’t get close enough, which was good. She couldn’t let anything happen to him.

There was a loud crash as the door was knocked down, and Violet was staring at the Monster.

She watched it for only a moment, then as it opened its mouth to roar, she sent the metal directly into its face.

It sputtered and gasped, rearing up and screeching, but Violet barely flinched, only stepping backwards as the thing tried to charge at her.

*Nice try.*

She raised her hand, and it slammed into the wall.

She could spread the metal as far as she wanted, she figured. Course, she didn’t know how this animal’s body worked, but her metal seemed to be inside it enough that she could control it a bit. Even if she was only throwing this thing around by its throat, that was better than not being able to control it at all.

The thing struggled for a few moments, screeching and hollering.
Come on, fucker, come on…

She saw something start to spread behind it- red strands, strands of light.

Bingo.

Thing knows I’m gonna kill it. So it’s trying to get back home.

Violet looked over her shoulder one last time.

Fiona and Carmelita were watching in horror and fear. Duncan and Isadora looked close to tears.

Klaus and Sunny, on the ground, were staring at her, denial and panic in their eyes.

This is for you. You'll die if you stay here. Get somewhere safe. I'll find you.

Violet looked at them, and then said, “I love you.”

She turned back to the Monster, which was still struggling and screeching. She shut her eyes, and finally lifted the table, liquifying it and sending it straight into the creature’s mouth, too. She wondered how much metal she could fit in it before it burst.

“Alright, asshole!” she yelled. “Time to go home!”

She could see it start to disappear into the wall, and she pushed it backwards, sending it straight through the temporary portal. And, shutting her eyes, she raced forwards and jumped in, too.

The gate closed within seconds.

For an instant, nobody spoke, staring at the blank space where the Monster and Violet had been.

Then Klaus let out a scream.

As he shut his eyes and curled up, hugging Sunny close, tears streaming down his face, the door to the room flew off its hinges, and the windows beside them shattered. Any of the items left in the room after Violet’s attack lifted into the air, and the others found themselves thrown against the wall.

“Klaus!” Duncan screamed, but Klaus didn’t seem to be hearing him. He just kept screaming and sobbing, and rocking back-and-forth as everything in the room started to spin around them. Duncan reached to cover his ears, not sure he could handle everyone else’s shouts and panicked thoughts in addition to Klaus’s- even inwardly, he was screaming for his sister, refusing to believe that she was gone.

Isadora slowly lifted herself, and raised a hand. “Klaus!” she cried. “Klaus, stop!” She shut her eyes, and twitched her hand, and then there was a deathly silence.

Klaus stopped screaming, freezing in place.

Then both he and Isadora crashed.

Everything in the air clattered to the ground as Klaus collapsed, and only a second later, Isadora fell onto Duncan, knocked out. Duncan gasped as his telepathy shut off, leaving the room even colder and quieter than it had been before.
Sunny started crying louder, and Fiona was the first one to recover. “Duncan, carry your sister.” she said, jumping to her feet and running to Klaus. “Carmelita, hold Sunny.”

“What-”

“Isadora knocked Klaus out. We’ve got to get to a van.”

“But-” Duncan began. “But, Quigley and Violet-”

“You heard her!” Fiona yelled, looking up at Duncan, her voice shaking. “You heard Violet, she’ll get your brother back if she can! But if we stay here any longer, someone will catch us and this will all be for nothing!”

Duncan took a deep breath, trying to wipe his tears away with his sleeve. Carmelita was numbly walking over towards Fiona, reaching out her arms to take the screaming Sunny. Klaus was on the ground, knocked out cold. Isadora was unconscious beside him.

He shut his eyes, and thought, *I’m so sorry, Quigley. We’ll come back for you.*

He struggled to pick up his sister, but when he did, Fiona said, “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

They ran, and tried their best not to look back.
Klaus woke up in the back of a car.

It took him quite a while to process his surroundings- a dark van, a few bags shoved into the corner, and nothing else inside, except for a few kids to his left, sitting in a circle. As he sat up, he heard a conversation already going on- no, no, an argument.

“That’s too far. They won’t be able to catch up.”

“If we don’t get a move on, the Lab will find us.”

“I don’t care-”

“You should. You know what they did to your brother, you saw what they did to Violet.”

_Violet._

_The Monster._

_Violet._

_Violet._

_Violet’s gone._

Everyone turned their attention to Klaus as he let out a cry, curling up and hugging himself, suddenly feeling as if he’d been punched in the gut. He heard them calling, but he barely noticed.

_Violet’s gone._

_We tried to hard to find her, and she’s gone._

In a flash, Duncan was there, throwing his arms around him in a tight hug. Klaus looked up at him, seeing that he looked very tired and his face looked very red. He looked up at the others- Isadora looked a bit sick, and quite exhausted, while Carmelita seemed stressed and upset. Fiona was biting her lip, staring at him, and holding… holding… holding his baby sister.

Sunny watched him, her own face red and teary, and quietly, she whispered, “Kla.”

Klaus waited until Duncan pulled away, and then he held out his arms, and Fiona passed Sunny to him. He clutched his sister to himself, still crying. “Wh-where are we?” he managed to ask.

“Just outside of Crawfordsville.” Fiona said softly. “We’re going to have to steal another van soon, I’m hoping to get to Chicago, but this will be too noticeable-”
Klaus struggled to breathe normally, to talk through his tears. “What about—about—”

Fiona moved closer, sitting beside him and putting an arm around him. “Listen, Klaus. Your sister thinks she can find us, so she will. But we can’t stay near Hawkins. The Lab’ll try to find us—there’s no way it’s all shut down. Chicago’s not safe, but we can hop a bus to somewhere that is. I know most of the danger areas, but that doesn’t mean we can stay in one place long. But your sister will find us if she can, and she’ll—”

“She can.” Klaus said quietly.

“What?”

“She’s Violet. She can do anything.”

There was a bit of a pause, as everyone stared at him, with the triplets looking a bit hopeful, Carmelita looking quite skeptical, and Fiona keeping her emotions well hidden.

“I think… I think Violet might’ve found Quigley.” Isadora said quietly. “Either that or—well, when I woke up, I wasn’t feeling his pain. Either she saved him or… or he st-stopped feeling pain…”

“Isadora, don’t say that.” Duncan said quietly. “He’s fine. He’ll be fine. We’d know if he—”

Fiona reached into her pocket, and pulled out a locket, passing it to Klaus. He hesitantly held it, and Sunny turned around to look at it, too. “Your sister passed this to you.” Fiona said.

“It’s not hers.” Klaus said quietly, tracing the EF on the top. “I’ve never seen it.”

“I have.” Fiona said. “When I was in the Lab, I used to steal small things, or my brother would sneak them to me when we were allowed to meet up. I swiped that from a storage room that I got locked in by accident. Used to hide all my stuff in the bookshelf, or in Moby. They took the shelf after— but they let me keep the toy. Didn’t know I was shoving stolen shit into it.”

She pulled the necklace open, and Klaus stared at one of the pictures for a second. “That’s my Mother.” he said, after a moment. “And her foster siblings.”

Fiona nodded. “Figured that.”

“One of them was that man who threatened Violet.” Duncan said.

“You read his mind, right? What did you see?” Isadora asked.

“Only… flashes. I… I almost went into a memory, but I got freaked out…” Duncan said hesitantly. “I just know his power is— is some form of Clairvoyance, he just knows things— not like seeing the future, he just gains knowledge real quickly. And the Lab, uh, tried to kidnap us, and our parents busted us out, and… there was a fire, some kind of fire, but I don’t know when, but it came to his mind when I brought up our parents.”

Klaus rubbed his finger over the photo. Where had Violet found this?

“We can take this info to Moxie Mallahan’s friends.” Duncan said quietly.

“For the last time, kid,” Fiona said, “We only know where one of them is located, and that’s a huge city in Canada. We’ll do our best to look them up, but our priority is staying alive and away from the Lab.” Duncan flinched a bit, and Fiona softened slightly as she said, “Keep your evidence with you, obviously. We’ll give it to— to whoever we can. But don’t get your hopes up, and don’t
expect it to happen soon.”

“How long are we going to be on the run?” Carmelita asked, almost blankly. She looked strange, as she leaned against the car wall, staring into nothing, barely moving.

Fiona took a long breath. “Well. A while, probably.”

“Are you…” Isadora asked quietly. “Sure we can’t go back for Quigley and Violet?”

“They’ll find us if they can.” Fiona repeated. “We can’t go back.”

There was a dark silence, and Fiona glanced between them all, her face falling as she saw their despair. She paused, then said, “My brother… he worked for the Lab. He was interning or something when my Mother decided to participate in experiments- I don’t know much, he didn’t talk about it with me after I was taken, and I barely remember anything before. I don’t… know what they told him, but I think they were threatening him to keep him quiet about what was happening. I didn’t see him much, he worked somewhere away from me, but on occasion they’d let him visit. I think they were hoping that he’d convince me to behave.” she snorted slightly. “As if.”

She trembled slightly, as he continued, “He sometimes seemed so scared, even though he thought I couldn’t tell. But he did his best to make me happy in the time we were together. We played cards, he taught me some songs, convinced the doctors to let me have some books…” She sighed. “When I escaped, he happened to be there. He found me in the hallway. He opened the window for me and told me he’d hold them off. I… don’t doubt he’s gone. They never…”

“Are you saying our siblings are gone?” Duncan asked, a hint of anger in his voice.

Fiona paused. “No. No, I… it’s a possibility, I won’t lie to you, but… what I’m trying to say is that the Lab’s not to be messed with, and that…” she took a deep breath. “I’m… here. I’m staying with all of you, I’m going to protect you, okay?”

“How…” Klaus began, and they turned to him as he struggled to speak. Sunny put a comforting hand on his, and he finally said, “We need a way to… to try and signal Violet. So she can find us.”

They were quiet for a moment, and then Carmelita said, “I might have something.”

She reached into her bag, digging in it. “I don’t know why I shoved it in, but I stole this from a kid at school and… guess I just thought to bring it with.”

She pulled out a small walkie-talkie, and passed it over. Klaus held it in his hands, feeling a bit shocked. “Th-thank you.”

“Shut up.” Carmelita replied, leaning back against the wall and looking away.

“That won’t be very good.” Fiona muttered. “Won’t travel long distance-”

“It’s better than nothing.” Klaus said. “Besides… if Violet thinks she can find us, she will. And she’ll bring Quigley, too. We’ll just… have to wait for her.”

He took a deep breath, looking down at Sunny. Then, he turned on the walkie-talkie.

“Violet?”

Violet was following a hallucination again.
The Monster was dead; at least, she presumed it was. She didn’t want to think much about that, though; it hadn’t been pleasant to see, even to a creature that existed to hunt and kill. But she figured it’d be hard to come back to life after having limbs ripped apart by the liquid metal forced inside of it, so they were probably safe. Now she just had to hope the Main Gate was still open, or that temporary portals opened without that thing’s help.

But as soon as it was dead, she had taken a moment to breathe, and then she’d whispered, very quietly, “Where do I go?”

She had to follow the Call after all.

When she’d looked up, she saw her Father, and he walked off, and she followed.

She tried not to think too much as she followed her Father out of the building and through the woods, walking over slime and roots and vines. She tried to focus on her surroundings, on analyzing them, on following the vision to where she needed to go. Don’t think about what you’re leaving behind, Violet. Just keep moving.

They’d been right, this world was just like another side of theirs, but dark and cold and filled with those roots and vines and covered in slime and mold. It was horrible. Violet couldn’t imagine behind here as long as that boy must have been. Especially alone.

They got out of the woods and into some dark, twisted version of a town. Violet flinched as she walked on the rough roads, wishing she’d managed to get some shoes. It didn’t matter, she guessed; she’d hopefully be out of here soon.

Bertrand stopped in front of the doors of a large building. Violet glanced up at the arch above the door, which had started to fall apart, but still read Public Library in a faded font.

“Is he inside?” she asked.

Her imaginary Father didn’t answer her, instead walking inside.

Violet followed.

She had to step over more roots and vines, but as they entered a larger room, she flinched to see how much slime was stretched across the walls, looking almost like webbing. She approached some of it on the wall, peering through it and stepping back when she spotted what looked like a pale, rotting corpse.

Well, fuck.

“That’s not-” Violet began, turning, only to see that her Father had stopped in front of another wall. She blinked, and he disappeared.

Slowly, she approached the far wall, coughing slightly as she did; the air here felt wrong. She stepped over roots, pushing her hair out of her face, and then looked up.

Her stomach plummeted as she saw the boy on the wall.

He was held up with the webbing, and something was shoved over his mouth, some kind of root. Violet ran forwards as fast as she could, ripping the webbing away and then grabbing at the root, pulling- holy shit, that thing was in his mouth. She stepped backwards, pulling back, and after a second, it came out, crashing to the floor- fuck, fuck, it was moving, it was alive. Violet let out a scream as she ran forwards, grabbing it. It let out a screeching noise and tried to leap at her, but she
managed to dodge and throw it against the wall. She shut her eyes, searching for metal, and only finding a little, on a pillar. She tossed out her hand, watching as the pillar crumpled, squishing that living root underneath it.

She didn’t pause to check and make certain it was dead; instead, she ran towards Quigley, pulling him off the wall. Shit, he looked bad. She’d never seen someone look so pale or still, and it was incredibly unnerving; he looked only a bit older than Klaus. He was in the same hospital gown as her, but his was ripped and torn and soiled with the slime from this world. God, he must have been freezing.

She laid him on the ground, feeling his wrist for a pulse. She started to panic, pushing her hair back again. No, no, he wasn’t no. She didn’t come here just to let this kid die. He was connected to her somehow, but even if she wasn’t, like hell she’d give up this easily.

She looked up, expecting to see a hallucination of someone, but she was alone. Then she took a deep breath, shutting her eyes. Father had taught her basic CPR about a year ago, “just in case.” He tried to teach Klaus, too, but he’d snuck away to finish reading a book on the Ancient Babylonians.

Violet tilted the boy’s head back, lifting his chin. She took her hands, and then pressed down on his chest.

*One, two, three, four.*

*Five, six, seven…*

Was it thirty or forty pushes? She kept pressing on his chest, trying to remember; it was thirty, yeah. Thirty. She could do that. Then how long was she supposed to wait? One second. Just one.

She pushed thirty times, then pinched his nostrils and placed her mouth over his, breathing in twice.

She sat back, watching. He didn’t move.

*No, no you don’t. You’re not dying.*

“Come on, kid…” Violet muttered, pressing on his chest again. *One, two, three, four, five…*

She shut her eyes, wondering if there was something she could do. She didn’t think she could use liquid metal to resuscitate someone, and she didn’t think ESP would be much help here.

*Six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen…*

This kid couldn’t just die here.

*Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen…*

“You’re not going to die here.”

*Twenty, twenty-one…*

“We’re all waiting for you!”

*Twenty-two, twenty-three…*

“We’re like you, okay? We’re like you!”
Twenty-four, twenty-five…

“Your siblings need you!”

Her voice broke as she counted twenty-six, twenty-seven in her head. His siblings needed him. Klaus needed her.

Did I really just leave? I shouldn’t have-

You should have. You can still save him.

Twenty-eight…

You can get him out, and find the others. We’re connected. We need to all be together.

Twenty-nine…

“Come on, wake up!”

Thirty.

The boy suddenly sat up, taking in a deep, shocked breath.

Violet jumped back for a second, and then started crying.

She reached forwards, pulling the boy into a tight hug. He was breathing- raggedly and shakily, but he was breathing.

She pulled away, pushing her hair back out of her face, and said, “Are you Quigley? Are you Quigley?”

She didn’t know why he wouldn’t be, but she felt a relief as he managed to nod slightly. He coughed a bit, and his eyes only barely fluttered open. He opened his mouth, as if to ask something, only to let out a sick cough.

“Don’t talk.” Violet said shakily. “I’m getting you out of here. I’m like you, see?” She pulled back her arm, flipping her wrist so he could see the mark. She was about to say her number aloud, but after a second’s hesitation, she said instead, “My name is Violet. Violet Baudelaire. I’m getting you out, your siblings are waiting for you. I… I need to find…”

She looked up, and saw her Father waiting in the broken doorway.

She bit her lip, and shut her eyes, and turned back to Quigley. He was still struggling to breathe, and it seemed like he might not be completely conscious. Slowly, she put her arms under him, lifting him up fairly easily; she’d gotten used to carrying Klaus whenever he fell asleep halfway through a conversation, and this kid seemed to weigh less.

“Hold on, Quigley,” she muttered. “We’re getting out.”

She stumbled after the image of her Father, wondering exactly how far they’d have to go. She didn’t know how far she could carry this kid, and she was already starting to feel tired, probably from her abilities more than the walk. She also very much hoped he wasn’t leading them back to the Gate, cause she didn’t know if she’d do very well fighting the Lab on the way out of this world. If she passed out before she could get Quigley somewhere safe… she didn’t want to think
about that.

Her Father didn’t head towards the Lab, though; instead, he stopped just outside the woods, outside some old, broken shed, covered in those vines. And he disappeared again when Violet blinked.

She walked up to the wall of the shed, placing Quigley on the ground for a moment and then pushing aside some gunk and vines with her hand.

She let out a bit of a smile as she spotted a red glow.

There was a circle, barely half her size, of red gunk, a little bit of webbing over it. But behind it, she could see a faint light.

Violet slowly touched it, and then pushed her hand through, breaking the slime and feeling something on the other side.

Feeling warmth on the other side.

Violet doubted they had long, so she lifted Quigley again, saying, “We’re getting out of here. Hold on.”

Quigley murmured something, or maybe he just coughed again. Violet just hugged him close, and then took a running start and leapt through the Temporary Gate.

She tumbled through the slime, landing with a crash on the wood floor of a shed. She flinched, and then sat up, sighing with relief as she breathed in the air. It was probably still technically cold, but it was much warmer than that other world. She managed to lift Quigley slightly, saying, “Are you alright?” He didn’t respond; though he was, thankfully, still breathing, he looked like he’d passed out.

Violet scrambled to her feet, only to flinch when she heard voices calling from outside the shed. Shit, shit, shit…

Violet pushed against the shed door, swinging it completely shut. She took a deep breath, panic building in her chest. Whoever was outside, they probably weren’t friendly, or they wouldn’t be able to help. She shut her eyes, and muttered under her breath, “Help me. Help me.”

When she opened her eyes, she didn’t see anyone, but she did feel a pull somewhere. She stumbled over to the corner of the shed, putting her hands on the floor. She shut her eyes, straining to think, ignoring the exhaustion she was feeling. You can rest when you’re both safe.

She groaned, and used one hand to hold her hair back, still messing with the floorboards with her other. She finally realized that one of the floorboards seemed a bit more loose than the others, and she had to drop her hair in order to use both hands to pry it up. She managed to flip it, and as she did, she saw something move out of the corner of her eye.

On the other side of the shed, a square of the floor flipped up, almost like a trapdoor.

Violet raced over to Quigley, managing to pick him up again. He stirred slightly, coughing.

“We’re hiding for a bit. It might be dark down there.” Violet warned. “And I’m not- not sure how far I can go. But I’m not letting you get hurt again, okay?”

He didn’t seem to have any reaction, and she wasn’t even sure he heard her. She managed to carry
him over to the trapdoor, seeing that the room beneath didn’t seem to be much of a drop, so she just jumped down, clutching onto the unconscious boy as they landed. She hurriedly put him down and reached up to shut the trapdoor, before shutting her eyes, searching for metal in the room. She found a good amount near her, and after placing Quigley on the floor, she reached out to grab it- oh thank God, a flashlight.

“Let’s hope these batteries still work.” she muttered, but as she turned it on, the first thing she noticed was that it looked very old; much older than flashlights she’d seen before. It flickered quite a bit as she shined it around the small room. There was a chair in the corner, with a lantern and box of matches next to it- good, she might need that, this flashlight probably wouldn’t last long. The only other thing in the room was a map on the wall.

Violet approached the dusty map, scanning it. It appeared to be of a city, but there were red lines sketched across it, intertwining and shooting off, marked with little plates with various city names.

“What is this?” she muttered.

Then she glanced to the bottom of the map, seeing faded writing at the bottom.

*Hawkins, Indiana: Tunnel System and Map*

“Tunnel system.” Violet muttered. She turned the flashlight, and smiled to see what looked like the edge of a door beside them. A door to a tunnel system. But that wasn’t the only thing making her smile. She knelt down, inspecting the faded writing closer, recognizing the way the *s* were slashed, the way there was a little swirl at the bottom of the *p*.

“Mother.”

She didn’t know why her Mother’s handwriting was on the bottom of a map of tunnels, or why there was a secret tunnel system under a shed at the edge of the woods, or what she and Quigley were going to do, or if she’d even be able to take care of him.

And she didn’t know how or when she’d find Klaus and Sunny again.

But she knew that she would. Or, at least, she hoped that she would. She’d find them somehow, as soon as she could. They were her siblings. They were all she had.

But right now, she had to run.

She looked back up at the map, scanning the red lines. What other towns would these tunnels go to? One of them looked very close to home, but she couldn’t risk going back there and getting caught by anyone who might still be around her house. Besides, her old home was quite a walk from Indiana.

One of the tunnels led to Indianapolis. That might be a long walk, but it’d be closer than home, and she didn’t know where these other cities were in relation to them.

“Oh, I’m getting us somewhere.” Violet said. “I’ll find somewhere safe, I promise.”

She went back to Quigley. He was still breathing, but she doubted she could carry him far. But at the same time, the bottom of a tunnel was not the ideal place for him to recover from whatever shit had happened to him. She could probably get him somewhere before she passed out.

“Just stay alive.” she whispered. “We’re on our way to… somewhere.”
Chapter End Notes

Final chapter tomorrow, and more updates on how Part Two will go...
“Come on, Sunny, you’re not even trying.”

Sunny huffed, looking up at Klaus. “Sorbeo.” she muttered, meaning, “But I can absorb information by touching the book! Why do I need to know how to read it?”

They were sitting up in an abandoned loft. A broken-down barn that still smelled faintly of horses wasn’t exactly the best place to spend New Year’s Eve, but it hadn’t snowed here, and the blankets Carmelita had swiped two weeks before were definitely coming in handy. Klaus had also managed to swipe a couple books from the Library they’d slept in a few days before, and though he still felt a bit guilty for that, it was better than keeping Sunny uneducated. And, well, the other books really helped pass the time.

“You need to read, Sunny, it’s a very important life skill.” Klaus said. “And it’s fun.”

“Meh.”

“Sunny!”

“Kla!”

“Come on, Sunny, just read it.”

Sunny groaned, then looked down at the page. She huffed again, reading out loud, “S-E-E-”

There was a triple knock at the door, and a call. “Hey, cakesniffer, it’s cold as fuck! Let us in!”

Sunny beamed and tossed the book over her shoulder. Klaus sighed, before picking her up and descending from a ladder they’d managed to lay against the loft. He pulled the door open, and Carmelita raced in first. “Outta my way, I got dibs on the blanket pile!”

“We have to share!” Fiona called. She walked in, holding their food bag.

“Did you get everything?” Klaus asked, as Duncan and Isadora walked in, holding hands and whispering about something.

“This’ll last us til our next safe place.” Fiona said. “We’ll be able to drive for a while.”

“You didn’t have to kill anyone, did you?” Klaus asked.
“No.” Isadora said quickly, giving him a pained smile and a pat on the shoulder. “That’s what me and Carmelita are for.”

“Yeah, but it was Izzy’s turn this time, so I got to steal some headbands while she made a guy to sleep.” Carmelita said, smiling slightly.

“Remember, you gotta store those in your own bag.” Fiona called, hanging the bag on a hook by the wall.

“Yeah, I’ll just ditch some of that food.” Carmelita shrugged. “Or that box you guys gave me, no idea what it’s for.”

“It’s *pads*, you idiot!” Isadora rolled her eyes, sitting against a wall. Duncan slid next to her, pulling out his notebook and flipping through it.

“And…” Klaus moved, sitting next to Duncan. “You find anything on the Lab?”

Duncan shook his head. “Only paper that mentioned them just said that the Department of Energy was rebuilding it. Meaning they’ll be up and running soon.”

“What about…” Klaus hesitated. “Did… you find anything on Violet? Or Quigley?”

Isadora stared hard at the ground, and Duncan took a sharp breath. “No. Isadora tried to- to reach out and find them, but-”

“Nothing.” Isadora said. “Maybe my emotional powers don’t work long distance.”

“They worked across dimensions.” Fiona said, moving to sit in front of them. “I’m sure a few hundred miles won’t cause problems.”

“Maybe they’re closer than that.” Klaus said quietly.

“Maybe.” Fiona said.

“Or maybe there’s another reason I can’t reach them.” Isadora murmured under her breath.

They sat in awkwardness for a second, and then Duncan said, “It’ll be the New Year soon. 1984.”

Klaus smirked slightly. “The second the clock hits midnight, the world’s gonna fall to a totalitarian government.”

“Big Brother’s watching you.” Isadora laughed.

Carmelita jumped down from the loft, hugging a blanket to her shoulders like a cape. “The fuck does that mean?”

“We’ll steal that book for you next time we’re at a Library.” Klaus said, as Sunny giggled from his lap.

“Yeah, not likely.” Carmelita sighed, sitting next to Fiona and wrapping the blanket around herself.

They were silent for a moment, and then Fiona said, “Klaus, you wanna try some exercises?”

“Not exactly.” Klaus sighed.

“Come on.” Fiona said. “Duncan and Isadora did theirs while we were out.”
“I actually got Carmelita’s thoughts and nobody else’s!” Duncan said proudly, rocking back-and-forth in excitement. “Starting on the drive over.”

“And it only took him an hour to shut that off, which was not fun.” Carmelita muttered.

“And I managed to make the employee fall asleep.” Isadora beamed. “Made swiping shit so much easier.”

Klaus sighed, then shut his eyes, holding out his hand towards the loft. He waited for a minute, focusing hard, and then Sunny’s book came flying at them. He reached up and caught up, grinning even as Sunny let out a groan.

“Very good.” Fiona said. “How far was that?”

“Quite a few feet.” Isadora said. “Nice work, Klaus!”

“And you didn’t even have that in your sightline!” Duncan said, putting a hand on Klaus’s shoulder, which caused his face to go a bit red. “That was pretty cool!”

“It was alright.” Carmelita said, which was a compliment from her.

“We can test some more tomorrow.” Fiona said. “We’ll bring some old farm equipment out of their storage shed, and Klaus can move that for a bit, and then Sunny can throw it.”

“Svago!” Sunny giggled. “Sounds like fun!”

Klaus nodded slightly. Then, after a second, he said, “Who’s got the radio?”

“I do!” Isadora said, pulling her backpack off and digging inside. “You wanna go first?”

“Yeah!”

Isadora passed the walkie-talkie to Duncan, who passed it to Klaus. Sunny leaned up against Klaus, biting her lip and looking a bit impatient to begin.

Klaus turned to the same channel he did every day, and then began talking.

“It’s Day Forty-Seven. Sunny read three pages before she threw the book.” Klaus said.

Sunny giggled, and everyone watched, waiting for him to continue.

“She’s doing so well, when she pays attention.” Klaus said. “She’s been trying to walk a bit, too. You should see her go. We’re in a barn now. It’s pretty cool; Duncan let me talk about those books I read on horses for a few hours.”

“It really was interesting.” Duncan said supportively.

“It’s New Year’s Eve.” he added. “I… do you remember last year? Sunny and I fell asleep before midnight, and you made us promise to stay up next year. I… we don’t have a clock, I-I don’t know when midnight is, but I’ll try to stay awake.”

He bit his lip and stared down at the radio. This was probably pointless. But it helped.

“I miss you.” he said. “We miss you. Please… please come back to us.”

Sunny leaned up against him, and he said, “Talk to you tomorrow, Violet.”
He hesitated, and then passed the handheld radio to Duncan. “Your turn.”

Duncan nodded solemnly, and then turned the radio on, as Isadora leaned over his shoulder. “Hey, Quigley.” he said quietly. “Day Forty-Seven, huh?”

New Year’s Eve kinda sucked this year.

They didn’t even bother staying up til midnight, instead just getting some rest in the house they happened to find unlocked. They’d leave in the morning, as soon as they could slip away without the neighbors seeing. They’d gotten pretty good at that, which should probably have been worrying.

He couldn’t sleep, though, so he slipped into the bathroom. He turned the faucet on, watching the water run down the drain.

*You're wasting water.*

*Don’t care.*

It was nice to see a sink work, and to make the water warm and run his hands under it, feeling the heat until it was too painful to continue. But sometimes he didn’t even bother with that; it was just nice to watch the water run.

Suddenly, he felt something in his throat, and he started to cough. The coughing didn’t stop after a few moments, though, and before he knew it he was retching, gripping onto the edge of the sink in an effort to remain standing. Tears burned at the edge of his eyes as he continued to gag, feeling like there was something *lodged* in his throat, choking him. He struggled not to burst into tears, his legs shaking so hard he was convinced that he was going to *collapse*.

He coughed again, and then threw something up.

Some kind of slug came out of his mouth, landing in the sink. It shrieked as the water hit it, and then it scampered down the drain.

He stared for a moment, breathing hard and still trembling.

Then he blinked, and he was *back there.*

The world was cold and blue, and vines and roots spread around the room. The sink stopped running, clogged up by roots and mold. He stumbled backwards, hugging himself and shutting his eyes, wishing that the cold was gone. *Go back, go back…*

“Quigley?”

He blinked again, and he was back in the bathroom.

The sink was still running. The world was still warm.

Quigley turned towards the doorway, and saw her standing there, rubbing her eyes and looking at him in concern.

“Hey. Did something happen again?”

Quigley stared at her, breathing hard, and then he nodded.
“Are you okay?”

“No.” he, and he started to cry. “No, Violet, nothing’s okay.”

She ran forwards and hugged him, and he hugged her back, and, from somewhere in the house, the clock struck midnight.

Chapter End Notes

Information for Season Two, which I will link here once it's posted!

- Will be published January 12-13, depending on when I get back to my laptop.
  Chapter Update schedule will be the same as this fic, ~3:00-4:00pm EST.

- This should be fun, since Team Fiona has to deal with the majority of the plot while Team Quiglet has to deal with both El and Will trauma. Fun.

- Season Two will also include more backstory information on the Original Numbers and the All the Wrong Questions Gang (aka Moxie and the crew) so that should be fun!

- Thank you all so much for your comments! They really are the highlight of my day, and I hope to see you all for Season Two!

EDIT: Here's a link to Season Two! Enjoy!
https://archiveofourown.org/works/17408771/chapters/40977590

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!