Does Spider-Woman Is Gay?
by Th13f0fH0p3

Summary

Clementine Everett swears she's not Spider-Woman, no, of course not. It's just a coincidence that she disappears every time she shows up and yeah, maybe she's unnaturally strong and quick, but that's just because she goes to the gym, right? Except of course she's Spider-Woman, and of course she's a broke ass college student majoring in photography as she tries to save Atlanta from super villains and the common criminal. Of course she has trouble taking care of her little brother, AJ, and paying her pseudo-father's hospital bills, and of course she gets messed up in a fight and is forced to rely on the help of two people she just met to save her life. Because that's just how it be sometimes, isn't it?

Notes

Th13f0fH0p3 on Tumblr and bethanybiscuits on Instagram
See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by until the city burns by SmoshArrowverseFan
If you were a piss poor university student majoring in photography, you would take every single opportunity for money you could get your hands on. Even if that opportunity is fighting in an underground boxing ring as people bet on whether you’ll lose or not. Even if you have an unfair advantage because you were bitten by a radioactive arachnid and can now climb walls like a spider. Even if you have a little brother to take care of. Even if you have to slip in through your apartment window at three in the morning with a broken rib or two and a busted lip. Even if the cute girl you see sitting across the courtyard at lunch keeps staring at your bruised face, well, especially since the cute girl keeps staring at your face. Not the point. Point is, if you were in that situation, you would be fighting in an underground boxing ring. It was better than becoming a stripper, anyway, although it could be said that the two professions were more similar than they were different. Except it didn’t matter, because you’re not majoring in photography (unless you are), Clementine Everett is. And currently? Clementine Everett is getting her ass kicked. Sure, she got thrown through buildings and punched so hard she broke the sound barrier on a daily basis, but nothing bruised her or her ego as much as getting beaten down by a regular ass human. She was strong, yes, could lift fifteen tons without breaking a sweat, yes, had the ability to sense attacks coming, yes, and could even run a mile in two minutes, yes, but if there was one thing she couldn’t do, was learn how to throw a fucking fight. She’d get punched, kicked, fucked over so hard she knew, even with her freaky healing rate, she’d still feel it in the morning, and yet she’d still stand up like the idiot she was, and keep fighting. It wasn’t her fault she had the honor of a stereotypical knight and the intelligence of a toothpick. Maybe she wasn’t even that smart, honestly. Because her opponent’s fists were raw, her entire body was bleeding, and yet she still stood up, only to be knocked back down again, just to pull herself back up… again. They’d been doing this for the past five minutes, much to the displeasure of the crowd around them, who had gotten far too used to it for it to be exciting anymore.

It was only when the owner of the club whispered at her angrily to get it over with, did she let herself get punched in the face, and stay down. The crowd erupts in a roar, money already starting to be exchanged as two bouncers drag her off ring and into a hallway. A few minutes later, as she’s wiping blood off her face with a formerly pristine rag, the owner comes in, shoves a wad of cash in front of her, and leaves. Picking it up off the floor, she shoots finger guns at the two bald bouncers and exits the club. She finds herself in the middle of an empty parking lot next to a seemingly empty warehouse, where the club resides. With a sigh, she starts jogging a couple blocks away to a side street, heading towards a small car. Clementine pulls the keys out and unlocks it, settling into the driver’s seat and just sits there without moving. After a few minutes of letting the injuries settle in, body aching, she turns the key in the ignition and drives away, back towards her apartment. Parking in the back alley, she gets put and cranes her neck up to the fire escape. Fifteen feet up, it was a bit annoying to get to, but she takes a deep breath and jumps, catching the bottom rung of the ladder with the tips of her fingers and pulls herself up onto the platform. Muscles crying out in overexertion and pain, she jogs up the five flights of rickety stairs and eventually makes it to her apartment window. Digging her fingernails into the bottom of it, she pulls upwards and slips inside, taking a moment to adjust for the difference in light. After a beat, she turns on the living room light and opens the door to her shared bedroom. To her relief, AJ is lying comfortably on his bed, facing the wall, breathing even. Entering quietly, she grabs a change of clothes and takes a shower, getting out fifteen minutes later. When she enters their room again, her brother is snoring, and before she slips into her covers, she presses a kiss to his forehead. When she wakes up, it’s to the smell of chocolate and the feeling of being hit by a train. Great. Heaving herself up and swinging her legs over the edge of her bed, she takes a look at the clock. 5:42. Huh, a little earlier than usual, and it seems she’s alone, too. Looking across the room
confirms her suspicions, AJ is already up. That's only made clear when her little brother comes in holding an ice bag wrapped in a cloth and thrusts it towards her.

"For your face," he proclaims, staring at her pointedly. "Pancakes ready in a bit."

"Yes, sir," Clementine salutes before realizing that's a bad idea, and presses the ice bag to her left eye.

The small boy stares at her for a few more seconds with narrowed eyes, frowning, and then as if realizing she’s not going to say anything more, leaves with a sigh. Sometimes, he’s too smart for his twelve year old self. If she gave him some excuse, he’d scoff and roll his eyes, if she said the truth, he’d call Lee and tell him that she was being stupid. Which she was, and she knew that. But she needed the money more than she liked to admit, with Lee’s hospital bills and her college debt, not to mention the cash it took to take care of a young, ravenous boy and to maintain her equipment. Guilt settled in the pit of her stomach as she thought about the fact that sometimes it was her own emotions that got people killed, because she put AJ first instead of keeping her stuff clean and up to date. With another sigh, she pushes away her thoughts and gets out of bed, not bothering to make it neater and instead heads straight to the kitchen. It’s in an open space next to what serves as their living room, which consists of a couch and a barely functioning TV. The kitchen itself is small and cramped, with barely enough room for one person to fit in comfortably. As such, she sits at the table, a square platform with three fold out chairs surrounding it. Maybe she wasn’t fit to take care of a kid so young, but she needed to. For Lee, for herself, even. There was no way she was letting him into the foster system, not after what he’d, what she’d been through. They needed each other like plants need the sun. He gave her the will to keep going, to keep eating and sleeping and getting up when she got knocked down. She was his world, and he was hers.

Lost in her train of thought, she’s pushed out of it by the clatter of a ceramic plate hitting the table, a steaming pile of chocolate chip pancakes on it. With surprise, she looks up and sees AJ across from her, already digging in to his stack with a fork. Smiling at his antics, she starts eating, eyes lighting up at the taste and devouring a pancake within seconds. It’s her infinite shame and infinite pride that even though he was nine years younger than her, he was so much better at cooking than her. Granted, he cooked the pancakes with an Aunt Jemima mix and wasn’t allowed to cook any meat, but that was just because Clementine had some sense of parental concern, however small it happened to be at times.

After a few minutes of silence, not counting the sounds of eating, AJ looks up at her curiously, “Are you going to take me to school today?”

“Uh-” She looks up and laughs, seeing chocolate all over his face.

“What?” Her little brother frowns, glaring at her.

“You’ve got something on your face,” she holds back a snicker.

“Where?” He grabs a napkin, anxiously awaiting her next words.

“Everywhere, goofball,” at the expression on his face, she laughs again, watching him rub the napkin all over his face. “Here, I’ve got it.”

Wetting a napkin in her glass of water, she gently takes his hands away from his face and starts cleaning up his mess. He looks annoyed, but stays still as she wipes the napkin over his face, and after a minute, she pulls back with an amused smile.

“There, all clean,” she announces, getting up and taking both their plates to the sink.
Behind her, she hears him get out of his seat and sees him leaning against the counter out of the corner of her eye, “But are you going to take me to school?”

“Time?” She asks, not bothering to look up from her task of cleaning the plates.

“5:54,” comes his response a second later.

Doing some quick math in her brain, she nods silently, smiling at the small whoop of excitement the affirmation receives from the small boy. He sprints away to go get dressed, and once she’s finished, he’s already sitting on the couch, dressed with his backpack sitting next to him. Going into her room, she rummages through the small dresser they share, before realizing the only thing she has left are things she’s literally never worn. Now, Clementine might be a dirty gremlin, but looking at her clothes in the hamper, either dirty with flecks of blood or having been worn so many times they’re starting to smell, even she can’t bring herself to wear that. With an annoyed sigh, she takes out her clothes, a pair of skinny jeans and an oversized sweater with a grinning cat on the front, and gets dressed, shoving a pair of sneakers on her feet, heading back out to the living room. To her never ending surprise, AJ is already on his feet, holding both his and her backpack, one in each hand.

“Thanks, kiddo,” she takes their backpacks, slinging hers over her shoulder easily and the two leave their apartment.

AJ bounds down the stairs, taking two at a time while she jogs after him to the best of her ability, still amazed at the amount of energy he has. They reach the bottom quickly, walking around the building complex to her parked car. Her brother doesn’t say anything about the strange location, just gets in the passenger’s seat and puts his seat belt on. She slides into her seat, putting the key in the ignition, turning it before having closed the door, and as she starts to go forward, feels AJ’s pointed gaze on her face.

“Seatbelt,” he says simply, as if reminding a three year-old to chew their food before swallowing.

Oh right. Sometimes she would be dead if it wasn’t for him. Giving him a grateful smile, she puts it on and pulls onto the street. As usual, they make it about three feet before they have to stop again, the light ahead of them turning red. It takes another five minutes for them to be on their way, making relatively good time on the commute to Richmond Middle School. To her right, AJ messes with the radio, flipping past the Christian music stations and finally settling on some kind of old school rock. Not that Clementine is not a fan of it, she just would rather listen to more modern stuff than Elvis and Kiss. After four songs from Elvis, two from Kiss, one from Led Zeppelin, a song from Queen pops on. That song being “Bohemian Rhapsody”, of course. Before Clementine can even think about, AJ turns up the radio and they go streaming down the highway, blasting Queen and howling along to the lyrics like mad men. After a few more songs, they pull up to AJ’s school, and turning down the music, Clementine turns to her brother and holds out a clenched fist.

As her brother goes to give her a fistbump, she unclenches her fist and spreads her fingers out, laughing at his disgruntled expression, “Turkey!”

“You always do that,” he grumbles, rolling his eyes and getting his backpack out of the back seat.

“Then maybe you should stop falling for it,” she responds. “Hey, have a good day at school, goofball.”

“It’s middle school,” he deadpans, shooting her a doubtful look over his shoulder as he walks away.

She shrugs, watching him enter the building before getting out of there. With both eyes on the road,
she opens her Spotify app, connects her phone to her car via the aux cord, and puts her ‘liked’ songs on shuffle. The next thirty or so minutes are spent singing her heart out as she drives to her first class of the day. By the time she pulls into one of the many parking lots, it’s 6:54, and she sprints towards the building, taking the steps two at a time till she reaches the third floor, and enters the room just as the clock strikes 7. Her professor pays her no mind, just gets up from his desk and looks up at his students before clearing his throat and beginning his lecture. Clementine spends the next few minutes taking out her notebook and furiously rummaging through her backpack till she finds a pencil, already confused as to what her teacher is saying. As best she can, she starts writing down notes with her limited understanding of what’s happening, and spends the next hour or so trying to figure out what they’re talking about. Once the lecture is over, she scours over her notes, tapping her pencil against her skull rhythmically. After a minute or two, she’s figured it out and puts away her things, slinging her backpack over her shoulder and exiting the classroom. Pulling out her phone, she takes a look at the time. 8:12. Another half hour till her next class. With a hum, she exits the building and sits down on the grass in front of her, setting her backpack down and pulling out her camera. She spends the next fifteen minutes taking candid pictures of students walking by, of the tree branches waving around her. The next five or so minutes she spends staring at the pictures on her camera, getting rid of nearly all of them. Then, suddenly, she feels the sun being blocked from hitting her and hears the sound of someone clearing their throat.

Shifting her gaze, she finds a woman staring at her, eyebrow raised, “Yes?”

“Was just wondering if you were alive,” the blonde shrugs, turns to leave, then seems to think better of it. “Are you good? You look like, uh, shit, frankly.”

“Who’s Frank Lee? I’m not Frank Lee,” Clementine responds automatically, earning herself a roll of the eyes. “Nah, I’m good, just… ya know, clumsy.”

“You must be really clumsy if you’ve been showing up to Gender Studies with a black eye for the past few months,” she crosses her arms, a frown permanently etched on her face.

“Well, I am,” she squints up at her, trying to get a better look at that face. “Hey, I think I know you from somewhere- besides class, I mean.”

“Nope,” the woman shakes her head. “Must be mistaken.”

“I never forget a face,” Clementine sits up, thinking intensely with her one braincell, then becoming horrified as she realizes who she is. “Oh, you’re the girl that- uh, was… eating leaves?”

“Excuse me?” Her face heats up in embarrassment at her reaction.

“No, not you? Ha. My mistake. Oh no look at the time I have to get to class, nice seeing you,” she jumps up, shooting her finger guns as she starts to leave, barely remembering to get her backpack.

Shit. Shit. Shit. That was close. Really, really fucking close. Too close. Because that girl was the one she saved five months ago, that saw her get thrown into a car and didn’t get up because she was down for the count, that, when she awoke again, had pulled her mask halfway off, revealing her face from the nose down, that had stared, frozen, when Clementine had grabbed her wrist from pulling the rest off, even though her hand was sticky with her own blood, that she kissed in the pouring rain while hanging from a street lamp, that kissed her back. Yeah, of fucking course that girl went to her college, and was cute, and thought she looked like shit. Cool beans.

In her panic to get away as fast as she could to prevent herself from blowing her own cover, she runs into a wall and promptly sits the fuck down, pinching the bridge of her nose in an attempt to
stop herself from bleeding, “Shit, ow, fuck.”

“Holy shit, you really are clumsy,” comes a familiar voice behind her.

When she turns around, characteristic of her luck, the girl is crouched there, looking half amused, half concerned, “Yeah, well, I did say I was.”

The blonde quirks an eyebrow before her gaze flickers down to her lips, “You’re um, bleeding.”

“I’m- what?” Licking her lips, she tastes the overly familiar, metallic taste of blood, feeling it dripping down from her nose. “Got a tissue?”

“Nope, but I know someone who does. Come on,” she jerks her head to the side as she stands up, holding out a hand.

With her not bloody hand, Clementine grabs it and the two work together to pull her up, “Thanks… So, what’s the name of my savior, who I did not witness eating leaves?”

She snorts, a sound that makes her stomach do backflips, “I’m Violet, and you are?”

“Clementine, nice to meet you. I’d shake your hand but uh,” she waves her hands, which are now both wet with her blood.

“Yeah, I’m good. Look, I’m going to give you a warning in advance. The person I’m taking you to is more or less a mother in her own right, so she’ll probably fuss over you. And uh, I’m going to say I’m sorry too, because my friends are sort of eccentric,” Violet scratches the back of her neck, not meeting her gaze.

“Oh my goodness, sug, who’s your bleeding friend? Come here, darling, I’ve got you,” a very loud voice accentuated by a southern drawl comes from in front of them.

Suddenly, Clementine finds herself sitting down on a bench, a red headed woman muttering to herself as she pulls out a first aid kit from her backpack. She shoots her new blonde acquaintance a look of mock fear before her entire vision is taken up by a boy with short dreadlocks.

“Hey, my name’s Lou-” He starts to introduce himself before stumbling away as the southern woman elbows him in the gut.

“Leave the poor thing alone,” the woman shoots him a glare before her pleasant face turns back to her. “Hello there, my name’s Ruby.”

“This is Clementine, a dumbass who ran into a wall,” Violet supplies for her.

“Don’t be rude,” the self proclaimed Ruby’s arm shoots out and hits Violet in the stomach, making her double over and wheeze. “Now, I’ll have you all fixed up in a jiffy, just hold still for me.”

Genuinely sort of terrified, Clementine does as she’s told, the only part of her moving being her chest as she breathes. After a minute or two, she’s stopped bleeding and has a kids pink band-aid on the bridge of her nose, where she scratched it on the rough brick.

“Now, hun, do you bruise easily or somethin’ cause you have some nasty lookin’ ones on your face,” Ruby raises an eyebrow as she finishes up, putting her first aid kit back in her backpack.

“Um, yes, got these from the wall,” she shoots a look at Violet, hoping she conveys her need for her not to say different.
To her utter disappointment, Violet shakes her head, “No, you didn’t. You had them before you collided with the wall.”

“Like I told you, I’m clumsy, could’ve happened any time and I wouldn’t know,” the brunette says forcefully, getting up just in time to avoid Ruby pouncing on her. “Nice meeting you, Ruby, Lou-, and you... other people. I’d like to hang out, but I’m late for class, so...”

Grabbing her backpack, she waves and sprints away from them, checking the time on her phone and to her never ending bad luck, is already five minutes late for class. She had hoped, foolishly, that her lame excuse had been just that, a lame excuse. Except no, she really was late to class, and even though this was college where none of the professors cared if you came in an hour early or an hour late, there was one person who did, Gabriel Garcia, one of the two friends she still managed to keep after the whole fiasco with the hairspray and lighter. She would’ve still felt bad about singeing his eyebrows off if he didn’t complain about it every second he was around her, and every second he wasn’t. It had happened years ago, and his eyebrows had recovered anyway, so there wasn’t much more for his case other than him whining about it.

When she enters the classroom, ever so slightly out of breath, she scans it for Gabe, who she finds glaring at her from across fifty or so students. She gives him a guilty wave and goes up to him, sitting in the seat next to his and he automatically slides his notebook to her. After a few minutes of panicked note-taking for the second time that day, she slides it back to him and receives a disappointed look.

“I’m sorry but I got kidnapped by a blonde and a southern lady because I ran into a wall and got a nosebleed,” she signs to him, although it takes him a second to comprehend what she’s trying to convey.

He only started learning, so she keeps her words as simple as possible, “Whatever, you still owe me seventy pushups.”

“I’m wearing skinny jeans and a sweater,” she glares at him, exasperated.

“Ten for each minute you were late,” he ignores her comment and nods sternly, folding his arms across his chest, and turns back to the lecture.

An hour and a half later, Clementine is on the grass next to the science department building, doing pushups as Gabe counts for her, “Thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five, why are you a machine, thirty-seven…” and so on.

At fifty, Gabe yells, “One arm!”

“For fucks sake,” she mutters to herself, putting her left arm behind her back and shifting her right arm to center herself.

At sixty, when she starts to feel herself breathing harder, he yells again, “Other arm!”

Quickly reversing her arm’s position, she does the next ten with her left arm, which is admittedly not as strong as her right, and finishes by doing a handstand and letting herself fall backwards, rolling to stand up, promptly kicking Gabe in the shin. He hisses and slaps her arm, cursing as he hops around on his uninjured leg. She watches him as she takes a drink from her water bottle, downing half of it in one go.

“Why the fuck are you literally Terminator?” Gabe groans, nursing his shin as he kneels on the ground.
“Because you’ve been making me do this shit since we were ten years old. Blame yourself, if anyone,” she responds, rolling her shoulders and stretching.

“I hate that you’re right,” he pouts, then brightens up when he sees someone walking towards them. “Hey Duck!”

“Making our friendly neighborhood fruit exercise again?” He asks as he comes up, raising an eyebrow.

“It’s the least I can do to get revenge since she singed our eyebrows off,” Gabe’s lower lip juts out as his expression intensifies.

“I don’t know… I kind of liked it,” the eccentric boy touches his eyebrows thoughtfully, as if wondering if he should shave them off.

“Yeah, well, you have half a brain cell,” at that, Duck rolls his eyes.

“So, are you guys coming to the festival tonight?” He asks, mouth spreading out into a grin.

Clementine shrugs, taking a sip of water, “AJ will probably want to go, so maybe.”

“I’ll be there, Javier’s making me take Mari,” the Garcia’s eldest child sighs.

“Well you definitely should, I hear there’s going to be a fireworks show and that maybe even Spider-Woman will show up,” Duck’s eyes light up as he speaks, practically vibrating with excitement.

At that, Clementine promptly spits out her water, “Why would she show up? I mean, doesn’t she have better things to do?”

“Does it matter? It’s Spider-Woman, the coolest fucking person on the planet, no offense, Clem,” Duck rolls his eyes and then winces, gesturing towards his friend.

“None taken,” the corner of her mouth quirks up at the irony of the statement.

“But speaking of Spider-Woman,” Gabe interrupts, pulling out his phone. “Look at this.”

His two friends move to stand next to him, watching as he pulls up an article titled, “Does Spider-Woman Is Gay?”, the accompanying picture being a poorly drawn image of an upside-down Spider-Woman kissing a girl, blue lines dragging across the entire thing. Duck instantly erupts in a fit of laughter while Clementine gives her friend an unimpressed look before letting out a snort that turns into a full on laugh. Students passing by barely pay them any attention, even though they’re all being obnoxiously loud. The fruit recovers much faster than the animal, but after a while, they’re all calm.

“Where did you find that, anyway?” The only female in their group clears her throat, still recovering from her bout of laughter.

“Some satirical blog called The Violet,” Gabe shrugs.

“Huh, I met someone named Violet today,” Clementine muses, recalling her interaction with the girl.

“You don’t think…” The third member of their group trails off, letting the question remain unspoken.
“No, I think it’s just a coincidence,” she laughs it off, but there’s a feeling of unease that tells her otherwise, realizing the similarity of the drawing and when she had kissed Violet. “When did it come out?”

“I dunno, like... the meme started showing up five months ago?” Gabe answers, unsure of his answer. “Why?”

“Just wondering,” the feeling that had been at the back of her mind promptly drops down her throat and settles as a heavy ball in her stomach. “I’ve better get going.”

“Right, see you, Clem. Have fun with Professor Singer!” One of her two friends yells after her as she goes, trudging off towards what she knows to be her doom.

It being her doom because Lily Singer was also known as “The General” by the media due to her expansive army of low-level criminals, who worked with her to bring crime into Atlanta. Not that she knew who Clementine was, exactly, she just seemed to have some innate hatred of her that caused her to fight every day for even a passing grade in her class. God, what Clementine wouldn’t do to just go to the police and tell them that it was her, that she was the one who’d killed so many people her death count was in the triple digits, that she was the reason Savannah suffered from one of the worst crime rates in the nation. Except she couldn’t, because the police were more likely to arrest her than they were Lily, because they were all corrupt and probably a part of her group anyway. Whatever, she’d deal with her on her own then, like she always did.

Walking into her classroom was... uncomfortable to say the least. Most professors didn’t acknowledge her existence, just kept doing their work, but Lily made it a point to glare at her every day as she came in, making passive aggressive comments during class, which she knew were directed towards her. It had been hard, but Clementine had finally perfected the art of completely ignoring the shit out of her, and just focusing on the important stuff. Taking notes and learning information, that was important, not her teacher being a petty asshole. So she was surprised to find that Lily didn’t even spare her a second glance today, eyes merely glassing over and moving past her to the next student that entered the room. Something was up, something bad. The only time she acted like this was when she was busy thinking hard, when in the afternoon, she showed up on TV because she was in a metal suit shooting bullets at whatever industry she wanted to harass now. With the festival coming up that afternoon, that did not bode well. Not at all.

Clementine was simultaneously uncomfortable with and thankful for the fact that her alter ego, Spider-Woman, was mainstreamly popular. Seeing her face -well, sort of- everywhere at the festival was good because it meant she could wear her mask without people taking much notice of her if she wanted to and because it made AJ so excited that she bought him the first Spider-Woman mask they saw. It was also bad because, again, it made her uncomfortable and nervous, and she was never very good at anything when she was nervous. Which is why when an explosion went off, the lack of bright colors in the sky making it clear it wasn’t a firework, she nearly jumped out of her skin. Beside her, Duck cursed and Gabe screamed. Shit. Shit. Shit. AJ’s hand was shaking in hers, and before she could think, she let go of him and grabbed his shoulders, looking him in the eye.

“Go with Duck, okay? I’m going to make sure everyone’s okay,” with that, she makes sure Duck knows what’s happening before she goes sprinting through the rushing crowd, her friends yelling at her to come back.

As someone who’s been Spider-Woman for about two years now, Clementine has become pretty adept at changing into her suit. Except, she’s nervous, and it takes her precious seconds longer than
normal for her to wrestle her normal clothes off, hiding in an abandoned stall to change. Pulling her mask over her face, she sprints out towards the explosion in the distance, not too far away now. Stupid, stupid, stupid. She should’ve known, should’ve done something to stop Lily before it got to this. The thoughts racing through her head nearly distract her enough that she nearly missed it when the feeling to duck makes its way to the forefront of her brain. Her body reacts on instinct, dropping to the ground just in time as bullets cut through the air towards her and make a new pattern in one of the tents. She rolls away, the world going into slow motion as she looks up towards her attacker. Standing not too far away from her, maybe ten feet, is Lily Singer, wrapped in her classic metal suit, a machine gun jutting out from her shoulder.

The world snaps back to normal as soon as she takes the scene in, extending her arms and shooting quick blasts of web towards the muzzle of the gun, still running as she goes. The sound of Lily’s distorted voice makes its way to her ears as she yells in frustration, the gun unable to fire anymore bullets. Stumbling over a knocked over piece of wood, Clementine curses and hides behind a stall, straining her ears to hear anything. After it’s been silent for way too long, she pokes her head around the corner to find Lily gone. Confused for a second, she hears the woosh of air as something giant and heavy makes its way towards her, coming from the sky. She throws herself out of the way just as the thing crashes into the spot she had been, rolling onto her feet and turning towards it. Where she had just been is replaced by the machine gun Lily had used against her, still webbed up. Momentarily distracted by the mystery of it, she doesn’t react quick enough for her to get out of the way of something whacking into her back, sending her sprawling. It takes her a moment to get back up, but when she does, she decides she’d rather not have, because she’s currently staring down death. Two literal missile launchers are pointed in her direction, one held in either of Lily’s massive hands.

“Are those for me? You really shouldn’t have,” she sighs, putting a hand to her chest. Silence follows her question, her opponent taking a moment and then squeezing the triggers. Again, the world goes slow-motion as the missiles make their way towards her, every fiber in her body screaming for her to move. And she does, sprinting forwards and leaping over the things, avoiding them by an inch. By the time the world’s back again, she’s right in front of Lily’s throwing the punch of her life. Her fist smashes into where her face should be, the metal crumpling inwards slightly on impact, the entire suit being lifted off the ground as she is pushed backwards... by three inches. Hissing, she ignores the feeling in her hand, which feels like it’s broken.

Honestly, it just might be, if the intense throbbing in her knuckles is anything to go off of, “Holy shit, what are you, made out of metal?”

Clementine is actually offended that her joke doesn’t get any sort of response except for another machine gun popping out of her other shoulder and starting to fire off rounds. It takes all of her concentration, at this range of two whole feet, for her to not get torn into shredded beef, leaping into the air and twisting her body into a shape that feels like shouldn’t be possible. Of course, because life is shitty, all of Lily’s stuff tracks her movements, and when she least expects it, one of the missiles collides with her back and sends her tearing through tents, rolling to a stop in a clearing. Her entire back feels like it’s on fire, and she can tell by the wind on her bare skin that it’s caused a respectable -if temporary- tear in her suit. That’s the least of worries though, because she can also feel blood soaking into the cloth, which has already started to repair itself, skin torn away from the explosion. Digging deep into her pool of resolve, she gets onto her feet, vision swimming. The first thing she registers is a second missile three inches in front of her face, which she barely manages to avoid by slamming herself back onto the ground, shooting a web to propel herself down. The next thing she registers as she gets up again, ignoring the dirt that managed to get into her wound, are the two people in the clearing with her. Of course, Violet, and Lou-, are staring at her, frozen with shock. Her own shock makes her freeze for a second before she realizes if she does
that, she’s liable to die, and turns towards where the missile went. Predictably, it’s making its way back to her, doing a strange and slow turn in the air. With a web shot at it, it explodes mid-air, too far away from the ground to cause any damage.

Turning back away from the missile, Clementine supposes she shouldn’t be surprised to find Lily charging towards her, propelled by fire like a fucking maniac, but she is. Not enough though, because her body goes on auto-pilot, arms shooting out and shooting webs like her life depends on it -which it totally does-, effectively webbing Lily’s giant suit to the ground, stopping just inches from her face.

“Looks like someone’s all tangled up,” even she admits that she sounds pretty pathetic, voice laced with pain, looking like she can barely stand up.

To her surprise, Lily speaks, “That was a really bad joke.”

“Thank you, I try to get out my best ones for you, but it seems because your missile fucking exploded on my back, I’m having trouble being funny right now,” Clementine grits her teeth, shuffling past the hunk of metal towards the two witnesses.

“Don’t worry, you’ll have more trouble in a second,” her voice, already distorted, sounds worse when she starts laughing.

“What does that-” And then she knows what that means when she turns and a gun pops out of the tiniest hole in her webbing and shoots at her.

Normally, Clementine could stop that with a web no problem, except she’s starting to see double, and when she aims, she aims at the wrong bullet. Sure, she’s been shot before, like, in the shoulder or foot, occasionally the rare hand, but never in the stomach. Never somewhere she knows could make her bleed out.

“Well, you were right, I admit,” she wheezes, managing to shoot a web at the gun to prevent it from ending her permanently as she falls onto her knees, webbing up her own wound on either side. “It is a hell of a lot harder to be funny right now. But you know what, I’m going to try anyway.”

“God, do you ever shut up?” Lily groans, barely audible through the ringing in her ears. “You’re dying, and you’re still fucking talking.”

“No, actually, my parents say I came out of the womb running my mouth, making quips about the doctor’s stupid hair,” Clementine grins through her pain, pressing a hand to her wound, already staining her suit with red despite the web bandages.

With a grunt of effort, she pushes herself onto her feet, ignoring the protests of her body at the action, and shoots a web at the closest tree, swinging away to the best of her ability. Behind her, Lily’s frustrated screaming follows her as she goes, barely managing to hit the branches. After a few minutes of getting away, she stops, gently lowering herself onto the ground and pressing a button on the side of her web shooter, a small capsule popping out. She lifts her mask up enough to show the lower half of her face and puts it into her mouth, swallowing it with a dry throat. It would take five minutes for the painkiller to make its way through her system, so she doesn’t get up, just tries to keep herself from bleeding out as she waits.

As she’s starting to feel the effects, the fire being replaced by a numbness, the rustling of bushes makes its way to her ears, and she freezes, turning toward the sound. To her simultaneous relief and dread, Violet appears from the bush, staring at Clementine. Quickly, she puts her mask back down
The movement seems to alert the blonde as she shakes her hands and starts talking, “No, no, it’s okay. I just came to help you.”

“Don’t need any help,” she keeps her statement short and sweet, looking around nervously.

“All due respect, Spider-Woman, you’re bleeding out,” Violet gestures towards her stomach and the growing stain of red it’s causing. “I promise you won’t have to take off your mask, I just want to make sure you survive. I have a friend, his name is Louis, and he can help you. All we want to do is help you.”

Sure, Clementine is pretty sure that Violet isn’t secretly plotting to kill her, but at the same time, she’s pretty vulnerable right now, and there’s no guarantee that they won’t take off her mask anyway, despite her reassurance. Unfortunately for her, she doesn’t have much of a choice, since she can feel the amount of blood she’s lost, and there’s no way she’s going to make it to one of her stashes of medical supplies in time.

“Lead the way, my blonde friend. Though as a warning, I can’t walk super great,” she shrugs, then immediately regrets the action, wincing.

“Can I… approach you?” The way she phrases her question makes it infinitely more awkward for both of them.

“Hey, I don’t bite, unless you want me to, of course,” Clementine wishes she never spoke.

“Maybe later, when your not dying,” the blonde’s face burns as she says it, slinging Clementine’s arm over her shoulder.

Together, the two hobble in some direction that she doesn’t know, but Violet seems confident enough that her worries are assuaged, “So, I don’t think I ever caught your name, although we’ve met twice, now.”

“Oh, it’s Violet. I’d ask you the same except… you know,” she holds back the urge to shrug, instead focusing on her efforts to keep Spider-Woman from dying.

“Yeah, that would be awkward. For now, you can call me, uh, Bob- no, um,” racking her brain for names that either don’t sound stupid or won’t too obviously lead Violet to realize it’s her, she comes up with nothing.

“What about Clementine?” She sounds embarrassed to even say it, but she does.

“Clementine? Yeah, I guess that works,” underneath the mask, her face heats up.

The next few minutes are spent in silence before Clementine blurts out, “So, you made our kiss a meme, huh?”

“Shit,” Violet curses, stumbling in surprise, causing her to utter a cry of pain. “Sorry, shit. Are you good? I- I didn’t mean to make it a meme, it just… happened.”

“I think it’s funny, actually. The fact that it’s a meme, not the subject matter,” she admits, voice strained.

“Right… So, it wasn’t like, an accident?”

“Nope.”
“Oh.”

“Yeah, I just- well, it was a thanks for saving my life, I guess.”

“Anytime?”

“God, I hope not- I mean, not that it was bad kissing you, just because I really hate almost dying, and although I like seeing you, because you seem cool, I don’t want it to become a habit… Shit, sorry, I’m just kind of a fuck up right now.”

“No, I understand what you mean.”

“Cool, because I do like you. Which is… weird, because you don’t even know my actual name and-”

“Clementine, Spider-Woman, whatever your name is, it’s okay.”

At that, the two fall silent, stumbling over tree roots in the darkness. After a minute or two they see a bright light, and Violet adjusts their trajectory slightly so that they head towards it. Coming onto a dirt road, a limousine awaits them, Louis -presumably- nervously pacing in front of it.

“Violet! I’m so glad your safe,” he gasps. “And Spider-Woman, nice to meet you, I’m a big fan-”

“Louis, we need to get going,” his friend sounds exasperated as she says it, pushing past him and opening a door, gently settling Clementine onto one of the seats.

“Right, right!” The excited boy gets in behind them, knocking on the divider window, which rolls down. “Get us home, please. And if you can, make it quick, Chairles. We’ve got Spider-Woman in the back seat and she’s bleeding out.”

“Of course,” a rough, old sounding voice comes from the front just before the window rolls back up.

The three sit in silence awkwardly, Louis and Violet staring at Clementine while she avoids their gazes, staring out the window before finally giving in, “So, any questions?”

“Why the mask?” Louis asks immediately. “Don’t you want recognition?”

“What I want is for the people I care about to be safe. If people knew who I was, they’d go after them to get to me,” she answers the question with practiced ease.

“How old are you?”

“Not going to answer that.”

“What’s your name?”

“Violet suggested calling me Clementine, because calling me Spider-Woman is lengthy and unnecessarily formal.”

“Oh, that’s just because she has a crush on this girl named Clementine who she met at school today.”

“I do not!”

“You started a conversation with her for no reason, called her a dumbass, and even brought her to
As the two start bickering about whether or not Violet likes her new acquaintance, who is literally in the car with them, Clementine thanks God for the fact that she has a mask on, if only to hide the furious blush having made its way onto her cheeks.
Recovering from a fight isn't as easy as you'd think.

Exposition and dialogue heavy.

When Clementine had first met Louis, she hadn't quite gotten a good look at him. A quick glance at best, and certainly not enough to form an opinion on who he was. Having being stuck in a car with him, stuck in a limousine, to be precise, she starts to get an idea. His clothes are clearly nice, the duster he wears over his button up, cactus print shirt is made out of leather, and if the fact that he has a personal chauffeur is anything to go by, the guy is loaded. So maybe, when the limo pulled up to the full scale mansion complete with a wrought iron gate and a circular driveway with a fountain in the center, surrounded by an arrangement of vibrant flowers, she shouldn't have been surprised. Except she is, and she can feel their gaze on her as she stares, jaw dropping.

"I take it you've never seen anything quite so ostentatious before?" Violet asks, receiving a punch in the shoulder from her friend.

"Well, not exactly," she knows they can’t see where her eyes are, but even so, she feels the need to look Louis in the eye. “Thank you for… saving me.”

“Hey, don’t jinx it, you’re not out of the danger zone yet!” He exclaims, although he’s grinning, as if he can’t believe Spider-Woman just said that to him.

“My mistake,” she dips her head slightly, as if apologizing, and then clears her throat. “To be clear… you can tell no one about this, do you understand? Not to be overly dramatic, but if anyone found out, it would compromise your safety and the safety of everyone you know.”

The elation on Louis’s face drops, replaced by a look of dawning horror, while Violet seems to have already comprehended the severity of what she’s doing. From then on, it’s silent as the limo drives past the main entrance, going on a paved road running along the edge of the interior, connecting to smaller roads further inside the compound.

“How big is this place, anyway?” Clementine asks, trying to get a scale for the map in her mind.

“A dozen or so acres, technically,” the boy hums, saying it so nonchalantly she almost does a double take.

“This is his parents summer house,” across from her, Violet frowns, as if she’s known for a long time yet still can’t believe it. “They’re at their other house in Washington, currently.”

“You’re… alone?” She turns to Louis, watching his face twist into something bitter.
“No, I have Chairles and the maids,” he says it like he’s trying to convince himself, like he doesn’t believe he’s been abandoned by his family.

Violet looks like she wants to say something but just shakes her head and turns away. She seems to know the truth of the situation, but Clementine knows it’s not her place to ask, being a bleeding superhero who pretty much just met him. Turning her attention back outside, she notices them heading towards a hanger, an airstrip leading up to it. They pull in next to a bright red plane and get out, Violet assisting her as they head through a door into an empty room, followed by Chairles. While Louis examines the brick wall opposite them, Clementine begins to wonder if she made a mistake trusting someone who clearly had a few screws loose. With a shit eating grin, the strange boy slaps his hand against the brick and immediately, the floor starts to lower, leaving them standing on a circular platform as they descend into the void. Next to her, Violet looks just as flabbergasted as Clementine feels, but can’t express due to her mask.

“Welcome to the bat cave, peasants!” Louis throws his arms out, causing bright white lights to illuminate the space below them.

The size of the space is not what’s impressive, although it’s quite large, but rather the equipment inside it. On the far side of the room is a giant monitor surrounded by numerous consoles blinking with vibrant lights. To the left is what can only be described as some sort of training area, complete with moving targets, various different structures simulating a skate park, exercise machines stacked in a line against the wall, and an open locker filled with different equipment, ranging from hockey sticks to boxing gloves. In the same area is a multipurpose field, a soccer goal at either side of the field, standing in front of the large poles characteristic of football, encased in plexiglass like a hockey rink, with basketball hoops hanging from the length of the field. On the right side is a bunch of tables filled with strange looking, indecipherable gadgets and pieces of technology, surrounding an elevated platform in a semi circle, the platform itself holding a sleek sports car.

As they hit the bottom, the motion breaks Clementine’s concentration, turning to Louis, who struts forward, humming Fall Out Boy, “Why do you have this, exactly?”

“I’m rich?” He looks back at her as if the answer is obvious. “I mean, what better way to spend millions of dollars than creating a super secret base under the plane hanger?”

“Donating to charity, maybe,” Violet mutters under her breath, half-dragging, half-carrying Clementine after her friend, all four of them stopping in front of the large monitor.

“Got me there, blondie,” he shoots a grin at them, then speaks to the console in front of him. “Activate ‘hurt peasant’ protocol, please.”

“Activating ‘hurt peasant’ protocol,” a robotic voice comes out of nowhere. “Please place the peasant on the table behind you.”

“What tab- holy shit,” Violet starts to turn around, then promptly jumps as a rectangular prism erupts from the floor.

Hesitantly, she removes Clementine’s arm from her shoulders and sets her down on the self proclaimed table. Half expecting metal arms to sprout out from the ceiling and inject her with sedatives, she tenses, keeping her breathing slow and steady. To her surprise, the only thing that happens is that Chairles walks up to her with a tray of tools and a plastic bag, setting both down next to her.

"Wait a second, your 'hurt peasant' protocol is just a table appearing?" Violet asks, disappointment dripping off her words.
"Sorry, it's not the automated medical AI you were hoping for," he retorts.

“If you could please remove your suit,” Charles sighs and ignores them, gesturing towards her and picking up the bag to show it’s contents, which happen to be a hoodie and a pair of sweatpants.

For a few moments, she doesn’t move, just contemplates whether or not death is preferable, and then shrugs. Pressing two gloved fingers to the inside of her wrist, her suit becomes loose and easily slides off her shoulders and arms, leaving her wearing a black, long sleeved shirt. Once Charles gestures to the rest of her suit, which still resides on the lower half of her body, she lifts herself up with her hands and kicks off the rest of the suit, black leggings underneath.

Clearing his throat loudly, Charles turns towards Violet and Louis, “If you could please occupy yourselves elsewhere, this is going to take a while.”

An hour or so later, Clementine is sitting on a couch, clean bandages covered by her loose fitting, borrowed clothes. Via the rudimentary system in her suit, she calls Duck. As it rings, Violet watches her curiously while Louis talks to Charles, animated and obnoxiously loud. After a few moments, the person on the other end picks up.

“Um, hello?” His unsure voice comes through, laced with worry.

“Hey, my… dude,” she pauses, awkwardly looking at her compatriots.

“Clem, what the actual fuck? You just- you just dissappeared and we were so worried and fuck, Gabe was like, crying. I mean, we had to drag AJ away from that place,” he’s so loud the system automatically turns down the volume to protect her hearing.

“I know, I know, and I’m sorry. Has he calmed down now? Is he okay?” Her mouth twists into a frown, hoping the small boy didn’t cause too much trouble.

“AJ’s fine, he’s worried and angry, but fine. Right now he’s with Javi at your place since Gabe and I can’t really take him,” Duck just sounds tired, already used to her worrying antics after so many years. “Are you okay? Do you need me to pick you up or something?”

“I’m fine, but yeah, that would be good,” she slips her hand under her hoodie, scratching at her bandages absently.

“Where are you?” In the background, she can hear him pick up his keys and leave his dorm.

“Um…” She racks her brain for a place close to Louis’s mansion. “The Dairy Queen on Third.”

“Why the fuck are you at a Dairy Queen?” He’s just exasperated at this point, voice filled with disbelief and confusion.

“Why wouldn’t I? Their ice cream bops,” she shrugs. “Perfect place to go after dealing with superheroes and supervillains.”

“You know what, we’ll talk when I get there. Don’t expect to go home immediately; I want a Blizzard Cake,” she can practically hear him roll his eyes through their connection.

“But… you’re lactose intolerant?”

“And?”
“You can’t eat an icecream cake, it has dairy in it.”

“When I have you as a best friend, I think I deserve a Blizzard Cake, you heathen. Dealing with your shit all the time is no easy feat.”

“I’m going to be the one to deal with your shit once you eat that cake.”

“Die.”

“I’m good, thanks for the offer though.”

“Die.”

“Still gonna be a no for me.”

“I’m going to hang up now.”

“Okay, nerd. See you in a bit.”

“See you.”

With that, he hangs up, leaving her in silence. Casting a glance around the room, she sees that Chairles is writing furiously on a clipboard, Violet seems to have lost interest in her conversation, and Louis is staring at her intently from the other couch.

“Well, um… thank you for all of your help, but I have to get going now,” she clears her throat, standing up.

Across from her, Louis does the same, expression hopeful, “I can give you a ride?”

“Sorry, but no. The longer I’m with you, the more you’re in danger,” Clementine shakes her head, much to the disappointment of the excited boy.

“Oh, well, if you come back in a month or so I’ll have a present for you,” a smile grows on his face again as he speaks, eyes sparkling.

“Sure,” she shrugs, starting to walk away, only to hear footsteps following her.

To her right, Violet walks beside her, hands shoved in her pocket, silently accompanying her to the front door. Pausing for a moment after she opens the door, she turns to her, looking anywhere but her face.

“It- uh, was nice seeing you again,” the blonde scratches the back of her neck, blushing slightly. “I hope I’ll meet you without the mask some day.”

Clementine hums thoughtfully, rocking on the heels of her feet, “I hope so too.”

Standing there awkwardly, she waits a moment before speaking again, “Bye, Spider-Woman.”

“See you, Violet,” shooting her finger guns, she takes a running start before shooting a web and swinging away into the night.

“So,” Javier starts, pointing a plastic spoon in her direction, mouth full of reeses pieces and vanilla ice cream. “You met Spider-Woman, saved her life, and then hightailed it… to Dairy Queen?”
“Basically,” she shrugs, dipping her own spoon into her Strawberry Malt.

The three of them are sitting in her apartment, Duck having already eaten half of his Blizzard Cake with the assistance of Javier, AJ asleep in his bed. She’d come up with her cover story on the way over, pretending to be too busy with eating to answer Duck’s questions. Her story went as such; “I ran towards the explosion, pushing past people until I ran into Spider-Woman, who was like, ‘What are you doing here?’, to which I said, ‘Making sure everyone’s okay’, and then ‘The General’ popped out of nowhere and started shooting. Somehow I reacted first and pushed Spider-Woman out of the way. After saving her life, she told me to run, and since I wasn’t insane, I did.”

“You’re weird,” Javier shakes his head, melted ice cream dribbling down his chin.

“What was I supposed to do?” She folds her arms, defensive, as if she had actually came up with a convincing story that made any sense.

“Find us?” Duck asks mockingly, raising an eyebrow. “Seriously though, I’m just glad you’re safe. We were all worried about you, Clem.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” she’s said it so many times now she sounds like a broken record. “I’m fine though, really.”

“You better be, you’ve got to take care of your hermano,” her pseudo uncle raises an eyebrow, squinting. “No time to be in the hospital.”

“Right,” the brunette nods, leaning back in her chair with a sigh, reminded of her step-father. “I haven’t seen Lee in a while.”

“Hey, he’s fine. I just saw him the other day. The doctor’s say he’s been twitching and that he’s showing more brain activity than before,” Javier reassures, placing a sticky hand on her shoulder. “Who knows what could happen? Maybe he’ll-”

“Just because he’s twitching doesn’t mean he’s ever going to wake up,” her words come out more bitter than she’d intended, and the other two fall silent.

It’d been a little less than three years since it happened. Since Lee got into that car accident and came out missing an arm, since his eyes opened, since AJ started living with her, since Carley died, since she didn’t wake up with nightmares most nights. But it wasn’t their fault, certainly wasn’t Javier’s or Duck’s fault. Whoever had hit them and ran, it was their fault, not Lee’s or Carley’s, not hers. That’s what she’d been told to tell herself by the grievance counselor, sitting on that musty couch, barely paying attention. That’s what the therapist Javier had gotten her afterwards had said, what they all said. She was tired of hearing it, more tired of not believing it, angry at the amount of times she’d sat in front of Carley’s grave, crying and asking her why. Knowing her step-mom, she’d say that things happen for a reason, that it needed to happen so she would go on to save lives. And knowing herself, Clementine would just say that it wasn’t fair, would get angry and yell, knowing she was right. But she never responded, because she was dead, and if Lee ever woke up, he would be devastated. It only hurt more because she’d seen it happen to them, saw Lee’s arm get crushed underneath the wheel as he fell, trying to push Clementine out of the way, Carley’s body flipping over the cracked windshield, the first to get hit. Hurt more because she held Carley as the light drained from her eyes, wheezing for breath as onlookers called 911, her own leg broken. Hurt more because the anniversary was in a few weeks, and she would go to her grave holding fresh flowers, just sitting there as people came and went, placing their own offerings, until Javier would come and gently coax her into going with him, eating shitty tacos from Taco Bell at the nearest park. Hurt more because Carley was her mom.
"I know, but we have to have hope, Clem," Javier says finally, determined. "We have to."

If there was one thing Clementine did not have the next morning, it was hope. Hope that she would survive the next thirty or so minutes as Gabe and Duck met Violet and her group. It had been an accident, just the three of them hanging out after class, Clementine doing push-ups on the ground while Gabe counted, when a slightly familiar voice called out to her. Looking up mid push-up, she sees Louis running towards them, a group following after him lazily. Shooting a glare at her friend, she looks at the ground and keeps going while Duck introduces himself. To her misfortune, the two seemed to get along well enough it was if they were long lost siblings, arms thrown around each others shoulders and belting out "Oh My Darling, Clementine".

"One arm!" Gabe yells just as the rest of the group arrives.

Without complaint, she puts her left arm behind her back and keeps going, not missing a beat. Silently, she thanks Gabe for making her doing this, completely aware of the small crowd of attractive people watching her. Her friend seems to realize this too late, face palming and grumbling to himself in Spanish, as if she didn't grow up right beside him, learning it whenever Javier babysat her. Making a show of it, Clementine extends her fingers and holds herself up by her fingertips as she continues.

Laughing, Louis casts a shadow over her as he comes to look, "Aw c'mon Clementine, you're going to kill my queer disasters of friends, especially Violet over here."

"Nope, she's got ten more left," Gabe clears his throat, shooting a threatening look and his friend, daring her to stop.

Doing her best attempt at a shrug, she finishes up and hops onto her feet, stretching her arms over her head, enjoying the way Violet's gaze shifts down to her exposed stomach. Well, enjoying everyone's gaze, really.

"Damn," Louis says, so soft it's almost a whisper.

Then as if the entire group shares one, very gay brain cell, they all snap out of it, looking away and blushing. The only people looking at her now are Gabe and Duck, the former glaring at her as he gestures towards Louis. Oh. Oh. Say it ain't so, the Garcia's got a crush. On talk-it-up Louis, no less.

"So... what are you guys doing here anyway?" Clementine clears her throat, sitting down on the grass.

"A pipe burst in Pierson Hall so they evacuated the building. We all have class there so we decided to hang out," Ruby explains, the entire group sitting down in a haphazard circle.

"Is anyone going to explain who the hell this is?" A brown haired boy groans, ripping up the grass beneath his fingers.

"I swear, where did you people learn your manners from?" The redhead exclaims, throwing a small pebble at the guy's head, aiming with deadly accuracy. "For Christ's sake, Mitch. This is Clementine, we saw her yesterday."

Rubbing his forehead, where a small red spot grows, he glares at her, only to be met with her steely gaze, flinching away, "Sorry, geez."
"Now, how about we go around the circle introducing ourselves?" She looks around, staring down anyone who dares to look like they'll say no. "Wonderful. My name is Ruby McIntosh, she/her, pre med with a major in sociology.

"I'm Mitch Harden, yes I know how funny ha ha," he rolls his eyes at Duck's snicker. "He/him, majoring in Chemistry."

"I'm Marlon Dantes," a blonde boy with a dead rat for hair waves to her, head laid on Louis's lap. "He/him, majoring in Comparative Literature."

And so on and so forth, the group introduced themselves. Besides Louis Yates (he/him), who majored in Drama, Violet Evergreen (she/her), who majored in Astronomy, and the ones that had already introduced themselves, there were five others. There was Willy Harden (he/him), Mitch's younger, freshman brother, hoping to major in Chemistry, Brody McFarland (she/her) majoring in Biology, Omar Fish (he/him) majoring in Culinary Arts, Aasim Zip (he/him) majoring in Chemical Engineering, and Tennessee Clark (he/him), a sophomore majoring in Studio Arts.

Then it was time for the other, smaller group to introduce themselves, with Gabe starting, "My name is Gabriel Garcia, he/him, majoring in Humanities."

"I'm Duck Randall, he/him, majoring in Cinematography and Film Production," the shorter boy says, smiling.

"Which makes me Clementine-" She pauses for a second, frowning briefly. "Everett, she/her, majoring in Photography."

Aasim gives her a weird look, though he seems to be the only one wondering about her hesitation with her last name, "You have another last name or something?"

From the other side of the circle, Violet shoots him a pointed look, noting the way Clementine's body language becomes guarded, "Or something."

"So what is it?" Ignoring the look, he presses on.

"Addison," she says, forcing it to sound casual.

No one seems to grasp the relevancy, but Gabe swiftly changes the topic, talking about his uncle, Javier, and his crazy dad, who was currently deployed in Iraq. Beside her, Violet listens, opting out of speaking and instead picks at her nails.

"Hey, don't you know you could get an infection from that?" Clementine whispers, leaning over.

"Never gotten one before," the other girl raises an eyebrow.

"First time for everything, right?" She asks rhetorically, smiling.

In response, Violet grunts and shoves her hands in her pockets, "Do you think these guys could get any louder?"

Pretending to think it over, Clementine hums, "Nope, don't think so."

"Me neither," she glances over at Louis, who is talking animatedly to Gabe about worms. "So, Clementine, tell me about yourself."

"Jeez, where do I start?" The brunette blows out her cheeks, the wind blowing stray hairs in front of
her face, staring up into the sky. "I was born in Atlanta, my mom's name was Kate, my dad's was Gavin. There was an accident and I was in foster care for a while, bouncing around and getting attached to a two year old orphan named Alvin Junior in the process. That was until a man by the name of Lee fostered me when I was thirteen. I was… a problem child, but he was determined to help me out of it. Eventually, after months of therapy, he told me he wanted to adopt me, and I convinced him to adopt AJ too. I wasn't 'fixed' or anything, but he was willing to put in the effort to help even after adopting me. A few years later, he met a woman named Carley and they… well, they got married about a year after they first saw each other. For a while, we were a family. Except three-ish years back, there was another accident. Now, I take care of AJ, alone."

"Shit, I'm sorry," Violet looks down, frowning, then does her best approximation of a reassuring smile. "I don't have quite the superhero origin story, but I can give it a shot."

In response, Clementine smiles at the irony of the statement, "Sounds good to me."

"Well, I was an only child, born to Kyle Evergreen and Anna Adlon -they were never married- in a crusty ass RV. My dad was an abusive, alcoholic asshat, my mom was never around because she was working, so naturally, I got into a lot of trouble. That's how we all met, actually," she gestures towards her friends, all still joking around. "We were all sent to 'Ericson's Boarding School for Troubled Youth' by parents who didn't want to deal with us. I was sent mostly because my dad hated me and who I was, and some other, more traumatic stuff you can only unlock if you take me on at least six dates beforehand. Anyway, while I was there, I met Louis and he introduced me to the rest of these fucknuggets, along with a few extras. Clearly, years after graduating, we're still good friends. Besides these guys, my dad died a couple of years ago from liver failure, and this is going to sound horrible, but I'm kind of glad he's gone. My mom's been a lot happier now without him, working only one job, even trying out her dream of starting her own restaurant by going to culinary school."

"Sorry about your dad," the other girl says, empathetic. "I don't really know if you wanted to mend things with him, but I get what it's like to end on bad terms with someone you care about."

"I guess I would've liked to do that, or at least punch him for being such a dick," that gets a snort out of Clementine, who tries to cover it up but only ends up laughing more at Violet's confused expression.

"I'm sorry, it's just I've never met someone so… brutally honest," she explains. "Don't get me wrong, I like it, it's just different than what I'm used to from people our age."

"Oh," the blonde blushes, focusing on the way her nose scrunches up and her eyes twinkle as she laughs. "Well, I'm glad someone appreciates if, at least. Louis always says I'll never find a girlfriend if I keep telling her that 'yes, that dress is hideous and no, I don't want to go out to a fancy dinner on Valentine's Day, I want to sit in our pajamas and binge watch The Good Place on Netflix.'"

"That's what AJ tells me sometimes, too. He'll come up to me a few days before it and say 'Clem, you know why no one dates you? It's because you're boring and sit around doing nothing when you should be out hanging with friends or going to parties'. Not going to lie, having your feelings hurt by a twelve year old really does a number on your ego," she chuckles, digging into the dirt with her bare hands.

"You're single?" Violet asks before she can stop herself, unable to keep the tone of surprise out of her voice.

Rolling her eyes, the brunette asks, "Why is everyone so shocked when they find that out?"
"Quite frankly, Clementine," interrupted by the whole 'Frank Lee' joke again, she pauses to glare at her. "Superficially, you're pretty and funny and smart and- what?"

The girl beside her is doubled over laughing, as if she can't believe what she's hearing, "I'm smart? I ran into a fucking wall and gave myself a bloody nose in a panic as I tried to get to class."

"Well, at the very least, you seem to have more brain cells than I do," Violet playfully shoves her shoulder.

Concealing a wince, the corner of her mouth twitches down, "You must have 0.0000000003 of a brain cell then."

"How did you know?" She gasps in mock surprise, raising a hand to her mouth. "You must be a mind reader."

"Sh! Don't tell anyone my secret," Clementine puts a finger to her lips, whispering in her ear.

"Of course not," she nods, trying not to laugh.

"If anyone found out, the consequences would be disastrous," she's so close now, Violet can feel her breath on her neck.

It would be a complete lie to say that it was doing good things for her health, "I would never put you in danger, Ms. Everett."

"So, chivalry isn't dead. Good to hear," Clementine smiles, leaning back, and Violet finds herself missing the warmth, stopping herself from pulling her closer. "Question."

"Okay? Go ahead and shoot," she raises an eyebrow at the brunette.

"Is Louis into dudes?" The question is so blunt that she takes a second to register what's happening.

"Well, I mean, yeah, he's pan," Violet narrows her eyes. "Why?"

Gesturing towards Gabe, she shrugs, "My friend may or may not have a crush on him."

"Oh," noticing the way the two talk to each, Louis as animated as always, Gabe smiling and making the other boy laugh. "Since it's my job, as his best friend, to make sure he doesn't get with anyone bad, not that you're friends with anyone bad, exactly, but do you mind telling me about him?"

"Not all," wiping her dirt stained hands on her jeans, she smiles. "We've known each other for a long time, not as long as I've known Duck, but enough that he's like a brother to me. His uncle, Javier, took good care of me for a while, so it's like he's my uncle too. Gabe has had... a tough time of life. His dad and mom fought a lot, his dad being borderline abusive towards her and eventually Javi stepped in, causing a lot of conflict in the family. When we were in our freshman year of highschool, his sister got shot, caught in the middle of a gang war, and nearly died. If a doctor hadn't been nearby, I don't think she would still be here. Ever since then, he's been pretty protective of her and of the people he cares about. Gabe's a good kid, trust me, he wouldn't hurt Louis."

Violet hums a low note, watching Louis's eyes light up as the other boy talks to him, "Then I have no issues with him."

"Good," she nods and takes a deep breath, like she's making a tough decision. "What do you think about Spider-Woman?"
"Uh-" The blonde stutters, thinking of last night. "She's cool? I mean, I wouldn't have the courage to fight crime like that if I had super powers so… props, I guess."

Clementine nods, sighing, "A lot of people say that."

"What do you think?" She casts her a side glance, frowning slightly.

"I…" She looks uncomfortable all of the sudden, looking away as if she hadn't expected the question to be thrown back at her. "I don't know. I guess it just must be pretty stressful, having people's lives in your hands all the time, the pressure from the media to look good, dealing with your own personal problems while fighting crime and everyone thinking you're different than them, as if you're some far removed god when all you are is a human who happens to be able to do all that stuff. It's probably hard not being able to tell anyone who you are, knowing that if you die in the line of duty, your loved ones will never know what happened to you. It's… it's probably really lonely."

"Wow, I- that's really depressing, Clem," Violet blinks hard, not expecting that response. "It makes sense, but I guess I never thought of it that way."

"People don't tend to think of celebrities as human beings," she twists her fingers, tightening them around each other in discomfort.

"Do you… think about that stuff often?" Her hand twitches, resisting the urge to intertwine their hands together, to comfort her.

"You could say that," she shrugs and when Violet looks up, she sees that the other girl's gaze is already on her. "My hands distracting you?"

"Oh, no, sorry. Just um, I zoned out. Nice hands though," she wants to tear her own throat out.

"Really? I always thought they were kind of stubby and rough," thankfully, Clementine takes the compliment in stride, splaying out her hands.

It then that Violet notices the scars marring the surface of that dark skin, the criss-cross hatch of thin lines, thick lines, holes, fresh cuts, even the small, darker, jagged edge of a circle cut off by the ending of her hand, "Woah. That's… you must've been a mischievous kid."

"Eh, more like a dumb adult," she flexes her hands for a second, then sets them down on her lap. "A really, really dumb adult, though I did get into my fair share of fights as a kid."

"You?" Violet asks, surprised.

"Like I said before, I was a problem child. I was the 'spends all of their time in the nurse's office having their knuckles bandaged since the third grade till the tenth' kind of problem child," her smile is like the moon, irresistible, imperfect, but still containing that otherworldly beauty that takes your breath away.

It's then that Violet realizes she might have a crush on her.

Shit.

The following weeks are spent in soft, comfortable moments of spending time together, resting, playing video games and eating lunch with friends. Everyone except for Clementine finds
themselves lulled into a feeling of safety, as no enhanced criminal has made any sort of attack since the festival, since "The General" escaped from custody shortly after being arrested. Spider-Woman's alter ego, however, was more antsy than ever. She found herself pacing, forgetting important dates and events, unable to sleep at night and instead spending a lot of time throwing down in the ring with anyone who dared to even look at her funny. As everyone else relaxed and caught up on lost sleep, she was feeling more tired than she'd ever had before, high strung and emotions running rampant from her anxiety. What was only making it worse was the ever nearing date of 3/21, the shittiest day of her life.

Her friends started to notice the darkening bags under her eyes, the way she jumped at the slightest movement, her slumping, tired form. Which is how she found herself at her apartment door, wearing a severely oversized hoodie and sweatpants at 6 pm the night before the anniversary with Violet, Louis, Gabe, and Duck in front of her, all holding grocery bags. While her two childhood friends burst in immediately after she joined the door, casually brushing past her and setting their stuff down, her two newer friends stood there awkwardly, unsure of what to do.

"Um, come in, I guess," she rubs her face, yawning.

Louis immediately comes through the door after he gets permission, while Violet takes a more calm and apologetic approach, sliding past and giving her a small smile as she goes. Behind her, she hears a door open and sees AJ coming out of their bedroom, sprinting towards Duck and tackling him in a hug. The older boy gasps and picks him up, twirling around and laughing. With a tired smile, she closes the front door and trudges to the living room, finding Louis splayed out on the couch with Violet sitting at the table, helping Gabe pull things out of the bags. A wild assortment of vegetables, fruits, Pillsbury dough, a six pack of beer, and ice cream tubs find their way out and onto her table and counter tops, Gabe pulling out her largest pot and slapping it on the stove.

"Anybody going to tell me what's going on?" She asks, flopping onto the couch and effectively crushing Louis's legs.

"You know the soup my mom used to make when we got sick or when something bad happened?" Gabe asks, not looking up from his busy hands.

"I- yeah, I do," noticing the way his eyebrows furrow as she starts her sentence, she does a one eighty on the whole thing.

"Well, these guys are going to help me make it, and we're going to make you feel better," he looks at her pointedly, a strangely serious expression on his face.

"You are free to try, my brother from another mother," she smiles back, making him look away, pulling out a cutting board and scooching over for Violet to come into the kitchen.

The next hour is spent with three adults squished into the kitchen, accidentally elbowing each other in the gut while Gabe told the other two what to do. Meanwhile, Clementine was banned from her own cooking space and Duck was playing with AJ. It was an hour of actual relaxation, when she could just forget about Lily and Spider-Woman and could just be someone hanging out with her friends. They joked around and Violet nearly took her knife and ran it through Louis's neck, but at the end of it they were sitting at the table (Clementine had gotten out more chairs), eating hot soup and corn slathered in mayonnaise and chili powder. Each of the adults had a beer in hand, though Violet took it slow, only taking tentative sips between spoonfuls of soup. If there was one thing Gabe was good at, it was cooking.

"So?" The Garcia asks through a mouth full of corn. "How did we do?"
"Fucking amazing," Clementine responds, getting a second helping of the soup.

"Swear," AJ says automatically, prompting an equally automatic apology from his sister.

The others snicker at the brief interaction between the two siblings before turning back to their own food. After they’ve finished eating, three of them squish onto the couch, the other three sitting on the floor, everyone eating out of a tub of ice-cream. It's 9 now, and even though they all live quite a distance away from Clementine's apartment, none of them want to leave anytime soon.

"I'd say you did what you came to do," the unwilling host says suddenly, scooping out some ice-cream. "So, congrats."

"We made you happy?" Louis looks at her suspiciously.

"If that was your goal, then yes," she yawns for the fifteenth time in three minutes.

"You should probably go to sleep," the only blonde suggests, setting her ice cream down. "C'mon."

"But what about you guys?" Her eyes flicker around the group as she's pulled up, still awake enough to put up a verbal fight.

"We'll sleep in your room," Duck's eyes get wide, a light bulb turning on in his head. "Like a sleepover."

"We're not all going to fit," she starts to protest as everyone gets up and follows Violet, who's leading her to the bedroom.

"Doesn't matter," she opens the bedroom and plops the brunette on her bed, moving away afterwards.

Or she tried to, anyway, because a hand shot out and wrapped around her wrist, pulling her back, "If I have to sleep here, you do too."

"You have a twin sized mattress," Violet points out, flush with the side of the bed.

"Yup," with one final tug, the blonde goes spilling over the edge, rolling over Clementine and hitting the wall with a dull thud. "And now there are two-"

"Make that three!" Comes Louis a second before he jumps onto the both of them, pinning them under his weight.

"What the fuck, get off Lou," Violet grunts, trying to push him off of them, only to find he's already asleep and counts as dead weight. "Shit."

From the other side of the room, where a more calm conversation is occurring, AJ says, "Swear."

"Sorry," she mumbles back, struggling against her friend.

"I've got it," with minimal effort, Clementine pushes him off, rolling over Violet and getting stuck between the wall and the bed. "That was easy-"

Slipping off the bed, Violet's arm wraps itself around her waist, pulling her flush against her body, keeping her from falling, "Sorry."

"It's okay," blushing furiously, the brunette smiles, their foreheads touching. "Guess we're sleeping like this if I don't want to fall."
“I mean, if you’re okay with that,” the other girl quirks an eyebrow.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Her smile transforms into a mischievous grin.

“Oh my god would you two stop flirting over there?” Gabe groans from the other side of the room.

“Sorry, goodnight,” Clementine apologizes as Duck gets up and turns off the light.

The six of them lie in the dark, only one of them actually asleep, but none talking. Duck and Gabe are curled around AJ, who lies between them, while Louis gradually pulls Violet and by proxy, Clementine, closer and closer to the wall, wrapping his arm around her torso in a steely grip. One by one, they close their eyes and fall asleep, and for once, Clementine finds herself able to do the same.

Just as she’s a moment from rest, the sound of her phone dinging wakes her up fully, though the others remain sound asleep. Carefully, she disentangles herself from the other two on the bed and sits up, grabbing her phone. On the front screen, from her contact at the SPD, was a message.

True to her contact's information, the only thing she need do was follow the smoke. It billowed out of the tall building, the raging fire vibrant against the backdrop of the black night. Below it were police sirens screeching, emergency vehicles racing towards Washington Industries with their lights flashing. Clementine herself was swinging as fast as she could, trying to keep a clear view of the building as she went. Every swing, no matter how smoothly executed, made her entire body ache, stretching tired, bruised muscles. If she had to fight, it wouldn't go so well for her. Not that fights usually did.

After a minute or so, she reaches the building, running up the glass sides till she reaches the thirteenth floor. The blown out windows make it harder to go any higher, but she webs her way up, emerging onto the fifteenth floor, holding her arm in front of her mouth.

"Is anybody here?" She calls, throat constricted from the smoke.

There's no response as she pushes aside debris, eyes burning. She makes a note to herself to add a filter to her mask and make it airtight. Exiting into a long hallway, the lights flicker overhead, the whole building shaking from another explosion. Cursing, she makes her way through the hallway, nearly going past a twisted metal door, smoke pouring from the top. Taking a deep breath of tainted air, she ducks her head in, blinking rapidly as she tries to make out what she's seeing. Lily, in her metal suit, is trying to hold down another enhanced criminal, William Carver. Her suit is battered, whole chunks of metal ripped off and deep gouges all over. Carver doesn't look so great himself, blood coming from his mouth, outfit covered in glistening red. Clementine has no clue what happened here, but she knows it's her duty to stop it. As she takes a step forward into the room, ready to take another breath of poisoned oxygen, a frightened cry reaches her ears. Stopping in her tracks, she turns on her heel and runs towards the sound. Up the stairs, where her skin starts to feel like it's boiling and the air is so thick with smoke she can barely see, Clementine stops at a doorway, hacking her lungs out. Through her blurry, tear streaked vision, she sees the source of the sound. A small group of people are braced against a window, thin cracks spread throughout it. This section of the building is slumping off, the floor tilted so that gravity prevents them from leaving their precarious situation. Once they see her, they start calling out for help, shifting on the glass.

"No, stop!" She throws out a gloved, spread hand. "Remain calm, I'll get you out of here."

Then, without warning, an explosion comes from below and with a groan from the entire building, the glass shatters. Throwing herself forward, she shoots out webs, falling out of the building. Time goes in slow motion for her as she creates a web hanging from the building to catch them, the group slamming into the webbing. Landing as gracefully as she can, she looks up. The entire side of the building is leaning out, the top floor making its way closer to the ground. With a panic, she starts shooting out webs as fast as she can, trying to glue the thing back together. As she does so, she realizes it's barely slowing it down and gets up, swinging between the main part of the building and the one that threatens to crush onlookers below. Shooting webs at the building, one arm outstretched to the main bit, the other to the smaller portion, she wraps the webs around her arms.
and hopes for the best. Part of her is dimly aware of the minute likelihood of this working, the other part is only focused on the excruciating force trying to tear her body in half. The webs tighten fast and hard, enough to cut off her circulation and give her intense rope burn, the cloth of her suit and the skin on her hands ripping away. At the core of herself, she feels a tension so intense she nearly screams as the sound of a pop reaches her ears, shoulder dislocating as the web snaps taught. Perhaps using herself as the glue between a thousand tons of concrete, falling to the ground at hundreds of miles an hour, was not a smart idea. Too late now, though, because she's spread her arms as far as they can go, her webs pulled to the brink of snapping, and yet she's still there, not dead. As far as she can tell, between the hazy smoke and the mind numbing pain, the building has ceased its descent, aided by the other webs she'd shot earlier. With one deep, deep breath, she pulls at the webs with all her strength. Arms shaking, teeth grit, her own tools twisting into her skin, she slowly pulls the building closer and closer, and finally able to put her hands together, she unwraps the webs and ties them around each other.

Making sure the group is secure, she rushes back down to the fifteenth floor, back to the room she saw earlier, attempting to relocate her shoulder as she goes. Entering the room, she sees nothing, just blackened concrete and random debris. Carefully making her way through the room, she reaches the edge, where a large hole resides. Exhausted by having her muscles torn in half, the feeling to duck doesn't register, and the metal hand rushing towards the back of her head collides with a sickening thud. Her hand shoots out, reflexively shooting a web at the building and she goes swinging like a horizontal pendulum, slamming into glass and laying on the burning building, hand awkwardly raised, web still attached. Through the haze of pain clouding her mind, she's dimly aware of the blood on the floor. She barely remembers to detach herself from the web before standing up, holding her throbbing head. Squinting to see, she grows horrified at the scene in front of her. Not far from where she stands, a wall has collapsed near the elevator and stairs, where a bunch of people lie, half covered in rubble. Wheezing, she stumbles towards them, searching for anyone alive.

"Hello?" She coughs, nearly tripping.

There's no response from the still bodies, just the trickling of dust from the ceiling as another distant explosion rocks the building. Clementine freezes. She wants to get out of here, needs to get out of here. But she can't, there are people left, and she needs to get to them, despite the threat of a thousand tons of concrete collapsing on her and the possibility that she's being stalked by Lily Singer, despite the way her mind turns to past memories, making her shake. No, she has to stay, because she's Spider-Woman, and that's her job, putting her life in danger so others can be safe.

Violet wakes up slowly, eyes cracking open and dilating to accommodate for the dark room. Taking in her surroundings, she remembers where she is, Clementine's room, Clementine's bed. Groaning, she reaches for her phone and checks the time, 3:34 A.M. Jesus. With a start, she realizes she has an abnormally large amount of room to move around, and scans the room. As she suspected, Clementine is nowhere to be found, just Louis sleeping in the bed next to her. Getting out of the bed as quietly as she can, she leaves the room and searches the apartment. A heavy feeling of unease settles in her stomach as she finds it empty.

"Gabe, wake up," she whispers, shaking him.

He lazily swipes at her arm, rubbing the sleep from eyes, "What time is it?"

"She's gone. Clem is gone, Gabe," she shakes her head, watching his eyes widen in shock.

With a quiet curse, he gets out of the bed, careful not to wake up AJ or Duck. Violet follows him
out to the living room, where he turns on the light and scribbles something on a sticky note. He turns away and grabs his shoes, stuffing them onto his feet.

"What are you doing?" She folds her arms, eyebrows furrowed.

"Going out looking for her," he grumbles, tying his shoelaces. "You coming?"

Instead of responding verbally, she grabs her own shoes and puts them on, and together, the two leave Clementine's apartment. They rush down the stairs, Gabe hissing at the light drizzle that comes from the sky. Side by side, they walk around the block, then further, and further, checking dark alleyways and abandoned buildings. Eventually, a hazy glow catches Violet's eye, and she moves to get a better view, followed by Gabe. With horror, the two look at the scene playing out in the distance.

The tallest skyscraper in Savannah, Washington Industries, has lost some of its height, half the building slumping off and barely holding together. It burns bright, smoke pouring out the broken windows and clogging up the sky.

"You don't think…" Violet leaves the question unfinished, breathless from shock.

"She's been trained as a first responder. If there's anywhere she is right now, it's there," her companion sounds grim, pointing a shaking finger at the burning building.

Meanwhile, Clementine's lowering a man, the last of his group, to the ground via a makeshift web sling. As he sets down, he tugs on the web and she pulls it up quickly, slinging it around her shoulders and looking for the next group. She's been in the building for the past five or so hours, taking breaks from the poisoned air whenever she could afford to, rescuing anyone she can find, pulling bloody corpses from rubble and searching them for identification. They might not be alive, but at least she could give their families some piece of mind. Taking into account how long she's been in here, she's not doing half bad, considering that any other person would be super dead by now. Sure, she's got a massive headache, coughing every breath she takes, wheezing with every inhale, and feels like she's about to collapse any second, but otherwise, she's fine. Other than the burns on her arms and legs, of course. Despite her condition, she's made good progress up the skyscraper, nearing the top. Which is when things start to get even weirder.

As Clementine's trudging up to the top floor, she pauses, head barely peeking over the edge of the stairs. Half the room is significantly lower than the other, cracked with the webs straining to hold it up. There's only one thing untouched by the flames here, a wall with the outline of a large rectangle, as if a monitor had been ripped off the wall. Similarly, there are exposed wires and more outlines of smaller objects. Whatever was there, it was probably the reason by the attack. Calmly, she walks up the rest of the stairs, carefully avoiding the broken glass littering the floors. Normally, it paid off to have spandex covered feet because it helped with movement, but in situations like this, it was just precarious. Scanning the room, she sees a plaque on a burnt desk. Luke Washington, CEO of Washington Industries. She traces the engraved words, searching for the accompanying body that should be around here. To her surprise, she doesn't see one. More investigation yields the same conclusion. Starting to walk to the window, the building groans one last time before it goes hurtling towards the ground.

Now, Clementine's never been in a falling skyscraper before, but the feeling of it is familiar, as she slams into the ceiling, panicked. Standing up, she bursts out the closest window and pulls herself downwards with webs. With a jolt, she stops her descent with a web and swings about the head of emergency vehicles, yelling out for people to scatter. Then, in the crowd, two people catch her eye,
right in the path of falling rubble. Gabe and Violet are staring up in horrified shock, unmoving.

It takes her less than a second to grab them and swing out of the way, tons of concrete slamming into the place they were a second before, slamming into less familiar faces. Guilt settles heavy in her stomach as she sets them down on a nearby rooftop, both of them stumbling backwards and staring at her as she crouches at the edge.

"Holy shit," Violet whispers. "Why… why us?"

Clementine stares down at the splattered blood, and this time the tears aren't from the smoke in her eyes. Her throat constricts and pressing her palms into her eye sockets, she breathes slow and deep. After a moment, she stands up and lets herself fall off the short building, swinging to the ground, landing in front of an SPD patrol car. The nearest officer puts their hand on their holster, staring at her.

"Is there anything more I can do?" She asks, voice hoarse.

The officer stares for a second longer before looking up at the skyscraper, shaking their head. Tired, she sets the makeshift bag of web, full of identification, on the hood of the car. With a heavy heart and damaged lungs, Clementine leaves.

By the time Violet and Gabe have gotten to the apartment again, she's cleaned the soot on her face and changed clothes, careful to hide the small burns and random assortment of injuries by wearing a long sleeved shirt. Instead of going to sleep, she sits on her couch with a cup of coffee and a blanket wrapped around her as she stares at nothing. Once they see her, they approach quietly, cautious as they sit next to her. She acknowledges their existence with a simple hum as Gabe touches her shoulder.

"Where were you?" His voice is quiet, as if he thinks she'll break at the slightest sign of criticism.

"Coffee," she lifts the coffee cup, the Starbucks logo on the side.

"We went looking for you," he tries again, choosing his words carefully.

"It's the twenty-first, Gabe," her grip tightens on the cup, gaze flickering over to look at him. Immediately, he looks away, his body posture slumping, "Oh."

"Yeah," she takes a sip of the coffee, grimacing at the temperature.

"Violet, do you and Louis have anything happening later today?" The Garcia asks suddenly, eyes lighting up.

She frowns, "Uh, no, not really. Why?"

"Do you mind… spending the day with all of us?" He glances over at Clementine, noticing her reaction, which is to not have a reaction.

"Sure," she shrugs, also looking over to their friend, confused.

Gabe smiles and gets up, heading to the front door, "Well, I'm going to get some more coffee. Keep her company, okay?"

Violet nods silently, listening for the click of the door closing before she speaks, too nonchalant,
"So… we almost died a little bit ago when we were looking for you."

That catches her attention, eyes snapping to the blonde girl, "What?"

"Yeah, you know Washington Industries? Their skyscraper caught on fire or something and we went over there because Gabe said you were trained as a first responder. We were just standing there, looking around, and suddenly parts of the building come raining down. One second we were standing on the ground, the next we were on a rooftop, Spider-Woman in front of us," she explains, shoving her hands into her pockets.

Clementine closes her eyes and covers her mouth with her hand, suddenly feeling sick, "Jesus."

"Woah, are you okay?" Her hand reaches out and lands on her shoulder as the brunette leans forward, visibly strained.

"Sorry, yeah, it's just-" She forces herself to swallow down the bile in her mouth. "You guys could've died… because of me."

"No no no," Violet shakes her head vehemently. "Do not think like that. We're fine, look, not even any scratches. We got saved, remember? It wasn't your fault."

She doesn't say anything to that, just comes to the realization that she has to tell someone, "Violet, I-"

"M' back!" Gabe announces as he bursts through the front door, carrying a paper bag and a carton of Starbucks drinks.

"Oh, hey. That was quick," Violet waves.

"Yeah, well, I sort of work there, and it's just around the corner. Anyway, I miss anything?" He asks, sitting on the other side of Clementine.

"I told her about our encounter with Spider-Woman," she shrugs, taking the offered frappuccino. Gabe visibly deflates, suddenly stilling, "Right, yeah. That was… not fun."

"I'm sorry I made you guys worry," Clementine clears her throat, eyeing the paper bag. "I didn't think you would go looking for me, especially not there."

"It's okay, Clem. Wasn't your fault," he rests a hand on her knee and smiles. "And to make sure you believed me, I got you a little something."

As he says that, he pulls out a pastry from the bag, and her demeanor does a complete and slightly disturbing 180, "A cheese danish? Gabe, you shouldn't have!"

Her hand shoots out and the danish disappears from his grasp, laughing as she nibbles on the edge of it, "Glad you like it."

She says something through a mouth full of food, and Violet translates, "Thank you, you're the best."

"You can actually understand her?" He asks, amazed.

"Louis always eats with his mouth full," she shrugs and takes a sip of her drink. "You become adept at figuring it out after a while."
"How long is a while?" He grins.

"Couple thousand years," Violet returns the smile in a much less extreme form, the corner of her mouth quirking up slightly.

They spend the next few hours talking quietly as so not to wake up the others, and finally, around seven, AJ emerges from his bedroom. Holding his hand is Duck, who is pulling a barely conscious Louis along by the arm. AJ shoots Clementine a concerned look, coming over and hugging her. Duck grabs a coffee and shoves it at Louis, who wordlessly chugs the whole thing. After an hour of explaining what happened and much chiding from AJ, the group gets in their cars, Clem, AJ, Violet, and Louis in one car, Gabe and Duck in the other. The drive is uneventful, quiet, and neither Louis nor Violet ask where they're going.

The morning of the anniversary is bright, sunny, birds chirping and kids playing. On a normal weekend, Clementine would still be asleep in bed, having planned for a day of relaxation. But not today, because today is the day she sits in front of her adoptive mom’s grave, holding a bouquet of her favorite flowers. She walks hand in hand with AJ, the others trailing from a distance. As they walk through the slightly overgrown grass, scanning the plaques in front of her for her mom’s name, they’re alone, the only people around being the grounds keepers. Eyes landing on the plaque, she sets down the three bouquets she carries in one hand and sticks her hand in the handle of the flower vase, twisting until it pops up, water dripping off it. Placing it securely back in its hole, right side up, she fills it with fresh water from her water bottle, placing the bouquet of violets in it. Leaning back, she lets herself fall onto her butt, sitting there with her legs crossed, AJ silently standing next to Gabe and the others who stand out of hearing distance.

“Hey mom, it’s… it’s been a while since I last saw you, and I’m sorry for that,” she starts by clearing her throat, staring at the grave as if she expects Carley to pop out any second and reprimand her for not visiting. “I’m trying to make you proud, you know? Trying to do what you said I should, with the whole saving people thing. Not going to lie, it’s kind of hard… because there are people you can’t save. Like you, I guess. Shit. I- I didn’t… I could’ve saved you. If I had just- I don’t know- if I just knew about it, you could still be alive, you could raise AJ like you should’ve, if you weren’t here. But you are, and it’s not my fault, right? There wasn’t any way I could’ve known, and there’s no way we would all be alive and okay if I did, right?

“...Anyway, how’s the afterlife? Is there an afterlife? I know I’ve asked that a lot but I just- I wonder. Like, if I died fighting a villain, would I go somewhere? Is it like heaven and hell or more like we’re all in the same place, like purgatory? No, well, maybe. No way to know, I guess. Sorry, shit, you probably want to know about AJ, huh? He’s twelve this year, I know, he’s so old and it’s crazy. He’s not here right now, but he will be, I just wanted to talk to you alone real quick. But, uh, yeah, he’s doing good in school, he’s getting all A’s and therapy’s going well for him. You know, learning to control his anger and talking about his emotions instead of bottling them up like I do, which I’ve been working on with my own therapist, by the way. It’s pretty weird because he’s almost as tall as me? I know his biological parents were pretty tall, well, Alvin was, but I really don’t want him to be taller than me. I want him to be my little goofball forever. Wait, is this how parents feel? Just completely and utterly terrified of the prospect of their kids growing up and leaving them, completely independent of the people they used to depend on everything for?

“Nope, nope, that’s weird. I am not a parent… right? Crap, I think I’m a parent, not that you or Lee weren’t his parents, our parents, just that I kind of have all the responsibility for him now. Pretty stressful, if you were wondering. I’m just a kid myself, basically, just… learning how to do taxes and I can’t even cook anything more advanced than putting milk in my cereal. I mean, I don't even
think that counts as cooking. What kind of parent am I if I can’t cook him pancakes or give him chicken noodle soup when he’s sick? A bad one, that’s the kind of parent I am. But you and Lee… you were the best parents a kid could ask for. I only hope I can raise him right, so that he can grow up to become as good of a person as you were, as Lee is, even if he can’t exactly do anything besides breathe.

"...There's people waiting to talk to you, like AJ, Gabe, and Duck, so I guess I'm going to go now."

Awkwardly, she ends her one sided conversation with her dead, adoptive mom and gets up, picking up the other bouquets and waving her brother over. He comes quickly, and before she goes to other graves, she ruffles his hair. As she moves, she notices Violet and Louis following her from a respectful distance, stopping when she reaches her destination. Silently, she sits in front of the plaque on the ground and traces their names with her finger. Gavin Rain Addison, Kate Rose Addison. It wasn't their anniversary, but she was here, and it's been so long since she saw them, she couldn't help herself. With a heavy sigh, she pulls up their vases and places the flowers in them, daffodils and white roses respectively. After a moment of quiet deliberation, she turns and waves over Louis and Violet, who share a look before walking over.

"Meet my biological mom and dad," she gestures towards the grave, watching them trace the names with their eyes.

"Oh, Addison," Louis says quietly in sudden realization. "That was your other last name."

She hums, shrugging, "Yeah, sometimes I don't know which one to use, the one I was born with, or the one that belongs to the two people who were closer to me than they ever were. Makes it kind of awkward when I introduce myself."

"I get that. Legally my last name is Evergreen, but I always related to my mom more," Violet says, trying to connect with her.

"I say go for it. If you don't connect with the name, then change it. Besides, Violet Adlon sounds much prettier than Violet Evergreen," she's pretty sure she should be shot on sight for flirting right in front of her parents' grave.

"Oh," the blonde blushes, hiding her face in the collar of her jacket. "Thanks. For what it's worth, I think Clementine Everett fits you better than Clementine Addison."

"Y'all nasty," Louis's face screws up in mock repulsion. "Flirting in front of graves is like, a cardinal sin, right?"

"Oh yeah, sorry, Vi, we're both going to hell now," the brunette laughs. "Seriously though, I don't think they'd mind."

"Really?" Louis raises an eyebrow in disbelief.

"They spent their lives trying to help others to get them a better, happier life. Hell, I even used the large sum of money I inherited from them to make a foundation helping others. With that logic, however roundabout, I think they'd be fine with it as long as it makes one of us happy," her answer is thought out enough that it makes him wonder if she's thought about it before.

"Wait, you made the Addison Fire Fund?" Louis asks suddenly.

Her expression becomes guarded almost immediately, a drastic change in demeanor from a couple seconds ago, "Yeah, I did."
"I thought you looked familiar," Violet says quietly. "I'm really sorry about your parents, not that I wasn't before, it's just…"

"Honestly, it's fine," Clementine shrugs, her face relaxing as she sighs. "Most people I meet find out eventually, and as far as reactions go, this is in the 99th percentile."

Because of course, she wasn't lucky enough to avoid losing two different sets of parents in her life. Wasn't lucky enough to keep her biological parents, or her adoptive ones either. God, it really was her luck that she was Spider-Woman. Was he playing a trick on her or something? Was this secretly hell? Maybe the real torture was Marlon's hair? Yeah, probably.

With another sigh, she gets up and dusts off her jeans, "We should probably head back to my mom. AJ doesn't usually say a whole lot to her, so he's probably done by now."

Following after, Violet and Louis walk beside her, the blonde kicking rocks as she goes, "Is it her anniversary?"

"Three years ago today," Clementine nods, looking up at the clouds. "It feels so long ago, but also like it was yesterday… does that make any sense?"

Violet hums a low note, thinking, "Yeah, it's like you've started to recover from the trauma, but you'll never forget about it."

She nods again, glancing at her, wondering if she can personally relate, and the three walk in silence, slowly approaching the rest of their group. AJ is standing behind Duck, who kneels at the grave, his cheeks glistening as his mouth moves, trembling. Next to him is Gabe, who looks like he's on the verge of crying himself, his beanie clenched in a shaking fist.

Clementine manages to catch the end of whatever her childhood friend was saying, and it makes her stop in her tracks, a lump forming in her throat, "-always so kind to everyone you met, and how you and Lee were there for my dad when he needed serious help. Thank you so much for everything, for Clementine, someone I couldn't live without, someone who is just as generous and wonderful a person as you were. I will never, ever forget you."

She takes a deep breath and a step forward, pulling Duck into a tight hug as soon as she gets close enough. He's shaking, and the tears are coming faster now, his weight leaning on her heavily. She knows how much he's hurting right now. Duck had known Carley his whole life, she'd babysat him, was there for his first words, helped him learn how to walk, took him to parks and went camping with him. In a way, he lost more than she did. Then again, she did lose her second mom, but it was stupid to compare pain. With a deep breath, she swallows her emotions and blinks away the tears forming in her eyes, and when Gabs joins the hug, wrapping his long arms around the both of them, she closes them.

"You're allowed to cry, you know that, right?" He whispers in her ear, voice raw.

She says nothing, just burying her face in their shoulders and holding them closer.

After a few moments, she lets go and takes a step back, "So, anyone up for Taco Bell?"

Clementine spent the next few days (maybe weeks, she couldn't really tell) in bed with a fever, coughing up her lungs and throwing up charcoal colored mush. Maybe doing intense cardio in a burning building for five or so hours without any filter to speak of was a bad idea. Probably. Definitely. Sure, she was Spider-Woman, but last time she checked, spiders didn't have any special
resistance to heat or smoke. As far as Clementine was concerned, she was happy just to be alive.

Since she incapacitated, Javier took AJ to school since she couldn't even lift her head the first day of being sick. Gabe texted her his notes for their shared classes, and got the rest from random people she happened to know. Between sleeping and going to the bathroom, not even trying to eat, her friends visited, mostly just Duck, Gabe, Louis, and Violet. Everytime they came, they insisted she go to the hospital, while she adamantly refused. They got so insistent she locked them out of her apartment. The day after, she woke up as she was being carried down the stairs, surprising Gabe so bad he dropped her. Since then, at her threat that she would break his entire body by throwing him out her apartment window, they hadn't brought up the hospital. It was unnecessarily violent, but she wasn't sure what she would tell the doctors when they asked about her lungs looking like burnt hamburger patties, even though the only thing she'd ever smoked was a joint one time in sophomore year of highschool. It was such a bad experience she swore off smoking anything ever again, especially since the doctors told her that her lungs would probably never completely recover after the accident. Not to say she didn't take drugs in other forms, just not like that. Hell, she and Gabe used to get together regularly and get high off their asses eating edibles on the weekends. That was a while ago, when she didn't have AJ to take care of, and she could afford to not be able to function properly. Doing that now would put countless lives in danger. The whole thing was completely off-point, but she supposes that's what happens when you're living in a haze produced by a fever. A fever caused by inhaling way too much weird crap. Kind of reminded her of when she'd eat one too many edibles and just lay on Gabe's couch like a soggy noodle, feeling super shitty. Most days, that's how she felt. It was worse now that her body couldn't decide what temperature it wanted to be at.

On a day when she was feeling slightly better than she had been, she manages to get up around two p.m. and trudges to the kitchen. To her surprise, she runs face first into a slumped shoulder, stumbling back. Two arms reach out and grab her, keeping her from falling. Even if she wanted to, there's no way she's going to be able to fight whoever this is. Everything is blurry and her head pounds, and the only thing she can do is hold the stranger's arms tight to steady herself. After she manages to get her vision to stop swimming, she recognizes the intruder.

"Oh," the pale green eyes staring at her widen. "Hey, Vi."

"Why are you up?" She asks, not letting go of her, probably noticing the way she sways back and forth. "You should be resting."

"Mh," Clementine slumps forward into her chest without much resistance. "How did you get in my apartment, anyway?"

"Gabe got me a key," the blonde explains, gently easing her back to bed. "Are you hungry?"

"The smell of food is enough to make me throw up," she shakes her head and instantly regrets it, holding back bile.

"Um, thirsty then?" Setting her down on the bed, she presses a hand to her forehead, still burning hot.

"Almost as thirsty as Louis is," she mumbles, falling to the left slightly.

Violet snickers and wipes away a strand of hair plastered to her sticky scalp, "I'll get you some water, just don't pass out before I come back."

"Aye aye, captain," the other girl salutes dramatically, a lazy grin on her face.
It doesn't take long for Violet to come back holding a glass of water, sitting on the bed next to her and handing her the cup, "Any idea how you got so sick?"

Through the fog in her mind, Clementine struggles to come up with a convincing lie, "I fell."

"And got sick?" The blonde raises an eyebrow.

"Into…" She wants to stab herself from the effort it's taking to use her stupid brain cell. "A puddle. And I drank some?"

Violet squints at her suspiciously, "You drank puddle water?"

"Yes," she affirms with a small nod, taking a sip of water. It goes down roughly, hard to swallow with her mouth being so parched. She can't remember the last time she forced herself to drink water. Coughing slightly, she spits out some water onto her hands. Then suddenly, without warning, she remembers the blood on her, covering her side, covering her splayed fingers as she pushed herself off the floor, squinting through the smoke to see the bodies. She shoves the cup in Violet's direction, not bothering to see if she catches it, and rushes to the bathroom, getting the toilet lid up just in time as she vomits the small amount of food she'd managed to get in her. Behind her, she can sense Violet kneeling by her, holding her hair away from her face and rubbing her back, murmuring comforting words. After a few moments, she leans back on her knees, messily grabbing a handful of toilet paper and wiping her mouth clean. With a groan, she shifts off her legs and sits down properly, closing her eyes. Hesitant, gentle arms wrap around her torso and pull her close, head nestled under a sharp chin. She shifts slightly so she's on her side, curling inward slightly, the other girl's arms holding her securely. The two stay there for a while in silence, Violet running her hand up and down her arm, as if to say that she'll be okay.

"M' sorry," Clementine murmurs suddenly, forcing the words through the exhaustion that threatens to make her fall asleep.

"For what?" Her companion asks, just as quiet.

"I'm all gross and sweaty… and I'm getting all my germs on you," as she speaks, she gets even quieter. "Just sorry for being sick and- and because I'm probably getting you sick."

"It's fine, really. I'm pretty sure that if you were going to get me sick, it would have happened already, considering it's nearly been a week," Violet shrugs, carefully brushing away the hair that had fallen in front of her face. "Don't worry about it, Clem."

She makes a small noise in the back of her throat, a smile creeping onto her face, "Clem, huh?"

"Wh-" Even though she can't see her, she knows the other girl is blushing. "If that's okay? Is that too much? I don't want to be weird or anything."

"It's cool. Lee used to call me that, when he wasn't calling me sweet pea or something like that," the words slip out of her mouth easily, her normal filter for sensitive personal subjects completely gone.

"Lee?" Violet asks, intrigue clear in her voice.

"My dad," she explains, the sound of her brain screaming too distant for her to notice. "He's in a coma."
"Oh, shit," the profanity must have activated some kind of trigger in her because her eyes snap open when she realizes what she's just said. "Your life kind of sucks, huh?"

"Uhsndvand," Clementine's brain and mouth collaborate to produce the most accurate form of verbal key mashing to ever be heard. "Hsnamdhsm."

"Are you having a seizure?" Her companion tenses, sounding half amused, half concerned.

"No?" The mechanism preventing herself from making a giant and utter fool in front of her (sort of) crush reactivates, much to her relief. "I was just expressing how funny your bluntness is."

"I don't know if you've heard about it yet, but there's something called laughing made explicitly for showing how funny things are," Violet snorts, idly playing with the stray hairs at her neck.

"Oh, really? That sounds pretty cool," the brunette smiles, relaxing again.

She stays quiet for a few moments, just tangling her fingers in her hair, "I'm sorry for saying that, I just- that's really fucked, Clem."

"Yeah," her companion hums, closing her eyes and yawning. "I might fall asleep on you, just so you know."

"That's fine," Violet murmurs, and she can feel her shift. "But if you don't mind, I'm going to put you back in your bed, since it sucks shit to fall asleep on bathroom floors."

The other girl just nods, letting Violet pick her up bridal style and carry her from the bathroom. Her hands grasp the fabric of her shirt, nuzzling her head into her chest. Their trip is short, and Violet gently sets Clementine down on the bed, lowering her so that she's laying on her back. As she goes to leave, a hand grabs her own and weakly tugs on her arm. As she looks back, her heart stops beating. She hasn't known Clementine for very long, but she knows one thing at least, and it's that she hates being seen as anything less than strong. So when it finally hits her, this vision of this girl, breathing shallow, so weak she can barely stand, staring at her with pleading eyes to stay, Violet feels her own eyes wet and emotion starting to build in her throat. She doesn't leave though, just sits on the floor next to her bed, holding her hand, and watches her fall asleep. Watches Clementine Everett, a girl who's been through so much, close her eyes and leave herself completely vulnerable to her, and that's when she starts crying.
Memories

Chapter Summary

Nightmares and friends

Chapter Notes

This is shorter because it's an intermission chapter, basically

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing she notices when she wakes up is the heat. It's suffocating, making her breaths short, making the baseball cap her dad stuffed on her head last night hot, making her feel like her skin was melting. Not the kind of heat that was characteristic of Georgia summers. Not the kind of heat she's ever felt before.

The next thing she notices is the light coming from under her door knob and the strange, distant roaring noise.

"Mom?" She calls out, grabbing her favorite stuffed animal and getting out of bed.

When no one responds, she stops cold, calling out louder now, "Dad?"

Her voice echoes through her small room, and the light only gets brighter. Looking around, she checks the dark shadows in her room, searching for any monsters hiding in the dark. Once she's assured herself of that threat being eliminated, at least, she turns away and puts her hand on the doorknob. Crying out, she pulls back and drops her stuffed animal, nursing her burning hand. Tears form in her eyes as she picks up her bunny and sits with her back to the wall on her bed, shaking. Outside, the branches of the tree holding her treehouse wave back and forth violently. With every passing second, the sound gets louder, and louder, till it sounds like it right outside her door. Then another sound joins it, the sound of a siren, like the police. Was she in trouble? Were they coming for her? Had they already come for her parents? Where were her parents? Where were they?

She holds her bunny tight to her chest and sobs into it, dirty with her tears. For what seems like hours, she sits there, crying as her eyes start to burn from the heat and every breath makes her cough. Then, comes the third noise, the sound of muffled voices from her window. Through the tears, she sees a figure in bulky brown clothes, illuminated by a street lamp, knocking on the glass. With trembling legs, she pushes herself off her bed and walks over, then stops as she notices their face. It was weird and black, a giant knob protruding from it. Scared, she stumbles back and runs for her door. Despite the heat of the door knob, she throws the door open and steps out. Down the stairs, she can see a bright orange, flickering thing. Another monster. Turning from that, she sprints down the hallway to her parents' room. It's part way open, so she just shoves it with her shoulder and calls out to the figures laying on the bed.

"Mom! Dad! There's a monster downstairs!" She jumps onto the bed, shaking them. "One tried to
get in through my window!"

When neither her words nor her actions make them stir, she stops and looks at their faces. They're both peaceful, eyes closed and expression blank, as if they're sleeping. But they're not moving, not even twitching as she stares at them. With dawning horror, she notices that they're so still, not even their chests move.

"Mom? Dad?" Her voice is so quiet it's almost a whisper.

Then she hears footsteps behind her, and as she turns, she sees the monster again. The brown thing, with its malformed face stands there, hands outstretched.

"No! Get away from me!" She shrieks and tries to get away, jumping off the bed and running to the farthest corner. "Help! Mom, help!"

"It's okay, it's okay," the monster reassures, approaches her slowly. "My name is Christa, what's your name?"

Suspiciously, she squints through her tears, "I'm Clementine. Why do you want to know, monster?"

"I'm not a monster, I'm a firefighter," the self proclaimed 'not monster' says calmly. "I need to get you out of here, okay Clementine?"

"Not a monster?" She asks, staring at its face. "But your head…"

"It's a mask, to protect me," it explains, slowly reaching out. "Come on, it's not safe here."

"What about my parents?" Her gaze shifts over to look at them, still not moving.

"My friends will get them, but right now, my job is to get you," true to her word, more 'not monsters' come through the door, going to her parents.

"Oh, okay, like a group project?" Her tears slow as she starts to understand, letting the figure pull her close by her hand.

"Yeah, just like that," the figure nods and picks her up gently, quickly walking back to her room, to the window.

"Wait! My bunny!" The small girl points to the dirty bunny that had fallen on the floor earlier, when she had run away.

They take a moment to pick it up and then climb out the window, descending a ladder with Clementine cradled in one arm. The figure, Christa, jogs away from the house and sets her down on the back of a bulky white van. A man in blue walks towards them, kneeling down in front of her.

"Hey there, what's your name?" He smiles, and she stares at his scruffy beard.

"Clementine," she says slowly.

"Well, Clementine, I'm Omid, it's nice to meet you," he shakes her hand, still smiling. "I'm just going to check if you're okay, is that alright with you?"

She nods, swinging her feet, "Are you a doctor?"

"Sort of," the man takes off a rubber cord from around his neck. "I'm a paramedic. Now, do you hurt anywhere?"
The small girl shakes her head, and he visibly breathes a sigh of relief. He insists on making sure she's okay though, so he instructs her to take a deep breath as he holds a cold metal to her back. All the while, he talks to her, asking how old she is and how she likes school, and for a while, she forgets about her parents and the sirens that blare around them. Then suddenly, there's panicked shouting and loud creak. That's when she looks up from his face and his weird, not quite full beard, and watches her house collapse on her parents.

Clementine wakes with a start, breathing hard and covered in cold sweat. Her gaze flickers across the room, illuminated by the light trickling through the window. To her relief, AJ is still sound asleep, unaware of her situation. Shakily, she gets out of bed, stumbling out of her bedroom, turning on the light as she goes. Holding back bile, she sits on the couch heavily and holds her head in her hands. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe, goddammit. She forces herself to inhale but it's not working, her heart still pounds so loud she can hear it and her ears ring. Pulling her phone out of her pocket, she hits the first person she has on speed dial. As the phone rings, she squeezes her eyes shut and wheezes out another breath.

"Clem?" The other person picks up, voice groggy and confused.

"Hey, Vi," she coughs and pulls in another shaky breath.

"Shit, are you okay?" Violet sounds alert now, shifting on her bed.

"Uh," Clementine gets out a second before she clutches her chest as it constricts, letting out a pained whine. "No."

"Christ, okay, just- breathe in for five seconds, hold for eight, breathe out for seven. Just keep doing that, I'm coming over. I'm going to stay on the line, but I'll get there soon," she instructs. "Just keep breathing."

She's too preoccupied with staying alive to protest, rocking back and forth on the couch, listening to Violet's reassuring words. It's an indefinite amount of time later when someone sits down next to her, weight shifting the couch's cushions.

"Breathe with me... that's it, slow and deep, Clem," comes her voice from the left, making her breathing loud.

Slowly, they get their breathing in sync, and she cracks her eyes open, squinting through the darkness to look at the blonde's face. The way her mouth hangs open slightly, expression open and calming, it's an anchor. So Clementine doesn't look away, just stares and says nothing. Does nothing until her breathing becomes automatic and unforced, until she's stopped shaking. Then she looks away and relaxes, sinking into the cushions of her couch.

"Can I touch you?" Violet asks hesitantly from her side.

With a hum, she simply nods and reaches out towards her, meeting a soft hand which intertwines with her own. It's such an easy, noncommittal gesture, but one that seems so natural it's like they've done it a hundred times before. The physical contact is grounding, now that she's not overstimulated and freaking out. So she slumps over and leans on the other girl heavily, eyes closed. They don't say anything, and she's grateful for that because she is just so tired. With that, she starts falling asleep, and succumbs to the feeling of comfort. And for the first time, in a long time, she has the feeling that she's going to be okay.
The next time Clementine wakes up, she feels like her limbs are made of lead, weighing her down and making her sink into the couch. Due to this, she doesn't get up, just curls into herself and keeps her eyes closed. After an indefinite amount of time, she shifts position and tries once again to fall asleep. When she realizes that there's no way she's going to, she sits up and looks around.

Light filters in from the windows facing the alleyway, the only thing illuminating the room. It's mostly the same as she remembers from last night, except this time there are new sounds, a crackling, a soft humming, the scrape of a spoon hitting the bottom of a bowl. Slowly, she turns towards the kitchen, the origin of the noises, and sees a familiar blonde figure standing there. She hasn't seemed to notice that Clementine's awake, fully absorbed in her task of whisking eggs in one of her few bowls, face adorably scrunched up in focus. The sleeves of her black shirt are rolled up to her elbows, her iconic denim vest thrown on the table, the buttons glinting in the natural light.

With a mischievous grin, Clementine gets up as quietly as she can, making her way over to Violet. Standing directly behind her now, she takes a step forward, pressing the front of her body against her back and wrapping her arms loosely around her waist, chin resting on her shoulder. To her surprise, the response is subtle, with Violet tilting her head slightly to accommodate the new person occupying the space and relaxing into the embrace. It's enough to make her wonder if she knew she was going to do this.

Shrugging the thought off, she closes her eyes and murmurs, "Good morning."

"It's 3 in the afternoon but go off I guess," comes her response, voice dripping in amused cadence.

"Oh," she says quietly, opening her eyes and releasing a deep sigh. "Well, good afternoon, then."

"Mh," Violet hums, turning her head so that her cheek is up against Clementine's. "Was wondering when you were going to wake up. I've been here so long I even had to take AJ to school."

"Sorry about that, but- " She draws out the word, abandoning her inhibitions and planting a small kiss on the other girl's cheek. "I promise I'll make it up to you."

The blonde is so close she can feel the corners of her mouth turn up, eyes creasing, "And how do you plan on doing that?"

"Taco Bell?" A shit eating grin grows on her face as Violet groans, leaning her head back and knocking it against her shoulder.

"I'd rather eat glass than that crap again," she complains, breath tickling the skin under her ear. "It's worse than Chipotle."

"I warned you their vegetarian burritos sucked," Clementine laughs, jostling her slightly. "Not my fault you didn't listen."

"I just thought, you know, surely it couldn't be that bad, but then there I was picking through soggy lettuce and just- it was really gross," she rambles quietly, shivering at the memory. "Take me there again, and I'll break your knees."

"Ouch," wincing in mock hurt, she pulls her a little closer. "You won't have to worry about that, I was planning on ice-cream, anyway."

"Fuck yes," the other girl sighs in relief. "You're paying right?"
"Wouldn't be much of a thank-you if I wasn't," Clementine snorts. "So… what are you making?"

"Eggs and bacon," now that she's said it, the smell of frying meat is apparent.

"But you're vegetarian?" She asks for clarification.

"For you, dumbass," Violet says it like it should be obvious, scoffing at the need for her to ask. "I figured you'd be hungry after last night."

"I mean, yeah, I guess I am," at the mention of that whole thing, Clementine frowns. "Thanks."

Her friend seems to notice the change in mood, lifting up a sticky, yolk covered hand and placing it lightly on her cheek, "No problem."

"Ugh, gross," she groans, shrinking away from her cold touch. "But like, for- you know, being there even though it was super late, not just cooking lunch or whatever. Although, thanks for that too."

"Don't worry about it," Violet shrugs and leans over to pour the bowl of whisked eggs onto an awaiting pan. "It was no trouble. But speaking of which, if you want to talk about it, I'm always free."

She mulls over the offer for a few moments, pausing as Violet's now free hands slide over the ones wrapped around her waist. "Thanks."

The two of them stand there in silence for the next however many minutes as Violet cooked, lulled into a strange sense of domesticity that catches them off guard. Between the gentle teasing and mild flirting, the lingering touches and soft looks, it was clear their relationship was… something other than platonic. Not that either had explicitly said as such, so maybe Clementine was imagining it, even if she hoped to god she wasn't. Maybe that was why neither moved away from each others embrace, even though it was completely unnecessary and whatever humor it had contained was long gone now.

It was only when they could no longer come up with any sort of excuse that they disengaged from each other, sitting at the table and eating. The two made idle conversation, not awkward enough to be small talk, not natural enough to be an actual, full fledged conversation. Once they had finished, they sat on the couch and watched a movie on Violet's laptop, neither having work or any classes that day. By the time they had finished watching it, AJ had gotten home from tutoring, and was sitting at the table with his headphones on, doing homework. It provided them with a false sense of privacy that allowed for a less savory change in subject from the stupid movie they'd been watching

"I…" Clementine starts abruptly, looking anywhere but Violet's face. "I had a dream about my parents. About when they- when they died."

"Oh," her friend says softly. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah, I have, um-" She stares down at her hands and takes a deep breath. "Post traumatic stress disorder, like the thing soldiers get, except it can happen to anyone, apparently. Normally I'm fine, more or less, but when triggers come up, it gets… difficult."

In the background, the movie plays, but she can barely hear it over the anticipation of her next words, "I'm glad that you told me and if you ever need someone to help you with that stuff, just know that I'll always be here for you."
Clementine releases a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding, tension visibly draining out of her, "Thank you, that means a lot."

"No prob, Bob," the blonde jokes, a small smile on her face. "You want some popcorn?"

"I'd love some," she nods, missing the body heat of Violet as she gets up and goes to the kitchen.

Then there is is, the moment Clementine realizes something so stupidly obvious. This woman, she's beautiful, and she likes her, as in, really, really likes her. As in, the very thought of her can make her smile, and sometimes, sitting with her brother, she's all she talks about. Her pale blonde hair, her equally pale green eyes, delicate hands and lanky body. At the table, AJ gives her a grin as if to say 'I know what you're thinking' and jerks his head towards her. 'Go on, go get her, you idiot.' But she doesn't, because this woman, she's beautiful, and she likes her, but she's Spider-Woman. So whether she likes it or not, she's dangerous, and Violet is the last person she'd want to hurt.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will come out a little later than the others, since I've hit a bit of a writers block and I realized I need to do some research. The reason this came out late was because I was out camping and didn't have reception
Past and Present

Chapter Summary

Clementine meets a new friend and sees some old ones

Chapter Notes

This one is a little longer to make up for the time it took to make it

Your first fight is always the worst, not because you get used to the feeling of adrenaline coursing through your veins and the fear of getting hurt, but mostly because you have no fucking clue what you're doing. The reflexes and muscle memory necessary for being a good fighter aren't there, and you know they'll only get better with time, with scars and bruises. And then when you get that, you're still… faked out, but you have some level of confidence that maybe you can win. You don't win, usually, because usually you're a normal human being, not the alter ego of a superhero. Not like Clementine. But even she, standing in the corner of the ring as the unofficial referee counts down, staring at her opponent, feels jittery with anxiety. Gets shaky and breathes fast, flexing her hands open and shut unconsciously, the ace bandages limiting her range of movement. Tonight's worse than usual, due to this guy's enormous size. He's got to be at least six foot three, hulking muscles and wide frame, taking up a quarter of the ring just standing there. There's no way he weighs less than three hundred pounds. On the other hand, there's her, five foot two, muscular in her own right, but only weighing around a hundred and thirty pounds. It's a completely unfair fight, and by the way the crowd jeers, she knows everyone is betting against her. That's what you get when you fight illegally. Bullshit. But unluckily for them, she hasn't been told to throw the fight, so she's sure as hell going to win it.

When the match official starts, the big guy, who was introduced as 'The Mastodon', rushes her, head down like a bull. She has half a mind to jump over him, but realizes normal people can't do that, so instead opts for rolling to the side. He crashes into the ropes and bounces back, aiming himself in her direction. Another roll and they're a few feet apart, his back to her. With a quick, fluid movement, she kicks him in the small of his back and then punches him in the face once he bounces off the ropes, pushed into them by the force of her first attack. Around her, the sound of the crowd is deafening as he goes stumbling. Before she can move closer again, though, he gets his balance back and punches her in the face. Ow. Okay. That... that hurts a lot more than it usually does.

The force of it pushes her onto the ground, spitting out blood as she goes. She's started to push herself up for a when a foot slams into her back and goes face first into the ground.

"Not cool, dude," she grunts, reaching around and grabbing the foot on her.

With an unusual amount of effort, she throws the guy off her and bounces right back up. He looks different, she realizes. His face, which had been a smooth, pasty white, seems almost scaly, rough bumps all over his skin, now looking like the color of paper. Yeah, this dude's not normal. Oh, oh
shit. His right arm flashes out towards her and she puts her arms up, his fist connecting with her forearm. Stumbling back, not having grounded herself, she plants a foot on the ground and lunges forward with another kick. It collides with his chin, head snapping up with a gruesome cracking noise and he takes one heavy, colossal step backwards. With him, the crowd screams in excitement as his face contorts into a snarl.

A second later, a giant paw reaches out and grabs her, holding her tight to his massive frame and squeezing the life out of her. Gasping for breath, she kneels him in the stomach, and when that doesn't work, strains her neck and clamps her teeth down on his ear. Clementine doesn't like to play dirty, but she also doesn't like to have her spine crushed. Crying out, he drops her, his ear hanging off, blood pouring down the side of his face. Taking the window, she gives him a nasty uppercut. For a second, he seems like he's not just going to topple over right there and then, and then he stares right at her, eyes dark as he winds his arm up. The sensation so familiar to her now, like an alarm going off in the back of her head, flares up, and she barely manages to shift to the side before he swings. His fist clips her side, just for a fraction of a second, but she can still feel it crack under the force of it. Grunting, she spins away and grounds herself as he turns, knuckles clenched. When he lunges forward, she jerks back. To her misfortune, he has absurdly long arms, easily grabbing her arm, pulling her forward and down, slamming his knee into her stomach. Letting out a pained wheeze, she crumples onto her knees, and when she's started to recover, he delivers another knee to her gut. Not good. Pushing herself up for a moment, a shoe slams into her face and she goes crashing back down on all fours. Her ears start to ring once elbows make contact with her back, forcing her onto her stomach and making her head hit the ground heavily. A numbness takes over her when she's pushed onto her back and he sits on top of her, rearing his clenched fist back. Then the blows start coming, raining down on her like hail, so forceful her head snaps back and forth. Left. Right. Left. Right. Left. Right.

She was once told that being beaten to near death is peaceful, like you're floating away and it's happening to someone else. At the time, she didn't believe him. Now, she's not so sure his words were as false as she believed them to be. Because it is peaceful, when blood flies from her mouth with each blow and she's staring up at his face, unmotivated to stop him. And god, the crowd. Even through the deafening ringing in her ears, she hears them roaring, jeering. Then, when her head has been forced to the right for the umpteenth time, she sees something that pulls her back into her body, back to reality. Out in the audience, she swears she catches a glimpse of pale blonde hair and pastel green eyes.

With a ferocious determination building in her chest, she pulls out any strength left in her and holds out a hand, catching a fist in her hand. Eyes steely, she twists hard, a sick satisfaction filling her when she hears a pop, using his pain to push him off of her. As he's cradling his dislocated hand, she kicks him in the back, forcing him on his side, and stomps down as hard as she can on his head. Again. Again. Again, till he stops moving and she's pulled back.

She barely feels it when the referee grabs her hand and raises it in the air, barely hears the crowd screaming as he announces her victory, as she's dragged off the ring and pulled away. The club owner gives her a thumbs up across the warehouse, a half lit cigarette dangling from his mouth. Dropped in a pile of useless limbs near the wall, her bookkeeper comes over and hands her a dirty rag. She grunts out a thank you as she starts wiping blood off her face, though she has a feeling it isn't doing much. Normally, she can take punches just fine, but this time was different, between the intensity and frequency of them, she knew her face probably looked pretty bad. As she cleans herself up, she scans the room for the person she thinks she saw, but finds her vision so blurry everything mixes into the same vomit brown color. It... probably wasn't her anyway. Why would she be here? This place was sketchy as hell, and Violet seemed smart enough to stay away from here, assuming she even knew about it.
Clementine's eyes slide down, exhaustion making her lids heavy, and only moves again when green fills her vision. Right, payment. With a bloody hand, she grabs it and shoves it in a pocket, pushing herself up and out.

As she stumbles through the parking lot, vision swimming, she has half a mind to call up Violet and ask her to pick her up. The other half of her mind is sane and tells her she's a fucking idiot. Giggling, even though it hurts, she leans on a nearby sign and just breathes. She totally had a concussion or something. When she hears footsteps behind her, she tenses, and when someone grabs her shoulder, she turns and punches them. Or tries to, anyway. Her vision is so bad she swings and misses, fist uselessly flying through the air.

"Woah woah, it's just me, Clem," squinting, the face in front of her comes into focus, blonde hair, pale green—no, blue eyes.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Marlon?" She asks, blinking sweat out of her eye.

"I should be asking you that. Seriously, fighting in an illegal ring?" He scoffs, his stupid mullet outlined by the nearest street lamp, another figure behind him. "Come on, I'll fix you up."

It's not like she doesn't like Marlon, but something about him gives her the creeps, and her instincts are usually spot on, "Who's that?"

"A friend," he says nonchalantly, shooting a glance back at them. "Let's just go."

"I can take care of myself," she crosses her arms across her chest, taking a step back.

He laughs, "I don't doubt that. Really though, your face is super messed up, and I just want to help. I mean, we're friends, right?"

She squints at him again, taking another step back, "Like I said, I'm good."

That gets him to stop smiling, and he frowns, sensing her unease, "I'm just trying to help."

"And I don't need any," Clementine shakes her head.

"Well… at least let me call someone," he starts to pull out his phone, but she grabs his wrist, stopping him.

"You don't want anyone finding out that you were here too," the thinly veiled threat makes its way out of her lips, glaring at him sternly.

He stares at her, completely surprised, but puts his phone away and starts walking, the other person following, "You're fucking crazy."

Clementine watches him go, squinting at the person following. A green, heavy coat, ripped jeans, combat boots and fiery red hair, but she can't see their face, and that's what bothers her. Despite her curiosity, she just wants them to get the hell out of here. Before she starts walking home, she makes sure they're safely out of sight, refusing to call a ride. Admittedly, not the smartest move, considering she was stumbling and tripping her over her own feet, swaying side to side like she was drunk. God, she really was in bad shape; that guy did one hell of a number on her. Speaking of which, she was going to have to investigate him as a possible enhanced person. Fucking hell.

She cursed, really started to suck when she fell into a puddle, soaking her bruised knees and scuffing her aching hands. Cursing, she gets back on her feet and keeps walking, kicking rocks in anger, anger at herself for being so stupid. Why didn't she let Marlon call someone? Why couldn't she just be a
normal person, getting high and going to stupid college frat parties? Why did she have to fight for money? Why did she live in a capitalist society dead set on squeezing every cent from her tired, beaten corpse? Maybe she should move to Canada. That was a socialist country, right? Fuck capitalism, she was too poor for this shit. Too poor to live, too poor to die. Funerals were stupid expensive, for some reason. How was she supposed to-

That's when she trips over the edge of the sidewalk and decides to give up, laying splayed out on her back, illuminated by a street lamp just overhead. Wow, she'd really hit rock bottom. Yeesh. There's no way she could get lower, right? Which is when a passing car sprays rainwater all over her as it goes by. Spitting it out of her mouth and blinking rapidly, she stares directly at the light bulb of the streetlamp. No, now she's hit the bottom. And she's hit it hard. Hit it so hard she's nearly broken it with the weight of her mistakes. Maybe going home wasn't a good idea. Maybe she just needed to clear her head.

Squinting past the glaring street light, she searches for the nearest, tallest building, and gets up, putting her mask and hood on as she goes. Jogging lightly towards it, she cranes her head up and extends an arm upwards. With a *thwip*, she's launched into the air, easily coasting past her web and shoots another farther up. Setting down gently on the roof, she walks to the opposite edge, sitting down with her legs dangling over it. Things like this, seeing the city from so high up, it never gets old. The wind, whipping around her, the pattern of lights, green, yellow, red, the distant honking from cars, the moon, clearly visible overhead. Even on the worst of days, it's enough to remind her why she still fights, why she's still here, and not somewhere far, far away from all this bullshit.

With a casual air, like she's moving off the ledge of a pool, she pushes herself off the roof and goes hurtling towards the ground. Free falling, wind harsh against her face, is one of the most exhilarating feelings in the world. Even when her body hurts, nothing can stop her from shouting out a whoop of excitement as she shoots a web and swings down low over the heavy traffic of rush hour. Releasing the web, she does a backflip, just to show off for the gawking pedestrians. They sure were good for boosting a bruised ego. She did have to admit, though, that swinging around like this, wearing the clothes she fought in, no doubt having hundreds of photos being taken of her, was not the smartest thing she'd ever done. Her only hope was the fact that Marlon never seemed particularly interested when they talked about Spider-Woman, so he was unlikely to see them. It was probably fine… right? Pushing the thought out of her mind, refusing to let him ruin her mood, she swings especially high, landing on top of a low rooftop, running across and jumping off the other side. She grins through her mask as she falls again, stopping herself from splatting on the ground with a web, swinging in a wide arc. Landing on a rickety fire escape, she's reminded of home, and squints down at the ground to see the street names. Having a general idea of where she is now, Clementine aims herself in the direction or her apartment and jumps.

When she makes it back home, she's greeted with an annoyed AJ throwing an ice pack at her as he stomps off to their bedroom. What's got him all fussy? Glancing at the table, she sees an open book. Oh. Frowning, she looks next to it, seeing the nearly torn in half stress ball.

She may not be a parent, technically, and she may be really fucked up, both physically and mentally, but she was his guardian, and she was going to help him out. With a sigh, she picks up the book -swapping it for the ice pack-, careful to put a bookmark in the page it was open to, and goes to their bedroom. She finds AJ lying on his bed, covering his face with a pillow. When she sits down next to him on the bed, he turns away, facing the wall, pillow still in place.

"Hey, Goofball," she starts quietly, continuing when she gets no response. "You having trouble
"Ndmdhdn," he mumbles something completely unintelligible through his thick pillow.

"C'mon, work with me. I can't understand you if you're doing that," she sets a hand on the pillow, hoping he'll move it.

After a minute of intense deliberation, he pushes it off his face, "I said it doesn't matter."

Sighing, Clementine gently puts a hand on his curly hair and hums, "I know it's hard for you, AJ, but I also know that you're very determined, and some disorder isn't going to make you quit."

He turns his face slightly, a small smile growing on his face, "Yeah, just like you, right?"

Laughing, she ruffles his hair, "Just like me. Now, let's get you some dinner."

"Mac and cheese?" The small boy asks hopefully, sitting up.

"Even better, Chinese takeout," she jokes, but the way his eyes light up makes her consider it. "While I go get it, go work on your reading, okay?"

"But…" AJ frowns suddenly. "Your face."

His hands stretch towards her head slowly, as if asking permission, flitting over the bruises, but she just puts a hand over his and smiles, "I'm okay, bud. But just for you, I'll take care of it before I go."

His excited grin returns in full force as she gets up and hands the book to him, "Thanks, Clem."

Giving him a brief hug, she walks to the bathroom, shutting the door gently and taking off her shirt. In the mirror, a collection of bruises splatter her torso, a sickening molt of black and blue. Although most of it is centered around her ribs, which she can tell must be somewhat broken, there are a few random ones on her hips and shoulders. Shifting her gaze to her face, she winces. There's a cut right above her right eye, and a deep cut on her cheek, the bridge of her nose and left eye colored in dark purple. With a sigh, she rummages through the medicine cabinet, cleans herself up, and bandages the wounds. Doing one last cursory examination of her face, she pauses.

The person staring back at her in the mirror is tired, exhausted, even. Drooping eyes and a subtle frown, dark bags under their eyes, slumping over like they don't have enough strength to keep themselves upright. God, she hadn't looked so bad since… since Carley died. Exhaling a deep sigh through her nose, she plants her elbows on the bathroom sink and holds her face in her hands. She couldn't keep this up for much longer even if she wanted to. This game of running herself ragged was one she couldn't win. Groaning, she opens the bathroom door and stares into the living room. There, she sees AJ, focusing as hard as he can on his task of reading. There, she sees the reason she's kept on running the endless race. And there, she sees the reason she'll keep going, even when her shoes have been worn through and she hasn't slept in days.

For him, she'll keep running, even if it kills her.

"Give me your fucking money," the gruff voice bounces off the concrete alleyway, easily making its way to Clementine's ears.

Pausing, she gently lowers the greasy bags of takeout to the ground and walks slowly to the
entrance, hiding around the corner. Two figures stand there, one, a person wearing a hoodie and extending their arm, the other figure holding their hands up.

"I-I promise that's all of it," the smaller figure stutters, voice high in pitch.

"Then your jewelry," the other one snarls, jerking their arm.

As they go on with that, Clementine carefully makes her way further into the alley, creeping up behind the aggravator. Holding her breath, she quickly reaches for their extended arm and twists hard, a heavy object dropping out of their hand and clattering to the ground. They cry out as she forces them onto their knees, wrenching their arm behind their back and gripping hard.

"Don't be a dick. Give me the crap you took," she hisses into their ear. "Go or I'll call the cops."

With that, she pushes them away, watching them scramble onto their feet as they throw their bag on the ground. They sprint away, leaving her and the victim by themselves. With a casual air, Clementine crouches down and picks up the object, feeling the familiar weight of a gun in her hand. With a practiced ease, she unloads the gun and puts the safety on, stuffing it in the waistband of her jeans. She rummages through the bag next, finding a wallet and random jewelry, looking up as she hears a voice.

"Thank you for saving me," they say from above her.

"No problem," she waves dismissively, standing up and holding the bag out. "Do you need me to walk you home?"

"Oh… that's kind of you, but I don't exactly have one," they mutter, almost shyly as they take it. "I booked a hotel, but they said I didn't have a reservation and wouldn't let me in."

"Shit, sorry," Clementine releases a deep breath, frowning as she steps towards the alleyway entrance. "Do you have any friends in the area?"

"Um, yeah, a few. I think Violet lives somewhere around here," the figure mulls, following the woman out.

"Violet Adlon?" She stops to pick up the bags of takeout, turning to get a look at the person in front of her now that she can see.

In front of her stands a woman with fiery red hair tied up in a ponytail and bright green eyes, wearing a black cardigan over a blue dress shirt, tight fitting jeans and clean Adidas sneakers.

Great, another beautiful woman seeing her at her worst, "Yeah, you know her, I'm assuming?"

"Do I ever," the college student grins. "How about I call her and you can wait at my apartment in the meantime?"

The woman gives a soft smile, bowing her head slightly, "That would be great, thank you… I'm sorry, but I don't think I caught your name?"

"Sorry about that. I'm Clementine," she says over her shoulder as she starts walking.

"Well, Clementine, I'm Sophie. It's nice to meet you," the redhead introduces herself, kind in tone.

"Nice to meet you too," pulling out her phone, she calls Violet and waits for her to answer.

She's met with a, "Hey Clem, what's up?"
"Nothing much, just met a friend of yours while I was out getting food."

"A… friend?"

"Says her name is Sophie?"

"Are you sure? She's supposed to be in Texas."

"Pretty sure."

"Well, that's really cool and all, but why are you calling me?"

"She doesn't have a place to stay, and I figured she'd feel more comfortable with a friend than on some strangers couch."

"So you want me to pick her up?"

"If you could, yeah."

"Yeah, of course, I'll be over in twenty minutes."

"Alright, see you."

"Coolio, my doodio."

"Bye, you idiot."

With that she hangs up and turns to her companion, arriving at the bottom steps of the stairs winding up to her apartment, "Vi says she'll be here in about twenty minutes."

"Vi, huh?" She waggles her eyebrows, having gotten over her initial shyness with the knowledge they had a mutual friend.

"Uh-" Blushing, Clementine looks away and starts marching up the stairs. "Yeah, you know. Lots of people call her that."

"Mh-hm. The only people she let's do that are people she really likes. And if I haven't heard about you, you must be a recent development," Sophie muses innocently, although clearly amused.

"I mean, we met a few weeks ago," pausing for her new acquaintance to catch her breath on the third floor, she looks out over the railing. "So, I guess you could say that."

"Then let me tell you," the redhead wheezes. "That is a record if I've ever heard one. It normally takes a couple of years for her to even tolerate a person. You must be something real special."

"I'm just a normal person," she lies through her teeth, continuing their ascent. "I've got nothing anyone else doesn't already have."

Behind her, Sophie pauses, so she looks back to see her staring, an eyebrow raised, "No offense, but I highly doubt that."

Opening her mouth to feed her another lie, she finds that nothing comes out, so she shakes her head and keeps going. With another rest, they make it to her apartment, finding AJ sitting at the table, eyebrows furrowed with effort as he stares down at his book. He doesn't seem to notice their initial entrance, but she makes sure to be loud as she walks through the always, alerting him to her presence.
"Oh, hey Clem," he greets, then squints behind her, frowning, becoming guarded. "Who's that?"

"Hi there, my name's Sophie. I'm a friend of Violet's... just waiting here for now until she comes," her eyes light up as she sees him, going over and sitting across from him. "What's your name?"

With a subtle nod from Clementine, he relaxes and smiles, "I'm AJ."

"What're you doing?" She twists her head, trying to read the text on the open page.

"I'm trying to read, but it's kind of hard. Clem says not to give up though," he looks down at the page, determination clear.

"I always had trouble with reading. Could never focus on it," Sophie muses, idly reaching across and poking the page. "You got that problem too?"

"Yeah, Clem says I have attention def-deficit-" He looks over to her for confirmation of the word, to which he receives a thumbs-up. "Hyper... activity disorder."

"Solidarity, little man. Me too," she holds up a hand, quickly receiving an enthusiastic high-five. "That sh- crap sucks."

"Don't worry, Clem says shit a lot," he dismisses her concern over the curse word easily.

"Seems Clementine says a lot of things, huh?" Sophie smiles at him as he continues.

"Yeah, Clem says-" His fave screws up as he realizes how many times he's said that. "Oh."

In the kitchen, talking out the cartons of food, Clementine laughs, "What can I say? I rubbed off on him. He is my little brother, after all."

The younger boy frowns, protesting slightly, then lights up as he remembers something, "By the way, you left your ice pack on the table so I put it in the freezer. Don't forget about it."

"Oh, thanks," pausing from her unpacking, she opens the freezer and grabs it, pressing it to her left eye. "What would I do without you?"

"Die, probably," he says nonchalantly, getting a snort from Sophie.

"This kid's a riot," the redhead grins. "What happened to your face anyway?"

"Would you believe me if I said I'm clumsy?" She asks weakly, already knowing the answer.

"No, sister, I would not," Sophie gives an unamused quirk of the eyebrow.

"I mean, I am, but I'm also quite adept at getting into trouble. White knight complex and all," Clementine half jokes, telling an equally sketchy truth.

"Huh," the other woman murmurs a sound of surprise, twisting a ring on her finger. "I can see that."

"My face give it away?" She chuckles good naturedly, sitting down at the table with wooden, disposable chopsticks in hand.

"Sort of. Makes sense you get along with Violet so well, then. One could say she's a bit of a troublemaker herself," Sophie's smile returns, turning to AJ. "Are you a troublemaker like your sister?"
"Sometimes," he grins back, leaning over and grabbing a box. "Not often."

"Mh," Clementine hums, swallowing. "Did you do your homework?"

"Yup," slurping up some lo mien, he talks with his mouth full. "All done."

"Good job, goof-" His sister starts, only to be interrupted by the sound of the door opening.

"Sophie!" Violet bursts in, wrapping her arms around the redhead. "How are you?"

"Great now that you're here. God, it's been so long!" She lifts the smaller girl up, holding her tight. "I've missed you."

"I've missed you too… but what are you doing here?"

"I'm transferring to a college nearby so I had to move over here. It, uh, didn't go as planned, though."

"Ah shit, sorry about that."

"It's cool, I got to meet your friend."

"Oh, ye- christ, what happened to you?"

Clementine looks up from her rice, glancing over at AJ briefly, "You should see the other guy. That staircase didn't stand a chance."

“You fought a staircase?” Violet raises an eyebrow, putting a hand on her hip.

“Well, I tripped and fell down this afternoon,” she shrugs, setting down her chopsticks on the table. “Like I said, I’m clumsy.”

“Uh, yeah, okay, Clem. I’m going to take Sophie back home, lets hang out soon,” grabbing the other woman’s hand, pulling her out of the apartment suddenly as her phone buzzes.

Exchanging a look with AJ, she gets up and goes into their bedroom, laying on her bed, ice pack pressed to her eye. Please, just this one night. Just one good sleep.

Midterms are a bitch. The all nighters spent studying, the amount of redbulll mixed with strong black coffee you have to drink just to stay awake, the other zombie-like students, and especially the feeling of dread that you failed it all once you're done. Like, what was this shit? No, Ms. Singer, it's not okay that your midterm project is a fifteen page essay complete with a PowerPoint, no less than twenty detailed slides. Fuck that. What's the point of anything if everything you say has to be in MLA format? So. Fucking. Stupid. For the love of Jesus, why couldn't-

"Earth to Clementine, earth to Clementine, do you copy?" Gabe repeats for the thirteenth time, bouncing a crumpled up piece of paper off her face.

It settles on her lap, and as he reaches to grab it, she swats his hand away, "What?"

"Dude, you're not even paying attention to me" he flicks her forehead, gesturing to the textbook in front of them. "Do you even want to pass Physics? I mean, why are you taking it? You're majoring in photography."
"I need my last math credit to graduate," she huffs, pinning him with a glare.

"Okay, geez," he throws up his hands in surrender and looks away. "Seriously though, are you okay? Ever since you were sick, you're been all… weird."

She had to admit, he was right. It'd been a few weeks since she'd fully recovered (physically, anyway), and there was a sense of unease about the whole thing that she couldn't shake. Not about being sick, but about Washington Industries. What had happened there? Why were Lily and Carver fighting? Where was Luke Washington? The media was in a panic, calling it a terrorist attack and claiming the CEO had been kidnapped for ransom. There was no comment from any government agencies, except the usual 'everything's under control' that they got every time something bad happened. On campus, it was the only thing people talked about. When the group got together, Marlon and Ruby and the rest, it was the only conversation that seemed to matter. Of course, criticism of her alter ego was rampant, even more so than usual. She'd had to stop herself from punching Mitch in the face on more than one occasion due to his off handed comments at how she was probably the one who was behind the attack. It was only because Violet shut him down so quickly that he didn't have a black eye. Seriously, what the hell was wrong with him? She did everything she could, all the time, and now people were accusing her of being a terrorist. Fucking assholes.

"I'm fine," she says, sharper than she meant to.

Her friend seems taken aback by her tone, but before she can apologize, her alarm goes off. Looking down at her phone, she sees the message to go along with it. DINNER AT ALBERT'S - 6:30.

"Shit," she swears and gets out of her seat, grabbing her wallet and pulling on her coat. "Can you make AJ some mac n cheese and make sure he gets to bed at a decent time?"

"Wh- how long are you going to be out?" He yells after her uselessly as she leaves her apartment and runs down the stairs.

She keeps her eyes on her feet to avoid falling down, hand hovering over the guard rail. It takes her less than a minute to get to the bottom, jogging along the sidewalk, zipping her coat up as she goes, breath clear in the air. The weather had been acting up recently, and despite the fact that it was spring and nearing summer, it was 28 degrees outside. She didn't live in Colorado, for God's sake, so what the hell was this about? Some real bullshit. Thankfully for her sanity, the sidewalks were clear of both people and ice, so her jog was uneventful and devoid of falls. Which was good, because her body couldn't handle any more abuse; between getting thrown around by enhanced criminals and fighting in the ring, she was practically a human punching bag. Admittedly, she looked and felt better than she had in awhile, even managing to rid herself of that black eye that made Violet first talk to her. The other girl had even joked that she didn't recognize her without it. It had been strange, after that fight, not going to ring for a while, but at least she didn't look like shit, or at least, looked less like shit.

Clementine was so lost in thought she nearly passed the restaurant, only jerked out of it by a person knocking into her as they exit Albert's. Quickly regaining her footing, she turns on her heel and walks to the doors. Her hand hovers over the handles hesitantly, heart beating in her throat. It'd been six years since she last saw them, since they moved away from her and Lee, traveling the world on a boat with Duck's dad, Kenny. They'd come a day before the interview so they could meet up, and she was excited, yes, but it had been a while. Sure, they'd talked during and after their trip, but never actually met once it was over. She'd
even spent an hour agonizing about what to wear, only to have Gabe remind her it was freezing outside, forcing her to scrap the whole thing. What would they think of her, now that she had grown so much? Before she can answer the question for herself, the door handle is wrenched out of her hand as someone on the other side opens it and walks through. Getting a glance inside, she sees who she thinks are her old friends sitting at a table, and decides to just plunge in. As she enters, and employee looks up as she enters, smiling that classic customer service smile.

"I'm here with some other people," she says, shrugging off her coat to accommodate the warm temperature.

The host nods and lets her walk past the desk towards the table she caught a glimpse of earlier. With an anxiety filled sigh, she stops at the end of the table. The two people sitting there are familiar, but so different. The man's beard is still super scruffy, his hair still cropped close to his scalp, but there are wrinkles around his eyes and forehead that weren't there before. The woman is in a similar state, with her sharp jawline and classic scowl, except her hair, dyed with streaks of blonde, is loose around her shoulders. Omid, the man, stands up immediately, enveloping her in a big hug, while Christa, the woman, waits till he's done to do the same.

"Hey there, girl. You've gotten big," Omid grins as she sits down between them at the small table.

"Yeah, I guess I have," noticing that he has to look up to maintain eye contact, she works hard to keep the amusement out of her expression.

"Well, you have had quite a bit of time to grow," Christa comments, her scowl transformed into a smile. "It's good to see you again, Clementine."

"And it's good to see you guys, too. These past few years have been… crazy, to say the least," she waves her hands around, as if gesturing to the crazy.

"I bet, with taking care of AJ and going to college," Omid jokes just before his face gets more serious. "I know I've said it before, but I'm sorry about Carley and Lee, and that we couldn't make the funeral."

Clementine shrugs, holding one of the water glasses to her lips, "It was just a funeral. I don't think she would've minded."

Christa places her hand on top of Clem's and squeezes it lightly, "Even so, we should've been there for you."

"I had Javi. He… helped me out. Got me a therapist and checked on me constantly," she takes a sip. "I've learned to deal with it, just like I did last time."

Omid looks down at his hands, then looks back up with an almost forced smile, "So, how's AJ?"

"He turned twelve this year, in January. God, he's almost as tall as I am, reaching about here," she demonstrates by putting her hand by her shoulder and laughs. "It's really weird."

"I bet. Seeing you now, taller than I am, is so surreal. Makes me realize how old I'm getting," Omid jokes good naturedly.

"Yeah… how old are you now, twenty?" His wife asks.

"Twenty one, actually. Twenty two in June," she responds, twirling a straw between her fingers.

"Damn, so you can drink alcohol now?" Omid's eyes light up.
"Uh-uh, no, you are not getting drunk," she slaps his hand. "Not if I can't."

Clementine raises an eyebrow, "Why can't you?"

The couple exchanges a look, and then Christa touches her stomach and says, "I'm pregnant."

"Wh- congratulations!" The youngest member of the group grins, grasping Christa's hand. "That's great!"

"Yeah, that's why we were so surprised Christa got the job offer, but they said the actual position is only going to be open after she has the baby, so it's fine," her husband smiles, touching her belly too. "I'm trying to convince her to name him Omid."

"We are not naming it Omid, not again," she pins him with a steely glare. "Besides, what if it's a girl?"

"Gender's a societal construct," Clementine murmurs into her drink, too quiet for them to hear.

"Then we name her Christa!" He exclaims, as if it's simple.

"Not again, Omid, not again," she shakes her head, exasperated.

"I'm with Christa on this one. It's just weird to name your kid after you, not to mention uncreative," the younger brunette interjects, shooting a raised eyebrow at Omid.

"Kenny named his kid after him!" He tries to defend himself from their words by waving his hands around in the air.

"Who goes by Duck and thinks his legal name is stupid," Christa pokes him the shoulder, breaking through his barrier easily. "We're not naming this little person after either of us."

"Then what about someone else? Like, you know, sometimes people name their kids after the people they've lost," instantly, the other two know what he means, the same names popping up in their minds.

The married couple look at their old patient, an unspoken question in the air, "You mean Lee and Carley, right?"

"Yeah," Omid says quietly, exchanging a glance with his partner.

"I…" Clementine looks down at his hands for a second before looking back up, as if she'd made up her mind. "Yeah, I think that's nice."

The three spend the next few hours catching up on life, sharing stories of stupidity and love, and when that comes up, naturally, the question of crushes comes up.

"So… got any cute boys around campus?" Omid asks, innocently taking a sip of his glass of wine. "Or girls?"

She blushes and stares into her drink, "Um, yeah, I guess."

"C'mon, spill it. What are their names? What do they look like?" He leans forward, eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Well, I mean," she glances up at his expression and carefully plans out her next words. "There's this girl named Violet that I met recently, and she seems pretty cool. I like her a lot and I don't
"I really don't know what to do about it."

"Just tell her you like her," Christa stares at her, like this is such an obvious and simple solution.

"What? No, no, she'd totally turn me down," she shakes her head, anxiety sparking from even the thought of it.

"You won't know unless you try," then there's Omid, and- oh god, she's being double teamed by two people she respects very much, and could never say no to.

"And I won't get my feelings hurt if I don't try, so, sounds like I won't be doing that," even as she says it, she knows she's going to lose this battle and promise something stupid.

"If she says she likes you back, cool. If she doesn't, that's fine," Christa's giving her that look again.

"It's just not that simple," comes her weak response.

"No, it is. People just like making it harder than it has to be. Now, Clementine Everett, you are going to go to that girl and ask her out on a date, or god so help me, I will do it for you," the older woman glares at her, although it lacks any real animosity.

Nonetheless, she is terrified, "Yes, ma'am."

Not long after that conversation, Clementine's phone dings, and she looks down to see the cause of it.

*Road Work Ahead: when are you gonna be home???? AJ is sleeping and I have classes tmrw*

She thumbs out a quick *be there soon* and turns to her companions, "I've got to run on back, Gabe can't stay over forever, and I don't want to leave AJ alone."

They say their goodbyes, hugging and promising to see each other again soon, and she leaves. It's even colder than it was earlier, making her pull the hood of her jacket up and shove her hands in her pockets. Opting for a walk instead of a jog, she follows the route back to her home with practiced ease. Louis often invited her out to the restaurant, usually bringing a friend or two. On second thought, maybe those were dates? Not that she didn't like him -as a friend-, but Gabe wanted a chance with him, and she wasn't going to get in the way of that. Not that she was assuming he liked her because she was narcissistic or anything, but it was a possibility. Shit, *was* she being narcissistic? Who was she to say Louis liked her? The dinners were probably platonic, nothing more. Right?

The next moment after that thought, a muffled voice emanates from her deep coat pocket, *"Hello Spider-Woman, what's bopping?"

Panicking slightly, she feels around and grabs her mask, pulling it out to see a hazy glow coming from inside of it. Taking a quick glance around, she dips into a nearby alleyway and slips it on.

"Who is this?" She whispers, lowering her voice in pitch.

"It's me, Louis? I told you that I can contact you now, right?" The voice, now that it's crystal clear, is obviously that of Louis.

"Uh…" Digging back in her memory, Clementine tries to remember what he's talking about.
She’s standing in Louis’s underground bunker, suited up in her normal, apparently, ‘not as cool as what I’ve got planned for you’ suit, and is waiting for him to blow her mind. Next to her is Violet, horrible posture and all, complaining about how long it’s taking for him to go get it. Meanwhile, Chairles stands to the side, hands crossed professionally behind his back. They haven’t seen the tall boy since he greeted them, to which he then immediately ran off, yelling about going to get the suit. It’d been fifteen minutes since then, and it’d be a lie of Clementine hadn’t started to wonder if this was a waste of time. To her surprise and relief, it wasn’t.

With a flair only Louis could pull off, he appeared in a cloud of purple smoke and strobe lights, posing as he holds a box in the air. He stands there for an absurd amount of time, when the smoke has dissipated and he starts to shake from his awkward stance, and then clears his throat.

“Here is your suit, Spider-Woman, new and improved,” he holds it out, an excited grin on his face.

Clementine takes it gently, opening the special packaging and pulling out a bundle of fabric. Dark grey, so dark it’s almost black in color, it’s a different take on the previous orange suit, instead opting for orange accents on the arms and legs, including the fingers of the gloves. Similarly, there is a lighter grey forming a barrier between the vibrant orange and the dark grey making up most of the suit. In a bold white, on the chest, is her logo, completely unchanged from the original design. Also in the bag is her new mask, comprised mostly the same dark grey with white, flexible, almost plastic like material where her eyes should be. She’s been staring so long she almost doesn’t notice Louis’s grin dropping from his face. With a flash, she pops out of her awe and looks up.

“Thank you, really, this is- this is amazing,” Clementine’s alter ego pushes as much emotion into her voice as she knows how to.

Immediately, his excitement returns in full force, eyes lighting up, “How about you put it on and I’ll tell you what it can do?”

Nodding, she takes a step back and follows Chairles to a small room which seems to be a bathroom, leaving her alone. She starts by decompressing her suit first, letting it drop to the ground, and carefully, as if saying goodbye, folds it up. Then her mask, which she places on top of the main body, and turns to her new suit. Similar to her original one, she puts it on the same way, loose until she holds her fingers by her wrists, and takes a look in the mirror. It looks good. Sleek. New. Fits her better than the old one did, mostly because she’s not the same kid as she used to be, still grieving the death of her second mom. More mature, maybe, less bright colors and more professional. Who knew superheroes could be professional?

She glances over at the mask on the kitchen sink, and with a barely held excitement, picks it up and pulls it over her head. Instantly, she feels the difference. Her view is no longer obstructed by the edges of the mask, instead, she can see so much more. It’s like the suit is tailored to her unique situation, like she’s been blind for two years and Louis just gave her a new pair of glasses. Everything is sharper, her mind now able to keep up with how fast her eyes move. That was going to be helpful in a fight. Smiling through the mask, she puts her old suit in the bag and walks out of the bathroom.

The other three’s eyes are on in her seconds, taking in her new look. Louis wolf whistles while Violet gawks, the corner of Chairles’s mouth turning upwards. It’s enough to make her blush, and for the twenty ninth time, she thanks her mask for hiding her embarrassment.

“Not to be narcissistic but I think I did a damn good job!” Louis exclaims, so excited he’s practically bouncing on his feet. “You too, Chairles.”

The older man just nods, letting Violet speak, “For once, I actually agree with you.”
"Okay, first off, rude. Secondly, I did take some more liberties than just the design, so…” He draws the word out for drama, ignoring the way Violet facepalms. "The main things this new suit will do is filtrate any toxic chemical, such as smoke, lessen the impact from blunt force attacks -don’t ask me how-, and when you get hurt, it will not only repair itself, but you too. And I hope you don’t mind, but we also took your communication device and made that more advanced."

Flexing her fingers, she notices the slight, barely noticeable change in material, "Not at all."

"Not exactly," Clementine mutters, wondering if letting Louis tamper with her equipment was the smartest idea. "You do know that doing this is putting you in danger, right?"

"I understand the risks, and so does Vi," his voice gets quieter suddenly, as if he's leaned away from his microphone.

"Hi," comes another voice, easily recognizable as Violet. "Sorry about him."

"Oh, hey. Why are you contacting me, exactly?" Clementine peeks out of the alleyway, making sure she's still alone.

"I dunno," she practically hear the other girl shrug. "Louis said he had something to tell you."

"Yes, I do! I forgot to mention it, but I have some information about the Washington Industries attack earlier this month. Apparently, William Carver and 'The General' fought it out for some sensitive data that the CEO had. My guess is, one of them has Luke, although my bet is on the latter," the eccentric boy bursts in, nearly cutting off Violet. "And Chairles says 'The General' was headed out towards The Chattahoochee River, supposedly disappearing into a warehouse nearby."

That was surprisingly helpful, "Thanks for telling me."

"No problem, Spider-Woman. Talk to you-" He cries out suddenly, her other friend's voice coming through.

"Thanks for saving my friend and I, by the way," Violet interrupts, quiet.

"Violet, what the hell?" Louis's distant voice yells.

"Shut up, you doofus. Anyway, talk to you later," with that, she ends the call, or whatever that was, leaving her in silence.

Suddenly remembering that Gabe needed her home soon, she tears off the mask and goes sprinting down the sidewalk, making it home in record time. Fumbling with her keys for a moment, she opens the door to her apartment and is met with a tired looking Garcia. Apologizing for being late, she waves his goodbye and checks on AJ, making sure he's asleep. After she's sure he'll be okay, she sheds her civilian clothes and puts her mask on, stepping out onto the fire escape. With one last look back at her home, she leaps off the edge towards where she hopes she'll find Lily Singer.
"So you said you've been feeling more stressed than usual, is that right?" The woman in the armchair asks, looking up to see her patient nod. "And why do you think that is?"

"My friend…” Her voice cracks, clears it. "She's in the hospital."

"Oh, I'm sorry... what happened?" Her name tag flashes in the light: Dr. Octavia Spencer.

"She was badly beaten, suffered several lacerations and orbital-“ The brunette takes a deep breath and starts to speak.

"Now what did we talk about last session?" The question is rhetorical, so she just closes her mouth and listens. "By using medical terminology, you're distancing yourself from the emotional trauma of the event. It's okay to be feeling the things you're feeling right now, Clementine. There's no shame in admitting that what happened affected you."

She wrestles with her natural response and tries again, "I was working at the time and my team was the closest…"

A flash of a sobbing redhead, of bloody hands and the weight of her body in her arms triggers a full body tremor, the noise of it growing in the back of her head.

"There was a lot of blood- it, uh, looked pretty bad. The doctor says she won't be able to see out of her eye again… I can't-“ She sucks in a breath and stares at the ground as hot tears run down her cheeks.

"Clementine, it's okay, just walk through it," her voice is soothing despite how Clementine shuts her eyes and curls up. "What's going on in your head?"

"I just-" Her voice is quiet, defeated. "I just want it to stop."

"The violence?" Octavia prompts softly.

"No," she looks up, whispering. "Her screams."

Chapter End Notes

:) a new chapter will be out soon
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i hope you're ready
Calm Before the Storm

Chapter Summary

A beach trip and a hospital visit

Chapter Notes

TW: Domestic abuse, blood

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being a superhero meant that any move you made was pertinent to your continued existence. Every second of your alter-ego's life was tracked by some random ass helicopter, trying to catch a glimpse of the person behind the mask. Which is why, when you fail, you fail in front of the whole world, and suddenly everything good you've ever done doesn't matter because you slipped up once.

Facing the consequences of such a predicament is one Clementine Everett. After her failure to capture Lily and William Carver a month ago and her lack of information on what happened to Luke Washington, the public's been riding her ass like never before. Really, if they weren't so annoying, she might even be flattered by the thousands of people who showed up for the protest against the very existence of Spiderwoman. And sure, she got the whole "who's watching the watch dogs" thing, but for once could they just leave her alone? For fucks sake, she was saving people's lives and yet they still demanded more, as if she wasn't a human being.

Which is one notion Mitch couldn't seem to grasp, "I mean, if she can't catch one simple criminal, how can we trust her to do anything at all?"

He'd been mouthing off for the past half hour or so, locked in a heated debate with Violet and Louis, who had become increasingly protective of the superhero, "A simple criminal? Seriously? William Carver in an enhanced individual and The General is a criminal mastermind. Spiderwoman is just one person."

"Yeah, a person who lifts tons without breaking a sweat. Why call yourself a superhero if you can't even save people like in the comic books?" He sneers, leaning forward.

While Violet quietly seethes and Louis shoots back another response, the rest of the group awkwardly stands by, picking at their nails or scrolling through Twitter as they attempt to ignore the argument right in front of them. If the amount of times everyone's looked up from their phones is anything to go by, no one's having much success. Spiderwoman's alter-ego herself is absently doodling with a sharpie on her arm, already having resigned herself to the fallout of her mistake. She'd mainly tried to stay out of it, both as a civilian and a superhero, but it didn't seem to matter. To opponents she was, at best, a deranged and misguided youth attempting to be a hero, while at
worst she was secretly a terrorist hell bent on destroying America. Her supporters, let it be said,
weren't a whole lot better on the whole "recognizing her as a human being who makes mistakes"
thing. To them, she was either an "uwu soft innocent baby" or an "ingenious, heaven sent ethereal
being who could see into the future and therefore literally could not make mistakes". The people
who held the latter view were often religious nuts reciting what they called "The Gospel of
Spiders", which, as one could guess, praised spiders and their superiority above humans as the
ultimate species. Weird shit, and although the gospel was an interesting read and certainly one of
the more thought provoking things Clementine had ever read, she couldn't really say she fully
supported the whole human sacrifice thing to appease the Spider Gods. Or the theory that she was
a shape-shifting spider-being who wore a mask, not to hide her identity, but to hide her gory visage
from an unforgiving world. All in all, it had more substance than one would expect, enough to keep
it on her bookshelf, but not enough that she adopted the beliefs as her own. Speaking of which…
She pulls her gaze away from her arm and eyes Marlon's necklace, the centerpiece of which is an
intricate, golden spider clinging to a small pearl.

Clementine had noticed it a few minutes ago when the sun reflected light into her eye and thus
captured her attention. It wouldn't have mattered much if she didn't see her symbol engraved on the
back of the spider, but she did. She wasn't exactly sure whether it was just merch or whether it
conveyed a hidden message, but what she did know was that it made her uncomfortable, to say the
least. Not that things between them weren't uncomfortable enough, given she recently threatened to
expose him to all their friends. Fun times.

A harsh sigh from beside her pulls her out of her reverie, the world snapping back into focus. To
her right is a slumped over Violet, pinching the bridge of her nose in annoyance as Mitch continues
blabbering. To Violet's right is Louis, who looks three seconds away from snapping, and suddenly
Clementine has an idea.

"Hey!" She shouts, stopping the argument in its tracks. "I think we're all a little stressed out. How
about we head over to Tybee tomorrow and just chill out, okay?"

Almost immediately, the group erupts in a chorus of agreement, leaving the three arguing members
to glare at each other as they relent to the idea. While Louis quickly warms up to it, Mitch's still
pissy and Violet keeps shooting him dirty looks out of the corner of her eye. The rest of them are
chatting excitedly, figuring out what they're going to wear and who's carpooling with who, and
then of course, that's when Clementine realizes a bit of an issue.

"Shit," she mumbles under her breath, just loud enough for someone to hear.

"What's wrong?" Violet instantly abandons her glare and turns to her friend with concern.

"I just realized that I won't even be able to go," the brunette sighs. "I can't just leave AJ alone, and
I don't have swimsuit anyway."

Then Louis pops into the conversation, grinning, "I don't see why he can't just come with us."

She gives him a skeptical look, "And the suit?"

"I was going to get a new one anyway, and I know Vi over here doesn't have one, so we can just go
and shop for one," he shrugs.

Looking down at her hands, Clementine frowns, "I don't have any money to spare, sorry."

"Hey, Clem, look at me," he reaches over, his face serious. "I'm rich, like, super fucking rich. Trust
me when I say buying a thirty dollar swimsuit for a friend isn't an issue."
She stares at him for a second before smiling, "Thanks."

Which is how Violet and Clementine were dragged to some high end clothing store dedicated to high fashion swimsuits. Louis walks in with a swing to his hips and ridiculous sunglasses set precariously on the tip of his nose, giving a small wave to any employee he passes. The other two follow meekly behind him, exchanging a look of mutual confusion.

Checking the price tag of the nearest swimsuit, Clementine lets out a low whistle, "Forgive me if I'm wrong, but even breathing this air seems like it costs more than thirty dollars."

"Like you wouldn't believe! I had to pay a hundred bucks for the three of us to just walk in here," Louis turns to her with a completely straight face which quickly breaks out into a grin. "Nah, I mean, everything here is pricey but I wouldn't have any less for my two best friends."

Violet grumbles in annoyance as he slings an arm around her shoulders, but a small smile plays at the corner of her lips, a blush dusting her cheeks and the tips of her ears. On the other hand, Clementine embraces her own smile, ecstatic.

"If we're your best friends, then I fear for how your normal friends treat you," the blonde grumbles.

“Hey! They’re…” He pauses for a moment and then shrugs. “They’re pretty shitty.”

“And the truth comes out,” Violet says, a shit eating grin plastered on her face.

“Oh can it, Adlon. I don’t see you hanging out with anyone else but us. At least I have other friends and aren’t stuck to me and this idiot over here,” he jerks his thumb over to Clementine, who’s not paying attention and is instead investigating a rack of swimsuits.

While they were bickering, her eyes had been drawn to a polka dot one piece swimsuit with a skirt sewn into the side. Taking it off the rack, she turns to Violet and offers it to her.

"Here, go try this on," her smile is so bright Violet can't think of saying no.

While the flaxen blonde goes to the dressing room, Louis tries to get Clementine to get into a swimming suit, each of his picks revealing more and more skin. By the time he gets to a tiny thong looking thing, she's completely ignoring him, searching through the small selection of kids suits. Once he realizes she's paying him no mind, Louis is quick to drop the joke and find another way to torment her.

"So..." He starts off, sidling next to her.

"Dear God, whatever you're about to say, do me a favor and don't," Clementine groans.

"At least give me a chance," he whines, clinging to her arm, staring up at her with puppy dog eyes.

Ever the sucker for Louis, she sighs, "Go ahead."

His face lights up, "Well, then, you and Violet, huh?"

She shoots him a sharp look, "What?"

"Hey, I see something happening there," he grins, bumping her side with his elbow. "It's pretty obvious you guys are into each other."
Her face burns brighter than a thousand suns, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"I see the way you look at her, like she's the only person in the room," his voice suddenly softens, rolling the fabric of a suit between two of his fingers. "You two would be good for each other."

Clementine smiles and pulls him into a big hug, squeezing him tight, "Thanks, Louis."

He returns the embrace with enthusiasm, squeezing back as hard as he can, when a voice comes from behind them, "What the hell are you two nerds doing?"

Louis refuses to let go, merely turning his head to stare disdainfully at Violet, "We're having a bro moment."

She stares back, frowning, "Uh huh."

Clementine just gives her an award winning smile and asks, “Did you like it?”

“Oh, uh, yeah, it’s chill,” her dead stare drops, a genuine smile replacing it.

"One down, another to go," Louis grins and turns his attention to Clementine as he let's her go.

She grimaces as he grabs an orange bikini, holding out to her, "Uh…"

"Just try it on," he juts out his lower lip and pouts. "Please?"

So she does, and it takes her a full minute to take off her shirt, avoiding the mirror. And when she finally puts it on, it's strange. It's the sort of pedestrian, normal thing she can't have, not with the massive burn on her back, or the multitude of gruesome scars that wrecked her torso like a battlefield. Not when her identity was always too close to being discovered. Not when Violet and Louis had seen that missile hitting her back. No, this… Clementine pulls it off and pulls on her clothes as fast as she can, sitting down on the bench of the dressing room and shaking. It was wrong to do it, dangerous even. She couldn't.

She gets out a few minutes later to an excited Louis, swallowing her panic, "I… uh, I'm good. I'm going to just… get something else."

He seems to sense that something's wrong and he just nods, not pushing the subject as she walks away and grabs a short sleeved compression suit. She walks back over awkwardly, and Louis tries to bring the mood up again by joking about all the stupid swimsuits on display. It works enough that it gets them all laughing again as they pick out a swimsuit for AJ, finally settling on a pair of swim trunks with zig zag lines of orange and black.

They go to Clementine's apartment afterwards, the three of them chilling on the couch and watching *Scooby Doo: Mystery Incorporated* till AJ mentions dinner. As tradition states, they immediately do a nose goes and Louis groans when he loses. Thus ensues a fifteen minute argument over what they're going to get before eventually settling for McDonalds. While he goes out and AJ does homework, Violet and Clementine just talk, from school to the logistics of having eyeballs on your feet. It's a welcome relief from the stress of just living, and after a bit, she falls asleep on Violet's lap, oblivious to the blonde's fingers toying with her hair and soft smile.

Being a superhero felt sort of like saving a train full of people and then getting hit by a plane and nobody even caring. It sort of felt like being a song everyone's heard but doesn't know the name of. It sort of felt like being an alien, feared by some but revered by others. It sort of felt like being a
living statue, never to speak and only to be admired. It sort of felt like being a college student with a comatose father and a little brother to take care of. Sort of.

Mostly it just felt really cold. Cold because you sat at the edge of a crane just so that when you got called to do something, it looked really dramatic. Because you're a superhero and fuck if you can't have fun once in a while. Even if once in a while is all the time and it's freezing because it's still winter and you're not wearing a coat. Superheroes don't wear coats, they'd look stupid. Or at least, that's what Clementine thinks, watching the nightlife of the city crawl towards the horizon, joints stiff from disuse.

She'd been up there all night, had climbed up after the others went to sleep and hadn't left since, even when her head swam from dehydration and cold. There wasn't a particular reason she'd done it, maybe just because it looked cool, or maybe because she felt like she should be punished since she hadn't yet found Lily. Definitely the latter, though she'd resist accepting the thought til it kicked her in the face.

It didn't get the chance to, however, as her phone rang, "Hello?"

"Where the hell are you?" Louis' voice sounds groggy, like he just woke up.

"Morning jog," she says simply, standing up and stretching her stiff limbs. "Why?"

"I dunno maybe because when you wake up and your friend just disappears without a trace, you get a little worried?" His voice is low but the annoyance is clear in his voice. "Is it so hard to believe that we care about you?"

She pauses for a moment, the silence deafening, "No… of course not."

"Uh huh… well, if you're out, could you get us Starbucks? Violet's practically a zombie when she wakes up and I really, really don't want to deal with that. Last time she tried to bite my head off!" He hushes suddenly before continuing. "The woman's insane, I'm telling you."

"Yeah, I'll go get it. What do you want?" Squinting at the city, she spots the nearest Starbucks and plans her route

"Ice Caramel Cloud for me, Nitro Cold Brew with sweet cream for the zombie… strawberry cream frap for AJ," he hesitates a moment before finishing. "And a cheese danish."

Clementine sighs, "Alright, see you in a bit."

"Bye," Louis signs off as she takes her jump, wind screaming in her ears.

She shoots out a stretch of web, unconcerned at how fast the ground approaches. At the last moment, her arm jerks slightly in response to the connection, swinging in a large arc over the cars, performing her usual flamboyant act with ease. It's such a normal thing now that she zones out, hardly even noticing when she nearly blows past Starbucks. Doing a hard stop, she drops to the ground and enters the shop, waving at a few people and giving fistbumps. She gets her order quickly, and the comedic reality of her situation is not lost on her. Spiderwoman is a regular at this Starbucks, and quite a few photographers stake the place out to get precious close-ups. She doesn't mind though, her suit is designed to hide her physical characteristics.

Later, in a random alley, she switches out of her suit to some shorts and a t-shirt, putting her suit in one of the many backpacks she has scattered around and slings it across her back. Starbucks in hand, she starts jogging back to her apartment.
Louis greets her back with glee, grabbing his drink and taking a deep drink, sighing in relief, “You have no idea how much I needed that.”

“Not as much as you need this,” she holds out the danish and he squeals, going to work on it immediately.

“You’re the best, Clementine,” he says through a mouth full of cheese and pastry.

Wincing in slight disgust, she turns and finds Violet already standing next to her, hand outstretched. Cautiously, she hands the cold brew to her. Like a ghost, the blonde floats across the ground towards the couch, takes a seat, and then takes a slow sip. Almost immediately, light returns to her eyes, a certain living quality that hadn’t been there before. If Clementine was being honest, it kind of freaked her out. It wasn’t often she met a real life zombie.

Tybee beach is strangely empty when they arrive, the last out of their large group. AJ immediately runs up to Tennessee, having taken a liking to the 2nd year with their shared love for art. He pulls out the sketchbook Clementine bought him for his birthday and shows him his sketches, delighted at the older boy’s kind praise and gentle criticism, taking it all in stride. Smiling, the three sort-of adults haul along all the beach stuff including, but not limited to, several floaties, a giant cooler, and a couple of towels. Louis struggles with a giant flamingo blow-up and he and Violet end up having to carry it together. Meanwhile, Clementine pays no mind to their struggle, merrily pulling the cooler along to their spot. Omar, one of the only ones still on the beach, greets her with a grunt, pushing around some ground beef on tinfoil above burning coals. She gives a similar reply before she’s crushed by an excited Brody hugging her, a surprising strength rising from the short woman.

“I’m so glad you guys could make it! This is going to be so fun, you guys,” she grins, looking up at the brunette.

“Yeah, I’m glad we could come,” Clementine says, holding back a laugh.

Wheezing behind her, Louis grunts, “Happy… to see… you.”

While Brody goes and helps him and Violet, Clementine looks around to see where everybody’s at. Marlon and Mitch are dunking each other’s heads under the water for as long as they can hold them while the others hit around a large inflatable beach ball closer to the beach, Gabe and Duck against Aasim and Willy. Close to Omar, Ruby and Sophie are relaxing, chatting idly to each other, a third towel which she assumes is Brody’s splayed out next to them. Noticing her, Sophie gives a wave which she returns as she sets down the cooler, rolling her shoulders to get out some of the tension. Beside her, Violet gives her a little nudge, leaning against her shoulder.

“Want to go out for a swim? I brought a board,” her offer in noncommittal, gentle.

With a smile, the brunette says, “Sure.”

Clementine had been hurt before, of course. She'd been stabbed, shot, punched, got hit by a car, nearly drowned, had her arms twisted at such an angle they popped out of their sockets, even had a searing hot brand stuck to her arm, which she’d covered up with a tattoo a few days later. Yet despite her experience with pain, nothing compared to the tight grasp Violet had on her heart, refusing to let go. Which, you know, sucked, because they could never be together. Not as long as people like William Carver and Lily existed.
Which was why when Violet looked at her, grinning, face a centimeter away from hers, she smiled back and gently pushed her off the surfboard they’d been sitting on. She surfaced to find Clementine laughing while Violet attempted to look mad, though she failed to hide her shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter. From the shore, Louis yells some insult and makes an L with his fingers, holding up to his forehead. Meanwhile, Violet spits out water and glares up at Clementine.

The brunette grins back, "Whoopsie."

"Eat shit," she mutters, grabbing a hold of her hands and pulling her into the water.

She stays underneath the surface for a little bit, allowing herself to sink, her eyes stinging, before kicking upwards and splashing Violet in the face, giggling as the blonde attempts to wipe the salty water from her eyes while simultaneously hanging onto the board.

“You suck!” Violet playfully hits her in the arm, spluttering. “You seriously suck!”

“Not as much as you do!” Clementine giggles as she slips back onto the surfboard, standing up with ease.

“I don’t.” Her face scrunches up as she tastes the water. “I don’t understand how you do that. It’s so hard and my legs feel like jello.”

“I’ll just help you up, here,” she extends a hand towards Violet, watching her decide if she wants to pull her back in again.

Deciding against it, she takes her hand and Clementine slips off the board on the other side, smiling reassuringly. With one hand, she steadies the board, and with the other, keeps holding on. Uncertain, the blonde cautiously gets on the board, wobbling and screeching as she nearly tips over.

Through her laughter, Clementine manages to get out, “Relax, I’ve got you.”

Her erratic movements cease, just on her hands on knees, breathing hard with her eyes closed, “This fucking sucks.”

“Hey, just trust me. I promise I’ll catch you if anything happens,” the brunette gives her a gentle squeeze, urging her to continue.

With a deep breath, Violet gets up on her feet, and then slowly stands up. When she starts to wobble again, nearly all the way up, she tries to balance herself and that’s when things go wrong. With a shriek, she topples over and in the process smacks Clementine straight in the face.

“I am so, so sorry,” Violet is saying later as she dabs at the cut on Clementine’s cheek with a cotton ball. “Water just freaks me out and I feel like I’m always about to drown and—”

“Hey, chill, it wasn’t even that bad,” she smiles. “I’m not dead, right?”

“I mean, I guess,” the blonde grumbles.

“So everything’s alright,” she reaches over and squeezes her hand. “Nothing happened and no one got hurt too bad. Actually, it’s kind of adorable that you’re this concerned over such a little cut.”

“With bacteria and stuff in it,” Violet protests. “It could get infected.”
“And I remind you, who’s the paramedic?” Clementine pulls her trump card and watches her reaction with a smug expression.

“Shut up,” she pulls back and takes out a bandage, carefully laying on her skin. “You feel alright?”

“For the last time, yes. I feel- oh my god,” Clementine suddenly winces, holding her cheek.

“What? What? Are you okay? Are you dying? Oh god, are you dying?” Violet gets on her knees and hovers over her, thoughts flying everywhere.

“The bacteria and stuff… it got in,” her voice is hoarse, feeble. “It’s infected and now I’m dying. Curse you, Violet Adlon!”

“Oh my god… shut up!” She wacks her in the head with a disposable plate as Clementine starts giggling. “You’re such a rude bitch.”

“Ah, but I’m your rude bitch,” waggling her eyebrows, she can’t help but keep the teasing tone out of her voice.

“Eat. Absolute. Shit.”

They’re sitting on towels later, facing the sun as it bleeds red and orange into the horizon.

“Pleasant day, huh?” Clementine asks, watching Mitch bearhug Marlon to pull him down under the water.

“Definitely, well, except for when I nearly killed you,” she nods. “Days like this remind me why I put up with some of the bullshit these people throw at me.”

“I feel ya,” the corners of her mouth turn up. “It reminds me we’re still kids.”

Except when Clementine was Spiderwoman, she wasn’t a kid anymore. She was a completely different person. Nothing more than the faceless hero people in help needed. As Spiderwoman, she was a machine, a weapon. And to be Spiderwoman, Clementine had to take careful note of her opponents body language, on their minute facial expressions and vocal changes. So when Brody’s shoulders tensed ever so slightly when Marlon laughed a little too loud and nudged her, she couldn't help but feel sick. Didn't really know why but knew enough to suspect. Sure, she'd had her fair share of bad relationships, got yelled at and put down but she'd never been hit. Never been in a situation of domestic abuse, which seemed to be unfolding before her very eyes.

Her fears only multiplied when she asked Violet about him.

"Marlon?" She asked, almost uneasily. "Why do you want to know about that idiot?"

"I don't know him that well. I figured you'd be a good place to start," being truthful around Violet was normally easy, but right now she had to put on a mask and hope it wasn't transparent.

"He's… ya know, Marlon? Angry, childish Marlon," she shrugs, avoiding eye contact.

"Angry," Clementine stresses the word, a bitter taste on her lips.

"Yeah," Violet glances at her, trying to gauge her reaction. "You've seen it."
And she has. She's seen it when he's driving them places, the way his face gets red and his veins bulge out. She's seen it when he loses a stupid game and goes storming out, dampening the mood. She's seen it when someone jokingly insults him or refuses to listen, getting into their face and pushing them back. That rage has only been directed at her once, when she'd refused to take that ride from him. She has a feeling the only reason he backed down that night was because he'd just seen firsthand how badly she could beat his ass.

So she shrugs and says, "Yeah, I have."

The next day, Brody sits down next to Marlon and when he jostles her, she winces, holding her ribs but claiming she has a stomach ache. It was an obvious enough sign. She'd met up with Violet later, both of them leaning on the fire escape, an unlit cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth, playing with a lighter in her hand.

Shivering in the cold, Clementine drags the words from her mind, "I think Marlon's hitting Brody."

Violet flinches then, her lighter nearly dropping from her hand, "What?"

"Her ribs," the brunette points out as calmly as she can with the turmoil in her head. "They were hurt."

"Sh-he said her stomach hurt," she flicks the lighter again, trying to disguise the fact that her hands are shaking.

"She lied. Her breathing was wheezy and her ribs were sore," Clementine glares into the distance. "You said it yourself, he's angry."

"He's not like that! He's just…" Her voice gets louder for a moment before cutting off. "It… it's not his fault. His head is messed up and-"

"Then he needs help, not excuses. More importantly, Brody needs the truth. He's hitting her and it needs to stop," her glare lands on Violet now, who turns to face her.

"You don't even know him! You don't know anything about them. Just- christ, Clementine. You can't just accuse people like that." The blonde looked away, shaking her head.

"I'm not!" She snaps suddenly, pushing off the railing. "How can you be defending him like we haven't seen him break a table in half because his favorite team lost their football game?"

Violet doesn't look at her, staring off into the distance and in a final act of defiance, lights the cigarette. Giving one last look, Clementine turns on her heel before the smoke makes her lungs die and goes back inside.

When Brody shows up a couple weeks later with a black eye, she sees Violet's face fall quicker than the law of physics dictate possible. And when Marlon's hand is suspiciously wrapped in gauze, it doesn't go unnoticed.

Before she can say anything to Violet or to Marlon, her phone goes off and she has to go. Giving some excuse about work, she rushes off to change into her suit. That was the thing about being a superhero; the world came before your personal life.

Brody weighed heavy on her mind, even as she went to her actual job hours later, sitting on the back of the ambulance with her legs swinging back and forth like a child. It was towards the end of
her most uneventful shift yet, and maybe it was cruel to say, but part of her preferred the chaos of
an emergency scenario to this. Her partner, Amy, had been talking about her weekend for nearly an
hour when their driver received a call on the radio. With slight relief at the save from Amy’s
constant chattering, Clementine got in and shut the doors, preparing silently and listening to the
report.

"...twenty one year old female. Bleeding from the head, unconscious..."

That was never a good combination. Usually meant some bad- wait. They were heading towards a
dorm. Not just a dorm, Brody's dorm. Twenty one year old female. There were a lot of people that
fit that description in that dorm. It didn't mean it was Brody. Not even when she ran up the flight of
stairs to her floor, not even when she pushed through the crowd to her room, not even when she
found Sophie crying, holding Brody's head, blood on her hands.

"Her right eye was badly damaged and it's unlikely she'll see out of it again. There might be some
lasting brain damage, headaches... we'll have to do regular checkups to make sure nothing
swells..." The doctor's words fade into the background, replaced by an all too familiar static. She's
surrounded by a group of mournful college students and as per protocol, remains a steady rock of
professionalism and respect. "I'm sorry."

Before anyone can say anything, Clementine raises a hand in peace and murmurs, "Thank you for
your help."

The doctor nods and leaves with a few last words, "She's unconscious at the moment, but two
people at a time can go visit her."

Sophie's head snaps up and no one argues with her when she grabs Ruby's hand and pulls her
towards Brody's room. The others sit to wait for their turn, but Clementine turns on her heel and
gets in her car. She turns it on with a few tries and throws it into reverse, and when she nearly hits
Violet going forward, she curses.

The blonde stares at her, seemingly out of breath, and taps on the driver's window, "I'm coming
with you."

"What?" She glares.

"To find Marlon. I'm coming with you," she pauses and throws a thumb over her shoulder. "And so
is he."

Louis is gasping for breath behind her, holding his side and putting up a hand, "Wait... dear god,
please wait."

If not for the fact that she knew they'd look for him alone, she wouldn't have unlocked her doors
and let them get in. Not even if they would see first hand how angry she could get.

"So where are we going first?" Violet asks as she straps in.

"Marlon's apartment," she responds curtly as she pulls out of the parking lot, grip too tight on the
steering wheel.

The drive over is silent except for the quiet music from the radio playing through the speakers.
Louis occasionally hums along, staring out at the city, and Clementine can't help but question how
he remains calm.
By the time they get there, it's around nine and the hallway to his apartment is empty, so Clementine takes the risk of picking his lock. Neither of her friends question it, though they exchange a glance that makes her a little uneasy. It's dark inside, a few bottles on his coffee table, a stained couch in the middle of the room, facing a small TV. Pushed in a corner is a twin sized bed, opposite that a small kitchenette, a TV table folded up against the wall. But no Marlon.

Despite that, Clementine takes a step forward and is immediately plagued with a sense of unease and anxiety. Something was wrong, something was very, very wrong. And then she sees it. From the corner of her eye, there's a figure stuck to the ceiling, holding a knife, face covered in a mask. Feigning ignorance, she turns and closes the door, shaking her head.

"Nothing to be found here. Do either of you know where he usually is?" Clementine asks, leaning against the door as she swallows her fear.

"Um," Louis shifts nervously. "There's this strip club he goes to when he's stressed."

"Are you kidding me?" Violet groans, rolling her eyes. "Just when I thought Marlon couldn't be more of a douche."

"He's-" He stops suddenly, biting his tongue. "Yeah."

The search for Marlon turns up with nothing more than an uneasy feeling; he’s nowhere to be found, the only evidence of him being his apartment. As Spider-woman, Clementine does some investigating, going through his credit cards and other personal information to see where he could’ve gone. Except all his credit cards have been canceled and his phone hasn’t pinged a cell tower in hours. It’s so sudden that it makes her wonder if something else is going on.

Chapter End Notes

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