Chaplain, Exile, Paragon

by Victorygin

Summary

After Percy is thrown out of vault 101, she must find her footing in the wastes. Along the way she is forced to question justice, redemption, forgiveness, and herself. Trust is not an easy thing to come by, nor is it easy keep.

This story is complete but comments are always welcome <3

Notes

I do not own fallout 3, or any real world aspects mentioned in this work.
You can find me at: http://victoryygin.tumblr.com/

See the end of the work for more notes
The image below is Percy using the Fallout 4 character creation menu; You can find more like it on my Tumblr.

Six people; She had shot five people, and just finished beating another a woman to death with the butt end of her childhood BB gun. Percy wiped the blood on her jumpsuit, taking deep breaths to try and calm her nerves. The woman had come at her swinging a bat, and without thinking, Percy had retaliated. She just kept on coming, with a desperately wild look in her eye…

She couldn’t stop her hands from shaking.

The lone figure stood up and looked over the horizon to try and distract herself. Everything within sight was in different tones of green, grey, and brown. Dead trees and the occasional burnt husk of a house littered the landscape. Off in the distance to the south east was what looked to be a giant mound of scrap metal.

‘Looks like better shelter than a roofless old shack…It's going to get dark soon too.’

Looking to her pip-boy with a mixture of fear and determination, the exile took a few strides in that direction before stopping short and looking back at the corpse of her former attacker.

‘She won’t have use for her equipment anymore…God forgive me.’
“Welcome to Megaton; I say this to everyone, and I want to make it clear that I don’t want any trouble from you. I have enough trouble keeping hell at bay already, and I won’t tolerate more chaos than there already is.”

The self-appointed sheriff surveyed the new arrival with a wary eye. His weapon was holstered, but Percy doubted his reflexes were slow.

“I don’t plan on making a mess of things, believe me. I’ve had enough of that already.”

Her eyes scanned what had turned out to be a city of sheet metal and pipes.

After arriving at her destination, she nearly turned back around after seeing the Securetron at the entrance. Percy had a general suspicion of robots, ever since Andy had nearly taken off her finger on her tenth birthday. Her father had patched her up well enough, all the while yelling about having that hovering death machine decommissioned. Her finger was fine, but the event had instilled in her a distrust of anything non-sentient that moved on its own.

“I’ve had a pretty eventful day, is there anywhere I can stay for the night?” She asked, wearily.

“The bar is always open, but not always free. I suggest the common house if you’re fine with sharing the lodgings with other travelers. Apart from that I can’t suggest much unless you get hurt enough to land yourself with the good doctor.” The Sheriff seemed less suspicious of this new wanderer, but maintained a firm gaze.

“Thank you, I think I need a drink now, anyway. I promise not to cause any trouble, but if I should see some, who should I call for?” Percy shifted from foot to foot, trying to ease the pain from both.

The Vaultie was eager for the conversation to be over so she could at least find a wall to lean against. She had been up for a while, and felt like she had been running the whole time.

“The name is Simms, but you can call me Sheriff” He replied sternly.

“Right. Nice to meet you, Sheriff.” With that, the former vault dweller headed in the direction of what she now saw was Moriarty’s saloon.

Gob stood at the bar, scrubbing away at the counter. Some wasteland asshole had decided the old wooden surface would be a perfectly reasonable place to leave their damn gum.

‘I’ll never get this shit out of the cracks…’

“Another scotch and ice over here, please.” A bored voice drawled from the smoke filled side room, just out of Gob’s view.

“Right away, sir” He called, tossing down his old rag in mild frustration.

He didn’t know why Burke asked for ice every time when he knew perfectly well that all he would get was slightly chilled at best. As he placed the drink on the counter, Gob called to the man in the corner

“Your drink is ready, Mr. Burke.”

…
Burke made no movement to get up, and Gob rolled his eyes and looked to the ginger in the corner. She got the hint and strode over, grabbed the glass, and put on her best sway as she went to serve the man.

“Here you go, sweetie.” She purred, the drink hovering eye level with Burke.

He took it without looking her in the eye. Instead, keeping them on her legs, he reached out and stroked her knee as he replied,

“Thank you, I don’t suppose you’re free tonight?”

“You know I always am when you come to call, baby.”

“Of course; well I hope to see you soon.”

Nova gave a small smile and walked back to her corner. She couldn’t stand Burke. It wasn’t as if he looked at her differently than anyone else, or was especially rough in the sack—God knows Jericho was the winner there—but there was something about him that unnerved her; like he jacked it to patriotic anthems in his spare time. The music suddenly became incoherent amongst waves of static. Gob grumbled and began fiddling with the radio antenna. After a few minutes of this, He slammed his fist on the top

“Come on, dammit! Work!”

“Give it up, Gob! It’s the station, not the radio. Change it to the Enclave. That one works fine.”

Gob hated Enclave radio; it was nothing but nationalistic Brahmin shit, babbling about hope and baseball and playing the same song on a loop.

As he gave up and moved back to the gum problem, the door opened, flooding the bar with unwelcome light. There stood the cleanest person he had seen…well second he’s ever seen. She looked a little familiar in the face, but the outfit was a dead giveaway.

‘I guess this is James’ kid.’

The girl walked over to the bar and practically fell onto the nearest stool. Resting her head in her hands, she mumbled through her fingers,

“Can I get a whiskey, please?”

As Gob set the drink before her, she finally looked up and met his eyes.

Surprise, fear, realization, and then curiosity played across her face as she sat frozen.

“Thanks.” She said, after the pause.

Gob moved the glass away before she could reach it.

“Hold up pal. Eighteen caps first.”

“What?”

“Caps. Money. No caps, no drink”

Gob was fairly certain he was the first ghoul this girl had ever seen, and was more than a little surprised she hadn’t acted more violently at his appearance. He didn’t wish to disturb this trend,
however, so he remained silent. The matter of payment was a different matter. He didn’t want Moriarty coming after him

“I don’t have any money; do you know where I can get some?”

“Moira closed up an hour ago.”

Nova had been tired of Gob’s general attitude all day.

“Christ, Gob. Trade with her and sell the shit to Moira tomorrow.” Nova was pretty irritated about the GNR signal too, and watching this new girl was a good distraction.

Blushing, he grimaced and turning back to the Vaultie.

“Fine, what do you have on you?”

Percy had dug through some old world wreckage on her way to Megaton. It was all so interesting to her, she couldn’t just leave it. Not that she had expected any of it to be of use to anyone else.

Finally, after trading some cherry bombs and old glue, she had a drink in her hand and her nerves were at last calming down a bit.

“Thanks, do you have a name?” Percy smiled slightly at the man before her.

“Gob…so?”

“So, what?”

“So aren’t you going to ask?”

Percy giggled as the whiskey took effect.

“I was pretty curious; unless it’s leprosy, whatever you have wasn’t covered in dad’s medical books.”

Gob’s expression remained the same. He wasn’t sure what to make of her yet.

"Oh crap is it leprosy? I’m so sorry!"

"No, no, I’m a ghoul, miss."

Percy’s face went from incredibly apologetic to the same curiosity it held earlier.

"I’ve never heard of that one before, is it a post war condition?"

"It’s not a damn condition, I’m not human anymore." Gob was not in the mood to discuss the shit turn his life had taken. He wished this bitch would just finish her drink and leave.

Percy seemed to have caught onto that. Downing her drink, she left for the door, hoping her legs would remember how drunk she was after she left the premises.

No such luck. She bumped her head on the door as she opened it, earning a laugh from other patrons.

The common house was full of men, eyeing her the way she had looked at her drink earlier. She ended up finding a dark corner between the supply shop and the armory to huddle in. Hugging her
bag, She let the whiskey sooth her into a much needed slumber.

Percy woke up to the sun beating into her eyes and what sounded like a town crier in the distance. Carefully getting up, she stretched the pins and needles out of her legs.

'Might as well try and sell some of this if I want to eat.'

Squinting into the light, she read the sign painted on the side of the metal shack she’d slept next to.

*Crater Side Supply*

'Someone has an interesting sense of humor.' she thought, wryly

It had been difficult to miss the giant atomic bomb in the town center, and Percy was beginning to wonder if anywhere was safe in this new environment.

Opening the door, Percy was greeted with a loud blast, and grey smoke "don’t mind the smoke! It’s perfectly harmless!" A tall redhead with ash and burn marks all over the front of her jumpsuit appeared from around the corner.

Recovering from the shock, Percy cleared her throat. "Sorry... if I’m interrupting something, I’d like to sell some stuff."

"Sure, sure--wait. You’re that vault dweller aren’t you? This is incredible! What was *that* like? Why did you leave!?"

Percy didn’t like where this conversation had gone so quickly, and made a note to find new clothes.

“Yeah, that’s right; it was pretty cramped and not so bright. But back to the thing about selling this stuff…”

“Right, of course, one man’s trash is another man’s treasure! What do you have?”

Percy looked through her bag.

There were a few vault jumpsuits, Butch’s tunnel snake jacket, some weapons, medicine, and a few odds and ends.

As soon as Percy set down a couple pilot lights, Moira’s eyes grew to the size of saucers.

“Oh my! I need those! I’ll give you 10 caps for each.”

*That’s hardly enough for one meal’* Percy felt her heart sink.

“I won’t suppose there are other ways to earn more caps?”

Moira tried to contain her excitement at these words.

“Actually, I’ve wanted to perform some survival based experiments for a while now. Problem is, I need someone else for the foot work, and mister lazy over there,” She shot a glare at the intimidating man in the corner, “Is against getting a *tiny bit* irradiated for the purpose of science!”

“...Um…just how irradiated are we talking here?”
Percy was fully aware that her stomach was warping her sense of self-preservation as it twisted inside her, but she didn’t care.

“Oh not much! Say, four hundred rads. Six hundred would be ideal. And I’d compensate for it, but that’s a bit more dangerous.”

Wincing at the thought, Percy negotiated “Throw in a decent meal and some radiation medicine, and I’ll do it.”

“Thank you! You’ve got yourself a deal! And I’ll even flush out that pesky radiation for you!”

Six hundred rads was far worse than she could have ever possibly anticipated. Percy clutched the rusted out railing as she made her way back up to Moira’s. She had puked once, and now could only stop to dry heave every few steps. Her insides seared and her skin felt like it was about to melt off.

“Oh you poor dear! Now, while the feeling is still fresh: how are you feeling?” Moira asked, slipping an IV of orange liquid into Percy’s vein.

“I feel like every cell in my body is inciting a rebellion…” She replied, too exhausted and nauseous to ask for food.

“Well in a way, they kinda are.” Moira said, distractedly tapping away at her computer terminal.

“Excuse me?”

“Yeah; funny thing really, your genetic make-up seems to be oddly similar to the genes required for ghoulification, in that they are reacting differently to radiation than the normal human being…” Pausing and looking up, she corrected, “Well, more interesting than funny…”

“Am I going to become a ghoul?” Percy asked, more than a little afraid to hear the answer.

“No! Well, probably not; but you do have a teeny tiny case of mutation…”

“How so?” She asked, Unable to hide the horror creeping onto her face.

“Oh, it’s not a bad mutation, per-say. Radiation will heal your minor cuts and scrapes. And the bigger the cut, the more radiation. Almost like a ghoul, but not quite. Really handy out in the wastes.”

While she knew Moira was probably giving her own version of reassurance, it didn’t help much. However, eager to distract herself from the residual pain, she asked,

“So…can you tell me more about ghouls?”

Nova was enjoying a cigarette after her latest “job”. It was one of the few pleasures she had these days since Silver had gone AWOL. She wasn’t sure whether it was the girl, or the jet she made, but Nova missed something. Burke hadn’t bothered her since that vault girl had shown up a couple days ago, so that was a plus. Nova had heard from some travelers about her headed in the direction of the raider’s food mart camp yesterday.
'Well at least she won't be messing with Gob anymore' she thought, assuming the girl to be dead.

As if on cue, the girl walked right through the door. With a bigger gun and leather armor instead of the blue jumpsuit she had first been seen in. She went straight for the bar.

"Gob, can I get a whiskey please?"

She was clear spoken as she strode to the bar and confidently sat down. There was determination in her eyes as she reached for Gob's hand when he moved to set down her drink.

"Hey! wha-!"

"Hmm…" She mused, while examining his hand.

"While there does appear to be missing skin, that isn’t to say your muscles are completely exposed; there’s this thin membrane, see? That leads me to believe that aspect of ghoulification is more cosmetic than purely detrimental...Tell me sir, can you still breath through the two usual orifices? Are you able to eat, drink, and relieve yourself without obstruction? Is your blood red, and do you require sleep?"

Percy asked all these things with a professional tone, neither releasing his hand nor his eye contact.

"What? Yeah! To all those things! So what?!"

Gob was not comfortable by any stretch of the word. First of all, he wasn’t used to people touching him, unless you counted Moriarty throwing him around. Second, last time he saw this weirdo, he had essentially kicked her out of the bar. Anyone else probably would have shot at him for it.

"Well based on that information," She continued, "I have concluded what while you do have a severe case of ghoulification, you are still completely human."

"Quit messing with me smoothskin, I can't age; radiation fucking heals me. You call that human?"

"Those are more like perks though, don't you think?"

For the first time during this interaction, Gob noticed the vault dweller’s hands were way warmer than they should be—practically burning, but in a pleasant familiar way.

"Yeah, and how do you figure?"

"Who hasn't dreamt of immortality?? And as for the irradiated healing," she suddenly released his hand, pulled a knife from her belt and drew it deep across her arm.

"Whoa, HEY! 'What is this girl's problem'?!"

However, within a few moments, the bleeding stopped and the cut sealed into a thin scar

"As for the healing, I can see several advantages to that."

Percy smiled and reached for the whiskey bottle

"So what do I owe you for this?"

"Fifteen caps."

"Yesterday the drinks were eighteen, weren’t they?"
Gob was thunder struck. Over the course of a minute, the vault girl had touched him without flinching, looked him in the eye without a grimace, and healed like a ghoul right before his eyes."

"For you, it’s fifteen. What’s your name, smoothskin?"

"Percy" she said, smile broad across her face.
After that, Gob and Percy talked about their not so convenient lives. Gob recounted how he used to live in Underworld with his adopted mother, and Percy discussed the more positive memories of vault 101.

Nova watched from a distance, deciding that the girl wasn’t so bad now that she was able to stand on her own two feet. Finishing off her drink, Percy bought a few stims and headed for the door. Before she could reach it however, she was stopped by Burke.

Nova turned her attention to Moriarty, who was stumbling out of his room upstairs, with a hangover.

“Oi, Nova sweet, I could really use you up here!” He grinned, eyes barely managing to focus on her.

“Sure, Hun…” She turned away from Burke’s pathetic attempts at putting the moves on Percy.

“Now who’s the pretty little lady, over there with the prick in the suit?”

“Percy? She just showed up a few days ago, she’s from the vault.” Nova mused.

“Percy, huh? You don’t get a lot of ladies with that name…” Moriarty rubbed his beard and looked long and hard at Percy as she stroked Burke’s cheek with a seductive smile playing across her face. She whispered something in his ear.

Burke became very excited, clasping her hands before rushing out the door. ‘True to form, James’ daughter has quite the way with words, and a body to boot.’

Moriarty watched as Percy talked to the West girl, who handed her a letter with hopeful eyes.

“Well if it isn’t his own flesh and blood! I was wondering if I would ever see you again!”

Forgetting about his plans with Nova entirely, Moriarty came down the stairs, all smiles and joviality.

Percy turned to meet him and was immediately confused

“I’m sorry?”

“Why, the last time I saw you, you were but a wee babe, all swaddled up and crying. Look at you now!”

“Oh…you knew my father then?”

“But of course! James and I go way back! Why it was just a week ago that he came through here; strange you weren’t with him at the time…”

“You saw him? Did he tell you where he went?”

“You know he did just that…funny though, I can’t seem to remember exactly where he was headed off to.”

Moriarty watched her—saw the hurt and confusion. He saw the realization and subsequent cynicism grow on her face. She knew just what he was playing at with this.

“Is there anything that might jog your memory?” She sighed.
“Yes, actually,” ‘hook and line, old boy!’ ‘There’s this old friend of mine, currently residing in Springdale down the ways. Get me the money I…lent her, and well, convince her of the error of her ways. Then I’m sure I’ll be able to remember where the dear old dad was headed.”

“Right…I’ll see what I can do about that then.” Percy looked troubled but not entirely against the idea, as she turned back around and left the bar.

Percy had found Silver easily enough. She was in one of the few houses that Percy hadn’t turned upside down scavenging previously. Silver was rude, but her situation was understandable.

“Down worry about it miss, if I can fool Mister Burke then I can fool that Irish pimp.” Percy giggled, taking another swig of her drink.

Silver smirked. “Don’t call me miss, I’m only twenty-five, you cheeky bitch.”

They had been talking in Silver’s kitchen over wine.

“Of course; I don’t suppose you’ve seen my dad though? Middle aged guy, grey hair, my face? Bastard left me in a vault with people shooting at me!”

At this, Percy slammed her palm in the table.

“Can’t say I have,” said Silver lighting up a cigarette. “But if you’re so mad at him, why hunt him down?”

“He’s my dad, and I need answers. He’s never done something crazy like this before, so I figure he’s gotta have a reason...” She replied, running a hand through her hair.

Percy had long crossed the line to drunk, but she had to get home before it got too dark.

“Well it was nice meeting you, Silver; I’ll tell Moriarty I killed you, but you should probably get out of here in case he sends someone else to check.”

Stumbling into Megaton still a little tipsy was probably not the wisest decision, considering all the steep walks and rusted metal everywhere. But that was the situation Percy had sound herself in.

She shielded her eyes against the setting sun, gaze drifting over to the bomb in the center of town. Confessor Cromwell—who she had originally thought was a town crier—was doing his usual proclaiming of “Atom’s word”. He had practically wet himself when he first saw her drinking water from the pond where bomb rested, calling her a glorious child whose devotion will reach Atom in “The Final Blast”.

Percy had been tempted to inform him that where she was from, she had also been clergy. However, she didn’t wish to get into a theological debate with someone whose mind had been so thoroughly seared by his constant proximity to the bomb.

Instead, she sat down on a pipe and waited for him to turn in for the night. With Burke gone, she could disarm the bomb and not feel so unsafe. The vault girl walked up to the bomb, ignoring the tick of her Geiger counter, looking for some sort of opening into the inner workings. After giving it a
once over, she pulled out a few important looking components.

‘There. Maybe Simms won’t be eyeing me all the time now…’

With that, she started for Moriarty’s to give him the “good” news.

Gob was rubbing away at a dirty glass—anything to look busy during the slow times—when Percy swayed in, grin plastered on her face.

“Howdy friend, can I get you a drink?”

“I’m afraid I’m a bit ahead of you there Gob, but maybe later. Where’s Moriarty? I need to talk to him.”

Gob’s face became serious as he leaned in.

“You didn’t really off Silver, did you Smoothskin?”

Percy smiled and shook her head, but said out loud, “Oh course I did, she put up a fight didn’t she? But I have the money here and I need to find my dad.”

“Right…well Moriarty’s in his office.”

“Thank you” and she made her way past him.

After a few minutes however, Gob began hearing the sounds of someone bumping around and muffled noises. He was tempted to go in and check, but didn’t wish to incite Moriarty’s wrath in the process if it was nothing.

Everyone in the bar jumped, however, when they then heard three consecutive shots fired.

Gob froze in fear before rushing for the back.

The door was locked!

He slammed himself against it until the old wood finally gave.

“What the hell!?”

Percy was in the corner near the back door.

Moriarty was lying in a growing pool of his own blood.

“He…he came at me…I tried to stop him, but he kept coming…Gob I didn’t mean to do it…”

She began shaking as she stifled a sob.

“Perse you need to get out of here. I’ll calm things down but you need to disappear for a few days…” Gob looked at the scene, wanting to comfort her, but not wanting to step over his boss’s corpse to do so.

She nodded, suddenly rushing forward and hugging him tightly.

“Thank you, Gob… I’m sorry, I’m so sorry!”
And with that she ran out the back door.

Gob looked over the dead man before him.

He should have felt joy and elation. He was free! But he knew nothing was ever that easy; work had to be done.

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“What the hell happened here!”

Simms was furious.

Everyone had cleared out of the bar by now. Earlier, Walter had gone to get the sheriff while the other patrons had rushed after Gob and discovered Colin’s body. No one had seen where Percy went, but it was clear she was the killer.

After the initial shock of being embraced by Percy, Gob had pushed everyone out with the help of a grim faced Nova; But Simms couldn’t be kept away from the scene.

“Moriarty had tried to force himself on Percy, sir.”

“And did you see that happen, or are you just defending your little friend? We all know you hated Colin, Gob.”

Nova spoke up. “Moriarty keeps tabs on everyone, maybe there’s proof on his computer.”

Having witnessed Percy and Gob’s discussion earlier, Nova was relieved to know Silver was ok, and wanted to help keep the newcomer out of trouble.

“…I’ll see if Moira can hack it, but if there isn’t anything there, Percy isn’t going to be welcome here anymore. I can’t have her causing any more trouble.”

Gob needed a drink.

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Percy didn’t stop running until she got to Vault 101. It was almost daylight and she couldn’t run anymore. She went into the cave entrance, and upon seeing the locked vault door, collapsed staring at the giant vault door. She was at a loss. Everything in this world was trying to kill her or worse, and she hated having to kill to defend herself! But what other choice was there?

She began digging through her bag for something to eat, when she found Lucy West’s letter.

‘I almost forgot about this…This should keep me away for at least a week…I hope Gob is ok…”

——

Arefu ended up being yet another crime scene.

“So you haven’t seen Ian West since yesterday, and this…family has been terrorizing you for weeks now?”
Percy listened intently to Evan King, the closest thing to a protector the town had.

She was a little concerned about no longer being horrified at seeing corpses lying around. Was it good that she was adjusting?

“The Family lives in Meresti station, but that’s miles away!” Evan was livid, barely able to talk as he clutched at his gun.

“I really need to deliver this note, so if West is alive, I’ll see what I can do about bringing him back. Is there another one closer by that’s connected to Meresti, maybe?”

“Seneca is nearby, but are you sure you can handle the Family? I don’t want more people dying.”

Percy grimaced “Well I don’t exactly have anywhere else to go at the moment.”

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**Two Days Earlier**

“Charon.” Ahzrukhal wheezed from behind the bar.

The so named ghoul glared up from his corner.

‘So it’s finally time again.’

Charon couldn’t deny he was excited; these instances were the few times he was allowed out alone, and the job wasn’t a particularly hard one, either.

“Charon, it seems I’m running low on ultra-jet. Kindly go to Murphy’s and see if he has anymore.”

“As you wish” Charon growled, pushing off the wall.

Exiting the large double doors, Charon took a step into the bright hot sunlight. God, he always forgot how wonderful it felt.

“Oh hey, Charon. Time for another shipment, huh?” Willow asked, leaning against the wall.

Nodding before reaching out his hand, Charon grunted “Got one to spare?”

Willow smirked, pulling out a single cigarette from the carton she kept at her feet.

The smoke filled his lungs, and he exhaled through his nose hole, enjoying the two hundred year old after-taste.

“Hurry back, will ya? Snowflake is a lousy lay without his jet.” Willow called after him.

Charon smirked back before making his way north.

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**Present**

Percy crept through the cave leading to Meresti. Squinting in the dark light, she stopped short as she heard shuffling and clicking nearby. Just as she turned on her pip-boy light, she came face to face with what appeared to be a giant humanoid, crab.
“Shit!” Percy stumbled back, landing on her butt. She reached for her submachine gun, firing a few successful rounds into its face.

This at least slowed it down enough for her to get back on her feet...And for another one to appear.

‘Fuck’s sake...’ Percy fired off a few more rounds before running back and switching to grenades.

Adrenaline jumped, thrumming in her ears as she ran for the ladder. She climbed to the top, trying to avoid the bright green ooze dripping down. Un-picking three, she threw them toward the rushing mirelurks before she clung to the ladder with all her might. Bracing herself, she was barely able to hold on when the grenades finally went off below her.

Jumping down once the dust had settled, she went over to examine the bodies. The second one twitched and Percy fired a few more rounds into its face before harvesting the meat.

“Welcome to Meresti” The man’s voice was smooth yet menacing.

“I’m looking for Ian, is he still alive?” Percy was a little surprised at how peacefully she was received.

“Of course, he’s here for his safety, after all.”

“His safety? There are two corpses in back in Arefu that would argue differently if they could.”

Vance bristled at this “Do not find fault in Ian for that, it is not so easy controlling one’s base urges without the proper training.”

“What are you talking about?”

“We here are not like you, human. We cannot sustain ourselves on the food of the old world, or the new. We thrive in different ways.”

“If not food, then what? Please Vance, I want to understand.”

Vance calmed at this “We thrive on the blood of the living: human, brahmin—so long as it is mammal. We have tended towards surviving on Arefu’s cattle stock, but then Ian had his...slip up.”

Percy’s blood went cold “He killed his parents.”

Vance turned away, looking over the subway balcony “As I said before, don’t find fault in him for that. If we had known he was one of us, we would have helped him sooner; His parents might have even been spared.”

“Look, can I go talk to him please? His sister is worried.”

“He is an adult so I won’t stop you, just know that if you cause any trouble, I will not stop my family.”

“I don’t think you get it—I’m a monster! I murdered my own parents! Lucy’s parents! How can I even face her after this kind of betrayal?!” Ian roared, slamming his fist against the wall.
“Ian…” Percy started toward him, trying to calm him down.

“No!” He jerked away from her touch. “Hell, I might even lose control and eat you too!”

Percy continued toward, pretty soon he would have to push her away if he wanted her to stop her advance.

“What you did…was a mistake. And if you could, I’m sure you’d take it back. But running away from your sister won’t help anything. She loves you, and in this world, families need to stick together.”

Placing her palms on Ian’s shoulders, Percy said, “I’m not asking you to leave your new family, but don’t shut out the old.”

With this, she placed Lucy’s letter in his hand and left.
Chapter 3

Charon stepped into the dark subway. Murphy and his bodyguard would probably still be up, but he didn’t want to risk disturbing them if they were…otherwise occupied. He was just about to head into a side room to sleep when he heard the creaking of a manhole, and a woman’s voice.

A smoothskin’s voice

“Murphy? I found some Sugar Bombs for you; you still up?”

Charon rounded the corner to find the palest, scrawniest woman he had ever seen.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“What about you?” She replied, hand hovering over her gun.

“I asked you first, smoothskin.” Charon, too, itched for his gun.

“I’m Murphy’s new raw material supplier. Is he out?”

“Quit looking like y’all are about to shoot up the place, I’m right here.”

Murphy came out of the back room, putting on his glasses with Barrett following close behind.

“Ahzrukhal needs more jet.” Charon growled out walking past the girl.

“It’s three in the fucking morning, Charon. I’ll have fifty inhalers for you tomorrow, but tonight, it’s three. In the fucking. Morning.” He turned to the girl “Same to you, Percy; super glad that you have more Sugar Bombs, really. But you’re not getting a single damn cap until at least eight.”

“Right, sorry; it’s hard telling time in a subway…” hands up in defense, the smoothskin going by Percy, backed out of the room...And went right for the room Charon had planned to sleep in.

“And where the hell are you going, smoothie?” Charon came up behind her.

“I’m going to sleep. I’ve just finished setting up an alliance between Arefu and fucking Vampires. I’ve had a bit of a long day, and I’m understandably tired. Nice to meet you too, by the way.”

Too exhausted to notice the confused look on his face, Percy went to the farthest corner. Curling into fetal position hugging her bag, she went to sleep.

Charon grumbled as he lay out is mat.

Turning over restlessly, he stared at her sleeping form for a few moments.

How the hell did she manage to sleep like that?

He had never seen such a young scavenger before. Furthermore, any dirt on her looked new—not engrained permanently into the skin like with other wastelanders. She also didn’t have any apparent scars.

Where the hell did she come from?
Percy set her pip-boy alarm to eight exactly last night, so she woke up to the vibrating sensation coming from her arm. Feeling the burning ache in her stomach, she scrambled to her feet, and immediately stumbled over the colossal form sleeping in the door way.

‘Wha- FUCK!’ As she fell, she felt her ankle gripped in a vice-like hold and yanked under a now alert and very angry ghoul. If it weren’t for her leather armor, her entire body would have been shredded against the sharp debris of broken metal, concrete and glass that littered the floor.

“Dammit, let me go!” Percy panicked, struggling against Charon’s hold. Landing a kick against his gut hard enough for his hands to loosen their grip, she quickly scrambled up from under him. Grabbing her gun, she turned back to face him with her sights leveled.

“What the hell was that for!?”

Charon may have been conscious, but he was not fully alert as he curled up holding his stomach.

“I could ask you the same thing.” He coughed as he climbed to his feet.

Percy suddenly felt very stupid. She was the one who had initiated the conflict this time. If she had allowed herself more time to fully wake up, she could have easily side stepped him.

‘Any other situation and it could have been a molerat or one of those mirelurk things…’

Her inner contemplation was interrupted by the sound of a stomach growling—one that wasn’t hers.

Charon face went from frustrated to exasperated.

“Umm…sorry ok? How about we go eat and forget about this?” Percy held out her hand as a peace offering.

“…Fine.”

Without thinking, Charon grabbed her tiny hand in his large one, and gave it a single shake.

As Percy passed him to start a camp fire in the nearby rusted out oil drum, Charon realized what had just happened.

She had initiated contact with a ghoul without hesitation.

He supposed he shouldn’t be too surprised, considering she was working with Murphy.

“Hey…Charon, right?” Percy called to him from around the corner.

He turned to see that she had managed to balance a cooking pot over the open fire by fitting a spatula through the handles on either side.

“I have tons of pork and beans here if you want some for, you know, the rude awakening and all.”

Ahzrukhal tended to avoid giving Charon anything but the caps necessary to procure ultra-jet, as he assumed the hungrier Charon became, the faster he would return to the Ninth Circle.

Charon simply nodded as Percy opened another can with her combat knife, adding it to the mix. The savory yet dusty aroma of two-hundred year old pork and beans filled the subway hall.
Murphy joined in a few minutes later, contributing some of his own food to the pot, and they all ate in silence.

Percy began helping Murphy fill empty jet inhalers as Charon and Barrett stepped out to take a smoke.

“So what’s up with Charon? He’s even grumpier than Barrett.”

Murphy snorted as he sealed the cap on an inhaler.

“He’s the bouncer at the only bar in Underworld. He’s been in that dump for at least fifty years and from what I can tell, he hates his boss.”

“Why doesn’t he just quit?”

“He’d have to tell you that one; he won’t tell me, and I’m not stupid enough to keep asking.”

The lone wanderer pursed her lips, but continued to work.

“How the hell did Murphy get a smoothskin to supply him with Sugar Bombs?”

Barrett and Charon were leaning against the side of the subway entrance, watching two molerats shuffle about in the distance.

“Your guess is as good as mine. She just showed up a couple days ago; said she was looking for the Family. When she noticed Murph’s set up, she got all excited and asked what he was working on. Murphy told her and said he needed Sugar bombs to make jet. She offered to give him whatever she finds for thirty caps a box. Pasty little bitch, isn’t she? Looks like she’s lived her entire life in a hole.” Barrett turned to him with a smirk.

Charon nodded in agreement before taking one last drag and extinguishing the cigarette butt beneath his boot. They went back inside to check on the others’ progress.

They were packing the last few inhalers into a metal box when the two gun men returned.

“…Seven boxes, so two hundred and ten caps…and another forty for assisting; when do you estimate you’ll be back around?”

“I’m not sure, a few weeks maybe? Moira wanted me to check out a fucking minefield near here, but I’ve got to head back to Megaton first to resupply…” Percy grimaced slightly at mentioning the city built around a bomb. The radio had said something about it being decommissioned.

“Right…Charon, I’ve got Ahzrukhal’s jet right here.” Murphy noticed the two walking in.

Charon handed him a bag of one thousand caps before shouldering the load and walking out without a word.

After five minutes at a brisk pace however, he heard the scavenging girl calling out after him. Slowing down but not stopping, he allowed for her to catch up with him.

“Hey! Charon! You’re headed to Underworld, right?”

“Right. And your point?”
“So, Megaton is on the way. Why not travel together, for a little while at least?” At this Percy blushed while keeping her eyes on the road.

Charon stopped short. His face was incredulous.

“Why would you want to do that?”

“Company? It’s a few days to Megaton, and last time I went this route, there were some super mutants. Anyone would feel safer with another person in that situation.” Percy blushed further as she added “And… I’m not entirely sure if I’m welcome back at Megaton, so if I’m not, I was hoping to follow you to the Underworld…”

Charon kept staring.

“…Look, I know we got off on the wrong foot… twice. So I won’t make you keep me company if you don’t want to… it was just an offer.” At this, Percy turned back to the road and started walking.

Still a little confused, Charon followed after her.

They had been on the trail for three hours by now. Despite being two feet shorter, Percy was a fast walker, so Charon didn’t need to slow his pace for her to keep up.

While the silence was wasn’t unpleasant, Charon decided to break it.

“So why do they call you Percy?”

“Hmm?” She scanned the horizon for potential threats

“Murphy and Barrett—Is it short for anything?”

“Yes,”

“…”

Percy made no move to elaborate.

“…So?”

“So what?”

Charon what getting frustrated. “So what is it fucking short for?”

“If I tell you, will you tell me why you don’t just quit if you hate your boss so much?”

Charon stopped short “Excuse me?”

Percy turned back to him “Murphy told me, but not why you don’t just quit. Anyway, I’m curious.”

Charon glared at her and moved ahead at a faster pace.

“He had no right telling you that. The damn junkie.” Charon growled out.

“Don’t get mad at him; I brought it up first. Your attitude I mean.”
“Are you always this intrusive?”

After a pause, Charon went on “Believe me, if I could, I’d leave the bastard.”

They walked in silence again for a few minutes before Percy spoke up again.

“I don’t care for my full name. My dad was really into Greek mythos, I suppose. It isn’t so bad I guess—just long. It’s Persephone.”

Charon snorted “You’re right that is fucking terrible.”

“You’re Charon and you work where? The Ninth Circle, right? Seems like fate was a bitch to the both of us, buddy.” Her reply was snarky, but the smile was back, and Charon wasn’t mad anymore.

The sun started to set. It was getting into the travelers’ eyes and making Charon anxious.

“Hey smoothskin, do you see any shelter ahead?”

“…Yeah, I think I see something in the distance…wait.” Percy stopped short and squinted ahead “Charon get down.”

“What are you talking about—Gah!”

A bullet ripped into his arm, causing him to drop the jet shipment

Raiders; He should have realized they would have noticed him travel back and forth carrying jet this many times.

Percy was crouching behind a boulder, occasionally jumping up to fire a few quick shots. Somehow a raider had gotten past her and was about to brain the vaultie with a lead pipe.

“Percy, look out!” Charon was quick to raise his weapon, despite the pain in his arm.

She turned just in time to see the raiders face explode, blood raining across her own. Shocked for only a moment, Percy switched to grenades and tossed two at the three remaining raiders.

One landed just ahead, and the other just behind the group.

Trapped, the raiders exploded in a blast of limbs and leather. Percy ran back to Charon once she saw that everything was all clear.

“Are you alright? I’m so sorry; I should have noticed them sooner!”

Charon picked the shipment back up, wincing at the pain in his arm. “I’m fine, let’s keep moving.”

‘Liar.’ Percy made a face, but decided not to argue further. “The raiders must have a base nearby. We can probably set up camp there.”

They walked ahead for a bit until they did indeed find the camp, but with four more raiders. Charon rushed them, not letting Percy get a shot in.

‘You’re not fooling anyone, you know.’
They found some mines, and along with the ones Percy had collected in Meresti, they were able to set up a perimeter. Percy was looking through and collecting supplies while Charon worked on starting a fire.

“So I found some tweezers, whiskey, scissors and a suture kit; are you going to let me look at your arm now?”

“I told you, I’m fine.” Charon kept working.

“It’s not like our trip is going to be slowed down by my tending to your wound. Plus, that bullet didn’t pass through your arm—it’s clearly still in there. Come on, my dad was a doctor; I know what I’m doing!”

Finally a flame started up. Charon sighed. Leaning back, he grudgingly looked at Percy expectedly. Percy set everything down next to him, got on her knees to get a better angle, and got to work.

“So ghouls don’t age right? How old are you then?”

Charon didn’t reply, simply watched the fire.

“Ok…” Percy decided not to push any further.

“Where did you come from?”

Percy paused at her work.

“Come on, smoothskin. For someone so nosey, you can’t share a little bit of your life? It’s pretty clear you aren’t from around here.”

Percy poured whiskey over the wound before talking over his silent curses.

“I came from Vault 101. I used to live there with my dad. I worked as a chaplain. Funny right? I think I drink and swear too much to fit the part, but that isn’t what the G.O.A.T said. Anyway, a couple weeks ago, my dad decided to leave the vault.”

“And you went with him?”

“No, I don’t know where he is. I was chased out by gunfire after I shot the security chief. He was torturing my friend on her own father’s orders. I have no clue where my dad is, and no idea where to start looking. The last man who might have known is dead.”

“Oh yeah? What happened to him?”

“I shot him. He…tried to take advantage of me.”

Percy was finally stitching up the wound when Charon spoke up “I’m two-hundred and twenty-six. It took a year before the ghoulification took hold. It happened pretty fast after that. I’ve been in Ahzrukhal’s…employ for 50 years now.”

Percy leaned back, examining her handy work. Taking a deep breath and blowing it back out, she jumped up.

“I think we both need a drink.” She ran over to the pile of stuff she had collected. How she could not only fit it all in her duffle, but also keep pace with him on their journey was beyond him.
Fishing out a couple bottles scotch and vodka, she dropped them in front of him.

“Pick your poison! Do you think GNR reaches this far?” Percy began fiddling with the dials on her pip-boy.

“I doubt it. I heard their dish got fucked.” Charon reached for the scotch.

After a bit of static, *Anything Goes* came through.

Percy smirked in triumph and began swaying to the music.

“They didn’t have this in the vault, just a lot of patriotic crap. The religious texts had a few hymns, but those weren’t so…lively.”

“Sooooo, bingo bango bongo I don’t wanna leave the Congo oh, no no nooo”

After polishing off a bottle of vodka all on her own, a very plastered vaultie was now dancing and spinning around the fire.

Charon was pretty tipsy after a bottle himself, but drugs and alcohol don’t affect ghouls as strongly as humans, which was a blessing and a curse. At least he still had most of his inhibitions.

“Hey, Charon? Did they play this before the war?”

“Of course they did. Smoothskin. Music wasn’t made *after* the war.”

Charon was contentedly leaned against an old tire. He loved times like these: when he had the freedom to do what he wanted without Ahzrukhal’s strict orders. And what little time he had left in this state was made more pleasant by his pretty companion.

‘Pretty?’ Charon mentally shrugged ‘*Every smoothskin is pretty, comparatively speaking*...’

Exhausted, Percy collapsed next to him, looking up at the stars.

“The moon is said to get about four centimeters farther away each year. It must have been HUGE before the war.”

Charon looked up. “Actually it looks a little bigger now…I wonder what caused that...”

“Who know...?” Percy stretched and yawned.

“Shouldn’t you, miss fun-fact?”

“I’m a chaplain, not an astrophysicist.”

Charon snorted, causing Percy to hike herself up and look at him.

“What’s so funny, big guy?”

“Nothing, it’s before your time, anyway. And don’t call me ‘Big Guy’; you’re just short, smoothskin.”

When Percy didn’t reply, He looked over and found her curled up, sound asleep.
Chapter 4

After a late start, and ensuing hangover, the travelers were able to begin again on their journey around noon with the help of a mentat dose each.

“Well here we are,” Percy ran ahead and called up to the Sniper nest.

“Hey Stockholm, if I try going inside, will you have to shoot me?”

“You’re fine Percy; Simms took a look at Moriarty’s computer. That guy was by no means innocent. And after the sheriff found out about the bomb…well let’s just say more people love you than hate you.”

Percy let out a sign of relief, before turning back to Charon, a little sad.

“Guess this is goodbye then. Thanks again for keeping me company.” Percy held out her hand.

“Thanks for stitching up my arm, smoothskin.” Giving it a firm shake—no longer unnerved by her lack of aversion.

“And hey, maybe I’ll go see D.C. sometime.” She said a little hopefully.

“Yeah…” ‘God, I hope not.’ The last thing Charon wanted was for Percy to see him weak and servile around Ahzrukhal.

After that, they parted ways, and Percy rushed into Megaton—only to be immediately accosted by the town sheriff.

“Stockholm said you weren’t mad anymore; I hope this isn’t some kind of sick betrayal…” Percy nervously itched for her gun.

“I was livid at first, but you’re fine. Actually I wanted to give you this.” He held out a key hanging from a string.

“I heard from a few citizens you’ve been sleeping outside, and after what you did to the bomb, I think you deserve a more permanent place among us.”

Percy stood before the house. It was huge. She had expected something closer to Burke’s or Jericho’s—a one room shack. Turning the key, Percy had a suspicion that Simms gave the ladies bigger houses to keep them around.

Opening the door, she was met with a rather enthusiastic welcome.

“WELCOME HOME, MISTRESS.”

Percy shrieked, stumbling back.

“Wha-wha-what the hell?” ‘Grenades, I need grenades, but I can’t set them off here. Maybe I can kite it outside and take care of it there.’

“MASTER SIMMS INFORMED ME OF YOUR ARRIVAL. DO YOU WISH TO SET
HOSTILITY PROTOCOLS NOW, FOR SECURITY PURPOSES?”

‘Simms?...A handy man??’ “Umm…all persons not accompanied by me should be…forcefully removed from the premises, should they invade."

Percy got to her feet, trying to brush off her earlier performance.

“OF COURSE, MISTRESS! PERMISSION TO RETURN TO MY CHARGING STATION?”

“Yeah…I’m just here to drop off my things before I head to Moriarty’s.”

“I DON’T BELIEVE I’VE HEARD OF THAT ESTABLISHMENT, MISTRESS. HOWEVER, THERE IS A GOB’S SALOON DOWN THE WAY, IF YOU WISH TO GO THERE.”

Percy did a double take. “Gob’s Saloon?”

Without stopping to hear his reply, she rushed out to see this for herself.

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Gob was busily checking inventory. It had been a week since the incident, and things had been going surprising well. He supposed it was due to the amount of Children of Atom in Megaton, but business was going pretty well, despite the bar being run by a ghoul and a former prostitute.

Gob looked over to Nova, who was smoking a cigarette in her usual spot. She arranged the rooms now, and had stopped sleeping around since she didn’t have to. She looked over to him, and a smile played across her face. He blushed, turning back to the shelf.

Nova had a new respect for him since he so vehemently defended Percy’s name against Simms’ loud accusations. The very day after Moriarty had died Jericho had come storming in past closing time, demanding a drink—despite being at least four drinks in already. Gob hadn’t even hesitated to tell him off.

“Dammit Jericho, I got just this place.” he had said, grabbing Jericho by the collar.

“Thazz fiine, juz give me Ol’ Nova for the night…She’s worth a couple capsss, right?”

Jericho didn’t get another word in.

Gob’s fist hit him square in the jaw, knocking him right out. The ghoul stood over him, breathing hard. Looking to Nova, he said,

“Help me carry him out will you? I don’t want him waking up here…”

“Gob!” Percy was standing in the door. “Gob, you did it! Thank you!”

She ran past the bar, practically jumping into his arms.

“Whoa, Perse…easy.” Gob smiled, happy to see her again.

Nova watched, not too happy about this interaction. She was grateful to the wanderer, but she didn’t care for this new level of friendliness.
“So what are you doing to do, now that you have a roof?” Gob said as he set a drink down in front of her.

“I don’t know…Moriarty was the last person to know where my dad was headed. He’s gone, so I have no leads.”

“About that…Moriarty had some dirt on everyone who passed through town. Maybe he left some information in writing.”

“Gob…” Percy was looking anxious. “Can I have a look at his computer?”

Percy side-stepped the stain of dried blood on the rusted metal floor. Pulling up the named files, she found one titled “James (Vault 101)”. Her fingers shook as she pulled it up:

So, out of nowhere, James came back to Megaton. Since he stayed here before he asked me where the hell he could get a lay of the land and find out what’s going on in the world. I told him about Galaxy News Radio in the ruins of D.C., and that guy Three Dog. Then like that, he was gone again.

I remember the first time he showed up almost twenty years ago. I never expected someone to actually want to or be able to get INTO a vault, but he must have had his reasons. He had his kid with him, some baby that wouldn’t shut the fuck up. Normally I would have kicked someone like that out of my place, but he had a way with words. Then, like that, he ducks into Vault 101 and he’s gone for almost twenty years. Nice guy I guess, but never spends enough caps.

‘GNR, then…’ Percy’s mind drifted to the tall ghoul from D.C.

‘Well regardless, I need better equipment than what I’ve got. I guess it’s the minefield first, then D.C.’”

*Ching* A bullet embedded itself in the car Percy was hiding behind.

“Fuck! Listen old man, I’m not here to fight you! I was just sent to check the place out! Dammit old man, stop shooting!” Percy ran to the nearest house for cover as the car exploded—but not before another bullet found its target in her leg.

Moira had told her rumors about the area being haunted, but nothing about a retiree Sniper.

Percy winced against the pain, digging through her pockets for a shot of med-X.

‘I only have a couple mags left for my rifle...And I need to get closer if I’m going to use the submachine gun...shit I really don’t want to kill this guy.’

Just as she administered the dose, she realized the gunshots had stopped after the last explosion. Although, she did hear the faintest sound of footsteps…

Slowly, quietly, the lone wanderer readied her gun.

As soon as the man’s head came into view, she raised her weapon and aimed.

“Hold it! Before you shoot, hear me out! I just came here to grab a few mines for my boss—that’s it. I’m not a raider or slaver or anything bad. I don’t want to shoot you but I will if you keep shooting
Getting a better look, he looked frail, and he was shaking slightly, but there was no fear in his eyes.

“They killed everyone, and now they sent you to finish me off for taking out some of their own. You’ve got me right where you want me, so just shoot, stranger. I know when I’ve been had.”

Percy lowered her gun slightly. “No…that’s not it I swear.” She glanced around, uncomfortable.

“In fact, I already got some mines, so if you promise not to shoot me in the back, I promise to leave in peace and never come back.”

The sniper was not content with just this. Clutching his gun harder, the old man’s voice shoot as he spoke through his teeth, “That’s not good enough anymore! Just what am I supposed to do here, huh? Eventually they’ll just send more until they finally get me. I’m too old to keep living like this!”

Percy’s mind was reeling. On one hand, the blood dripping from her leg was a clear reminder of what the man had just tried to do. On the other hand, she felt too much pity for his situation. He was right; she couldn’t just leave him here with her conscience still intact.

“…How about you come with me? I live in Megaton. They have a common house you can stay in until you decide what to do, but you don’t have to stay here alone.”

As a sign of good faith, Percy slowly lowered her weapon. “I’ll holster mine, if you holster yours.”

After a moment’s pause, he did. Percy signed in relief before smiling warmly, trying to defuse the situation.

“Great; so what’s your name, friend?”

“Arkansas.”

“Nice to meet you, Arkansas, I’m Percy.”

Any raiders they encountered met a swift end at the barrel of Arkansas’s gun.

“Better fate than they deserve…” He would mutter this and the like to himself after checking to make sure each body was dead while Percy collected equipment to sell later.

On more than one occasion, Percy would hear him moan and talk to himself in his sleep, and was more than a little concerned she was traveling with someone not all there.

Two days later, they arrived.

“If you’re fine with waiting, I had better go get the sheriff and let him know you’re here.”

Arkansas had calmed down considerably since their first encounter, and was no longer so jumpy.

“Fine, just hurry.”

“Hey Vaultie! Who’s your friend down there?”

Percy looked up to see Stockholm coming down from his post.
“I see he’s carrying a sniper rifle. You trying to get me replaced with an older model, or what?”

Percy shifted from side to side, wincing when she put weight on her bad leg. It was still healing. “I found him in the minefield area while I was out on one of Moira’s jobs. He said everyone else from that area had been killed by raiders. His name is Arkansas and I’m gonna ask Lucas if it’s fine for him to stay around here for a bit.”

“…Arkansas? From Minefield? Damn Perse, he’d better stay, that’s my grandfather.”

“You just keep the town on its toes, don’cha?” Moira said as she patched up the Vaultie’s leg.

Stockholm and Arkansas had had a teary reunion a week ago. Arkansas had found himself a new home and a new job as sniper damn near upon arrival. Moira had allowed Percy a few days to recover from the last expedition before informing her of the contents of the next chapter.

“You want me to what?” Percy looked at the woman incredulously.

“Just injure yourself a bit, dear. I want to analyze the effects intense pain on one’s desire to survive. Doesn’t that sound interesting? The human body is just too fascinating!”

Throwing herself off a tall building had been frighteningly easy for Percy, and as she limped back up to the supply shop, she wondered if she should be more concerned at her apparent lack of self-preservation.

“Well, unless you’re referring to my nearly giving poor Maya a heart attack with my faux-suicide, I don’t know what you mean.”

“Oh, killing off that mean bartender, defusing the bomb, and reuniting a family, of course!”

Percy winced, thinking back to the first memory.

Nearly three weeks ago, she had walked into Moriarty’s office to tell him the situation with Silver had been resolved…

He strode up to her and she could smell the alcohol on his breath and suspected he was also very high based on his red eyes and constantly fidgeting fingers.

He walked past her, closing the door and locking it before he spoke.

“I’m afraid that won’t be enough to get me to talk, lass.”

Before she had time to react, he grabbed her by the shoulders and slammed her against the cabinet, attacking her neck with tongue and teeth while he kept his hand over her mouth to muffle her screaming.

‘No, No NO!’ Percy was in full blown panic mode as his other hand reached for her belt. He unholstered her gun and threw it to the side.

She struggled against him, but his sheer weight was overpowering her.

“Easy dear, maybe if you didn’t struggle so much, we could both have some fun…”

Grabbing her arms, he took is weight of her just enough that Percy saw her opportunity. With her
arms hoisted above her head, she slammed her heel into Moriarty’s crotch.

Scrambling for her gun in the far corner, she grabbed for it, turned around, and fired three shots without hesitation.

Shaking herself free of the recollection, Percy asked “Just how many more times am I going to have to injure myself for the sake of science?”

“Oh you don’t need to self-harm anymore! I’ve got all the information I need in that area! No, I actually want you to do some field research on the local wild life.”

Percy chose to ignore how she had enunciated the words ‘self-harm’.
Percy quietly repaired her assault rifle with trembling hands.

She hadn’t even found the so-called tepid sewers Moira had suggested she go to test the mole rat stick. She had, however, discovered centaurs and the strategic use super mutants had for them.

Huddled in a shop building, Percy paused in her tinkering, eyes wandering to the skeleton collapsed over the counter across from her. With a scream, she threw the gun down, frantically running her hands through her hair.

“Fuck. Shit…Fuck!!” her voice wavered with each added expletive. “I didn’t fucking ask for this! I was supposed to stay in the vault! I was going to baptize Amata’s kids eventually! I didn’t want dad to leave—I didn’t want to leave! I would have stayed! I would have stayed and married and…” the words died on her mouth. ‘That’s right…’

She slowly got up, picked up the gun and finished her repairs.

‘Moira’s job can wait. If dad thinks he can just walk out of my life with no explanation, he’s got another thing coming.’

With new found determination, she strode to the door, threw it open, and was met with heavy fire.

Energy weapons fired and bullets from the maw of machine guns howled through the air, and Sarah Lyons was right in the middle of it all. GNR just couldn’t seem to get a break these days.

“Dusk! Gallows! You need to flank more! Initiate Reddin don’t more so far ahead!”

More mutants were coming from behind, but before Lyons could even level her sights, they were taken out. By a civilian.

There was fire in her eyes as she gunned down two more in quick succession, but still another one came up behind her wielding a super sledge.

“Civilian, watch out!”

The stranger ducked just in time.

Screaming in frustrating, she rolled onto her back, firing straight into the mutie’s face as it came into view.

“Civilian, What the hell are you doing here?!”

“Helping you out.” She called running ahead.

They were nearing the GNR building “REDDIN, STAY BACK!”

It felt like the entire world shifted sideways as a behemoth mutant burst into the scene.
The civilian stopped dead. “Wha-What the hell is that?!”

“Behemoth! No time, grab the Fat Man!!”

The woman was quick to obey, running to the launcher in the middle of the square…clutched in Reddin’s arms

‘Reddin…’

Without hesitation, the stranger tore the weapon from the dead woman’s hands and fired off a nuke before the behemoth could get too close the other members of the Brotherhood. It turned on her ready to charge. The civilian was reloading the launcher but dropped the nuke at the last minute.

“Hey, over here!!” Sarah tried drawing its attention, blasting shots off at its head, but it was no use. The behemoth was right about to tackle the stranger, when she leapt out the way, leaving a weird looking explosive behind.

Blue fire mixed with the explosion of a mini nuke. The shockwave threw the civilian into the fountain in the middle of the square.

‘Oww…’ Percy was going to feel a crick in her neck for week. Gathering her limps, she climbed out of the fountain to come face to face with one of the knights in power armor.

“What were you thinking there, outsider?! You almost got yourself killed; don’t you know anything about tactical warfare?”

“Can it, Vargas, she did fine…Go grab the tags, I wanna have a chat with her.”

The approaching figure took off their helmet to reveal a tough looking blond.

“Don’t listen to Vargas…the Brotherhood has been stretched pretty thin lately, and now this…” The woman’s eyes drifted to the fallen knight behind Percy. “More of us would have died if you hadn’t been here to assist.”

Percy followed her eyes to the dead woman behind her. “Um…did you know her well?”

“Know her?” Sarah forced herself to calm down. “…Yeah…we were really close.”

‘Oh’

“Well, um, is Three Dog in?” Percy gestured to the GNR building.

“Yeah, go right ahead…”

“Oh, Percy; I’m Percy.” She held out her hand.

“Sarah Lyons. Of Lyon’s Pride.” The knight said, taking the wanderers hand.

“Thanks…” Percy backed up before running into the GNR headquarters.

Sarah went over to Reddin, unsnapping the dog tag from around the woman’s neck.

“Oh Reddin, I’m so sorry.”
“HO, Baby! Is this the vault girl I’ve heard so much about? Pleased to meet’cha!”

Percy was glaring at him. “Why are you spreading information about me across the radio?”

Three Dog tried to remain cheerful in the face of the injured, bloodstained vault dweller.

“Sweetie, Baby! I try to spread hope to this pathetic wasteland, and that’s just what stories like yours do! Everyone needs a little hope, don’t they?”

Percy started walking slowly towards him.

“Is that why you stay canned in here, letting the Brotherhood “fight the good fight” for you? Your radio station barely reaches Megaton, so just how exactly are you spreading that hope huh?” She was toe to toe with him now.

“Honey, you only get cuter the closer you get. How old are ya’ anyways?”

Her fist connected with his face, causing him to stagger back a few paces.

“Whoa! Ok, I deserved that. But hey, I’ve got proposition for a tough gal like you.”

“Hey there, tourist. Yeesh, you look worse than me.” Willow smirked with a quirked eye brow.

“Anyone would look this bad after the time I’ve had.” Percy said, with a tired smile. “I heard Underworld was around here. Is there a hotel inside? I need a place to stay.”

“Sure tourist; go find Carol’s. Past the double doors behind me, then the entrance with the giant skull.”

Percy’s face lit up at the mention of the Hotel owner. “Thanks, I’ll do that.”

Patchwork was drunk off his ass as usual. Ahzrukhal looked up from a ghoulette flirting with him for a discount that she would never get. He gave Charon the look that said:

“If he starts anything, send him to Barrow’s.” before returning his attentions to the desperate woman.

Charon nodded in contempt, shifting his position against the wall. Aside from the issue of Patchwork’s eventual and unavoidable injury at his hands, things were slow in the bar. His mind wandered to the last Ultra-Jet shipment he had retrieved, and the wanderer he had come across at Murphy’s. Despite her having gotten on all of his nerves in the beginning, there was no denying how pleasant her companionship had become near the end.

“Maybe I’ll see you in D.C sometime.”

“…I haven’t had ENOUGH! Come on Az’, one more drink, then I’ll leave you alone.”
Ahzrukhal was working at his terminal, and without looking up, called to his bodyguard.

“Charon.”

On command, the ghoul pushed off the wall, taking three steps before Patchwork swayed to the door.

“I’m going, I’m going. No need to disturb the dog.”

As much as Charon wanted to punch Patchwork out for that one, the last thing he wanted was for it to be on someone else’s orders.

“Oh my goodness, you know Gob? How is my son?” Carol asked Percy as she prepared the woman’s food.

“He’s doing great! He owns a bar now, and he makes a decent living.” Percy grinned, sipping away at her Nuka.

Percy was exhausted after the day she’d had traveling all the way from GNR, too afraid of another mutant encounter to allow herself the slightest rest. Despite this, she was eager to talk to Carol. Gob had told her that his adoptive mother was a pre-war ghoul, and Percy wasn’t going to miss the chance to learn about the world before the bombs.

“That’s fantastic! I’ve seen so worried about him.”

“So what was your favorite thing to do before the war?” Percy blurted out before she could stop herself.

There was an uncomfortable pause before Carol chuckled lightly.

“Well that’s a first; usually people ask what the war was like. No one seems to care about the past unless it affected them, it seems…” She mused. “I’d have to say hiking was my favorite. Walking among the thick of the trees, and flowers in full bloom, hearing the wildlife and climbing the steepness of a mountain for hours just to catch the sunset…” Carol’s eyes glossed slightly, as she was pulled into the memories. “Music was another thing. It wasn’t just what that Three Dog person plays, oh no. There were orchestras, with hundreds of performers. And the music would be overwhelming, and beautiful, and just a couple cords could stick with you for days. What I’d give to hear something like that again.”

Percy listened, silently enraptured. She may not have known what an orchestra was, but it sounded magnificent.

As the vault dweller ate, Carol would talk about the trips her family would take to the movies or to the record store to buy the latest album by Dean Domino.

“And the beaches! Oh, the beaches would be so nice this time of year—so warm, with the sun glistening on the waves.” Carol wiped a tear from her eye as her wife walked through the door, back from her break.

“Things aren’t so bad now, though; I have Greta, after all.” She added with a smile to the aforementioned.
Despite Greta’s tough exterior, she smiled warmly at the one she thought of as the most beautiful woman on earth.

Feeling more energetic after the meal, Percy borrowed water from the bathrooms, and washed up behind one of the hospital curtains back at Carol’s. As she changed into a more comfortable dress than the protective yet restrictive combat armor she had been wearing, Carol called to her. “Where are you going, so late?”

“Just over to the bar for a drink before bed,” Percy said, feeling her stomach clench in anticipation.

Quickly crossing the hall, her finger’s stopped just short of the door knobs. The fingers of the other hand drifted to the long shaggy locks of hair, tangled together on her head. She hated feeling vain. Charon had seen her covered in blood and guts before, why would he care if her hair was a little messy? Why would he ever care what she looked like?

Someone from behind sensed her plight, and called out.

“Hey, smoothskin. Nice hair you got there, Need a trim?”

Percy turned to face a ghoul with a full head of hair, wearing soft satin pajamas.

Giggling slightly, Percy walked up to the man. “I’d love one, actually. Nice cloths.”

“Yeah, what can I say; they’re comfortable, and Willow doesn’t like me wearing much when she gets a day off.”

This caused the Vaultie to turn five shades redder than his clothes as she sat down on the barber stool the ghoul provided.

“So what’s your name, smoothskin?”

“Percy.”

“Nice to meet ya Percy, I’m Snowflake. So what were you hoping for?”

She couldn’t hold off anymore. She threw open the doors to the Ninth Circle.

Percy’s eyes quickly found Charon. ‘Tall, Dark, and Grumpy.’ She smiled. Anxiety melting away, she strode over to where he leaned against the wall.

“Hey stranger, long time no see!”

“Talk to Ahzrukhal.”

Percy was taken aback. “E-Excuse me? I thought you hated—”

“Talk. To. Ahzrukhal.” He growled out, cutting her off.

Percy’s eyes darkened, and without another word, she did just that.
“I could use a scotch.” She proclaimed to the bartender, trying to shake off the less than pleasant reunion.

“And scotch you shall have, my dear. What brings such a pretty young smoothskin to my neck of the woods?” the greasy ghoul set an especially full glass before her.

Charon watched the two interact. Percy would occasionally look back to him, but his frown stayed in place. He knew that the best thing for both of them was for him to pretend that he didn’t know her, and he hoped to God she would be too angry to try and talk to him again.

*He felt his throat tighten as he recognized the woman that burst through the bar doors. Rather than covered in dirt, blood, and leather as he had seen her before, Charon was now seeing her in a softer light—clean, even dressed up.*

*She turned his way. Smiling far too warmly for his comfort, she walked toward him, hips swaying in a way that drew his eye in the most teasing manner.*

‘Shit. No, no, not this way!’

‘…*I thought you hated…*’

‘*Fuck, stop talking, he’ll hear you!*’

‘*Talk. To. Ahzrukhal.*’

The giant bodyguard was brought out of his reverie when Percy approached him once again.

“I said, talk to—“

“Hey wait big guy, I bought your contract. You don’t work for him anymore.”

Percy looked positively exhausted, but smiled up at him as she held up the piece of paper.

Charon couldn’t believe what she had just said, but it was true. Her name was scrawled in messy handwriting at the bottom, over the faded ink of Ahzrukhal’s legend, and those of previous employers.

“So…you want get out of here, or what?” Percy swayed slightly from side to side, as she squinted slightly to maintain focus on his face. God, she was tired.

Too obsessed with imminent vengeance, Charon didn’t notice this as he strode past her, saying, “Of course; Please let me do something first.”

Percy swayed slightly as she watched Charon walk over to his former employer. She wanted to leave as soon as possible so she could collapse into her bed at Carol’s. Thirty hours of consciousness was killing her quickly.

She knew Charon hated Ahzrukhal. She knew that. She also *thought* she had known Charon as the type of person to *not* un-holster his weapon in the middle of a crowded bar and unload three blasts of his shotgun into Ahzrukhal’s face.
Once again she was given a very real reminder that she didn’t know everything.

Charon turned back to her, relief in his eyes, just in time to see her collapse in shock, fear, and exhaustion.
Chapter 6

Charon caught Percy before she hit the ground.

“Are you ok? Percy?” Charon gave her a little shake, but to no avail.

Shaking his head, he picked her up, shouldered her bag, and headed for Barrow’s, relieved that at least it wasn’t his fault that someone was going to see the doc this time—probably.

The walk definitely wasn’t going to go smoothly; as soon as he exited the ninth circle—hopefully for the last time—he came face to face with a livid Greta.

“What the hell’s going on? I heard gunshots! Where are you taking her!?” She became more excited when she noticed the lone wanderer’s limp form.

“Ahzrukhal is dead. Percy fainted. I am taking her to Barrows now.” Not feeling the need to continue the conversation, Charon easily side-stepped the thin woman and proceeded down the stairs.

But Greta followed him.

“And why did she faint, huh? And why is Ahzrukhal dead? Did he hurt her? Why is it even your concern that she fainted, Charon? Carol really likes the girl you know, and I don’t hate her much either, so if you hurt her so help me…”

Charon was getting fed up with the situation, but chose to tune the woman out; a skill he had become quite adept at over the past decades.

Eventually they both made it to the clinic. By now, Greta had become somewhat compliant with the situation, if nothing else than to make sure Percy was ok. She held the door open as Charon slipped in.

“Well hello Charon; doing the courtesy of escorting your victims now? What did she do? Refuse to suck that bastard off?”

“I didn’t touch her. She just fainted” Charon growled out, gently laying Percy on the nearest cot.

“Is that so?” Barrows looked over to Greta for some form of confirmation.

“Don’t look at me; I didn’t see what happened.”

“For fuck’s sake, she’s holding my contract, you can check for yourself. I couldn’t hurt her if I wanted to. And I don’t.” He added with vehemence.

Barrows went to Percy’s side, checking the wadded piece of paper in her hand.

“Well you’re telling the truth about one thing…At least that bastard’s dead; I’m sick of having to deal with the junkie withdraws. Now move over so I can have a look at her.”

Charon hadn’t realized how closely he had been hovering over her, and quickly backed away.

Now that people weren’t constantly harassing him, Charon had time to be more concerned for Percy. Looking closer, he noticed she looked pale as a sheet.
Charon made a face ‘Was she always this white?’

The dark circles under her eyes didn’t look good either.

“By the looks of it, she’s just a little sleep deprived. That shouldn’t have been enough for her to go out like that, though. Charon, what happened just before she dropped?” Barrows didn’t look up as he spoke, checking Percy’s pulse and shining light into her eyes to check dilation.

Charon couldn’t help but smile at the memory “I shot the bastard right in his face.”

“That probably did it then…auditory over-stimulation, and she probably wasn’t expecting you to do that either. I imagine she might be a little scared for her life now.”

Charon was instantly deflated. So it had been his fault that she was here.

“Regardless, she just needs a little sleep and she’ll be fine.” With this, Barrows went back to his office.

“Try not to kill her if she drops the contract in her sleep.” Greta hissed before she left, probably to go reassure Carol of the situation.

That left Charon with his new contract holder.

‘Shit, what a mess.’ Charon honestly couldn’t blame either of them for their animosity towards him. Charon had hurt too many ghouls and humans alike to count while under Ahzrukhal’s employ. It hadn’t exactly been within his power to stop, however.

He pulled a chair closer to Percy’s cot and sat down. So this was his new employer. Things could have turned out worse—Crowley could have decided he wanted a bodyguard. Then again, He honestly had no idea how the woman in front of him had managed to part Ahzrukhal with the contract. He wasn’t being arrogant when he thought of himself the dead man’s most valuable possession. After all, who wouldn’t want a brainwashed weapon completely devoted to their master?

This train of thought brought Charon back to Percy. What had she wanted with him? She didn’t seem like the slaver type, and he was fairly certain she had figured out his situation on their past journey together.

Charon resigned himself to the opinion that while things were uncertain, they were a damn sight better than what they had so recently been.

Leaning back in the chair and crossing his arms, Charon drifted into a light sleep.

Percy regained consciousness about nine hours later; with the first thing she noticed being the smell of antiseptic and medical equipment. For a moment she thought she was back in the vault with her dad. She felt her eyes water when she opened them and realized this was not the case. Sadness was immediately replaced with fear when she turned her head to see the gigantic ghoul, sleeping in the chair next to her.

Slowly, ever so slowly, she got up and tip toed to her bag lying in the corner of the room.

Just the rustling of the stiff fabric was enough for Charon to wake up, however.

“You’re awake.” Relief played across his face as he too rose. “I think we need to talk.”
“What’s there to talk about? You killed a man unprovoked. That seems pretty clear to me. I’m not keeping your contract. You should take it.”

Percy backed up any time he tried to advance, so eventually he gave up.

She looked just as wary as when they had first met.

“I don’t believe Ahzrukhal gave you all the details concerning the contract, Percy.”

“He said you were honor bound to do whatever I desired of you, so long as I held your contract. What’s stopping me from just firing you?”

“Then I would go to the nearest person and give them the contract.”

“Can’t you just be unemployed?”

Charon looked down in frustration “It isn’t that easy, smoothskin. And while I’m honor bound to do your will, it isn’t the same as other’s ideas of honor. I can’t not do what you ask of me. Even if I really, really don’t want to.”

“Ahzrukhal said something about you being raised by strange people…” Percy’s face looked more concerned now than wary, but her guard was still very much up.

“I have no idea why I must serve who holds that paper; all I know is that I must.”

“What happens if you try to resist?”

“I can’t.”

Percy unfolded the note and read through it “Aha! Right here it says violence on my part terminates the contract; would that solve it?”

“That is correct, however, after you enacted violence against me, I would have no recourse but to take my contract from you—by force, if need be—and go searching for a new employer”

“Well, I don’t want a slave…”

“Then you shouldn’t have bought my contract.”

Percy gave him a look before continuing. “And I can’t just give someone else the contract, because that wouldn’t solve the situation…What if I just destroyed the contract?”

Charon thought about it for a second, remembering the kind hearted wife of one of his first employers. “If you were to try, I would prevent you to the point of killing you should you persist. I would prefer that you didn’t take that route.”

Percy released a deep breathe, and began pacing the floor. ‘Why is everything so complicated…?’

Finally turning to look at Charon once more, she said “Alright. I won’t destroy it, or give it to someone else, or fire you. But if I find a way to free you so that everyone’s happy, I promise I will.”

For the first time that Percy had ever seen, Charon smiled. “Thank you, that’s a kind sentiment. But I have long since come to terms with my fate.”

Carol straight up refused to let Charon into her place after she heard about the incident.

Percy was trying to convince the woman that Charon wouldn’t hurt anyone anymore.

“That’s not good enough!” Carol said, uncharacteristically fierce. “He can’t take back what he’s done to the poor people that wandered into that hell hole.”

Percy had a hard time arguing with that, especially since she wasn’t entirely sure she had made the right choice buying the ghoul that stoically stood behind her.

Having talked to Barrows, Petal, Greta, even Winthrop the maintenance man—everyone agreed that Ahzrukhal deserved to die for how he had made Underworld his kingdom of alcoholics and junkies. Everyone had been dependent on him in some way, except for Carol and Greta.

And on top of that, Charon had been a slave! For fifty years he had had no say in his actions and had become the hand and face of violence and fear in Underworld, even if he had not been the mind.

At the end of the day, yes; Percy could forgive Charon. That did not take away from her fear of him, however, knowing what he was capable of.

“Percy.” Charon spoke up from behind her “If you give me permission, I’ll sleep elsewhere tonight and you can stay here.”

“But that’s not fair! You aren’t dangerous anymore; she doesn’t need to worry…”

Neither of them believed what she was saying, not completely.

Charon shook his head “Regardless, I think everyone would be more comfortable if I was out of sight.”

The Vaultie hated to admit it, but he was right. She too felt the need to get away from him, at least for a little bit. She needed to think more on the finer print of the contract—look for any possible loopholes.

With a resigned sigh, she nodded “Come back at eight tomorrow, then. I’ve already stocked up on what we need, and I want to be at the Washington Monument before dark tomorrow.”

Carol followed Percy farther into the room. “What possessed you to buy his contract, child? He’s a manmade monster!”

Percy became defensive “I didn’t know at the time! I first met him back at Seneca. He said he hated his boss but couldn’t quit. Clearly he was a slave; I figured if I bought his contract, I could just fire him and the issue would be over with.”

Percy sat down on the bed and began examining the contract. Sighing in exasperation, Carol left the lone wanderer with her thoughts.

‘If I try to destroy this thing, Charon is conditioned to kill me. So for him to be free, I’d have to die.’

The woman had run headlong into many life or death situations, often without a moment of hesitation. This was different, however. If she tried, she would be killed, regardless of whether or not she succeeded in destroying the tiny piece of paper.

Percy felt deep hate for the people who had done this to Charon. Everyone deserved a choice in their
fate... But what could she do? Whoever had brainwashed Charon were long dead. All that was left was their handiwork.

“The only life one should control is their own…” Percy thought back to her time in the vault.

2 Years Ago.

Percy just barely made it into the Overseer’s office without the alarms going off. The personal terminal however wasn’t any trouble. The Overseer had had the reactor room’s password changed. Percy knew he probably found out she used it for a shooting range. Scrolling through the entries she was learning just how controlling Amata’s father was. Suddenly, she found her name.

“As if having an over-idealistic scientist wasn’t dangerous enough for the wellbeing of the vault, his own daughter is now a woman of God! Loyalty to some deity could drain from vault loyalty. On top of that, she might use her sermons to challenge vault ideals! This is far too much influence for one family. The Tunnel Snakes have become more and more riotous, Wally Mack especially. He’s also been swooning over James’s daughter since the G.O.A.T. If I can secure their pairing next Matching Day, It might subdue two birds with one stone.”

‘Matching day...Wally?’

Wally was big and violent, always causing more trouble than even Butch. At least Butch had his limits—there were things even Butch thought was too far. Not Wally Mack. To be forced to marry Wally made Percy shudder. She slid to the floor, taking deep breaths.

Maybe if she refused out of devotion to the Lord, she might be exempt from the pairing process. No, that wouldn’t work...

Resigned, but still very scared of the idea of marrying Wally, making children with him...She shuddered, swearing to keep her head down, even preach about loyalty to the government that be, if she had to; Anything to change the Overseer’s mind. Why was she even a chaplain in the first place?

She left without finding the password. She would figure something out.

The next day, Percy felt well enough to retrieve the Virgo II Satellite disk.

“I need to find my dad James. I was told he had passed by here.”

“Sure he did! But first, you gotta do something for me, ya dig?” Three Dog grinned from ear to ear as He rubbed his cheek, sore from her punch.

Percy gave him a dark look.

“That’s not was I mean! Jeez! Get your mind outta the gutter! It’ll be easy, baby; just repair my radio tower, and that signal will reach all of the Capital Wasteland. I can spread the word about the good fight to more people!”

Charon and Percy stood in front of the museum entrance. “So this is it? What should I be expecting
“Way more mutants than we fought out here, smoothskin. Super mutants inhabit damn near every important building in D.C. Do you want to wait out here and send me in?”

Percy was shocked. “Of course not! I can handle mutants. Plus, what if something happens to you and I’m not there to help? No, it’s my mission, so I’m going in. Plus, who knows what pre-war stuff I’ll get to see!”

The ghoul was touched by her concern. Even after finding out what kind of monster he was, she was still cared for his safely.

“HUMAN! I’LL RIP APART YOUR BODY AND CRUSH YOUR SKULL!!”

That was as far as the super mutant got in its threats, however as a rain of bullets demolished its own skull, and it collapsed in a heap.

“I think that’s all of them.” Percy was shaken up from having to walk through the vault demo tour, but now they had the dish. It was surprisingly light, and as they carried it backs through the rooms. Then she noticed something. They were in one of the bigger areas. Stone bleachers lined the walls, with a rather large device in the middle of the room.

“Hey, what is this?” She walked over to it, looking over the controls.”

“It’s a star projector. It probably broke a long time ago.”

Charon was forced to eat his words as Percy flipped a couple switches, pressed one of the buttons, and the machine sprang to life. Dialogue most likely used to accompany the star show, but Percy noticed that the speakers had been blown right through.

“Wow…” Percy watched, mesmerized as the stars and galaxies silently danced across the dome ceiling.

The two explorers made their way to the bleachers, and sat down to watch the show.

After a few minutes, Charon looked over to Percy. Her eyes were wet. “Why did humanity destroy itself like this? They had so many beautiful things…”

She turned to Charon. “I want to give you standing orders, Charon.”
Chapter 7

His stomach plummeted in dread.

“Charon…I really want to trust you. I don’t want to believe that you’re just a weapon.” Percy’s knuckles went white against the concrete.

“But I just can’t! Not like this! By forcing you to be quiet and non-violent around others, I’m not giving you the chance to make that choice on your own.”

Taking a deep breath, and slowly releasing it, Percy continued “From now on, unless I say something is explicitly an order, you are free to do whatever you wish. I’ll have no say in how you act, or what you do.

She looked to him, half worried that he was going to run away and never see her again. ‘Hell, that’s what I’d do…’

Charon was shocked, and it showed on his face. Then he turned very serious.

“…Is this some kind of joke?...Are you serious?”

Percy threw up her hands in defense. “No! I’m very serious! I mean it; standing orders.”

After staring at each other for a moment, Charon grabbed the disk and made for the door.

“Where are you going?” Percy called to him; a little worried that he would leave her and take the dish with him.

“GNR isn’t going to repair its own damn tower, is it? Nah, that would be the right thing to do, wouldn’t it?” Charon added with a growl, smirking.

A relieved Percy quickly followed after him, smiling from ear to ear.

“I really don’t like this plan.” Charon looked up at the monument before them.

“Why don’t we wait till tomorrow to do this? By then you might see how stupid it would be for you to climb that thing in the dark.”

Charon was more like when she had first met him now, unconcerned with stating the untactful truth.

“Nonsense.” Percy was practically shaking anticipation. “You’re too heavy for me to save if you fall, I have my pip-boy light, and this is the only way to get the dish attached.”

So, hiking the bundle of rope over one shoulder, Percy entered the monument entrance, followed by Charon.

“Umm…What is that?” Percy pointed towards the small room at the end of the hall, whose thick metal doors were open and waiting for the two.

“Never seen an elevator before?”
“…” Percy starred exasperatedly at the ghoul.

“It takes us to the top, which is good, since the stairs collapsed a long time ago.”

After entering the elevator, Charon pressed the button indicating they wished to go up.

As soon as the doors closed, Percy became very tense. She jumped and yelped as the elevator began to rise. Excitedly turning to Charon, She looked like a kid in a candy store.

“How many of these were there before the war?”

“Most buildings had them, smoothskin. They were a matter of convenience.”

When they reached the top, Percy practically squealed, jumping out saying happily, “I can’t wait to go down! That was so much fun!”

Charon rolled his eyes as he followed her, but he was smiling too, despite himself.

The smile soon disappeared, however, as Percy began tying the rope around her waist, and clipping the satellite to her belt.

“I wouldn’t be doing a good job as your bodyguard if I let you go out there, you know.”

“Well it’s a good thing you’re my partner not my bodyguard, huh?” She shot back without looking up. “We are equals, Charon. And as such, we should be making decisions that make the most sense.”

“You mean like waiting until tomorrow?”

“I want to get this over with and get my reward from that ass-hat Three Dog as soon as possible.”

Charon grimaced, fiercely rubbing his chin. He couldn’t deny the pleasure he found in her referring to them as equals, however.

“Help me out, will you?” Percy finished fixing rail spikes to her shoes, taking two more in her hands.

Going over to assist her, Charon became very uncomfortable as he supported her.

She was a bit heavier than she looked. Charon chalked that up to muscle tone. Looking at her legs, anyone could tell that she rarely staying still for long.

Flustered, Charon focused on grabbing the rope. Slowly feeding it out the tower opening when Percy needed it, Charon’s heart was going a mile a minute as he listened intently to her climb and the satellite scrape against the wall.

After what seemed like an eternity, she finally called to him “Ok I reached the top. Just have to detach the old one now…”

The sound of metal beating against metal was soon followed by the old beaten up dish falling down the monument to shatter against the ground.

‘I hope it gives those Brotherhood assholes a heart attack…’ Charon thought as he tried to calm his own.

More clattering from above, until Charon finally recognized the sound of her descent.

‘Oh thank God’ as soon as Percy reached the landing, Charon rushed to her, wrapping his arms
around her waist to help her down.

Percy was jittery and giggling out of fear. Once she came to eye level with him, she said “I think I prefer heights when I have more ground under my feet.” She panted, arms clutched around his neck.

‘Were his eyes always this blue?’ Percy couldn’t help but stare. Suddenly becoming very uncomfortable, Charon set her down. “Didn’t you say you couldn’t wait to try going down?”

Percy’s blush deepened as she ran back to the elevator “Right! Let’s go then.”

The trip down was not nearly as pleasant as the trip up. Percy clutched the bar lining the wall, eyes clenched shut and mouth pressed to a thin line. As soon as the doors opened again, she belted out—not waiting up for her ghoul companion.

Percy and Charon silently crept through D.C.

Yawning, Percy looked at her Pip-boy. Charon noticed her actions and spoke up. “You can’t fight like that; we should find shelter soon.”

Percy nodded. “Most of the places here are boarded up or collapsed in though…”

“I think I see something ahead…Aw crap.”

“What’s wrong?” Percy caught up to him, looking for potential threats.”

“Just how tired are you, smoothskin?” Charon said, massaging his temples.

“Why, did do you see something promising?”

“In a manner of speaking…”

“Whoa, Charon, Who’s the pretty lady you brought?! Nice piece of ass right there! Is she a bonus for all the jet I buy?”

Charon starred daggers at the drunk. “Keep your hands to yourself, Dukov. We need a place to stay for the night.”

“Of course, of course! I respect another man’s claim! But sweetie; If you ever change your mind and want to try my world famous “White Russian”, let me know.” Dukov waggled his eyebrows before going back to chugging his whiskey. He left them alone, dragging one of the two women standing around up to his room. A red head watched them silently from upstairs as Percy sat down on the heart bed in the middle of the room. Looking up, she couldn’t help but stare at Dukov’s choice of ceiling decor.

The light fixture above them was of two women in a rather compromising position.

“How do you know this guy?”

“He used to have Ahzrukhal send him Ultra-jet. He’s a decent guy; just a sleaze who can’t keep his hands to himself.” Charon settled down on the couch across from her.
“Right…Um, Charon?” Percy looked up to the double doors Dukov had disappeared behind. “I think I’d feel better if you slept with me.”

Charon froze; mind flat-lining.

“It’s not like that! I just don’t think Dukov will try anything if he continues to think I’m more than just a traveling companion.” Percy began undressing down to a t-shirt and shorts, laying her armor out to air. Making a face, she thought, ‘I can’t wait to get to Rivet City so I can wash this stuff off…’

Looking back at her ghoul companion, she noticed the blush playing on his face. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to, I don’t trust Dukov, is all. But it’s ok if you’re not up for it.”

After a moment of silent contemplation, Charon began undressing as well.

Trying not to think of the things Dukov most certainly did in the heart shaped bed, the two fell asleep.

No light was able to spill through the thickly boarded windows, but Percy started slightly. Warmth enveloped her. She felt very secure, but her tired mind wasn’t able to conceive of why. Not letting it concern her, she drifted back to sleep as the warm something nuzzled into her back.

Charon was getting the best sleep he’d had in ages when he was rudely awakened by none other than—

“CHERRY! Take a look at these clown shoes! Haha! Charon, you’re doing it all wrong! The woman’s clothes need to be OFF!”

Charon scrambled out of the bed, luckily with enough presents of mind to throw the blanket over a stirring Percy.

He glared at the Drunk, who was busily slobbering over the neck of an uninterested red-head.

Remembering Percy’s words from the day before however, he spoke up. “The last think I’d want is to give you the pleasure of a free show, Dukov.”

“Ohaha, well whenever you do, Dukov will be eager and waiting! Good morning, sweet cheeks!” Dukov noticed an embarrassed Percy slipping into more conservative cloths.

“Morning.” She tried to hide her face as she dug food and water out of her bag, tossing some to Charon.

“Sorry about earlier.” Charon said under his breath as they ate. “I would have woken you sooner, but I was more tired than I thought.”

“Not at all, but I want to get out of here soon. Rivet City is still pretty far.”

“Did you say Rivet City?” The woman known as Cherry crept up to them. “Take me with you.”
“Percy looked up at her. “Aren’t you one of Dukov’s playmates? Why the change of heart?”

“You think I’m here because I want to be?” Cherry scoffed “I’m here because Dukey’s a good shot, and the slavers and raiders don’t often come this far into D.C. But since you’re here, I might as well come with you to Rivet.”

Charon looked to Percy. “It’s still pretty dangerous on the way. She might cause more trouble than she’s worth.”

Cherry was indignant. “I can keep quiet and out of sight, if that’s what you’re worried about. I way not be very good in a fight, but I won’t slow anyone down.” Turning to Percy, her voice turned pleading. “Come on! Us girls gotta stick together, right?”

“…Alright. But you need to put some clothes on. I don’t care if you’re bullet proof; I’m not traveling with someone half naked.”

“And where do you think you’re going?!” Dukov roared, stalking towards Cherry, now dressed in a hoodie and shorts donated by Percy.

“It’s over Dukey; I think I’m gonna travel a bit” She said, trying to maintain a bored tone.

“Oh, is that so?” Dukov pulled out his gun, pointing it at the lone wanderer. “After all Dukov’s hospitality, you steal one of his women?! And you!” He turned to face Charon. “Whatever happened to keeping your hands off another guy’s property, huh?!”

Before he could do anything, Dukov was rushed by the ghoul, who was already pissed that Dukov had dared to point a gun at his employer. She may have given him the freedom to do what he wished, but that didn’t take away from his sole duty, which was to protect his employer at all costs.

He grabbed Dukov’s face, using his other hand to push the man’s gun towards the ceiling as it fired. Continuing with the motion, a startled Dukov was thrown back onto the hard floor.

Charon got up and walked back to the two women, before looking up at the surprised girl upstairs who watched with horror. “Your protection is fine, just a little hurt.” He growled before turning his attention to the man on the floor swearing in Russian. “By the way, Ahzrukhal is dead. I shot him myself. Enjoy your jet withdraws.”
Chapter 8

“Is she going to be ok back there?” Percy was looking back, more than a little nervous.

“What, Fantasia? She likes it; Dukov might get a little rough when he comes around, but she can handle herself, trust me.” Cherry was unconcerned, scratching her head and squinting into the sunlight. “How far is it to Rivet, anyways?”

“About, two days I’d say. If we only stop to sleep, that is. There are mutants everywhere so I don’t want to stay in one place for too long.” Percy was planning out the trip on her pip-boy. “Charon, do any of these subway tunnels connect? I’d face a feral over a mutie any day.”

Charon walked up and looked over her shoulder. “A lot of these parts are caved in…These are good though…” He reached over and tapped on different areas, making markers appear. A wave of Déjà vu came over him at their close proximity. Quickly connecting a route, he backed away from her.

“That’s the best path I recommend, smoothskin.”

Things had been going pretty well. They ran into a few groups of ghouls during their trips through the metro, but nothing serious. Everything was fine, until they came across a reaver.

“What the hell is it throwing?!?” Percy was shooting from a distance, protecting a cowering Cherry.

“Concentrated radiation! Worse than the glowing ones, so stay back!” Charon was keeping it away from them by staying close.

Suddenly, the reaver rushed him. Caught off guard, Charon tripped falling hard on the ground.

“Charon!” Percy rushed out from cover.

The reaver was ripping at Charon’s torso, the radiation half healing the gashes, over and over, shredding into his chest.

Pulling out her Shishkabob, Percy waved it frantically at the reaver, hoping to draw it away.

No use, and it was too close to Charon, she couldn’t risk hurting him.

In desperation, she dropped the sword and grabbed the crazed ghoul by the shoulders, hauling it off Charon, who was nearly passed out from the pain.

Howling in rage, the ghoul made a swipe at her, but she ducked just in time. She made a dive for the flaming sword, but the reaver was closing in after her.

Scrambling for the sword, her finger clasped around it. Whirling around she slashed the reaver’s head clean off.

The body fell across her. Shrieking, she pulled herself from under it

“CHERRY! Cherry, I need your help! Help me carry Charon!”

Cherry was quaking in fear, but came up to assist. They half carried, half dragged his large frame
into the nearest information desk enclave.

Percy dug through her bag, producing ten mines.

“Ok Cherry, I need you to set these up near all the openings into this area, and a parameter around us—but not too close. Can you do that?”

“Sure, sweetie.” Cherry obediently rushed to do her job after sending a terrified glance at the fallen form of the one who she thought of as her primary protection.

Percy turned her attention to Charon. His eyes fluttered, and he was still breathing…slowly.

Working fast, the vault dweller pulled out psycho, buffout, stims, and her suture kit.

She injected two psycho, one into his hip and the other into his neck. This made him jump, eyes flying wide as his fingers clawed desperately at the ground. Ready with four buffout tablets, she stuffed them into his mouth before forcing his jaw closed again. Holding onto his face, Percy looked desperately into his eyes.

“Charon. I need you to stay awake for this. Whatever you do, do not go to sleep…That’s an order.” She said the last part with eyes clenched shut, wincing in self-resentment.

Charon stayed awake, but he was visibly shaking—from the drugs, or force the it took to obey her order, she wasn’t sure.

Grabbing two bottles of pure water, she ran to the corpse of the downed reaver, praying there was enough residual radiation to transfer to the water. She forced them into the ghouls torso as her Geiger counter ticked promisingly. Cherry came up behind her.

“I set everything up…Is he going to be ok?”

“I don’t know.” Percy said hollowly, keeping a safe distance from the corpse while waiting for the water to become properly irradiated.

“Shit…I should have stayed with Dukov…”

Percy slowly stood up, before turning to Cherry.

“I’m so sorry that our free services were not good enough for you. Luckily, you know the way back. Now you can leave—and I hope to God I never see you again, if you do—or you can bring me those waters in five minutes.”

Percy brushed past her and walked back to where Charon lay.

He was still awake, but very much in pain.

“I’m so sorry. I can’t give you any painkillers. You might go to sleep and not wake up.”

She injected a stim deep into the middle of his torso to prevent internal bleeding, while she worked on stitching the top layers back together.

Cherry soon joined them with the water.

Without a word, Percy took them from her and began dabbing it on his chest and face. This seemed to soothe him, and Charon became more relaxed.
Finishing up, Percy wiped her hands off and began rubbing her eyes in exhaustion.

“Hopefully he’ll be ok…Charon, you can go to sleep now.” Pulling out med-x, she asked, “Do you want this to help with the pain?”

But he was already asleep.

“Well then, Cherry, go get some sleep. We’re leaving as soon as Charon is up to the task.”

Percy slept for a couple hours before she awoke again. Checking on Charon, She reapplied the irradiated water. He signed in his sleep once she reached his forehead.

Grabbing his hand in both of hers, Percy allowed a sob to escape her lips.

’I almost lost you…’ Her shaking stopped—her thoughts going back to the morning the day before.

Without thinking, she leaned down, wrapping her arms around his neck, and she laid her head down on his shoulder—avoiding the damage to his chest.

“She be ok.” She whispered before drifting off to sleep.

Charon awoke to soreness in his shoulder, and considerably worse pain in his chest.

’What happened? Last thing I remember, we were traveling through the metro…’

Suddenly, he remembered the rush of a fight far too close quartered for his gun; the horror of a ghoul ripping out his chest as its own radiation partially healed him. He grunted in pain as he tried to get up, and the pressure in his shoulder disappearing immediately.

“Charon.” Percy came into focus, looking closely at him, eyes fraught with worry. “Are you all right? Do you need anything for the pain?”

“What happened to the reaver?...How am I still alive after that?” Charon rubbed his head, trying to bring back the lost memories.

Percy’s face fell, casting her eyes down. “I managed to pull it off of you. You were in pretty bad shape. I had to…make you stay awake.”

Charon didn’t understand why she looked so upset. Chuckling—and immediately regretting the ensuing pain—he said “If I knew you were this good, I wouldn’t have made such a fuss the first time you had to patch me up. I can’t believe I got my ass handed to me by a reaver

’Why isn’t he angry? I used his contract against him.’

Percy’s staring was making Charon uncomfortable.

“I’m sorry if I scared you there. I’ll be more careful about the ground next time. I think I’d like some of that med-x right about now; we should probably get moving soon. I don’t wanna stay here any longer than we have to.”
A small smile finally ghosted across her lips. “Right, here! I’ll go wake up Cherry. Make sure drink some water.” Scrambling to her feet, the vault dweller disappeared from view.

Charon eased himself into a sitting position, draining the water bottle like a man lost in the desert.

Un-wrapping his old bandages, he took a look at his partner’s handy work.

It looked pretty good. He lost some of his skin, but she was also able to salvage a bit.

He started to feel the pain killers take effect so he tried to stand up. ‘This is gonna suck.’

“How much farther?” Cherry was walking behind Charon and Percy.

They had been travelling for four hours now, walking way too slow in Cherry’s opinion.

Percy had long since regretted taking Cherry with them. Flatly, She replied “It’s up ahead there, see? Go ahead of us if you’re in such a hurry.”

Charon didn’t know why Percy suddenly couldn’t stand the woman with them, but since he had never cared for her in the first place, He merely smirked at the look of shock on Cherry’s face.

“What if a mutant gets me??”

“I’d have one less worry in life.” Percy said under her breath

“What’s your business in Rivet City?” Harkness held his gun at the ready, eyeing the tall ghoul suspiciously.

“Calm down; does it look like I could cause trouble, even if I wanted to?” Charon gestured to his chest with a growl.

“Easy, ghoul. I just want to make it clear that I’ve worked hard keeping this place safe and I won’t have you screwing that up.”

Cherry’s ‘Playmate’ act went on like a light. “You must be pretty tough, keeping this entire boat safe; I like that in a man.” She purred, striding up Harkness, her hips swaying seductively.

“Let’s go find a room.” sighed Percy, eager to get away from the woman.

“The Weatherly offers cheap rooms.” called Harkness, who was trying to ignore Cherry’s advances.

“You sure don’t want me to come with you?” Charon was facing the wall while Percy changed out of her armor, and into more comfortable slacks and a t-shirt. He could never get over how comfortable she was around him.

“I’d prefer to face him alone. Besides, that was a lot of travelling we did; you should probably get some rest.”
Charon hated to agree, but she was right. She’d probably prefer to confront her dad in private, anyway.

Charon awoke with a start. “Damn…anymore of this stuff and I might get addicted.” Injecting more med-x into his chest, He slowly made his way to the Weatherly Hotel’s front desk. “Excuse me.”

The woman before him was tapping her fingers against the worn wood anxiously. “Oh, yes? You’re that poor girl’s traveling partner, aren’t you? Feeling any better?”

She was clearly trying to look past his roughed up exterior in an attempt to act professional, but Charon appreciated it all the same.”

“Poor girl? Percy? What happened to her?”

“Well, when she first came in, she looked fine—if not a little nervous. Told me you were resting and not to disturb you. When she came back however, she was clearly upset; asked if there was a bar on the ship. I told her I had plenty of alcohol up here, but she said she needed the right ambiance or something, so I told her where to find the Muddy Rudder.”

‘Damn, what did he do to her?’ “Can you tell me where that is?”

Percy was four drinks in by the time he found her. She wasn’t loud like the last time he’d seen her drunk. There was dark look in her eye that said “Don’t mess with me”.

Turning, she noticed him on the stair way.

“Hey, you. You’ll never guess what happened.”

Charon walked over, sitting across from her at the booth. She had thought ahead as to how much she thought she would need to drink, as there were three bottles of whiskey unopened in front of her.

“He wasn’t even there, Charon. I missed him by a month. A month! And guess where he is now?”

Charon was beginning to hate this man. Three Dog went on and on about how Percy was looking for her dad, in hopes that he would maybe try to find her, but no luck.

“Where is the bastard?”

“Don’t call him that!” Percy was suddenly very loud, before slouching back into her seat.

“Who am I kidding? He is a bastard. A child-abandoning, runaway bastard. He’s in another vault. I don’t know which, or where, but he left me, and now he’s in another vault. Guess he thought 101 was too crowded with me there…” She drained her bottle, pushing one to Charon before opening herself a new one.

“Please drink with me. I can’t stand drinking alone.” She made a sour face after the last word before getting a head start on the new bottle.

Charon slowly uncorked it, looking into the golden liquid. Setting it back down, he said, “Smoothskin we’re gonna need a lot more of these if you want to get a ghoul drunk.”
A half-smile played across her face, and she called Belle Bonny over.

“All I’m saying is…Why are mirelurks even a thing?? Like…half humanoid, half crab thing. You know what: Don’t tell me; I want it to be a surprise.” Percy was giggling and clinging to Charon as they made their way up to the room. He wasn’t much support, clinging with all his might to the stair rail as he half dragged her up with him.

“Those things are more trouble than they’re worth, and they don’t even taste good.” Charon added.

“Right?! Were crabs that gross before the war?”

“Are you kidding? They were incredible; add a little garlic and butter, and you were in heaven smoothskin, I tell ya.” He hauled her up the last flight of stairs.

Percy grinned as she jumped him, wrapping her arms around his neck, her legs dangling.

“What’s a-little-garlic-and-butter?” She giggled as she tried to see only one of him without much luck.

“Very amusing” he said before throwing her over his shoulder.

“Hey!”

“Don’t worry, I got you.” With one arm around her waist, Charon used the other to support himself on the wall as he walked down the hall.

Once they reached their destination, he threw her on the bed before collapsing next to her.

Percy began pulling off her clothes to reveal the modest undergarments beneath.

“Smoothskin, can you at least try to keep your cloths on? Every time I turn around you’re tossing clothes left and right. I know I’m a looker, but try to contain yourself.” Charon muttered sarcastically through the pillow.

“It’s too hot in here! No insulation in the entire damn ship, I bet. Aren’t you hot?” she paused then giggled at what she said.

“A bit, except I have a little thing called modestly, miss former chaplain.”

“Come on, big guy, I won’t bite. Make yourself comfortable.”

With a sigh of exasperation, Charon got up, and dressing down to a pair of boxers. He didn’t need the bandages anymore, so he took those off too. Growing a little frustrated, he fell back on the bed beside her, grumbling “Regret it now smoothy? Not so handsome up close, huh?”

He wasn’t sure if it was the alcohol or the situation, but she just grinned at him. Suddenly, she leaned forward and gave him a small kiss on the cheek before rolling over, adding over her shoulder.

“You’re too hard on yourself, Charon.”

Definitely the alcohol.
Chapter 9

Something was brushing against Charon’s cheek. Opening his eyes, He saw Percy’s short auburn waves. She was sleeping in her usual way: tight fetal position, with one arm tucked in, and the other wrapped around her body. They had ended up sharing a pillow and sleeping above the sheets. Charon’s eyes drifted to her face, no longer clouded with the heartbreak she had experienced the night before. Her eyes fluttered open, slowly drifting to his own.

“My head’s killing me.” She muttered

“For once, so is mine”

Percy slowly got up, clutching her stomach as she crawled to her bag. She downed a bottle of water before throwing one on the bed for him and grabbing another for herself as she stood up.

“I’m going to go find the showers, maybe clean off some of these clothes.”

Charon grunted in agreement before attempting to get up as well.

“Can you get us some food? Something that isn’t as old as you, preferably…”

With this, Percy left to go find the showers, carrying a sack full of clothes and a box of detergent.

Percy felt hollow all morning. She didn’t even mind the cold water that reeked of old copper.

‘What am I going to do now?’ She felt lost.

The clothes took forever to finally scrub clean—Charon’s armor most of all.

‘This is so old, it’s practically falling apart!’

As if on cue, the stitching holding one of the sleeves came loose

“That settles it, I suppose…”

After Percy came back with clean clothes, they ate at Gary’s Galley before it was Charon’s turn to get clean.

Showers were the one thing made better for ghouls in the new world. The water tingled pleasantly against his skin as he scrubbed carefully around his new scars. Charon thought back to that night. Vaguely, he remembered Percy stitching him up. She had been so concerned about not giving orders. Charon hated his life, but he was used to it; for her to give him the closest she could to freedom? It was an entirely new life for him. However, he knew better than to expect this to last. Eventually she would need him to do something she was too afraid to. Then the orders would return. Sure she might rationalize it in her own mind: For the greater good, the needs of the many. What was one man as price for ‘Fighting the good fight’?

‘Except you’re not even a man anymore…that will only make it easier for her.’
Charon looked down at his arms. Scarred and ruined, with skin missing and veins showing.

The way she clung to them yesterday, though. And every other time she had touched him: No fear. No hesitation.

Charon shook his head, stepping out of the shower and getting dressed.

‘She convinced Ahzrukhal to give up my contract; who’s to say she isn’t playing me like she so clearly played him?’

“Hey, there you are!” Percy was working on her rifle when he got back, pieces messily spread across the bed with some semblance of a system to their order. She carefully climbed over the parts and off the bed. Going over to the cabinet, she pulled out a giant suit of combat armor.

“Here you go! Your leather stuff was looking terrible, so I got you this today. It took some tailoring, but I was able to combine a few to fit your size. It’s in decent condition too!”

She held it in front of him, standing on the tips of her toes to keep it from dragging.

Charon was at a loss for words. “Thank you…”

Percy looked troubled “Do you prefer leather? I’m sorry, I should have asked first, but your stuff was literally falling apart when I tried to wash it.”

“No, no,” Charon rushed to reassure her “This is fine; great, actually. I’m…not used to this.”

Percy’s eyebrows scrunched together as she said “Well I hope you get used to human decency soon.”

Returning to the bed, she added “If you feel up to it, I’d like to go out and do some field-work today. You see, I kinda work for this woman back at Megaton. She wants to write a survival book, so she has me do a lot of crazy experiments. I figure after I do a couple in this area, we can go back home.”

Clipping the last piece into place, she looked up “Sound good?”

“Excuse me?” Charon was confused

“I’m asking what you think. Is there anything you want to do here before we go? I don’t want to rush you, but quite frankly, I’d like to get as far away from this place as possible so I can hopefully forget all the time I wasted trying to get here.” Her words were frank and her face was grim.

She was trying not to let yesterday’s events bother her, even making a point to avoid the lab as best she could today.

“Where ever you go, I shall follow.” He said as he threw on the armor. It fit surprisingly well—comfortable even.

“Well, either we go test this repellent stick, or we put this observation device in a mirelurk nest, and since I have no preference, I want you to decide where we go.” At this, Percy turned to him with a smile as she held up both.
“Mirelurks? Why would this woman want to learn anything about them?” They stood outside the Anchorage Memorial.

“You’d be surprised the kind of things she wanted me to do.” Percy was feeling better now that Rivet City was nowhere in sight. Grabbing a stealth boy from her side pocket, she turned back to Charon. “Ok, I’m gonna slip in and out. There should be another opening out to the Potomac, so as soon as I come back, I want you to seal this one shut.”

“Wait, I’m waiting out here, while you go into a mirelurk invested memorial? Hell no, Smoothskin, you wait out here.”

Percy was skeptical “No offence, but I need the mirelurks in there to stay alive.”

If Charon had eyebrows, one of them would have been raised skeptically “And last night you were bragging about how you took down a behemoth mutant with a mini nuke and a grenade you made from Nuka-Cola; I doubt non-violence is your forte.”

“…I guess you’re right…just be careful in there, ok? And be quick; those things are vicious and these stealth boys don’t last very long.”

Percy handed him the observer unit as he activated the stealth cloak.

Charon slipped through the door with surprising silence.

Percy smiled, blushing slightly. Why was she surprised that he was so good at everything he did.

‘Oh my God, what am I thinking? Charon shouldn’t be this good. He shouldn’t have been forced to be this good.’

Percy kicked a nearby rock in frustration. Easing herself onto the hard ground, She thought back when she first met him. She had never really cared for tough guys…Lord knows there were plenty of those in the vault.

Charon wasn’t the same though. Where the boys of the vault merely affected strength, Charon’s abilities spoke for themselves. Blushing further, she thought back to when he had rushed at Dukov, despite the enraged drunk firing at them. Charon’s speed and precision and steel-eyed determination had saved her life without giving any thought to his own life.

She pulled out the contract for what felt like the hundredth time since receiving it.

Percy would look at it every time she had a moment alone: looking for some kind of loophole. Her fingerprint was in blood right next to her signature.

“Is this really necessary? It’s just a contract.” Percy examined the piece of paper while Ahzrukhal grabbed a small knife from below the bar.

“Quite necessary, I’m afraid.” He wheezed, “Charon is honor bound to whoever’s blood and name reside on the contract. Just enough for a fingerprint however—makes it all official in the ghoul’s mind.”

“Man’s” Percy corrected him sternly.

“Of course, my dear.” He replied dismissively. “Now, give me your hand…”
Looking closely at the print, she noticed something funny about the aged ink. It had a strange luminescence, different from the ink Percy had used when signing it.

‘That’s odd…’

She was about to look closer when she heard bumping and scrambling from deep inside the building.

Scrambling to her feet, she readied her laser pistol.

Charon burst through the door, slamming it shut before a mirelurk could rush after him.

“NOW!”

As Charon held it closed, Percy blasted the seam of the door and welded it permanently shut.

Letting out a breath, Charon slumped against the door.

“What do you take me for? Of course not.” Charon smirked as he took her hand.

“And then, and then,” Percy slammed her drink down with emphasis. “Do you know what happens when I poked it with that stick?! Its fucking head explodes! Blood everywhere, and I’m just standing there with this decapitated mole rat corpse twitching on the ground in front of me. Of course after that, big guy over here had to try it. We ended up using that thing ten times. I’m sick of mole steak now, lemme tell you.” Percy laughed, leaning against her tall companion as she took another swig.

Gob couldn’t believe his eyes. Charon: the bouncer of the Ninth Circle was at his bar, drinking scotch and looking unnervingly relaxed.

Nova laughed “Maybe you could share some of those with us, Hun. Anything that isn’t pre-packaged is great in my book.”

“Speaking of books, I still have one more chapter of that crazy bitch’s survival guide.”

“Why do you even bother with that thing, sweetie? She can’t be paying enough for what she’s made you do, I mean, she changed your genetic make-up for what? A few rad-aways and rad-x?”

Charon spoke up. “You never told me about that, what happened?”

Percy didn’t sense the agitation in his voice. “Oh that? It actually didn’t turn out so bad. I mean, Radiation heals me. Haven’t gotten a chance to ask Barrows about what that means, but hey, what’s the rush? Hasn’t killed me yet!”

Charon turned to Gob incredulously “I still haven’t figured this one out, surely you’ve known her longer, was she always this reckless?”

Gob was still very uneasy around the large ghoul. Before he could reply, Percy swayed slightly as she stood up. “I’m gonna go unpack, you can stay a little longer if you want, Charon. Bye Gob, Nova.” Percy gave a knowing wink to Nova before turning to leave.
Percy had noticed how close the two stood together, the occasional intentional brush of skin.

‘I’ll have to ask Nova what that’s like... for science.’ blushing hotly, she rushed for the door.

“So I’m guessing Ahzrukhal’s dead?” Gob blurted out.

“What else would he be after being stupid enough to give up my contract?” Charon was giving him a wry grin before taking another drink from his glass.

“About that: what the hell did Perse say to get the bastard to sell?”

“Hell if I know; she’s clearly got a way with words though.”

Charon was still very much suspicious of his Employer’s silver tongue.

He found her struggling with a mattress halfway in the house.

“Just in time! Moira was still open so I bought a second bed. Better than the couch, right?”

Percy was red faced from her struggle. The frame appeared to have been thrown to the side in frustration.

“You really didn’t have to do this, smoothskin.” Charon hoisted up the mattress, bringing it into the house. “Where do you want this?”

“Umm…” Percy looked troubled. “In the room right in front of the stairs. What do you mean by that?”

Charon set the mattress against the wall, returning to grab the rest of the frame.

“I mean, why are you doing all these things? My comfort should not be your concern.”

Percy riled at that. It didn’t help that she was still pretty drunk when she said,

“What?! Oh course it is! Why should I not care that you’re comfortable?”

Charon avoided eye contact as he got to work assembling the bed. He was also a little drunk, and not in a good mood after talking to Gob about Ahzrukhal. “You are my employer, not my friend.”

The silence that followed was only broken by the sound of metal scrapping together and the creak of mattress springs.

“...Why would you say that? I’ve never considered you an employee. You’re my partner; of course I should care about your comfort.” Percy’s arms were limp at her sides when he finally turned to look at her. Seeing her like this was getting Charon angry. She had given him permission to speak his mind, maybe it was about time he did.

“Why the hell did you buy my contract then?”

“I told you: I thought it would be better than you staying in the corner of that bar. Didn’t you say yourself, Ahzrukhal was a horrible person?”

Charon scoffed. “Yeah, and what kind of person would that bastard give my contract to?”
That cut Percy to the core. “…What?”

“What the hell did you say to the bastard? He knew I hated him, the way I figure, the only person he would give my contract to, is someone who would make me suffer more than he ever could. If you managed to trick him, how the fuck am I supposed to trust you?”

Charon was terrifying in this moment. He had backed her into the door. There were tears in her eyes. He had never seen her upset like this before.

“Charon…do you really think I’d be capable of that?”

“How should I know? You said you couldn’t trust me if I was controlled by the contract, well I can’t ever trust an employer. No matter how kind they might seem, you will eventually give in to the urge to use me like the tool I am. So stop pretending to care about me. I’ve had enough of these mind-games.”

Percy glared at him as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“You’re right Charon; you are such a tool.”

She pushed him, and he backed away reflexively. Opening the door, she left the house, and Megaton.

Charon had been searching for her for three days.

‘How could she have gotten away from me this fast?’

He had been kicking himself for what he’d said.

Regardless of the vocal freedom she had given him, talking that way to an employer was inexcusable. And now, she was off God knows where.

Up ahead, he spotted Brotherhood Outcasts. Hiding behind nearby debris, he overheard their conversation.

“So this chick comes out of nowhere, sees us fighting mutants, and practically takes ‘em out for us. And get this: Sibley convinced her to run the simulation. Honestly, who’s stupid enough to do that? Anyways, when she dies, I’m not gonna be the one to clean her guts off the simulation pod.”

‘No…” Charon watched them enter the elevator in horror.

Percy had always been one for heroics; never one to run away from danger.

Groaning in frustration, he ran at a breakneck speed for the lift.

“You. Why did you let her get in there?”

Olin found herself slammed against the wall of computers by an enraged ghoul.

“*Cough* How…did you…get in…here?” Clawing at his arms, her eyes drifted to the sealed
chamber doors…and the door controls which were now sparking and frayed on the ground.

“You better get Percy out of there, or you will never leave this room.” Charon was truly terrifying; all sense of restraint was gone. Dropping the scientist to the ground, Charon stood over her as she caught her breath.

“The Anchorage simulation has already started. It can’t be turned off until it is either completed or failed.”

“Anchorage? The Battle at Anchorage?”

Charon had no idea why, but that was horribly familiar.
Percy felt sick to her stomach as she ran through the D.C area.

She didn’t care if she still held Charon’s contract. She just wanted to get away from him. In the back her head she acknowledged that he would have to follow her.

“Damn this fucking paper, and that bastard!!” She screamed to no one in particular.

How could he think that of her? What had she done to him? Rubbing her scalp and thoroughly tangling her hair, she wondered what she could possibly do to gain his trust if he only saw her as his master. Percy had long since begun trusting Charon in spite of herself. Even before she knew about the contract—hell before this whole mess even started—she had found herself feeling safe around him—a complete stranger. She thought back to when he had attacked her for tripping over him. Having occurred so recently after the incident with Moriarty, she’d panicked. If it had been anyone else, she would have left without another word after thoroughly injuring her attacker. But something about him had made her stay.

Percy remembered the feel of his arms wrapped around her, his head pressed against her back when they stayed the night at Dukov’s. Her body grew warm at the memory, making her even more frustrated now.

Has he really felt this way about their situation all this time?

Her thoughts were interrupted by gunfire up ahead.

“So, what you’re saying is: That armory will only open if this simulation of a world war three battle is passed?”

“We’ve tried bypassing the system, but no use.” Olin handed Percy the simulation pod harness. “On top of that, the program is designed to terminate whoever fails the simulation—and you can’t leave after it starts. A few were told to try to shut down the system from the inside, but that didn’t seem to work either. If anything, they probably died sooner. We don’t even know for sure what happens in there, we can only monitor your vitals.” Olin paused, turning to the lone wanderer.

“Look, are you sure you want to do this? We don’t know you; you don’t owe us anything.”

Percy was busy examining the inside of the pod. ‘This thing is made from the same bomb proof material my pip-boy is made from…’

“How does the pod kill the people that fail the simulation?”

“Everything that isn’t the pod or the pod harness is instantly vaporized. Horrifying, but easy to clean.”

With sudden realization, Percy pulled out Charon’s contract.

Percy knew this was rash, but what did she have to live for? She had no one in the wastes—not
anymore, anyway.

‘I’m tired of wandering. It’s all pointless now, anyway.’

Tucking the contract into her under top, she changed into the harness and climbed into the pod.

“Turn this thing on before I change my mind.”

Olin moved to the computers, but Percy stopped her. “Wait…If a tall ghoul named Charon comes through here, I want you to tell him something for me…”

Percy was immediately disorientated by bright flashes of light before the ground settled into focus beneath her.

“There you are, soldier! Almost lost you there!” Strong hands grabbed her shoulders, pulling her to her feet.

“It looked like you were going to miss the drop point completely; you released your parachute too late.” The man reprimanded

“Thanks…” Percy had a massive headache as the light faded to normal.

“Don’t mention it, now we need to push through those damn reds and head straight to base. You wanna go in guns blazing, or is this going to be a stealth mission?”

“Huh?…” Percy knew she needed to find her bearings fast when she heard shouts in a foreign language in the distance.

“Damn, I guess they made that decision for us.” Pushing a gun and knife into her hands, the soldier before her readied his own rifle. “Cover me: I’ll meet you in the artillery base.”

At this, he began climbing the cliff face at exceptional speed, leaving to Percy to take on the Chinese by herself.

Groaning to herself, Percy crouched down, cocked her gun, and looked around the corner. There was only one around the corner, but she noticed several snipers along the opposite cliff side.

“Well…now or never, I guess…”

Percy rounded the corner, firing off round after round into the nearest soldier’s face.

Charon roared as he slammed the butt of his shotgun against the side of the pod.

“That won’t work, you know. That pod is fucking bomb proof. Your gun isn’t gonna do shit.”

Olin was sitting in the corner closest to the busted door.

Snaring, Charon threw his gun to the ground. “What do you suggest I do then? My employer is in there, and I can’t protect her from out here!”
“I suggest you wait. Time moves way faster in there, she should only be in the simulation for a couple hours—four tops. There’s nothing you can do about her safety until she gets out; it’s completely beyond your control.” Hoisting herself from the floor, Olin returned to the computers, passing the time by watching Percy’s vitals’ display.

Running through the pipe covered halls, Percy came into another open room just as the body of a Chinese soldier fell through an opening in the ceiling, followed closely by Sgt. Montgomery.

“There you are! I hadn’t seen you in a while, I thought the red’s had gotten to you!”

“Well maybe if you’d stayed with me, I wouldn’t have been late…” Percy grumbled.

“Every soldier needs to be faced with crisis at some point in their campaign.” He said before running further into the building. Percy suspected that was more the simulation script than the AI.

The enemies were relatively easy to take out. The most trouble she had was with the Crimson Dragoon snipers.

“Up ahead! We need to take out those cannons attacking our base. Our pulse fields won’t last with that kind of assault!” Montgomery tossed her the charges before running and gunning up the hill.

‘This simulation really covers all the bases,’ she thought attaching the charges before running to the next, doing her best to avoid gunfire as she worked.

Finally she was at the last one. Rushing for cover, her attention was drawn to Montgomery just as the last charge went off.

“Great job, private! Now we can head back to base for our next—“

A shot rang out.

Percy watched in horror.

For just a moment, she forgot that it was a simulation.

For just a moment, she watched her commanding officer get shot through the heart, and collapse into pixels.

“Ben!!” She screamed as everything went out of focus.

“Great job, soldier.” Constantine Chase was saluting Percy as her vision came back into focus.

Struggling to maintain the soldier act, Percy saluted back.

“All a part of my…American duty, sir.”

Chase bit down on his cigar, turning from her.

“Those damn reds took a good man away from us, private. A good man, and a good soldier.”
“Sir…I’m not sure if I can continue on future missions without some assistance.”

“Of course; skilled as you are, I’m not sending a greenie out there alone. No private, I have Ben’s replacement all lined up.”

Chase motioned to someone by the door.

An incredibly tall man stepped into the light, his blue eyes harsh and determined.

“Private, I’d like you to meet the pride of our division. This bastard is one of the fiercest fighters I’ve ever seen.”

Percy was hardly listening as she stared in awe at the man before her.

His hair. It was all there. His nose too, and his ears, and all his skin. He was incredibly tan and muscles seemed to bulge at every opportunity.

“What is your name…?”

“Easy solder, that’s classified! His codename is Charon. He’s being tested for the opportunity of a lifetime, and I won’t have you screwing that up.” Chase cut in.

“Right…well then…Permission to be dismissed, sir.”

“Permission granted, private. Now, go get back our oil.”

Steadily making their way through the trenches, gunning down errant Chinese soldiers, Percy turned to the man beside her. He looked so much like the Charon she knew. He even shot the bodies of fallen soldiers like Charon. It almost hurt her to look at him, remembering how she had left him at Megaton.

He sensed her unease.

“…Ma’am?”

“Yes!” Percy straightened up as much as she could while crouching.

“Just how new to the field are you, Private? I’ve never seen you until today.”

“Oh, umm…” Percy needed a back story and fast. Why would the simulation test her like this? Or had Charon been more conversational in the past, and the AI had recorded it?

“I’m actually from the…Intelligence Bureau…I need to observe Chinese battle strategies first hand, as well as find any secret intelligence in their field bases.” Percy remembered the briefcases hidden in different areas of the artillery outpost. Cocking an eyebrow, she smirked as she added, “In reality, I outrank General Chase, but he doesn’t need to know that.”

Charon grinned wryly. “Is that so, well it’ll be our secret then. We’re getting close, orders?”

Percy was taken aback. “Orders?”

“I’m here to assist, not lead, ma’am; it’s part of my training.”
“Right… well…”

They were at the Chimera Depot. Chase’s reasoning had been that if America couldn’t have Canada’s oil, no one would. It was up to Percy and Charon to take care of that.

“You cover me, while I plant the charges. The wait time is only twenty seconds, so keep your distance, ok?”

“Yes ma’am.” Charon cocked his gun, excitement playing in his eyes.

Running ahead, He drew their fire first with a grenade, then short bursts of fire.

Admiring his technique for only a moment, Percy got to work.

“Look out, there’s a tank! Orders?”

Knowing the name of the thing didn’t take away from the fear as Percy watched the giant machine come from around the corner, seemingly on its own.

Staring in awe and horror didn’t last however, as it quickly took aim at her and she was immediately tackled to the ground.

Charon’s massive form hovered over her.

“Orders!?"

“Um…will grenades work on that thing?”

“Maybe, but that Gauss rifle might work a little better.”

“In that case…take these grenades and circle it while throwing them. I’ll take it out with the energy rifle.” Scrambling to their feet, they got to work.

They worked incredibly well together. Percy tried chalking it up to effective AI assistance, but a part of her couldn’t help but be reminded of the first time they took out a raider camp together.

“Charon…How long have you been in this special program?”

Having holed up on one of the bombed out shelters, the two repaired their weapons before their final assault on the listening post.

Charon paused in his work before replying robotically, “Didn’t Chase tell you? That kind of information is classified.”

Praying that her cover story would hold up against the simulation’s AI, she persisted. “And I told you, I out rank him. Tell me…now.”

Charon’s eyebrows furrowed. “I’ve been training for about a year now…funny, can’t remember the specifics of when I enlisted.”
“And what does the program train you for?”

“Following orders.” He replied before she could even finish her question.

“…that’s it? Surely that doesn’t require a special program?”

“Aren’t you from the Intelligence Bureau? You tell me.”

“…Why did you join the army? Please, I need to know, what made you do this?”

Percy was getting closer and closer to him.

“Why wouldn’t I? My country is under attack!”

“But it isn’t! This is a war over energy! There are nuclear cars in the streets and yet we are fighting over oil because, what, it’s rare now?!”

The simulation was getting agitated.

“I fight for my country!” The AI Charon declared, standing up, cocking his weapon, getting ready to charge back into the fray.

Percy knew she needed to stop pushing the simulation.

“Fine…so you are…you ready?”

“Of course, I always am.”

Percy readied her own gun before they ran for the entrance.

The place was crawling with Crimson Dragoons.

“Don’t kill the engineers, this isn’t their fight!” Percy whispered urgently as they came into another room. She hadn’t forgotten that it was just a simulation, but she couldn’t bring herself to attack a civilian—even a fake one.

“…Yes ma’am.” Charon growled out, displeased.

The vault dweller was exhausted; how did a simulation do that?

In the room ahead, she saw one of the checkpoints, with ammo and…health!

Without thinking, she rushed ahead for the health canister.

“Private, watch yourself!”

Slamming her hand on the canister, Percy turned just in time to see a stealth cloaked Dragoon raise his rifle.

He couldn’t get much farther however, as his head exploded.

“Charon…Thank you!”

“No time, get the others, behind you!”

Grinning evilly, Percy pulled the picks out of two grenades with her teeth before tossing them in the hallway ahead of them.
Charon was back to trying to break open the pod. The butt of his gun was beginning to splinter. The pod didn’t have a scratch.

A bored Olin watched him while she listened to the Outcasts trying to fix the simulation room door.

“So you’re Charon, huh? She mentioned you before getting in there. You keep going on about some contract, but the way she talked about you, I thought the two of you were lovers.”

Without stopping, Charon asked, “Oh yeah? And why is that?”

“Oh, just what she said to me before going in there…” Odin hoped to bait his curiosity enough to at least stop him from banging on the pod over and over.

It worked. Slumping his shoulders in exhaustion, he set down the gun and turned to her. Olin continued.

“Whenever someone fails the simulation, everything but the pod harness is completely vaporized. She wanted me to tell you that she took the contract in with her; she wanted me to tell you that if she didn’t make it, you were free.”

Charon slowly turned back to the pod.

“Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?” his voice was quiet, all the rage had left him.

“It seems irrelevant now; she’s already outlasted our previous attempts.”

Percy watched in horror as Jingwei committed suicide on his own sword before her eyes.

‘It’s just a simulation, it’s just a simulation!’

She had attempted to convince the General to stand down and surrender, but the simulation had other ideas.

More American soldiers in power armor rushed ahead, taking out the remnants of the enemy units.

“Good work soldier. With your help, the enemy has finally been pushed back!”

She turned to see General Chase walking up behind her.

“Before this ends…can you tell me what will happen to Charon?”

Chase angered. “While that’s none of your damn business, He’ll be sent to the south eastern branch of the Commonwealth for mental conditioning and sensory enhancements. After that, He will truly be an unstoppable force for the great U.S. Army!”

And everything faded to black.

As the pod opened, everything happened at once.
The Brotherhood Outcasts finally managed to pry open the door.
Percy wearily slumped in the pod, tears streaming down her face.
Charon rushed to her, taking her tired form in his arms.
“Charon…” She sobbed, hiding her face in his neck.
The Outcast members rushed in, holding their weapons up while Olin rushed to them for cover.
Macraw walked in, furiously calm.
“Outsider if it weren’t for what you just managed to do for us, I’d have you and that menace of a ghoul gunned down. Now go open that armory room, get your share, and get the hell out.”
Sniffing, Percy nodded as she shrugged out of Charon’s arms.
Walking down the hall to the armory, Charon heard some of the Outcast members argue with Macraw.
“I can’t believe this, letting her in here is one thing, giving her some of our much needed equipment? That crosses the line Macraw!”
“We owe her one, Sibley calm down. That’s an order.”
Percy ignored them, tapping away at the access panel as Olin eagerly looked over her shoulder. Just as she got the door open, Sibley and his men drew their weapons.
“Macraw, me and my boys are a little tired of your form of leadership!”
Before he could even fire however, a laser shot that came from behind Charon knocked Sibley’s head clear off.
Percy, wielding a shiny new Gauss rifle, rushed into the ensuing fray; followed closely by Charon.
Chapter End Notes

Those Images at the bottom are of Percy and Pre-war Charon through the fallout 4 character creation menu. You can find them and more images on my Tumblr.
Chapter 11

Charon was carrying Percy on his back as they made their way back to Megaton.

She had been surprisingly weak from the simulation. It has been intended for solders during the war, as preparation for the real thing. Despite being a simulation, it had been extremely physically taxing, and all the exhaustion she had experienced over what felt like week, had been squished into a matter of four hours. To walk for long distances had become impossible.

Their progress was slow and silent.

“You don’t need to carry me all the way, Charon. You need to rest.” Percy had tried to reason dully. The relief had worn off from when she had first seen him when the pod opened. The shame of being an unwilling master had come back with a vengeance.

Ignoring her, Charon kept his eyes front. He wanted to get them back to Megaton, and as far away from the outcast base as possible.

After three days straight of travelling without a break, they finally got home. It was early in the morning, but that didn’t matter to the two travelers. Continuing in silence, they both went to their respective rooms, and crashed.

It was a good twelve hours before Charon stirred. He never needed to sleep as much as the average person; in fact he would occasionally stay up all night, not wishing to sleep. However, this last expedition had thoroughly warn him in many ways.

Getting up and flexing, he walked over to Percy’s room to check on her.

The woman on that bed had been willing to die for his freedom—almost had.

How could he possibly wrap his head around that?

He’d felt powerless, waiting on the other side of that pod.

As Charon watched her, he began to feel a tightening in his chest.

Shaking his head, he went downstairs to find something to eat.

Percy woke up to the smell of something deliciously sweet and savory and…Blamco Mac and Cheese?

Mentally, she had no desire to get out of bed, but her stomach had other plans.

Percy lay there for just a moment longer however, feeling her stomach boil and turn.

She had failed.

She had succeeded but failed.
Charon was still a slave, and she still had no purpose.

Slowly stepping down the stairs, she saw the source of the delicious smell.

Charon was cooking over the stove she had installed before she had left Megaton so long ago. She had originally found the stove broken down in Moira’s but with some spare parts, she had managed to jury rig it into working somewhat. The parts had come from the Handyman that came with the house. As nice as it would have been to have extra security for her house, Percy just couldn’t sleep knowing it could glitch and kill her.

“What are you cooking?” She asked, going to peek around his shoulder.

“Brahmin steak with Nuka-Cola and whiskey; helps cover up the taste all irradiated food shares.” He replied quietly, his voice almost guarded.

“Stir the macaroni, will you? It’s gonna burn.”

Finally the food was done. And they sat down to eat.

Percy told Moira she wanted a pre-war theme installed way back when she had left for D.C. the first time. She loved how warm it made the place look.

Breaking the silence, Charon spoke up. “What did you see in there?”

Silence.

“Percy, you have to tell me.”

Taking a sip of water, anything to get rid of the giant lump in her throat, Percy replied.

“I saw you. You were there at Anchorage. You were training in what the simulation called a ‘Special Program’. They were training super solders. At the very end, it told me that you were going somewhere called the south west commonwealth for mental conditioning.”

Charon couldn’t remember Anchorage; only that he had fought there. He also couldn’t remember ever being to one of the commonwealths.

“You could have died in there. Over what, a new gun and some armor? How is that worth the risk?”

Percy looked pained. The numb feeling that had overtaken her back at the Outcast base was fading.

“Olin told me about what you did. With my contract.” He pressed

“I was a burden to dad, now I’m a burden to you. I serve no purpose alive.” She muttered keeping her eyes on her food.

“You aren’t a burden to me.” He didn’t know what else to say.

“You’re right. I’m a thousand times worse. I’m your master.” The word burned against her tongue. This was worse than the numbness.

“Just because you hold my contract, doesn’t mean you deserve to die, Perse!”

“How can you say that? Aren’t I worse than Ahzrukhal!? She exclaimed. Jumping up, she rushed for the door. “I need a drink; I’m doing to Gob’s.”
“Stop running away from this!” Charon was after her.

Grabbing her arm, he turned her around, clutching her shoulders as his face came close to hers.

They stood like that for a moment, looking into each other’s eyes. Charon was the first one to look down.

“You aren’t worse than Ahzrukhal. You almost killed yourself to free me. That’s… Amazing…but your death isn’t worth my freedom.”

Looking back up, he continued. “I shouldn’t have accused you of playing mind games with me…I’m just not used to all this… **niceness**…”

Releasing her, he straightened up, rubbing the back of his head he added. “You’re the farthest from a burden to me…the world would be even shittier if you were dead, Percy.”

He looked down when he felt tiny arms wrap around his waist.

Percy clung to him, sobbing quietly.

“Thank you… **Thank you.**” She repeated over and over, her face pressed against his chest.

Charon wasn’t sure what to do, but settled on holding her closer.

Tentatively, he ran one scarred hand through her hair, in an attempt to calm her down. It was incredibly soft.

Her shaking eventually subsided.

After she calmed don’t a bit more, Charon lead her back to the table to finish her meal.

It really was delicious. Percy was almost reminded of Anne Palmer’s cooking. That woman made the best sweet rolls from snack cakes and dandy apples.

Charon was sitting closer to her now than before. He rested his left hand on the table, and it was almost reaching for her. Ready to give comfort if needed.

“…When I first talked to Ahzrukhal, he went on and on about how you would do everything he said without complaint. Hurt, torture, kill—it didn’t matter. It killed me to hear him talk about you simply as a means for his ends, instead of the man you are. I wouldn’t have been able to live with myself, leaving you there. I had to do something. He didn’t want money. He used the words, ‘Life for a life’ Greta for you.”

Percy took a sip of her drink. Glaring at it as if it was the dead ghoul.

“I wasn’t about to kill anyone, even Greta. So I threatened to stop supplying Murphy with Sugar Bombs. They’ve gotten pretty scarce after all, it would be so much easier for him to just give you up. And he laughed.” She was almost astounded by the memory. “‘Well he mostly just handles drunk ghouls, now, anyway. The jet is worth more.’”

Charon ground his teeth together. His hate for Ahzrukhal had nearly consumed him in those fifty years spent in hell. The thought that the old bartender hardly gave him a thought… It made those years seem even more wasted.
“You what!?” Percy screamed at the scientist.

“I wanted to protect Greyditch! I was so close to a breakthrough but then you began killing off all my test subjects!” Doctor Lesko was yelling right back, but there was clearly fear in his eyes.

“I just can’t believe your gross lack of scientific control! There’s a child in Greyditch whose entire family has been killed because of your inability to set boundaries! As a scientist you have an obligation to what’s left of humanity to set a safe experimental field—not letting your test subjects run wild!” Percy threw her hands in the air.

Lesko turned to his equipment. “Look, if I can only figure out a way to control them, maybe if I was able to set an observer closer to the ant queen.”

Charon laughed. “Well fuck that! Where is the queen? I’ll take her out myself.”

“You can’t do that! I worked too hard! All my progress will be lost!”

Lesko rushed at Charon, only to be grabbed by the collar and thrown against the wall.

“Don’t push me.” Charon growled out.

“We’re running low on food…” Percy mused, looking through her bag. “Is there anywhere close by good for scavenging?”

“I don’t know about scavenging, but Greyditch is nearby; we can resupply there.”

Percy lit up. “Is it close?” She was eager to see what other pockets of civilization existed in this world she was still so new to.

“Yeah, it’s right up there.” Charon pointed in the distance.

In the past few days alone, their relationship had become so much smoother. Charon was reminded of the wonderful times when his last employer sent him out on errands. The freedom.

Smiling, he looked to his new partner.

Percy was shading her eyes as they walked casually in the direction of Greyditch.

Despite her life in the vault, she had no trouble with sunburns in the hot wasteland sun.

She had, however, collected a few cute freckles across her cheeks. Suddenly her face looked troubled.

“Charon…look at those smoke trails. Isn’t Greyditch in that direction?”

Fire ants were everywhere. Literal fire ants. Big ones too.

“What’s going on here?” Percy and Charon were crouched behind a severed car door, using it as a shield against the fire breathing ants.

“If I knew, I’d tell you; hold this.” Charon let go of the door, aiming at the nearest one, he shot its head off after a few rounds.

“We can’t keep this up, we need better cover!”
“Hey! You guys! Over here!”

“A child?!” Charon was practically dragging Percy along as he rushed to protect the boy.

“What are you doing here?!”

“They came from the metro! Oh God, they killed everyone, they killed my family!” He ran for Percy.

“Charon, we have to do something.”

Charon looked just as worried. There weren’t any children in the Underworld, thank God, but Charon always had a soft spot for them.

“You said they came from the metro?”

Charon held the mad scientist back while Percy looked through his computer.

“F.E.V…Lesko what is this?”

“It’s nothing, hurk!” He was once again slammed against the wall.

“Forced Evolution Virus; it’s Pre-war! I found it while searching through one of the old opened vaults.”

“Well it’s gone now.” Percy tapped a few keys, clearing the screen.

“What?!” Lesko continued to struggle in vain against Charon as Percy grabbed a device from the crowded counter.

“There are plenty of dangerous creatures out here already! We don’t need you making more. You can keep the queen, but I’m killing its guards. Charon, watch him. I’ll be right back.”

A couple grenades took care of the warrior ants disappointingly fast. The queen was a different matter.

‘I need to get close…But I don’t want to get roasted alive…I really didn’t want to waste this one…’ Sighing, Percy switched on the stealth boy. Sneaking up close, she stuck the observer near its abdomen. She was about to leave, when she noticed something in the corner. “Is that…what I think it is?” Silently pulling an empty whiskey bottle from her bag, she collected some of the queen’s pheromones before leaving the cave without a sound.

Percy gunned down the last of the giant ants while Charon watched with Bryan.

“Shouldn’t you help her?” Bryan asked nervously.

“Nah, Percy can handle herself; plus she has some stress she needs to take care of.”
His point was made when several ant parts flew in their direction.

“So what are you gonna do now, kid? You can’t stay here.”

“I’m not sure. I have an aunt in Rivet City, but that’s days away.”

Charon rubbed his temples. He wanted to help the boy, but he and Percy barely had enough food for the two of them, and he didn’t want to be responsible for a child’s death in the wastes. He wasn’t going to survive for long alone here either.

“Hey guys! Come check this out!”

Percy was in an open garage.

“What is this, Charon?”

“A motorcycle; one in surprisingly good condition, too.” Charon muttered, walking up to get a closer look.

“Do you think we can ride this? It would cut days off our travel time.” Trying to look good in front Bryan, she resisted the urge to ask for further clarification.

Charon’s face lit up as it roared to life. “Does that answer your question, smoothskin?”

“Motorcycles, elevators, cram?! The things you did for convenience!” Percy kept her eye’s tight shut, clinging to Charon’s back as they rode along the Potomac. Charon laughed at this, enjoying the moment. Bryan was having the time of his life, pretending to steer the bike as Charon drove. It had been too long since he felt like a kid.

They found a boat in relatively good condition.

“Do we have to go this way?” Bryan was skeptical as Charon loaded the bike onto the boat while it rocked precariously.

“Would you prefer to face super mutants?” Charon was surprisingly gentle with the boy as he helped him into the boat.

When Charon went to help Percy into the boat, he noticed her suppressing a smile.

“Don’t say it, smoothskin; I get the irony.”

She couldn’t help but giggle as he grabbed her by the waist, picking her up before stepping onto the boat.

“Of course…Ferryman.”

His hands were warm against her hips. His fingers brushed her backside in a way they both couldn’t help but notice. Charon focused on rowing the boat, Percy on the rudder. They avoided eye contact for the entirety of the trip.
Seagrave Holmes was looking into one of the larger shards of mirror glass in his room.

Vera had been in acting stressed and nervous for weeks. He hoped to at least relieve some of that today. Grabbing the makeshift vase from his dresser, he made his way to the Weatherly Hotel. The flowers had cost him over a hundred caps; straight from Tenpenny’s personal courtyard. He even managed to find some paint to put some decoration on the glass milk bottle he used for a vase.

Taking a deep breath and slowly letting it out, he stepped into the hotel.

“Hey, Vera? How you doing today?”

Rushing to wipe at her eyes, the young blond looked up from the counter.

“Oh hi Seagrave…How can I help you?”

“Actually, I got you something; Flowers—to spruce the place up a bit.”

Her eyes lit up as he revealed the gift from behind his back.

“They’re nice.” She smiled warmly as she sniffed at the blossoms.

“I should hope so!” Holmes laughed nervously, leaning on the counter. “Those have come a very long way just so see your beautiful smile, my dear, and lemmi tell you: it sure was worth the trip!”

Vera laughed as she made a place for them on the counter. “Thanks for this…”

“But?” Inching around the counter, Seagrave moved closer to Vera.

“But, even though I know in my head that everyone is probably dead in Greyditch…I can’t help but hope a little that some of my family survived, you know? The world is a pretty shitty place, huh Holmes?”

Hesitantly, he rested his hands on Vera’s shoulders. “I’ll say…but we gotta make the most of it, right sweetheart?”

“Yeah…yeah I guess so…” Vera leaned against him, turning to look into his eyes.

“Aunt Vera!”

Bryan Wilkes stood in the doorway in front of none other than the two travelers who had passed through a couple weeks ago.

“Bryan? Bryan!” Blushing, Vera untangled herself from Holmes and rushed to embrace her nephew.

“Bryan needs a home. Vera, do you think you can provide that?” Percy asked, as Charon walked over to poor Holmes.

“Sorry to interrupt you two.” He muttered.

“Not at all. This is way better than anything I could ever do for her. Thank you, truly.”

Holmes smiled as he watched the reunited family.
Chapter 12

“Hey sport, nice to meet you!” Seagrave was eager to make a good impression on Bryan. “Vera told me all about you; say, you hungry? How about we go get something to eat, huh?”

Bryan was unimpressed. “Sure…can Charon come?”

Even if he couldn’t remember any specific examples from his pre-war past, Charon knew how mean children could be to someone new. It would help if anyone tried to pick on him.

“Sure, kid.”

After the men left, Percy pulled some wine out of her bag. “Penny for your thoughts?”

Quirking a smile, Vera pulled a table together.

“Sure, what’s on your mind?”

“Well, I’m putting together a book, and I need some information on the history of Rivet city; any idea where I can get some stories?”

Vera entwined her fingers in thought as Percy poured the both of them a glass.

“Hmm…All the shop owners are on city council, and Bannon keeps track of the minutes. Oh, Abraham Washington runs the pre-war museum, so he might be a good place to start. There used to be a man named Pinkerton who to live here, but he’s long gone; maybe the scientists know something.”

“Wow…thanks!” Percy wasn’t expecting so many leads, or to get them all out of Vera so easily.

“So…You and Holmes huh?”

“Vera snorted into her wine. “Hah, sure, so long as his supply shop is open, so are my legs.”

‘Wasn’t expecting that.’ Percy frowned. “Really? He seems to really care about you.”

“Exactly! Between my hotel and his shop…talk about easy living!”

Percy decided to change the subject. “Right…speaking of your hotel, I’m gonna need a room tonight.”

Percy was in awe. Before her was the largest collection of pre-war paraphernalia she had ever seen—and in such good condition!

“Well hello, little lady! Appreciating the glory of what once was?”

“Oh yes…” Percy was in ecstasy. Shaking her head, she refocused. “Umm, I actually had some questions…”

“Sure, sure, but since you’re a traveler I have a little request myself. Tit for tat, so they say.”
As she left the market place, she was nearly run over by a girl even scrawnier than herself.

She was completely out of breath, and clearly scared to death. Looking nervously behind her, she said “Oh… I’m so sorry miss, please excuse me…” She was about to run away again, but Percy stopped her

“Whoa, hey, one second; what are you so scared of?”

The woman was suspicious. “How do I know I can trust you?”

Percy was exasperated. “You shouldn’t trust strangers, but it’s not like I can do anything to you here with so many guards.” She smirked. “Look, let me help you.”

“The woman was still nervous, but Percy practically radiated trustworthiness.

“Ok…my name is Mei, I’m a runaway slave.” She said under her breath. “There’s a man named Sister here, and he’s gonna take me back to Paradise falls, I just know it. I can’t go back!” Mei realized that Percy was dragging her back to the market. They finally stopped in front of Flak N’ Shrapnel’s. Pulling out a hundred caps, she passed them to Flak saying, “Get me a knife, a .44 magnum, and some ammo for that.”

“Sure, just don’t use it against me.”

Percy pushed the weapons into Mei’s hands.

“Will this work?”

Mei’s was tearing up. “Thank you…”

Charon watched Holmes’ shameless attempts at getting on Bryan’s good side.

The local children had been decent; well, except for that Hargrave kid. Wanting to get back to Percy, he let Seagrave walk Bryan home. Charon found her standing in front of the Science Lab door.

“Hey Perse…You going in there?”

She jumped, whirling around. “Hey! Yes…um, can you go in with me?”

Charon resisted the urge to scoff at such a silly question. “Of course, smoothskin.”

He put his arm around her shoulders without thinking.

Percy immediately calmed down. Smiling, she opened the door and walked in.

“I need your help Dr. Li. It’s in your best interest to assist; the Institute is always kind to brilliant scientists, but less forgiving of those who cross us.”

“Can it Zimmer, You’re crowding my work.” Turning, Li noticed the two travelers coming in.

“Oh…it’s you. He’s not back, you know.”

“No! I mean, yeah…I had a few questions about Rivet city’s history, actually…” Percy began to
ramble nervously.

“Well I’m sorry, but I don’t have time.” Madison brushed past her.

What’s her problem?” Charon grumbled.

“She’s in love with my dad, she hates that he left Rivet city for me, then came back only to leave again.” Percy replied bluntly. “I’ll ask someone else.”

“Wait a minute, ma’am,” Zimmer jumped in front of the two.

“You look quite proficient at surviving the wastes.”

“You gotta problem with the way we look?” Charon growled out, stepping in front of Percy.

“Ah I see you took that as an insult.” Zimmer was unfazed, as his own bodyguard stepped closer. Turning, Zimmer said, “Armitage, its fine. At least one of these two should be reasonable.” He practically looked through Charon to Percy.

“You see, I lost some property a while ago, and I’ve been having a surprisingly hard time finding him.”

That got both Percy and Charon’s full attention.

“I-I’m sorry?” Percy managed to just barely hide the hatred from her face.

“Yes, an android. Ironically one of my catchers have gone rogue.”

“An android?” She asked in shock, moving from behind Charon, who was staring daggers at Zimmer, who was smug to see Percy had taken the bait.

“Oh yes, you’d be surprised by the advancements the Institute has made since the war.”

“I have an idea.” Percy said flatly.

“In any case, I’m quite sure he’s in this area. You find me my android, and I’ll repay you quite handsomely.”

Putting on the evilest smile she could muster, Percy replied, “Of course; we will keep in touch, Dr. Zimmer. Come along, Charon.” Without even giving him a look, she left for the door. After a few steps, she turned back to him, mock shock on her face. “Come along Charon, don’t keep me waiting.” Charon didn’t know what to think.

Glaring, he replied, “Of course, Mistress.”

They walked all the way to the Muddy Rudder before either of them spoke up.

Charon noticed a woman had been following them from a distance, since they had left the Lab. She didn’t look like much of a threat though.

As they sat down, he finally spoke up. “Ok, what the hell was that, smoothskin?”

“I can never tell if you call me that endearingly or as an insult.” She mused. “Wine please, you want anything?”

“What the fuck? After all your high and mighty talk about freeing slaves and now you’re going to
hunting one down?”

“Will you keep your voice down?” Lowering her own, she added, “I’m not going to help him, look:”

She pulled out two holotapes. “I found these at Moira’s and Doc Church’s. They talk about some android who was looking for reconstructive surgery. I thought it was a hoax but apparently not. We have to find him, and warn him, or at least find enough evidence to just say he’s dead so Zimmer will leave.”

“I might be able to help with that.” The woman who had been following them stepped up, taking a seat on Percy’s side.

“I’m part of the underground railroad. We helped him find a surgeon.” Pulling something from her pocket, she added, “Take this to Zimmer as proof.”

“Do you know his surgeon? Can you tell me where he is now?”

The two stood before the broken off bow of Rivet city.

Charon tried the door. “It’s locked tight, are there any other entrances?”

Percy looked to her pip-boy.

“Hmm… maybe if I can swim around the bow, my pip-boy will pick up an opening,” Percy began stripping off her armor. “Can you pass me the rad-x?”

After swimming the perimeter she called to Charon. “There’s an entrance beneath the surface over here, I’ll get in and open the door from the inside!”

“Be careful.” He leaned against the door and waited.

“Well I’m a total shit head…” Charon groaned, rubbing his chin.

First he keeps assuming her actions were for the worst, now he can’t help but check her body out every chance he gets. He was completely shameless. She was his employer, and he had no right.

He needed a cigarette.

Blowing smoke through his nose, he wondered out loud, “What the hell am I doing…?”

With a loud groan, the door creaked open. Percy rushed out clutching her side.

“Shut the door! That place is full of mirelurks!”

“I need to blow some steam.” Charon got up, cocking his gun before rushing through the door.

“What the hell are you two doing, blowing shit up, and disrupting my peace?”

Pinkerton was more displeased than angry to see them, but not the slightest bit surprised.

“Are you Mr. Pinkerton?” Percy really wanted to look around his lap, but tried to focus on the task at
hand.

“What kind of question is that? I assumed you were the smart one between the two of you; clearly I was very wrong.”

Percy was tired of how everyone had been today. She finally snapped. “Can you please cut the shit? I know you did reconstructive surgery for an android not long ago. Someone from the Boston Commonwealth is here looking for him. I need to know how to find him in order to warn him.”

“And how can I know you aren’t going to turn him in, huh? I’m too proud of my handy work to let it all go to waste.”

“Someone from the Railroad in Rivet gave me this.” She pulled the device out of her bag.

“That’s one of the android’s components… I was wondering why this piece was missing…”

Pinkerton took the component from her. “Alright… here: This is his new and old face, as well as a tape of his voice audio. He has a new memory; I was very thorough. He does have a recall code though.” He gave Percy the holotapes, which she then loaded into her pip-boy. Charon looked over her shoulder at the tiny screen.

“Oh God… Charon…”

“I know…”

Percy grabbed her things. “We need to get Zimmer out of here as soon as possible!”

Without another word to Pinkerton, they left the bow and ran for the bridge. There was no time to waste.

Harkness was, of course, very suspicious of their behavior as they tried to rush past him.

“Whoa, why are you two in such a hurry?”

“Harkness…” Percy was out of breath. “Where is Dr. Zimmer? I need… To talk to him… about a job…”

Harkness gave her a funny look. “He’s in the damn lab. Pestering Li again, no doubt.”

She grabbed his shoulders. “Thank you! So much!” Without another word, she rushed for the lab with Charon close behind her.

“Why didn’t you use the recall code?” Charon whispered in her ear.

“If he remembers, he might get so angry he’ll try and kill Zimmer! And if Zimmer doesn’t make it back to the Commonwealth, who knows what they’ll send as retaliation! I don’t know what kind of weapons they’ve developed at the Institute, but I’m not keen on finding out.”

She stopped short, turning to Charon. “I’m really sorry, but I need you to play the slave and mistress act again for Zimmer; He can’t suspect a thing.”

Charon tried not to blush and the other implications of such a phrase. He quickly recovered however. Putting on a sterner face than usual, he stepped out of her personal bubble before replying, “Of course, Mistress.” He broke character just briefly to give her the slightest smirk.

It was Percy’s turn to blush. Shaking her head, she continued on her way to the Lab.
'I need to focus!'

Squaring her shoulders, She put on her cockiest sneer before throwing the door open.

“Dr. Zimmer, I’m afraid I have some bad news.” She strode over to the old man and his bodyguard holding up the robotic component. Charon stood silently behind her, arms crossed, eyes never leaving Zimmer.

“I’m afraid your little android became just another victim of the wastes. I found his body eroding in a pool of irradiated waste, and this part not far from the…wreckage. Sadly, nothing else was salvageable.”

“And where did you find this?” Zimmer took the component looking closely for a bar code to denote the android model.

“In the bow of the ship. The area was highly unstable; the room I found it in collapsed right after I managed to get out.” Percy rested a hand on her hip, leaning to the side while looking very bored.

“Regardless. I got what you asked for…or close enough, anyway.” She shrugged “Anyway, about my payment…?”

Zimmer sighed, handing the component to Armitage. “Of course, of course; Here.” Grumbling “Such a waste…” He handed Percy fifty caps before walking out.

Percy stayed in character. Striding back out, and heading up to the aircraft landing strip at the top of the ship. As soon as the door closed behind them, she ran for the side, looking over to the entrance bridge.

“Look, there he is! He’s actually leaving!” Percy turned, rushing back for the door “Harkness needs to wake up; It’s too dangerous for him to remain ignorant of his past.”

They found him in an empty security guard break room, all alone.

“Harkness, I need to talk to you.”

He rolled his eyes. “And here I was hoping you were over your earlier weirdness…What is it, Miss?”

Percy looked so sad. “I’m sorry, but it’s too dangerous for you to stay like this anymore.

Activate A3-21 recall code violet.”

Harkness was immediately on his knees, clutching his head, groaning in intense pain as the memories flooded his brain.

Percy rushed forward to help him, but Charon held her back. “Don’t! He might hurt you.”

Terrified, Percy watched Harkness struggle.

“Why did you let that bastard leave?” He finally growled out. “If you hadn’t gotten him to go, I could have given him what he deserves.”

“I don’t want any more of the Commonwealth anywhere near here. If you get revenge the entire
wasteland could get destroyed all over again.” She replied quietly. “Your past memories might have been fake, but your present sure isn’t. Don’t you care about this place? You have way more responsibility to it than I do.”

Harkness struggled to his feet, still holding his head. He sighed, frustrated. “I know. Dammit I know.”

Charon let go of Percy, walking forward. “Regardless, you’re free, Harkness. What are you gonna do?” He asked.

“Keep being Harkness, I guess. They can’t know I’m not human though. Can I trust the two of you with that?”

Percy was practically skipping down the hallways back to their room. Unclasping her pip-boy she turned the radio all the way up as *A Wonderful Guy* began to play. Throwing the wrist computer onto the nearby nightstand, Percy practically jumped into Charon’s arms, embracing him in a hug as the door closed behind them.

“We did it!” Leaning back a bit she smiled at him.

The smile got a little smaller as she saw his own expression. He was looking at her with the oddest look in his eyes. It was serious, but not angry or worried.

She was suddenly very aware of his arms, tight around her waist as he held her close.

She lips separated slightly. Eyes half lidded, she leaned forward, pressing a gentle kiss against his lips. They stayed like that for a moment, Charon frozen and unmoving.

She pulled away, looking nervous.

“…Sorry, I shouldn’t have don—” His lips came crashing against hers; his, rough and firm, moving urgently against her soft ones. One hand reached up to run through her thick hair earning him a gentle whimper from the beautiful woman in his arms. Her arms wrapped tighter around his neck as her tongue tentatively ran against his upper lip, sending shivers down his spine. Charon readily opened his mouth, so eager to taste her.

Percy felt the edge of the bed against the back of her legs for just a moment before they both fell back. Letting out something between a giggle and a moan, Percy turned her head, trying to deepen the kiss as one hand ran down to stroke gently at his neck.

Charon felt incredible, but also shameful, as if he was forcing himself on her…until her leg rode up the side of his hip.

Percy was becoming flushed, feeling him so eager against her. She could hardly think; she had never felt like this for someone before. Charon’s fingered began playing against the base of her shirt, brushing against her skin. He began running kisses up her jaw, taking her ear lobe gently between his teeth, breathing hot breath against her ear. She was too intoxicating to his senses—her taste, her smell, everything about her seemed geared to draw him in. He moved his attention to the base of her neck, sucking tenderly at the skin there. Rolling his hips against hers once more caused Percy to gasp.

“Charon!” She moaned, trying to get her senses back. “Stop! Please…”
Charon immediately pushed away from her, backing off the bed.

Percy was panting, blushing hard.

“I’m sorry…I need some air.” Avoiding his gaze, she ran out of the room.

Without thinking, she found herself past the bridge, sitting on the metal stairs leading up.

She ran her hands through her hair. “What the hell am I doing…?”

‘He seemed just as eager as I was…

But I hold his contract! It isn’t right…

But he could have stopped me, I didn’t order him to do anything!

It doesn’t matter; it would be like forcing him to be with me…

But that’s already what’s happening, isn’t it?’

Percy groaned. “This sucks!”

“It’s about to get a whole lot worse, sweetheart.”

She felt the cold hard barrel of a gun against her lower back as someone spoke menacingly.

“Don’t move, and stay quiet. You and I are gonna take a walk.”

Percy slowly nodded as she stood up. “Are you Sister?”

“Bingo. I wasn’t here for that slave bitch though. There’s someone who is pretty impatient to see you.”

They walked north a ways until the tall buildings of the D.C. ruins hid the both of them from Rivet and its guards. Four talon company mercs were standing by, waiting for them.

One of them spoke up. “This the woman? Doesn’t look like much: scrawny.”

“It sure is. Three Dog won’t shut up about her. The savior of the wastes stands before you, gentlemen.” Sister answered.

“Gee, is that what they call me; too fancy for my taste.” Percy kept a brave face. Hands trembling, she was ready to jump at any moment.

“Whatever…” A tall, burly merc walked up, pulling med-x from his pocket. As soon as Sister’s gun pulled away from her back, she leapt into action. Grabbing Sister’s pistol from him, she turned the tables; now it was her holding the gun against his temple while she used him as a shield against the guns aimed at her.

“Hold up! I want some answers and I want them now!”

Without even a pause however, all the talon members shot Sister before rushing Percy.

The tall one came up behind her, shoving the med-x into her neck and everything went black.
The world went in and out for Percy. Every time she woke up to the ground shaking under her, and roaring in her ears. These sensations didn’t last however, as more med-x flooded her system.

When she finally came to, her arms and legs were bound behind her. Percy struggled against her binds. No use. A man in a suit was standing before her. Her eyes found his feet, making their way slowly up his form, before glaring him straight in the eyes, shielded behind a pair of tinted glasses.

“Long time no see, Burke.” She said with a small smile.

“It has been a while, hasn’t it, my dear?” He said leered back at her.
Burke slowly walked up to her, eyes calm but deeply menacing.

Crouching down in front of Percy, he began to slowly unbutton her shirt.

Percy jumped, trying in vain to back away from his touch. Burke sighed, frustrated at her struggles.

“Now now, darling,” He pulled a revolver out from inside his crisp clean suit. Everything about the man was tailored, manicured, and clean—but no less intimidating for it. Without hesitation, he held it up you her forehead. “Please don’t struggle, my dear, the last thing I wish to do is hurt you.”

Percy stilled immediately, mind racing. “Oh Burkey, I know but…This is so sudden. I’m an old fashioned girl, and you haven’t even met my father—” Despite the fear coursing through her, she tried to put on the air of seductress she had used when first meeting him.

As she said these words however, Burke pulled on the sleeve of her right shoulder. The color left his face just for a moment, before it was replaced with red.

“You slut.” He whispered. Taking his gun by the barrel, he slammed the handle against her cheek. Percy shrieked in pain, seeing stars.

“Who is it, you whore?”

Pistol-whipping her again on the other side, he began furiously ripping her clothes to shreds.

“Please, please stop! Burke please!” Crying for mercy, Percy jerked against her bindings, trying to hide her face from his wrath.

“Who, who, WHO!” He grabbed her by the hair yanking her up so he could punch her in the stomach. He was a mad-man, his typical calm and collected façade broken by the faint red bruise in the corner of her neck.

Losing the last remnants of his patience, he took up his gun once more, holding it to her head shouting, “Tell me the bastard’s name or I’ll blow your brains out and hang your naked corpse from Tenpenny Tower for him to find!”

“Charon!” she screamed a declaration and a cry for help to the man she might never see again.

Burke grabbed the front of her bra, ripping the fastens apart and tearing the seams. A tiny folded piece of paper fluttered to the floor.

Panting, Burke grabbed the paper while Percy cowered before him.

“And what is this, my dear girl?”

Percy’s blood went cold as he read the paper, but stayed quiet.

“Well well well. So not only have you been untrue, but with a slave and a ghoul no less; and you use him to sate your depraved lusts, is that it?” Burke chuckled, slipping the paper into his suit. “I imagine I would have many uses for such a thing.” With a roar, he broke his temporary calm. He grabbed a lead pipe from the ground. Turning back to her with fire in his eyes, he struck her over and over as she screamed, pleading for the tiniest shred of mercy.
Finally, darkness retook Percy, and Burke stood over her naked form, taking in his bloodied handiwork.

Charon watched Percy rush out of the room, too ashamed of his actions to speak, much less go after her.

He fucked up. The very self-control he prided himself on, slipped for a few glorious minutes. More than likely now, she would give his contract to another. Sure, she would give it to someone she saw as kind—that’s just the sort of girl she is. But he would ever see her again after the contract officially changed hands, that’s for sure.

Charon’s fist met the metal wall with a resounding *gong*, echoing through that entire level of the boat. He stalked down to the Muddy Rudder.

Harkness was leaning hard against the bar when Charon joined him.

“How friend, where’s your pretty companion?"

“Getting air…” Charon growled out, lighting a cigarette.

“I’ll drink to that. You know the best thing about being a damn android?” Harkness asked under his breath as he passed Charon a drink.

“What’s that?” Charon took it, memorizing the rust on the wall behind the bar.

“You can drink as much as you want, but you never die of alcohol poisoning. I’ve damn near cleaned poor Bonny Belle out.” He raised his voice for the last part, winking at the Bartender.

“I’m not complaining, honey.” Bonny smirked before turning on the radio and going to her store closet to re-stock.

Cherry came through the doors and sauntered down the stairs. Somehow, she managed to make her admittedly conservative cloths look indecent with the sway of her hips, and the burning stare she gave Harkness.

“Hey, baby, what’s shaking?” Cherry cooed as she began rubbing Harkness’s shoulders.

Harkness stood up, leaning heavily against Cherry as she swayed to and fro.

“Dance with me.” He gurgled into her shoulder.

Cherry grinned wryly, but grinned all the same. This was her life, going from one shield to the next. At least this one was younger and handsomer than the others.

Charon took a sip of his drink, watching the two.

They stayed like that for a couple hours, Cherry never taking a drink herself.

Charon was staring long and hard into his glass, trying to cherish what would surely be the last remnants of freedom he would have for a while.

The whiskey reflected the ruined face he bore. He had long ago come to terms with the state of his being. He hadn’t been with a woman since his skin started falling off, and quite a while before that,
as well. Even back when he first met Percy, and how friendly she had been—how she had no hesitation about touching a ghoul—he never imagined she might be even slightly attracted to him. And maybe, for a moment at least, she was.

Charon shook his head. She just got caught up in the moment, she always did that; didn’t mean he could just take advantage of her the way he did.

Hours passed—Charon wasn’t sure how many—he began nodding off, with the radio blaring. Harkness and Cherry had eventually retired to one of the booths.

His head hit the bar

And his entire body lit up.

Charon’s bar stool clattered to the floor, as his stood rigid, all pistons firing.

He hadn’t felt like this in…one hundred and ninety six years.

“Harkness.”

The android ignored him, but not for long as Charon grabbed the back of his collar, ripping the couple apart.

“Harkness.” He repeated, nearly lifting the android off the ground.

“Percy. Something’s happened to her. I need to find her.”

Harkness sobered up immediately. Rushing to the intercom as soon as Charon dropped him.

“Wake up, everyone! I need all hands on deck to hunt down the lone wanderer. Wherever she is, she’s in trouble.”

Charon ran for the bridge. Waves of anxiety and hot flame shot through his body. He hadn’t experienced this feeling in nearly a hundred years, and he knew exactly what it was.

“Charon. Go grab some food from the mess hall, will you.” Sergeant Theodore commanded, splayed languidly against the couch in their cramped vault room. His wife Noel looked nervously after the giant man’s retreating form. “Are you sure you should talk to him like that dear? I don’t think he appreciates it…”

Theo grumbled, pulling the contract out of his pocket. “You see this? This makes sure we’re safe from him, and he will do…whatever we want!” He repeated for what felt like the millionth time since they were moved into the vaults, years ago.

“I know, but—ah!” His wife grabbed her bulging stomach.

Panting, she tried to carry on. “Just because he has to…doesn’t mean he wants to!”

Theo was concerned for his wife, but groaned all the same. “You shouldn’t worry so much. It doesn’t matter what he wants, I’m his employer, so he’ll do what I say.” After ten minutes, the couple looked up to see Charon approaching with a bowl of noodles for each of them. This was his first real employer since…her. The man was an asshole, but the work wasn’t bad. At least he wasn’t out in the trenches anymore.
Noel had another contraction halfway through the meal. Rolling his eyes, Theo turned to Charon. He was a big man—though not as big as Charon—and the strain of bearing Theo’s child was intense for his small wife.

“Get my wife over to the clinic.”

Poor Noel barely made it. Exhausted, she collapsed onto the nearest bed while nurses rushed to her side, ignoring her giant escort.

“How far apart are they?” The doctor asked, walking up with a clipboard.

“I don’t know, two hours usually. But these were so close together, just a matter of minutes.” Noel gasped, trying to get comfortable and failing.

The doctor urged her to stay in observation until the baby came.

“No, Theodore would hate that…Besides, this place is so small, I can be right over when I do go into labor.”

When the woman and her guard arrived back at their personal living quarters, Theo was gone.

“Probably at the bar…” Noel mused, a tired look in her eye.

Charon leaned against the wall. After a few minutes of silence, Noel shifted up, walking over to the fridge. Grabbing a beer from the top rack, she held it out to Charon. “Here; I can’t drink, so I’ll watch you.”

Theo hadn’t told him he couldn’t drink, so Charon took the chilled bottle. Noel watched him take a sip; he have her a dry smile. “Thanks.”

“…I’m sorry about my husband; He can be very…dominant, sometimes.”

Charon had been with the two for a few years now. Noel almost left Theo for bringing a super soldier into their home as a slave, until he made Charon explain to her that he was no one’s slave.

“Hm.” Charon kept his face down, entertaining himself by flipping the bottle cap along his knuckles. The war had started and ended in a matter of hours, but they were still in the vaults, and would probably stay there long after Charon died. The vaults were too crowded. There were a few good apples left among humanity, but Theo certainly wasn’t one of them; then again, neither was Charon.

“Charon,” Noel brought him out of his little reverie. “You’re bound to us by a contract you signed before the bombs dropped, right?”

“I am.” Charon said slowly, continuing to keep his eyes down; now, focusing on the faded pattern of the carpet.

“But the war’s over. Why are you still bound by it?”

Noel was a strange woman. She wasn’t strong, and she wasn’t very smart either, but she was sweet and oddly perceptive. And her pity for him was clear.

“Couldn’t tell you.” Charon said shortly.

Their conversation was ended abruptly when Theo came in swaying slightly.

“Charon, why the hell are you drinking my beer!?” Theo slammed his fist on the nearest table.
Noel jumped to defend him. “I let him have it; I didn’t know it was yours. Haven’t you had enough anyway?”

This only angered Theo further. “You shouldn’t be able to let him do anything! I hold his contract!”
He turned to Charon. “Get out of here!”

“As you wish.” Charon left for the door immediately, turning to Noel as the door opened. There were tears in her eyes. It was her turn to be looking at the floor.

The next day, Theo kept giving his tall employee suspicious looks. Noel had been quiet all evening after Charon left the room the night before and he didn’t like it. Charon was taller than him, and more muscular.

Fuming, Theo found Noel sipping on a Nuka-Cola, speaking quietly to the man behind the counter in the mess hall. Charon sat at a booth not too far away, watching out for her, as he always did, per Theo’s orders.

“Well, you’ve been chatty lately haven’t you? Feeling better?”

Noel looked up coldly. “Yes, much better.”

“Good to hear,” Theo moved to gently rub her shoulders. “But what’s troubling you now, love?”

Frowning away from his touch, Noel stalked away, calling behind her. “You know exactly what, Theodore.” Laughing jovially to the man behind the bar, Theo rushed to follow his wife. He looked tense, grabbing his wife by the shoulders again. Noel looked startled and more than a little afraid. Knuckles going white against the table, Charon yearned to follow them—to protect the kind young woman. He knew Theo suspected foul play. What little he knew about his employer, it was abundantly clear how jealous Theo could be. For every man that smiled a little too warmly at his pregnant wife, she would always cover up a little bit more over the next few days. Charon grimaced; poor Noel.

But there wasn’t a damn thing he could do to help her.

The first place he looked, of course, was the hotel room, but she was nowhere to be found. The only trace of her was the pip-boy, still singing its cheery tunes. Growling, he grabbed the device from the stands, muting it before leaving to go look outside.

One of the security guards collided with Charon as he opened the bridge door. She was out of breath, from the run and nearly fell on her ass.

“Percy...the wasteland savior...*gasp*...red head, right?”

Rushing to help her with her footing, Charon grabbed her shoulders.

“Please, where is she?!?”

“She was out on the other side of the bridge, she looked excited and frustrated.” Charon looked down, ashamed. “Then this one guy...Sister, I think...he went out and joined her. Then she got all
still, and they went out a ways into the ruins. Haven’t seen either of them since!”

Charon was standing before the corpse formerly known as Sister. Breathing hard through his nostrils, he stared at the scene before him, trying to take in what had happened. There had been more than two people; that at least was clear by the number of different foot prints in the dusty clearing. Turning to Sister’s body, his frustration bloomed once more. The boot of his shoe slammed against the dead man’s nose. Feeling a satisfying crunch, Charon looked closer at the bullet wounds of the man. They were from multiple directions, couldn’t have been Percy. Bending down, he dug two fingers into the man’s belly, pulling out several tiny metal ball bearings.

“Percy never uses a shotgun…” Charon muttered, holding the pieces closer.

“Alright ya’ bastard, where is she?” rifling through the man’s pockets, found a small piece of paper in the body’s back pocket.

Meet me in the drainage chamber of Oscar Tango for your reward. Do not fail. To arouse my displeasure would be most unwise. –B

“Who the fuck is B? Doesn’t matter. They. Will. Pay.” Charon growled to no one in particular.

Back at Rivet City, Charon got on their motorcycle, the engine roaring to life.

Whoever took her—whomever had a hand in taking her—they were dead.
Chapter 14

At the outskirts of D.C, Charon overlooked the wasteland horizon. The pain still wasn’t gone. He didn’t mind it so much. If anything, he clung to it. It was the one fragment of verification than Percy was alive. Closing his eyes, he tried to think back to his army days. Oscar Tango…that was certainly a broadcast station, but where?

There were at least ten in the greater D.C. area.

Holding up her Pip-boy, he pulled up the map hoping it would jog his memory. His brow furrowed in concentration. The note said drainage chamber, probably one of the minor bomb shelters.

He rubbed his forehead in frustration. Charon travelled the wasteland a hundred times, and this one seemed so familiar! Images of a metro station flashed through his mind, maybe he saw it on the way to Murphy’s…That’s it—Dot’s Diner!

Throwing his leg over the motorcycle with fire in his eyes, Charon blazed a trail in the direction of the Jury Street metro.

The couple ended up staying in their room all day. Charon was told to stay away. Against his better judgment, he did as he was commanded.

Leaning against the stainless steel of the main entrance room, Charon longed for his bed. It was almost twelve in the morning, but he knew better than to test Theo’s patience. Settling in, Charon forced himself into a light sleep.

 Darkness surrounded him, Charon couldn’t breathe. Chains, wrapped around his neck and arms were pulling ceaselessly from above as shadows from below clung to him, pulling him down into the abyss. He was stretching eternally through a void and he just wouldn’t die; please, someone make it end!

With a snap he was brought back to the world of the living.

Something was wrong.

Something was very wrong!

He was on fire, waves upon waves of burning heaving anxiety coursed through his veins.

Charon scrambled for Theo and Noel’s room. Slowly, silently, he opened the door without a sound. Before him, Noel was crouched and sobbing quietly before the family safe.

As if being led by a puppeteer, Charon walked up behind her, making her jump as he put his hand firmly on her shoulder. Wincing in pain before jumping away from him, Noel turned. Charon’s blood ran cold, but his face remained unreadable. Her face was covered in burses, with one eye swollen shut.
His contract was in her hands.

“Charon…” She gasped, clinging to his front. “Charon, he’s gone mad! Look at me! I can’t take this anymore, please, you have to help me! After I get rid of this damn thing, we can leave; you and me! I’ve been talking with the guys in the lab, the radiation levels are low enough, we can make it out there—I know we can!” She waved the paper before his eyes, frantic and afraid.


“What? NO! Charon, this isn’t right, please I can’t do this!”

Her over hand found another corner of the contract, making a small tear just before Charon’s hand’s closed around her throat.

“Char—” Her neck snapped to the left.

The contract fell from her limp fingers. Her body fell with a loud thump to the ground.

Theo could be heard cursing in the other room before thundering into the living room.

“What the hell was—Noel…” Theo looked to his wife on the ground, then to his body guard, looming over her.

“You…YOU BASTARD!! HOW COULD YOU DO IT?!”

His fist connected with Charon’s jaw, but he didn’t even flinch.

He turned, tears streaming down his expressionless face.

“Physical violence on your part invalidates our contract.”

Theo was red in the face, his entire body shaking.

“Fine… I want you to take that…fucking contract…and get out of my vault.”

Slowly, Charon bent down, taking the damaged contract in his hand before tucking it in his pocket.

They walked silently to the entrance. Theo moved to the vault door controls.

“She loved you. You know that don’t you?”

“Nothing happened between me and Noel.”

“I know.”

“I’m not going to deny I didn’t care about her, but I’ll tell you one thing: Her death isn’t on my hands.”

The recent widower’s face shot up. “What the hell do you mean by that?”

“She was holding my contract. She made a tear in it. This has never happened before, but I sensed it all the way from here. She tried to tear it. I had no control over my body.”

“What’s your point, bastard?”

“I may have killed her, but I’m not the murderer. If you had treated her with the slightest bit of love—hell, if you hadn’t been beating her—she wouldn’t have tried to destroy the contract. She would
still be alive.”

The alarms went off, the vault door groaned open behind him.

Theo’s knuckles were white against the monitor. “Get out. Never come back. I don’t want to see your damn face here for as long as I live.”

Slowly, Charon walked out of the vault, stepping over one of the skeletons lying on the floor.

“Don’t worry, you’ll never see me again, Mr. Overseer.”

Charon opened the flimsy door to the outside world, leaving vault 101 forever.

Percy’s eyes opened to the dim red light of the dark room. Her entire body hurt, but at least the bleeding stopped. Burke was a sadist; he would make sure she stayed alive for as long as possible. Speaking of the man, Burke was nowhere in sight. Struggling to her knees, the prisoner’s ankles and wrists were still bound behind her. Carefully, she lifted one knee such that she could put most of her weight on that foot. Twisting, she repeated the process as the other foot was replaced by her knee again. She made her way to the metal stairway leading, hopefully, to somewhere safer. The stairs were a nightmare, but nothing compared to the hell she was already in. Bruises strained her muscles, and every movement was agony, but finally, she made it to the top of the stairs. Gasping for breath, Percy took in her surroundings. There was an old broadcast radio in the corner, and outside the opposite door, she saw what looked like a sewer tunnel.

‘Well so much for escape…maybe that radio works.’

By the time she reached the radio, her knees were thoroughly shredded from all the broken glass and shattered wooden splinters on the floor. After three tries, she managed to stand up, balancing on her toes, she leaned forward, turning the radio knob to ‘on’ with her teeth. The face lit up and Percy sighed in relief. Turning her back to the counter, she took the Morse-code clicker into her hand.

She managed to tap out a short message, just as Burke came through the door.

He observed her naked form as she shook in fear before him, not saying a word.

Slowly striding forward, Burke broke the silence. “Just what do you think you are doing, my dear girl?”

Percy stuck her chin out, glaring at him. “Don’t call me that. I’m not yours, I never was.”

She realized the best way to keep his eyes from noticing the radio was to make him angry. To keep his eyes on her.

“And I never will be; Charon already took that away from you, didn’t he?”

Marching up to her, Burke punched her in the gut. He watched as she crumbled onto the ground, coughing and gasping. Taking her wrists from behind her, he dragged her back down the stairs, forcing her full weight onto her shoulders until they made a sickening pop.

Percy hollered in pain. Burke dragged her like that back down the stairs and threw her against the wall.

“I read that contract, you know. Do you honestly think what he did to you was out of love? You
forced yourself on him, sweet.”

With a sneer, he turned away.

“You’re wrong. I never forced anything on him. He cares about me…”

Burke came back to her, knife in hand. Crouching down in front of her, he moved the knife to her left thigh, but she flinched away, wincing as she fell on her shoulder.

Burke grabbed her by the hair, pulling her up as he ran the knife against her skin, leaving a shallow slice.

He left deep cuts across her entire body. Percy just glared at him, muscles tensed, but she didn’t let him see a single ounce of her pain. Burke was not pleased with this. Flipping her to her belly, he straddled her legs, pinning her down. He ran the knife long and deep across her lower back, finally causing her to cry out.

“You may think you’re brave. You may thing you’re a good person sullying your body with that filth. But you’re wrong. You are simply contaminating yourself with a temporary symptom of the charred earth. And it would be my pleasure to slowly, painfully, rid the world of such a waste of humanity.” After leaving a hundred jagged cuts across her body, Burke pulled a pair of pliers out of his coat, setting them to the nail of her left index finger.

Jury Street metro Station was crawling with Talon Company. At least ten members stalked the surrounding town ruins. Charon looked out from behind one of the bombed out buildings. He had three grenades, and plenty of ammo, but only a couple of stims.

He cursed himself; Percy was always trying to give him more to carry, since Gob was always giving her a discount on the things. Charon shook his head to clear it. This was no time for regret. That was all in the past anyway. This was now.

Taking his shotgun from off his back, Charon shot at one of the cars nearest the roving contract killers. The car exploded in a ball of nuclear fire. Immediately, he ran for new cover, knowing they would find him soon if he didn’t. Taking out one after another, Charon moved fluid and deadly. This was what he was made for. His employer…no, Percy was in danger, and he would to everything in his power to find her, and ensure her safety from this point on.

Finally, he stood over the last Talon member. The man was just a boy, really—a blubbering mess. The child’s legs had been blown clean off from the first explosion. Grabbing him by the hair, Charon lifted him up to eye level with one hand.

“Where is she?” He growled menacingly.

The boy was hysterical, hardly able to form coherent sentences, much less rat out his contractor. His confession was not needed however, as the sounds of tortured screaming drifted up from the nearby sewer grate.

A woman’s screams.

Charon immediately dropped the boy. Without a pause, he shot the amputee’s head clean off, ending his misery.
Having finished with all of her fingernails, Burke was taking a sick sort of pleasure in crushing each finger under the heel of his shoe. He gave her an evil grin as he slowly put more and more weight on her pinky finger, adding a twist, rubbing the torn flesh into the filthy floor. It was already thoroughly stained with her blood.

“Please…just stop!” Percy sobbed out. She had blacked out from the pain several times by now, only to be brought back by Burke pouring scotch across all her bloody cuts.

“And why should I do that, my dear girl?”

She would do anything at this point, if at least, for the pain to end.

But then she saw it.

A tall shadow loomed behind Burke. A ruined arm reached out, grabbing his head before slamming it over and over into the nearest wall.

The small dark room was filled with an ear spitting roar.

Charon had slipped quietly into the sewer, following the screams. When he came upon the two, he only saw red. He only came back to his senses when Burke’s body fell to the ground with a wet thump. His head was red jelly with bits of cracked bone sliding down the wall to join with the rest of him. He dug through the dead man’s pockets until he found his crumpled contract and the pain stopped, at last.

Charon finally turned to the crumpled form or Percy.

“How did you find me?” she gasped in disbelief.

All the rage left him. Dropping to his knees before her, his hands shaking, reached for her shoulders but shrank back. She looked almost as bad as Burke. But she was still breathing, at least.

He unbound her wrists and ankles before grabbing a nearby tarp. Charon wrapped it around her naked shoulders. He carefully put her over his shoulder as he climbed the ladder back to the surface.

She needed healing that no doctor could adequately provide at this point, and she needed it soon before she bled out.

Climbing onto the motorcycle, Charon gently but securely wrapped one arm around her.

He could think of only one person with enough stored up radiation to help Percy. They headed for Northwest Seneca, and for Murphy.

Percy’s eyes fluttered open slowly. The tiny room she was in had a faint green glow to it.

She tried faintly to move, but her entire body was stiff. Stiff and warm.

Eventually she wiggled out of the tarp. Looking back, she saw Charon with his arms wrapped around the bundle she had been a part of.

In the corner, she saw some folded up Brahmin skin overalls. Slipping them on with shaky hands, she noticed that her skin was glowing slightly. She checked her pip-boy, her eye brows shot through
the ceiling. Almost dropping the devise, she stifled the gasp. She should not be able to stand up straight with this much radiation, but she didn’t feel her skin burning off like the first time she had contracted this many rads. So maybe what Moira had claimed was actually true. Charon’s paper was on top of the pile of her things. Percy took it before turning to look to Charon again. How had he found her? She crawled toward him quietly. Gently, she kissed his forehead before standing up again. A sigh escaped his lips, but otherwise, he didn’t stir. A phantom itch caused her to scratch at her shoulder absent. Sudden realization struck her and she turned to look at her fingers. All back, on both hands. Pretty long too. Shivering, Percy steeled her resolve. This ended now. It had to. She made her way out of the metro, only to find Barrett leaning against the wall outside.  

“Good morning smoothskin; long time no see. Thought you were gonna die there. You’re lucky Murphy needs you for his ultra-jet.”

She tried to smile back, but it just wasn’t in her. Instead, she asked for a cigarette.

“Sure, smoothy; didn’t take you for a smoker, though.”

Silently, they smoked in peace. The sun was peaking over the horizon.

Halfway through her second one, Percy spoke up. “I’m going to destroy Charon’s contract. Just burn it up. It’s the only way I know that he can be free. But when I do, I know he’s gonna come after me. I need you to protect Murphy. Don’t let him get in the middle of this. Let Charon kill me.”

Barrett looked at her long and hard. “And just why the hell are you gonna do something stupid like that? After he worked so hard to get you back. After bring you here to heal. It’s gonna ruin him; surely you know that.”

Percy’s eyes stayed ahead as she replied. Aching in her heart cut through the numbness monopolizing her senses, but just for a moment.

“If Murphy was bound to you in the same way Charon is bound to me…Wouldn’t you do anything in your power to set him free? Charon would have out lived me anyway. Eventually he’ll forget. Isn’t his freedom worth temporary sadness?”

That shut Barrett up.

“I thought so.”

And without further hesitation, Percy took his lighter. She watched the crumpled paper slowly turn to ash in her hand. The flames licked at the skin of her palm, but it healed before her eyes, and she didn’t feel it anyway. Charon was connected to this contract by more than just honor. If he wasn’t, he wouldn’t have known she was in trouble. He wouldn’t have found her as quickly as he did. The funny ink created weird colors among the flames.

Taking one last drag from her cigarette, she watched the sun set, and waited for Charon to free her.
Chapter 15

Charon stood in a long bright hallway. Chains bound his arms and legs to the floor, but they weren’t painful. Percy appeared before him, smiling serenely.

“Percy! You’re ok!” He tried to say the words, but no sound came. The Percy before him just laughed, but no sound came from her mouth either. She put her arms around his neck, reaching up to kiss him. He happily obliged, her soft lips felt amazing, and he strained against his bonds to get closer to her. Suddenly, her lips felt like fire. Jumping back in surprise, he was shocked to see the face of Noel. Blood was pouring from her mouth and eyes. She lifted her hands, palms up. A ball of flame burned there.

“You’re free.”

Her words had a voice, but he wasn’t sure if it was Percy’s, or Noel’s.

Charon started, gasping for air. His body felt…strange. The pain was gone, but it was something else.

He felt…light.

Stretching, he noticed Percy was gone, and so were the clothes he’d set out for her.

Murphy was more than happy to help where he could when he saw Charon on his doorstep. What little blood that remained in the scientist’s face, quickly drained out of it when he saw the bloodied mess that was Charon’s employer.

“She needs radiation. Don’t ask how, but it can heal her too.”

He had placed her wrapped up body as close as possible to the waste filled oil drums in Murphy’s supply closet until her skin was glowing slightly before setting her to rest against the farthest wall. He watched intently as the skin on her arms began knitting itself back together.

Charon got up and went to look for Percy.

He quickly found her outside the metro with Barrett.

“You’re awake!” He couldn’t hide the relief from his face, and didn’t want to. “How are you feeling?”

She turned. Her face was gaunt; deep shadows hung under eyes. But most of all, she looked afraid.

“Hey…” Charon strode closer, reaching for her hand, but she shrunk away.

“Percy, what’s wrong?” He turned to Barrett for some sort of explanation, but Barrett was glaring at him, fingering the combat knife at his side.
“I…finally did it… I’m ready Charon.”

“What? I don’t get—” but his words were cut off as she held up her hands. A pile of ash, still smoking, rested right there in her open palms.

He knew what it was. How could he not? She had finally done it.

With a rush, he took her in his arms, holding her close despite her struggling.

“Why did you do that, Percy? I could’ve killed you.” He muttered against her neck, shaking slightly.

“Why aren’t you though?” She whispered voice quivering, still afraid.

Charon pulled back enough to look her in the face.

“You’re guess is as good as mine. But I’m never going to hurt you, Percy. I promise you that.”

Percy broke down, sobbing in his arms. The weight of the past days’ events finally hitting her.

“I want to go home.” She finally managed.

“Let’s go then.” They walked in silence to the motorcycle.

Charon heard Barrett slam the metro gate behind him.

They were back home by mid-day.

Percy went to the weapons closet, looking forlornly through the slim stock.

“I guess my gun and armor are all back at Rivet city, huh?”

“I was in a bit of a rush at the time…”

Percy spun around quickly, hands up in defense. “Oh no, It’s fine! I’m glad you were…”

Heavy silence filled the room.

“…You uh…You want to get a drink?”

Charon sighed, but smiled when he looked back at her. Old habits are the best habits in times of trouble after all.

She wanted so dearly to get past what had happened; Hell, so did he.

Charon didn’t regret a damn thing that he did that night, but that didn’t mean he was proud of it.

“Yeah, let’s go see Gob and Nova.”

The bar was crowded that night, and had been most nights. Ever since word got out that the Savior of the wastes had taken down a Behemoth mutant right in front of the GNR building and lived in Megaton, merchants, mercs, and plain old folk looking for somewhere safe flooded through the front
The common house was fuller than ever, and those who could afford it, chose to stay at Gob’s saloon.

Gob smiled at that. *Gob’s Saloon.* He’d never get tired of that.

He looked up, eyes wandering the bar until he found Nova taking drink orders at one of the tables. His entire body warmed at the sight of her. What a gal like her saw in a ghoul like him was beyond his comprehension.

But she definitely enjoyed their time together, that was for sure. He couldn’t help but smile proudly when she looked up and blushed at him. Just then, two figures sat down at the bar.

“Welcome to Gob’s, What can I get you?...”

As he turned, he saw who it was. Percy was leaning heavily against the bar, just like the first time he had seen her. Charon was at her side, arm around her shoulder. His eyes were shooting daggers at the men making faces at the couple, daring them to say something.

’Soo it finally happened.’ Gob smiled, until he noticed just how tired they looked.

“Two scotch.” Percy muttered, running her re-grown—and surprisingly long—nails along the cracks in the wooden bar.

“Is that anyway to say hello after so long? Come one, hun, we missed you.” Nova appeared from behind them leaning against the bar, exposing her cleavage for Gob’s benefit.

“We’ve...been through a lot recently,” Charon said, taking the drink glasses, moving one to Percy.

“Wanna tell us about it?” Gob asked tentatively putting the caps into the nearby register.

“Not just yet, sorry.” Percy smiled sheepishly “How have things been since I last left?”

Nova was quick to fill them in on town news. Arkansas had been doing much better. Doc was giving him a dose of Mentats every couple of days, and he’s helped out with some pretty bad raider attacks. Moira sold quite a few of her books to the caravans passing through.

“That reminds me, you should talk to her about royalties! You did most of the work, anyway.”

Leo got busted when Walter found him OD’d at the water treatment plant. Doc saved him, but Jenny was sobbing all night about it, but Andy won’t let him out of his sight now.

Eventually, Nathan got so drunk, he began dancing on one of the tables, singing Yankee Doodle Dandy, screaming at Gob to turn on Enclave Radio. Gob had to close the saloon for the night over that when Simms came knocking.

Charon and Percy went home, and then to their separate beds after that.

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Darkness was everywhere; she felt the stickiness of blood along her fingers and legs. Shivering she felt rivulets of it crawling down her lower back. Burke stepped into view from the shadows.

“My dear girl, do you honestly think I’m done with you? No, you’ll never be free.”
“Gah!” Percy bolted up, cold sweat drenching the mattress in her tiny metal room. She tried curling up to comfort herself, but Burke came back into her mind. Groaning, she stretched as much as she could until she felt the cold frame of the bed against the tips of her toes.

Charon lay awake in his own bed across the hall. He wasn’t used to sleeping in a separate room from his employer. He shook his head. No, not employer…but what should he call her now? It was so strange not belonging to anyone. He was no longer a weapon, but he didn’t quite feel like a man. Charon jumped at the sound of his door opening. Percy stood nervously in the doorway, tugging at the oversized shirt she was wearing. His lips became dry when he realized it was his.

“Can’t sleep?”

Pursing her lips, she looked to the floor, nodding.

Without another word, Charon scooted closer to the wall, making room.

Percy was shaking pretty violently. He put his arm around her shoulders, stroking his fingers gently across her back as her breathing steadied. Supporting his head on one hand, Charon watched her sleep for a bit. He couldn’t remember the last time they hadn’t slept in the same room, but it was a relief to have her so close. She usually slept in a tight ball, but now, her toes nearly reached his own and her arms were pillowed beneath her head. His fingers drifted under the back of her shirt, feeling the scars along her lower back. The radiation had healed the wounds, but the scars would remain for years. Something about the marks along her back caught his attention, however. The ones on her arms and legs were like lightning—jagged and messy. But these seemed to have some sort of pattern. Carefully, Charon lifted her garment just enough to get a better look. His hand jumped back as if he had just touched a hot poker. He hissed in revulsion

“What does it say?” Percy asked quietly, her face pressed against his chest.

Charon made a face, choosing to remain silent.

“I know he wrote something there, Charon. I was awake for it. I have a right to know what’s on my own body.”

“…It says ‘Ghoulfucker’.”

A shiver ran up her spine. “I suppose it could have been worse.”

Charon sat up, completely disgusted. “There aren’t many insults in the wastes worse than that, Perse.”

She sat up as well, keeping her eyes on the mattress. “I think there are; He could have drawn obscene pictures, or sliced in his own name. Besides, as far as he knows, I am. He…saw the hickey you gave me and…got pretty mad.”

Charon’s anger was replaced with shame. His lack of control was what put her in danger, and now, she was branded for life.

“Sorry about that…I shouldn’t have forced myself on you.”

Percy turned, surprised. Her face reddened a bit, but she kept her eyes on his. “I didn’t mind that, actually. I…felt guilty for throwing myself at you. That was horrible. I mean, you were basically my
slave. That wasn’t right.”

Charon scoffed, but leaned in, placing a soft kiss on her lips. She hesitantly reciprocated, eventually pushing her body flush against his chest. They stayed like that for a moment, enjoying the contrast of his ruined skin against her soft flesh.

Charon rolled until he was on his back, pulling her with him.

She rested her head against his chest, relaxed, but still reserved.

“How did you know to find me? That contract…It wasn’t just paper. There’s no way you could have known I was in danger that fast.”

Charon winced, the memories still fresh in his mind. He knew this would come up sooner or later.

“One of my previous employers…Theo. He was a truly horrible person—almost as bad as Ahzrukhal. He had a wife who tried tearing up my contract. I wasn’t even awake when she first touched it, but I knew something happened. It was like burning tar in my gut. I confronted her, tried to get her to give it back, but she was too upset.”

“What happened to her?”

“…She got one rip into it before I killed her” Charon looked to Percy, trying to read her face. She had stiffened noticeably, but tried to keep her face calm.

“I tried not to. Something came over me. It was like the contract made me do it—Percy, you have to believe me!”

“I do.” She said quietly. “What I can’t figure out though, is why you didn’t kill me.”

She almost sounded disappointed.

Why hadn’t he? He hadn’t felt a thing when she burned the contract. Well, except for that weird dream.

“It might have been because you were my employer. Otherwise things might have gone down very differently.” It hurt him to admit it, but it was true.

What would he have done if he’d murdered Percy?

Charon wrapped his arms tighter around her, as if to keep her safe from the very thought.
Chapter 16

Percy gasped as Charon drew his lips across her neck. He stroked gently up and down her sides, making his way up to her ear and his tongue traces the lobe languidly “Charon…” but her words were cut off with a finger.

“My dear girl…” Burke whispered against her ear before biting down.

“AHH!!” Percy awoke with a start. She was bound by Charon’s embrace, but not for long. She struggled and kicked, shrieking in a panic the whole way.

“Get away get away, NO!”

With a thump she fell off the bed, looking up terror stricken at the confused, and more than a little hurt, ghoul still in bed. Shaking, she backed into a corner, eyes bugging out before she realized where she was and who she was with. Charon. The real Charon. Tears welled up in her eyes. “It was Burke—he was back a-and I thought—” Her voice caught and she pulled her knees in tight against her chest. She heard the groan of the bed as Charon got up. He brought his arms around her, crouching and holding her close but still giving her enough space to move if she wanted to.

“He’s gone, Perse. I killed him myself. He can’t hurt you anymore.”

“I know.” And she did—at least when she was awake. She kept her eyes on his ruined skin, making sure it was really him. She huddled closer.

He picked her up bridal style, taking her down stairs into the kitchen.

“What are you doing?” Percy asked, a little surprised, but trusting his strength.

“No offence, smoothskin, but you need a bath.” He set her down before the sink, taking a rag, and running it under the faucet until it was nice and wet. He turned back to Percy, who was taking off his oversized shirt.

His mouth went dry. Charon hated how tight his pants were getting at the sight of her. He was immediately revolted by his reaction. For God’s sake; this was the last time to be thinking of something like that. Looking away, he thrust the rag in front of him for Percy to take. Stepping out from the small kitchen, Charon closed the curtain behind himself to give her some privacy. There were the sounds of shuffling, followed by minor squeals of pain.

“You all right?” Charon resisted the urge to check on her, no matter how much he wanted to.

“…No…” A broken sob came from behind the curtain. “Can you come in here? Please?”

He found her leaning against the opposite wall, rag in the rink. Her eyes were red and her face was screwed up in frustration.

“My fingers still hurt from where he…a-and my ribs too…Fuck!” Percy hissed, wiping at her eyes, only spreading more mud and grime.

Without a word, Charon took the rag and moved to stand before her. Taking one of her arms, he squeezed the rag, letting the water drip across the dirt and blood there before scrubbing more firmly.

‘Christ…’ the scars looked even worst without the blood and dirt hiding them. He continued with the
next arm, then with both legs, taking note of the goose bumps the cold tap water left on her flesh. Charon hesitated at her chest, not sure what to do. But she took his hand between hers, gently moving them to just below her heart. Blushing hard, she looked away as he cleaned her front. Her ribs poked noticeably through the skin. And her hips lost what little curve they had to them a few days ago. The radiation must not have been enough. It probably needed to eat a lot of fat and muscle off of her just to fix what Burke had done. He insisted she not take off her underwear, however. As he worked on her neck, he noticed how intently Percy watched him. Her hand moved to touch his cheek. Her thumb traced the corner of his mouth.

“…What?”

“I just… I need to know it’s you.”

He moved closer. “It is me. I’m here for you, and I always will be.”

Overcome by how close they were, Percy closed the gap, kissing him fervently. She ran her hands up and down his ruined arms. She needed to feel him, to know that it was him and not…

Charon, kissed her back just as desperately. He couldn’t even hate himself for doing it. Out of respect, he kept his hands at her waist, but Percy didn’t seem to have the same idea as he felt a slender thigh drift up the side of his leg. With a choked moan, he lifted and set her on the rim of the sink, where she instantly wrapped her legs around his waist. His hands trailed lower down to her hips, tracing patterns through her underwear. Groaning in pleasure, his palm went flat against her lower back as he held their hips closer together.

Percy mewed softly against his lips, fingers massaging his scalp as his lips traveled south to her throat, sending shivers down her spine. Percy stilled slightly against him, but in his passion, Charon didn’t notice. Trailing hot kisses up to her ear, he nibbled gently at her earlobe, growling predatorily.

“Charon, Charon stop!!” Percy was no longer enjoying herself, and began pushing against his chest insistently.

He backed up immediately and she wrapped her arms around her chest, body shaking with her eyes cast down.

“No! No…” Her thumps traces absently against one of the cuts on her arm. Charon noticed as the nail left tiny white scrapes just above the scar. For the first time, he really looked at her since they got back. Her hair was well past her shoulders—it had grown nearly four inches! Her nails were long too. Usually she kept them short and practical so they wouldn’t break. They had been the only clean thing about her just a few minutes ago. Percy noticed his staring.

“I think the radiation grew back a little too much.” she said absently as she continued to avoid eye contact.

‘Yeah, and took away a whole lot too.’ He thought, trying not to let his eyes wander too much. “The hair looks good long. I like it.”

Hesitantly, Charon reached out a hand, taking a bit in between his fingers. Percy leaned into his touch, finally looking up.

“I’m sorry…I want to forget what happened, but…”
“It’s going to take time.” Charon finished for her. He moved closer, wrapping her in a loose hug.

“Yeah…” Percy rested her cheek against his chest.

Charon ran his hand through her hair.

Sniffing, Percy rubbed her face, putting on a smile. “I never got to thank you, for saving me, I mean.”

Opening the fridge, she pulled out a pot full of wrinkled green fruits.

“I got these from Jenny a while ago. She called them refined punga. They are supposed to be good for keeping the rads down, but I figured they would also taste pretty good too. Did you have these before the war?”

He was glad for the distraction. He took the bowl from her so she could get dressed again. “No; like myself, these must be a byproduct of the bombs.” Grabbing a knife, he sliced off two pieces of the odd fruit.

They both made a face after taking a bite.

“Bitter!” Percy winced

“I agree…Past that, it doesn’t taste half bad.” Taking another bite, Charon was reminded of the chicory coffee his uncle gave him once.

“Huh…” he was getting flashes of his life before the war: Drinking coffee at five a.m. before heading off to work, nudging his cat Spike away from the door before he left…

“Charon?” Percy tapped a nail against his shoulder, wincing a bit at the strong taste of the punga.

He smiled, taking another bite. “Apparently, I had a cat named Spike.”

“Hmm” Percy looked as if she was about to say something more when they heard a knock at the door.

It was Arkansas. He was looking a little nervous. “I uh, I heard you were a pretty good shot! I was gonna go hunting mole rats for the Brass lantern if you wanted to help out and get some of the cut.”

Charon turned to Percy, who was already getting equipment out of the lockers.

“That sounds great! I think I could use a little sun, we only have leather armor here, but that should be fine I think, right?” Turning to see Charon rubbing the back of his neck uncomfortably, she paused.

Walking over, he set his hands on her shoulders.

“Look…Maybe you should sit this one out. We just got back. You’ve been through a lot...”

Percy was speechless, but only for a moment. Smiling, she said,

“Right—you’re right! I should probably just stay in town for a bit. You go, but don’t stay out too long, ok?”

Clasping her hands to keep them from shaking, she watched Charon and Arkansas leave.
Left to her own devices, Percy dug through locker until she found a mostly clean green dress on a bottom shelf. Thinking back, she couldn’t remember wearing this since she first visited the Underworld. Her stomach growled. That’s right; they hadn’t really eaten much of anything that morning due to the puna fruit being so bitter.

“Well I suppose it’s to the Brass Lantern I go.” She muttered under her breath.

The sun was brighter than she was currently used to. Squinting, she threw on a pair of tinted glasses before she made her way down the narrow walk way. Settling down into one of the stools, Percy smiled at her neighbor.

“Morning sunshine!” She said jovially to the man, who was clearly nursing a hangover. The man turned, only to have his eyes bug out when they fell on her bare shoulders.

“Jeezus! You must be that wasteland savior huh? You know, not all guys have a scar fetish, not even in the wastes.”

The smile fell as she replied

“That’s funny, because no woman has a drunk-off-his-ass-before-fucking-noon fetish. Not even in the wastes.”

Charon took aim through the old sniper’s rifle. It was nice hunting like this. Hunting to eat: It was no longer about killing or being killed. It was just long term survival. Time seemed to slow down to a crawl at times like these. He liked it. Smiling, he took the shot.

The animal was struck through the eye. Feeling no pain, only brief surprise, the beast fell the short distance to the ground.

“Good one. It’s strange not hunting people anymore. I’m still not used to it. I might be able to though, thanks to that young lady.”

Keeping his eye in the scope, Charon scanned the horizon as he asked,

“And who saved you, Lucy?”

“That blond daisy? The wind would probably knock her down if it weren’t for Megaton’s walls. No, Percy—your girl, isn’t she? She seems to be all about saving lost souls. She did the same with Gob, and I hear she did something similar with Lucy’s estranged brother. She’s a real sweetheart—don’t ever let her go.”

“I don’t plan to.” Charon’s voice trailed off as he noticed the sun glint off a signature set of black
armor.

He couldn’t keep the rage at bay as he grabbed his shotgun, leaving Arkansas behind.

The company member barely had time to raise his gun before it was shot away along with the rest of his arm. Charon was on the screaming man in a flash.

“Why the hell are you here, and where are the rest?” he snarled, slamming the man against a nearby boulder.

Three shots rang out from behind him. They were Arkansas’ shots.

“Well…I guess we’re all alone, just you and me. Tell me everything before you lose the other arm.”

The Talon company member didn’t hesitate.

“We were contracted to kill one Percy, the lone wanderer!”

Who sent you!??” Charon pulled out a knife, holding it before the man’s crotch.

“I don’t know! The boss didn’t tell me!! Please you gotta believe me, I don’t know nothing!”

Blood splashed to the dusty ground, and the man howled.

Stuffing his shotgun’s barrel into the man’s mouth to shut him up, Charon spoke just above a whisper.

“You go back to your base, and you tell your boss, that unless he also wants to sing soprano, I’d better not see any more of you smoothskin fuck wads anywhere near Percy. Now…go away.” He growled finally freeing the would-be assassin.

“Hey…kid.” Gob waved his hand’s before the wanderer’s eyes until she came out of her stupor just enough to make eye contact.

“Are you alright? You seemed…out of it. Where’s Charon?” he looked worried.

“Juss fine” Percy smiled sweetly, using all her strength to keep Gob in focus. “Hez…hunting molerats…With Arkan…sassafras again…he’ll be back tonight.”

This didn’t stem Gob’s concern as he reached for her glass. “I think you’ve had enough. The heat probably isn’t helping either, maybe take off some of those layers when you get home?”

Percy was dressed such that nothing from her wrists to her ankles was showing. She even had a thick strip of cloth wrapped around her neck as a sort of scarf.

“I’m fine, really! I’m a little cold, actually.” Percy smiled, lying through her teeth, despite the sweat clear as day across her brow.

“Come on smoothskin, at least get rid of the scarf—”

The entire bar went silent as Percy’s stool clattered to the floor. She panted through clenched teeth as she readjusted her scarf. Confused, Gob’s hand slowly fell back to the bar as she started backing for the door.
“I—I’m sorry…” She bumped against Nova, who was also looking a bit concerned for the vault dweller. She was hardly the girl who crawled out of the vault months ago. Cheeks sunken in, eyes darkened with shadows, hair frizzed and past her shoulders, and nails long and jagged.

“Easy, hon….” She said gently, grabbing for the sleeve of Percy’s shirt. The old material ripped easily as Percy tripped back, revealing a lightning pattern of red and white. “Oh…” Shocked, Nova pulled away, watching as Percy stumbled and scrambled out of the bar.

The scent of Washo’s detergent filled the two story shack as Charon scrubbed the dry blood from his face and arms. He watched the bloody soapy water drain between the cracks in the rusted floor. After a whole day of hunting, he couldn’t even tell whether the blood belonged to man or rat—not that it mattered.

‘It won’t last like this. They'll just keep coming for her…”

Charon looked out into the living room. Percy had done so much to make this old shack look like a home. From the jukebox in the corner, to the Nuka-Cola machine upstairs. Turning, he looked hard into the cracked mirror over the sink; painstakingly cleaned and polished.

“I save to do something.” His knuckles turned white on the rim of the sink as he heard the front door slam. He listened intently as Percy went upstairs up to their room without a word. It had once been considered his, however briefly. But it seemed that Percy wasn’t one for sleeping without company. Especially since the nightmares.

They were getting fewer and farther between, but every so often she would start up, or get a funny look in her eye while polishing the guns.

Drying off, Charon threw on a pair of boxers and once worn t-shirt. Before he could go upstairs and see what had upset her however, He heard a loud rapping at the door. It was Nova.

“Can I talk to you?” She looked pissed.

Shifting back and worth, Charon rubbed the back of his neck. “What do we need to talk about?”

“Don’t worry about it. Now get your fucking clothes on and meet me back at Gob’s.”
Chapter 17

Pacing back and forth, Gob’s hand dropped to the pistol at his waist. The .44 Magnum was the most valuable thing in the rusty old bar, and Gob was terrified of it. It had been used to threaten him and Nova on more than one occasion back when Moriarty was still alive…and drunk off his ass.

But now, somehow, there was a man even more chilling on his way to the saloon. The door creaked open and Gob whirled around in an instant, gun cocked and aimed.

“Whoa Gob! Calm down it’s just me.” Nova held up her hands, backing against the door.

“Shit, sorry Nova.” He instantly lowered the gun.

Nova walked up to the ghoul. “Is a gun really necessary? Percy lives with him, and I’m pretty sure she doesn’t pack heat while she sleeps.”

“You don’t know him. Ahzrukhal had him do a lot of crazy shit. I thought Percy was in control now, but who knows…She’s too nice, maybe he’s making her do things—dammit!” He slammed his fist against the counter.

Nova stayed calm; moving behind the bar to join him, she was about to say something when the door opened for the second time.

The two glared at the one as Charon stood at the door, arms crossed.

Gathering his courage, Gob set the pistol on the counter, in clear view of the colossus before him.

“What’s been going on? What have you been doing to Percy?”

Charon set his eyes on the deadly weapon, but scoffed at the words of the unintimidating ghoul who possessed it.

“The only thing I’ve done is kill off that crazy fuck, Burke.”

He moved closer, setting himself down on one of the stools. Lighting up a cigarette, he looked back down at the gun. “Mind putting that away?” Gob was furious, opening his mouth, but Nova shut it with a hand on his arm, taking the gun off the counter.

“Ok, Charon, Talk. What’s been going on? Where did Percy get all those scars? Why does she look like hell?”

Charon shot a glare a Nova. Even with the scars, Percy was still the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen before. But she was also right; Percy wasn’t doing too well, even if the external scars were healing. With a sigh, he told them everything. Her kidnapping, him finding Burke and seeing what the bastard had done to Percy, and finally, her destroying the contract.

Gob was horrified, but Nova was upset in a different way.

“Good God…” Gob slumped onto the counter, head falling to his hands.

“And you did nothing?”

Charon tried to remain calm at the accusation. “Say again?” he asked glaring at her.
“You’re telling me she was kidnapped, drugged, beaten and tortured, and all you’ve done is go hunting?”

Very calmly, Charon told up, slowly leaning over the bar, towering over Nova.

“‘Just go hunting’? I saved her. I got her healed up. I’m the one who’s been making sure she’s eating and sleeping. What have you been doing, aside from poor drinks down her throat when I’m gone?”

Nova stood her ground. She wasn’t afraid of him.

“If she wasn’t here, she’d be getting drunk at the Lantern. Jericho drinks there now; do you really want her getting drunk with him around?”

That shut him up. Frustrated, Charon crushed the cigarette against the bar with his knuckle as he sat back down.

“Now tell me: how many times has Percy done dangerous things unnecessarily. Things you could have done it instead, but she insisted?” Charon almost scoffed; it was an off day if she didn’t run head long into a gang of raiders with only half a clip loaded.

But that got Charon thinking. There was the GNR radio tower, the brotherhood sim pod, then that time with the giant fire ants, and getting to Pinkerton in the broken of bow of Rivet city…Then at Murphy’s. She knew he might have killed her for destroying the contract, but she did it anyway…

“Like she didn’t care about dying.” He muttered out loud.

“WHAT?” Gob shot up.

Nova ignored him, sighing as she said,

“So I’m guessing a lot of times.”

Charon nodded.

“So it sounds to me like she hasn’t given two shits about her own well-being since you met her—and perhaps long before that too—and not only are you just noticing, but all you’ve done is gone hunting”

Charon remained silent. He was ashamed of himself. As an employee he had failed her, and as a free man, he had practically ignored his friend.

“So what are you going to do about this?” She continued to ask.

“What the hell am I even supposed to do?” Charon growled, angrier at himself than anything. “Go home and ask her why she keeps trying to off herself? I’ve tried to help her, to get her to open up, but she keeps jumping around it!”

“You need to do something, Charon!” Gob’s fingers reaching for the gun again.

“I swear to God—”

Charon knocked his chair back as he stood and turned for the door.

“Gob no!”

*BANG*
A bullet embedded itself in the wall, about a foot from Charon’s shoulder.

Charon turned just enough to look Gob’s way.

“Good thing you missed.” He growled out.

Percy was wrapped in a ratty old blanket atop the bed when Charon returned, only her eyes and forehead peeking out from the mass, but he could see from the door that her eyebrows were knotted together.

She looked up hopelessly. “Why did I leave? I could be in the vault right now, keeping my head down. ‘You’re born in the vault, you die in the vault’. But no one wanted me there, so here I am.” Tears began streaming down her face without her permission. She buried herself further in the covers.

Awkwardly, Charon sat down at the edge of the bed. He had brought the punga fruit with him. He passed the bowl to Percy. He waited until she started eating to speak up.

“I don’t know a lot of useless people who scale the memorial just to get a better radio signal.” She didn’t say anything, but hiccupped as she continued to eat.

“Born in the vault and die in the vault’…That’s one shitty hallmark.” Percy looked up confused.

“It’s an old company, they made…oh forget it. My point is…I’m not saying the wasteland is better, but at least you have a choice out here. Personally, I’d pick freedom over safety any day.”

Percy sniffed, clumsily whipping her nose on the blanket as she scooted closer to Charon.

“And they call me gross.” Charon smirked, leaning away exaggeratedly while simultaneously putting his arm around her waist.

Percy continued to lean closer until she was practically on top of him.

As her hand reached up to stroke his cheek, his eyes caught sight of the scars littering her arms, and the unnaturally young looking nails on each finger.

“Thanks Charon.” She said. “For everything.”

As her gentle lips moved against his dry ones, he slowly kissed her back, running one hand through her hair.

It always surprised him just how soft in was. Soft and thick. The kind of hair you could lose yourself in. He never quite understood why she was bothering herself with him.

His touch was mesmerizing. Those rough yet gentle fingers against her hair, Percy was getting lightheaded. Hesitantly, she pushed him further onto the bed. He complied, careful not to make her uncomfortable, letting her decide how fast they went.

As her kisses moved to his neck, he groaned slightly. His pants were getting way too tight. His mind was still troubled however.
“You never did answer my question.” He said, trying to keep his voice even.

“Hm?” Percy’s hands moved up until they were massaging his scalp as she kissed along the ridge where his ear used to be.

“Why did you destroy my contract?”

She froze, but just for a second. Desperate to keep the conversation from heading in that direction, she inched her leg up until it was kneading, agonizingly slow against his crotch.

Charon groaned through his teeth, but it quickly turned into a growl as he grabbed her shoulders. He pushed her away until they were both sitting up again.

“No! Answer me…” He said, shaking her. “Why would you put yourself in danger like that? If it hadn’t have been for that piece of paper, I never would have known you were gone until it was too late.” Charon’s voice broke at the last word. It sounded worse coming from his ragged throat.

Exhausted, he leaned his head against her shoulder as he continued. “The contract didn’t feel so bad with you holding it. Travelling with you was the closest thing to being a free man I’ve ever been in two hundred years. That contract protected you, or at least helped me find you.”

“But you weren’t a free man.” Percy whispered. Shaking slightly from his outburst, she felt it was her turn to comfort him. She rubbed his back soothingly.

“But you knew what could have happened.” Charon persisted. He pulled back slightly to look into her eyes.

There was so much pain there.

“I was so tired, Charon…I hurt so much. Even now, it’s like an itching burning that never quite goes away. I feel it in every cut.” Her breath itched without her permission, and Percy began sobbing again.

“I just wanted it to end. And I thought, if… I was going to….do it anyway…I might as well do it for you.”

His heart nearly broke at that. Charon held her tighter, rubbing her back softly.

“It’s all over now Percy. He’s gone and I won’t let anyone hurt you again.”

He waited until she calmed down a little before getting up and leaving the room.

After a minute he came back with a syringe filled with translucent blue liquid.

“Hold out your arm.”

Percy inched back. “Please no. Talon kept me drugged on that for who knows how long. Please, I’d rather itch than go numb.”

Charon’s throat burned with hate at the mention of those bastards. But he went on.

“It’ll be fine Perse, I’ll just give you a little bit. Enough for the itch to go away. I’ll be right here with you. I promise I’ll never leave.” He added.

Summoning up her courage, Percy turned her face away as she thrust her arm forward.

Her muscles tensed as the needle pierced her skin, only to be forced slack by the fast working
narcotics. Percy started to sway uneasily. Charon moved forward to steady her. Her eyes drooped, but she struggled to hold onto consciousness.

“Don’t go, Charon, please stay...” She muttered, the words hard to form. Her eyes trying to stay focused on him, and she clung to his front.

“I’m here. I’m not leaving you.” He said softly, leaning her back until they were laying down side by side. Curling around her tiny form, Charon spooned her while whispering into her ear, promising how he would never leave her. He would always be there. Always. Eventually Percy fell into a deep sleep, but Charon was restless. Too much was running through his head to get a good night’s sleep. After a few hours—and he was sure Percy was fast asleep—He got up and left the house. Without really thinking, his legs took him outside the walls of Megaton. He could get plenty of stars while inside, but the air was better out here. Nova was still up, smoking a cigarette while leaning against the wall.

She turned, holding out an open pack to him.

Even without word’s, Charon knew it was a peace offering, and he took it.

The wind was picking up. He knew a dust storm would come through in a few days, but for now, the breeze was pleasant.

They stood in silence, enjoying the dusty old-world delight’s that hung from each mouth.

Nova was not one to be scared of a ghoul, no matter how tall, and Charon appreciated it, even if he didn’t like it earlier.

“Ok.”

Nova turned to look at Charon, who had just spoken up.

“I figure I can take her to Underworld. Carol will be able to help her more than I ever can.” He conceded sadly. “I’ll give her some space for a couple days, then go down to Rivet. We left most of our things up there last time.”

“Do you think leaving her alone is a good idea?” Nova asked.

“She won’t be alone. There’s Carol and Greta, then Dr. Barrows. Besides, I’ll only be gone for a few days.”

“Where are you gonna go?”

Charon thought back to the men Burke had hired. Talon Company.

“I have an idea.”

The world was spinning when Percy woke up. For a moment she had no idea where she even was. She reached for her pip-boy—Percy usually kept it on the nightstand—but it was gone!

Made slightly more awake by this, she clung to the walls as she made her way to the stairwell. Relief washed over her as she heard music playing quietly downstairs. Charon had gotten up before her
after all. She found him packing what few travelling provisions they had.

“Morning.” The words were hoarse in her throat. Even the little sunlight streaming through the cracks in the wall was too much; Percy squinted in the light.

Charon jumped slightly at the sound of her voice. He turned. His heart fell. She looked so tired, and not just because she had just awoken. Tired and sad. Why had it taken him so long to see her like this?

Because she was still gorgeous.

The way her long lashes fanned out from those eyes, which on any other day could pierce right through the soul. The gentle freckles that played across her nose and shoulders, just beginning to appear. Those soft pink lips, reddening slightly as she gently chewed her lower lip.

Startling himself out of his trance. Charon tossed her a cold Nuka to soothe her throat.

“Morning. I figure we could go to Rivet and get our stuff.”

She smiled. The thought of getting out again was a relief.

“Great! What can I do to help?” She was about to head for the weapons locker, but Charon was quick to stop her. “Actually, I’ve got that covered; why don’t you get food, water, and chems together?”

Since her confession last night, Charon didn’t feel so good about her going near anything sharp, or possessing a trigger.

Percy gave him a funny look, but didn’t question. Those eyes were so trusting. She was always one to give half-truths to strangers without batting an eye, if it got her what she wanted. But never with him. He couldn’t remember a time when she didn’t trust him completely. He wished he could trust her as much, even with her own life.

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Even in the hot wasteland sun, Percy refused to take off her many layers. She wore a long sleeved shirt covered in holes, dusty overalls, and a storm chaser hat. As they loaded up the motorcycle, she took note of how much emptier her own pack was compared to Charon’s. She had plenty of food and water, and medicine and clothes, but no weapons.

“I can carry more, you know.” She spoke up. Charon smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “The bike will be doing most of the carrying, smoothskin.”

She gave him another funny look, but didn’t argue further.

As they rode, somewhere along the way, whether it was the pleasant rumble of the engine, Charon holding her securely against his warm chest, a combination of the two, or perhaps residual med-x in her system, Percy managed to fall asleep.

As the dusty wastes shot past them, Charon’s mind drifted back to what Percy had said about the Talon Company. They were worse than the raiders. On top of that, they were organized. And, they gave worse men more power, by working for hire.

They wouldn’t go down easily
Charon grimaced, holding her just a bit closer.

Images of Percy’s bloodied near lifeless form flashed through his mind.

Eyes bruised and forced closed. Cuts, long since healed, open and pouring rivers of blood onto the concrete ground, forever stained with her innocent blood.

Charon shook his head, forcing himself to push the images away.

“I thought we were going to Rivet; what are we doing in the Underworld?”

Charon tried to think fast. Lying didn’t come easy to him. He hadn’t been able to for centuries, after all.

“What can I say? I miss the people here. Ahzrukhal was a bastard, but there are good folks here. I wanted to catch up a bit.”

Her eyes flashed with suspicion that made his throat seize.

For a second, Charon was scared she knew what was going on.

But the look came and went quickly. Smiling, she made for the entrance.

“I’ll check us into Carol’s then if you want to get our things.”

“Ok. See you in a bit then.”

He watched her walk up the stairs, and out of sight.
Carol idly hummed, arranging packages and cans of different pre-war foods on the shelves behind the front desk. Things had been almost peaceful since the Ninth Circle closed. Or rather, was repurposed. It was still a bar, but there weren’t any chems to be found. Instead, it had become a part of Carol’s place. Greta would sell food and drinks in the former Ninth Circle, and Carol would provide room and board, as well as overnight snacks. This meant that Carol and Greta had less time together, but it also meant they could afford to close up for entire days with the added revenue.

Memories of their last ‘day off’ caused Carol to blush as Percy walked through the doors.

“Good to see you again sweetheart! Why are you wearing so much? It’s almost 90 degrees out!”

Percy smiled nervously. “I’m fine, these clothes are nice and comfortable.”

“Nonsense, You’re gonna kill yourself like that.” Carol shook her head, coming from around the counter, she grabbed the hat and scarf from Percy’s head before the girl could move back. Flustered, Percy looked away, waiting for Carol’s reaction.

“Love? It’s slow right now, so I’m going out for a smoke. Want anything from Tulip’s?”

“Yes Sweetheart, get me a nail file please? But first, don’t you want to say hello to Percy?” Carol asked pointedly turning her around.

“Oh? Hey kid. What did you do, walk into a cheese grater? Well, at least you still have your nose. Later honey.” She spoke the last bit to Carol before stepping back out.

Smiling, Carol led Percy behind a set of curtains. “Now, how about we get you changed into something that breathes a little better, ok?”

Charon decided the best place to keep the bike was in his old room in the Ninth circle. Oddly enough the bar’s door was locked up, but it was picked easy enough. To call where he slept a bedroom was kind, but closet would have been more accurate. There was just enough room for a mattress, which was hardly enough room for the average man, and not nearly enough for him. Plenty for a bike at least. Seeing the tiny space brought back unwanted nostalgia. Memories of staying up for weeks on end only to curl into a tight ball for a few hours of sleep. Part of him would have rather just stayed up. But it wasn’t just the room—or lack of it—it was also the smell. The smell of old piss, bile, and beer.

He took an irreverent sniff at the memory, and noticed for the first time, the smell wasn’t present anymore.

In fact, the bar didn’t really smell like anything.

“Hey! What the hell are you doing?!” a Female ghoul shouted at him from behind.

Greta.

Charon scowled, turning around. “What the hell are you doing here?” she asked
“I could ask you the same thing”

“This place belongs to me and Carol now. If you wanted the place, you should have staked your claim.”

“The last think I want is this place, but I was hoping to stay the night.” Charon growled.

“Oh yeah? Pay for a room like everyone else.”

He was so fucking tired of people picking fights. Whatever happened to the good old days where people around here were afraid of him? Or at least left him alone…

“Like hell I will. I lived here for fifty years. Those years were pure hell. Now I’m going to stay the night in a good bed. I’ve earned it. I know Ahzrukhal had one. I’d appreciate it if you cleaned the sheets for me.”

Greta knew she lost the war, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t win at least one battle.

“Fine. But fifty caps for the clean sheets. I think we all know what he did in that room.”

Charon was feeling much better when he opened the doors to Carol’s Place. And his mood could only improve from there when he say Percy. She was sipping Nuka-Cola and talking with Carol over the counter. She was wearing a sleeveless pink dress that went to her knees. Her hair was combed and fell to her shoulders in gentle waves. She was smiling. The straw hung loosely from her lips as she let out a small laugh. Her eyes traveled to the door and there was so much warmth there as she waved at him. Relief washed over him. His resolve was reinforced, knowing that this was already doing her so much good.

“Carol was just telling me about when she first met Gob. I didn’t know he was a young ghoul” Percy told him as he walked up.

“Relatively.” He smirked, setting his arm around her waist instinctively and she leaned into him equally so.

“He was so handsome,” Carol reminisced. “Such nice blond hair and the shyest eyes you ever saw.”

“Well he still has the eyes!” Percy grinned. “And he still has plenty of game; He’s got a lady friend now. He’s crazy about her.”

Carol began dabbing her eyes. “I’m so happy for him. Ever since he left I’ve been worried sick. But he’s really happy?”

As the day went on, they went door to door saying hello, and in Tulip’s case, Percy used what few caps they had on Sugar Bombs—“It’s an investment!”—bobby pins, and one pre-war book Quinn had found while travelling.

“You done yet, smoothskin? I didn’t realize you wanted to visit everyone…” Charon groaned as they made their way for Dr. Barrows.

“Weren’t you the one who said you missed the people?” Percy teased. She had been near giddy the entire day. The change in scenery really was wonderful. On top of that, she was showing off her arms and legs with no shame at all.
“In small doses, I guess; But Barrows is just too a big dose.”

“Fine, quitter. I’ll meet you back at Carol’s later then.” Percy grinned as she pushed him away.

When he turned to leave however, she caught him by the wrist.

“Hey…” He protested turning back. But he couldn’t say anymore as she leaned up, getting one arm around his neck to help hoist her the rest of the way up to giving him a quick kiss.

“Thanks again,” She breathed, smiling up at him.

“For what?” he was confused, but not displeased.

“For everything. Now you can go.” She wheeled him around before giving him a final push.

As Percy walked through the old double doors to Barrows’, it took her a while to catch sight of him. He was on the other side of the glass, drawing blood from one of the glowing ferals. It didn’t seem to mind at all, but then she noticed that Nurse Graves was distracting it with a pen flashlight. Percy watched with interest. The blood was more a muddy sludge that had strange luminescence. Tapping on the glass, she waved, but this caught the attention of the other one… Ethyl maybe? The ghoul lunged at the glass, scratching fruitlessly. Percy jumped but didn’t back away.

“Dr. Barrows? It’s Percy. We met a while back. I wanted to talk.

After ten minutes of washing and decontaminating, Barrows finally slumped into a chair across from Percy, after setting up a table and the blood specimens between them.

“Long time so see, smoothskin. Care to give some of that healthy skin in the name of science?” He mused, looking over his vials.

“No actually, but I don’t think you’d want mine anyway. The wasteland has already changed me on a genetic level.”

“Is that so? How exactly?” he asked, knotting medical tubing around one arm, and slapping his veins until they began to bulge.

Percy told him about Moira’s book, and the field work required to complete it.

Barrows cackled as he filled a clean syringe with some of Meat’s blood. “That crazy broad…I met her when she was a tyke years ago. She used to catch radroaches and throw them into the waste pools to see what would happen; guess she hasn’t grown out of that!”

Percy watched in horror as he stuck the needle into his arm. He hissed slightly before sighing in near ecstasy.

“…Am I interrupting something?”

“Not at all. Meat, Ethyl, and I are blood matches.” Barrows panted, rubbing his skull as he focused back on her with great intensity.

“So Moira screws with your DNA; I’d still like some. For research, of course. What does this change do, exactly? Any perks?”

“Yes, actually. See these?” Percy held out her arm, tracing along a particularly long scar.

“I got hurt pretty bad just a few days ago.”
Barrows guffawed “That’s Impossib—oh I see; Very interesting…” He leaned closer, taking her arm to inspect it.

“That’s quite a perk…how many rads does it take to heal major wounds?”

“About fifty or so will fix a cut, but it takes over two hundred for something major, like a broken arm, or lacerations like these.”

Percy immediately switched tones, and once again, she was the Doctor’s daughter. All science and analysis.

“So what are the down sides?” Barrows asked, trying to keep the jealousy out of his voice, if he couldn’t keep it out of his eyes.

“That’s what I came to ask. Will I eventually turn into a ghoul too? And what about effects over time? Will this aspect of the change wear off eventually? Is this something that I could potentially pass onto offspring? Will I even be able to have children?”

“Hard to say… I’d need blood work, and some skin would be nice too…”

“Take it.” Percy said resolutely. “Short of entire organs, take whatever you need. I don’t want to suddenly grow an arm out of my stomach and not at least expect it.”

“Hello Charon, I was wondering when you’d come back.” Carol read through a magazine, barely sparing him a glance as he entered the hotel.

“Look, I didn’t give her those scars so don’t even—”

“Oh I know. She is very comfortable with you. Besides, you’re a big guy, why waste your time with knives?”

“She got—”

“Don’t tell me. When she’s ready, she will. What ever happened didn’t happen to you, so it’s not your story to tell.”

“I’m leaving tomorrow.” Charon finally got a word in.

“Of course you are.” Carol turned a page. “You haven’t had a real relationship with anyone in a lifetime; of course you can’t handle other people’s problems.”

“I’m sorry.”

Carol finally looked up “What?”

“I’m sorry for making life here worse. I didn’t choose that life. I didn’t want to do anything Ahzrukhal made me do. But I’m trying to make things better. Starting with Percy. I need your help, Carol.”

Her eyes softened. “You really care about her, don’t you?” It wasn’t a question, but it was filled with surprise.

Care didn’t even begin to describe it. Charon scowled, rubbing the back of his head as he said,
“Don’t act so surprised. When I’m with her, it’s like the past years never happened. She makes me want to be better, even if it’s just so I can get a smile out of her.”

The realization of the fact came over him as he said the words.

“Then why are you leaving?”

“Because there are still people in the world who had a hand in what happened to her.” He growled.

“Revenge? I can’t see her appreciating the gesture.” Carol sounded concerned as her brow furrowed.

“I couldn’t live with myself if those bastards managed to take her again. And if they did, I have a feeling it would be too late when I find her again.” He replied knowingly.

“As great as it is to get my hands on some nice locks, are you sure you want to cut it all off, smoothskin?” Snowflake examined her hair, appreciating the lack of split ends.

“Yeah, long hair isn’t really my style. I don’t want anyone getting ideas about pulling.”

“I donno, some people like that…I hear.” Snowflake quirked an eyebrow.

“Well not me; I want this one, can you get my hair to curl like this too?” Percy held up one of the old pin-up mags the Stylist had lying around, showing him one of the topless girls with bobbed hair and finger curls.

“Sure can, but it might take a bit longer.”

“Fine; how did they get their lips all red like this back then?” Percy wondered out loud as she looked through the worn out pictures of women long gone.

“Lipstick. Willow has a couple sticks if you want one.”

“Sure she won’t mind?” Percy asked, trying to keep her head still while he worked.

“I’m sure I can make it up to her.” Snowflake said wryly.

The next time Carol saw Percy, she had a bandana wrapped tight around her hair. She was holding a magazine, and a small dark tube when she walked through the double doors.

“Where’s Charon?” She asked, fidgeting with her headwear.

“He’s sleeping at his old place, I believe.”

“He should have told me, I already bought the room.” Percy grumbled, choosing a bed to fall on after the long day.

“You bought a bed, not a room. Hardly enough for…” Carol trailed off as she watched Percy’s face go red.

After Carol went to sleep, Percy lay awake for a half hour before giving up on the notion of sleep.
Her mind was pleasantly blank while she tried to nod off, but she missed Charon’s warmth. Frustrated, she left the hotel, taking two glasses and a bottle of scotch with her.
Chapter 19 (smut)

After a shower, and a semi-warm meal, Charon collapsed into the soft bed formerly owned by his previous employer. Greta had cleaned the sheets, and even straightened up the room a bit too. The book Percy had bought earlier that day stuck out from his bag on the floor. Charon hadn’t read since long before the bombs fell, but he had a feeling it was something he enjoyed. Taking it up, he scanned the first few pages before he was quickly engrossed. It was about a man who managed to survive the end of the world due to a technicality. Charon thought it was wishful thinking that the end of the world would be through disease, rather than bombs. Disease seemed too…subtle. But what really struck him, was the setting. It was so very much like the world he only vaguely remembered before man turned against itself. The smell of the pages brought back a more pleasant sense of nostalgia. Memories of soft red carpet…no, maroon…sitting next to the window as the radio told tales of pirates and new found islands to explore. His brother’s fighting over who was Grognak, and who had to be Grelok, the weakest and stupidest of Grognak’s many enemies. Shelves filled the crowded room, which was lit only by the window he leaned back against. More light flooded into the room as his mother opened the door. Figured she’d get on his case. He was smudging the glass and cleaner was expensive. Everything was expensive these days.

A knock at the door disrupted the silence.

“Go away.” He growled as menacingly as he could, hoping to strike utter terror into whatever poor sap decided to bother him.

“Nah.” Percy slipped through the door without hesitation. Grinning up at him, she held up the glasses and scotch.

“Oh…sorry. What about Carol’s?” Charon set down the book he had stopped reading a while ago on the nightstand.

“I’ll demand a refund tomorrow.” Percy waved away the comment before settling down next to Charon and passing him a glass.

“So…is this your old room?” Percy asked after an unnaturally uncomfortable silence. Charon looked distant, like she had just woken him from a strange dream.

“No, but it is for tonight.”

“Oh.” Percy caught the implication before taking a sip of the golden liquid.

“Why didn’t you stay at Carol’s?” She decided to breach the topic.

“Those two have never been very fond of me.” Charon replied
“I don’t blame them.” Percy screwed her face up on mock disgust. “I can’t hardly stand you myself, big guy.”

Charon chuckled, taking a sip from his own glass. “And here I thought you might have been flirting with me when you bought my contract.”

“Not too far off.” Percy waggled her eyebrows, before collapsing back into the bed in a fit of giggles.

Charon changed the subject, pointing to the bandana. “What’s with that thing on your head, anyway?”

“Oh!” Percy jumped up from the bad, twirling around to face him. “Close your eyes, I want to show you something!”

“Wouldn’t the point be for me to keep my eyes open, then?” The muscle above one eye raised as he smiled slightly.

“Shut up and close ‘em” She snapped playfully. Percy looked suddenly slushed, but determined

When he opened them again, he could have sworn he had been sent back in time.

Percy stood before him with tight finger curls in her hair, and red lipstick framing her smile. And what a smile it was. For a moment, the entire wasteland around them slipped away and it was just Charon and Percy.

“Snowflake had this magazine full of pre-war women. They all did poses like this:” She leaned forward pushing her breasts together as she clasped her hands, smiling seductively.

“I have a feeling they weren’t just selling clothes.” She went on, twisting while running her hands through that perfect hair.

Swaying her hips slightly, she settled on his lap—all joking gone now—looking down at him as she caressed his cheek. “They sure had style though…” She leaned down, coming closer and closer…

He had to come clean.

“I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“What?” the smile fell from her rosy lips in an instant.

“Just for a few days.” Charon shifted uncomfortably.

“But…why?” Percy couldn’t keep the disappointment out of her voice.

“There’s…something I need to do.” He said dumbly. He wished he thought out a better excuse

The silence between them was palpable. Charon couldn’t make himself look back at her. He didn’t deserve to.

But, eventually she continued her ministrations. “Only a week?”

Startled, he looked up. She was sad, but the smile was back.

“Only a week.” He parroted back as his eyes closed without his permission.
“Then…Go tomorrow. I won’t stop you. But stay with me tonight?”

She began kissing down the side of his neck.

“Are you sure…I’m…what you want?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not a good person.”

“Liar.”

“You haven’t known me that long.”

It was true. They had only really been travelling together for a couple months.

“I don’t need to know who you were, or what you’ve done, to know that in the time we’ve travelled together, you’ve been the nicest man I know.”

“…Why?” Why him? Harkness would have been a better choice. Hell even Three dog; At least he could be someone she could grow old with.

“Charon. Remember when I helped the Brotherhood Outcasts, and I saw a simulation of you before the bombs fell?” She began playing with the button on one sleeve. Charon’s eyes watched the fabric separate, and the strap falling to the side. “You were so handsome.” Her other hand moved to the other sleeve. “And you still are. Your eyes, the way I can see your muscles tense and relax, and oh, I love how I practically need to climb you for a kiss.”

Percy lowered her forehead to his. “I want you. Every single part of you. Even the parts that don’t have skin.”

Her fingers traced to the hem of his shirt. Pulling it up and over his head. They traced the border of where his skin ended on his shoulder.

The exposed muscle was not exactly that. Something thin and transparent protected tendons and tissue below.

Charon swallowed dryly, as he watched her bend down to kiss the flesh there. Her eyes dropped down farther. She pressed her palm to the exposed abdominals just above the apparent bulge in his pants. With the other hand, she caressed the back of his neck—her nails made him shiver—her lips pressed against his pulse point.

His body was not his own. His hands found her hips, pulling them in to grind against his own. Percy arched her back, moaning against Charon’s neck as pressed flush against him. Her top slowly inched lower down her breasts.

Charon twisted them around until Percy was laying across the bed with him hovering over her.

“Just, tell me if you want me to stop.” He whispered into her hair. Turning to look up into her eyes. Percy nodded silently.

Charon traced each and every strike of lightning on her skin. They practically glowed as her body flushed. “Damn, you’re beautiful.” One hand dipped to her center. Pausing just at the hem of her under-shorts. He looked back up for her approval.

“Don’t stop.” She was shaking in anticipation. Her fingers grasping onto his shoulders were all the
encouragement Charon needed.

His fingers crept beneath the cloth, rubbing slow circles against that little bundle of nerves. He kissed along each and every scar in time to his finger’s motions.

As Percy’s breath became more and more erratic, Charon moved his attention to her left breast; licking circles around the nipple before taking it between his teeth.

“Mmm!” She hummed, arching into his touch. His fingers went lower, tracing along her opening.

Suddenly, he stopped pleasuring her.

“W-why’d you stop?” She asked breathlessly, looking down.

She watched Charon bring his wet fingers to his mouth.

Tasting her.

“Fuck…” He dove between Percy’s legs. Wrapping his arms around each thigh, he began working his tongue up and down her folds.

He wanted more.

Throwing her head back, she pleaded; begging for more. “Yes, right there, please Charon yes!” Percy grabbed at his scalp. The pain of her nails digging in only got Charon more excited.

It was a good thing he was holding her down; Percy felt like if he wasn’t, she would have shaken apart.

He was her anchor.

Taking her clit in his mouth, Charon sucked as her moans became and more desperate. He let up slightly. Pushing a finger into her and curling up. He wanted to get her ready for him. It had been a while for both of them, he was sure. Pushing in a second, he lapped at her opening, desperate for the juices his fingers teased out of her. Her legs and lower abdomen began shaking uncontrollably. Clutching at the sheets, Percy chanted his name like a prayer, struggling desperately against his iron grip as she came closer to the edge. His hand shot up to stroke one breast. He felt her heart beat thud excitedly.

Sensation rose up from her center, spreading to all corners of her body. As it climbed up her neck, Percy tried to resist it, to prolong paradise just a little bit longer. But it finally managed to escape as a frantic, searing, moan. She collapsed back against the bed, trying to catch her breath.

Charon was experiencing his own version of ecstasy. To be able to give another such pleasure as opposed to pain, and on top of that, for it to be her.

“My Persephone…” He gasped, resting his cheek against her inner thigh, looking up at her with such want in his eyes.

Percy sat up to get a better look at him. She reached down to stroke his cheek as she said, “I don’t think I mind that name so much anymore. I kind of like it coming from you.”

“Oh yeah?” Charon grinned, kissing along her inner thighs.

He travelled up her form with slow open mouthed kisses.
“Well, Persephone,” He paused, kissing a scar on her rib cage.

“You are not only unbelievably sexy,” he settled down beside her, stroking his fingers lazily over her abdomen. He leaned over to whisper into her ear.

“You taste incredible.”

Between Charon’s fingers and his words, Percy couldn’t keep from laughing.

Flipping over, she sat up on his chest as he leaned back.

“Jeez big guy, how long has it been since you sweet talked a girl?” Percy covered her smile with the back of her hand as she continued to laugh.

He smirked but didn’t say anything. Instead, he took a moment to appreciate her as she took off the dress that had settled at her hips. The curve of her spine and the way her knees brushed up his sides as she moved was an almost ethereal experience for Charon.

She bent down to kiss him. Tongue forcing itself into his mouth without much resistance. Her hand dipped down and she began working the zipper on his pants.

Charon became nervous. He had been rock hard this entire time, and was hoping she wouldn’t notice.

He wanted her. Hell, he really wanted her. But he wasn’t sure how much she’d want him back after she saw what he was sporting.

“Hey, Perse—”

“Shush; I can’t be the only one naked here!”

“Yeah, but you should know…”

He was finally freed as she tugged his loose pants down to his knees.

It was stiffly leaning to the side as Percy looked up in aroused interest.

His cock still had most of its skin, but there was some missing at the base and just under the tip.

Her fingers curiously traced up and around his shaft. “Is it more sensitive here?” She asked softly as she stroked her thumb against the skinless base.

Charon didn’t reply. He couldn’t. He watched in disbelief as she began stroking him from his base to the tip achingly slow. Pre-cum beaded at the tip. In utter awe, Charon watched as Percy’s lips brushed against it in a single chaste kiss. Looking up into his eyes, she slowly licked the moisture he had created from her lips.

The ghoul screwed his eyes shut, hissing and swearing as he felt her lips enveloped his tip, tongue swirling it as she pumped more firmly at his base.

It took every semblance of control he still had left not to grab her head and thrust down her throat, it felt so damn good. With one hand he grabbed the head board, and the other, soft as a feather, he brushed back her hair so he could see her face better. She purred against him and Charon felt himself getting dangerously close.

Pulling her off of him, Charon got himself under control as she settled back on his lap, his cock
rubbing teasingly along her opening. Percy’s lips were swollen and red, little of the pre-war paint stained her face. Her eyes were lidded, and she couldn’t think of much else but the tantalizing feeling of him rubbing against her.

“Charon, I need you right now!...” She breathed urgently against his neck.

“Are you sure?” Charon was almost shaking. But he wanted to give her one last chance to back out.

She looked at him like he was crazy. Grinding her hips against his. She managed to moan out “Y-Yes! I want to feel you inside me right now! That’s an order!”

He didn’t think he could ever be so thoroughly aroused by those three words, but Charon was inside her in an instant. She yelped in pain, Grabbing onto his neck. “Slower...”

She whimpered.

Nodding, Charon set a slow pace, not just for her, but also himself. Even after all the prep, she was extremely tight, and he didn’t want this to end too soon. As her moans turned to those of pleasure, he began to thrust faster, focusing on the ceiling, trying to keep himself from finishing too soon. Percy met his pace, watching lovingly. Her Charon.

“Hey.” She gasped between moans “Look at me.”

Charon closed his eyes, trying not to lose himself in the sensation.

Slyly, Percy leaned forward until her breasts were rubbing against his chest.

His base began rubbing against her clit, sending ripples of pleasure through her chest. Grabbing his face, Percy kissed him, moaning into his mouth as her second orgasm shook through her.

Charon nearly lost himself as she squeezed around him. He wrapped his arms around her, pumping faster. Her walls pulsed tightly around him. He moaned her name as his vision blurred and release finally claimed him.

Light crept in from under the door. GNR was playing quietly in the distance.

Stretching, Charon looked to the side, sensing a weight in the bed next to him.

In the grey light, he saw Percy sleeping peacefully next to him. Her bare chest rose and fell slowly. Percy’s hair was fanned out around her in and her head was tilted to the side in his direction. One hand reached limply for his pillow.

That’s right…

Carefully, the ghoul rolled his legs off the bed so he could sit up. Lighting up a cigarette, he rubbed his face, trying to wake up a bit more. Last night came back in senses rather than images. The smell of her hair...her taste…the sound of her shuddering voice as he...

Charon couldn’t help smiling, almost dropping the rolled tobacco.

He was brought back to the present as two arms wrapped around his chest.
“You’d better go soon, otherwise I don’t know what I’ll do just to keep you here.” Percy muttered against his back, leaving gentle kisses there.

“Do you really have to go?” She sounded like a pleading child.

Charon didn’t say anything, but took one hand, wrapping his own fingers through her tiny ones.

“Yeah…I know you do…And you don’t need to tell me why…” Percy recited what she had said the night before. She moved to lay on her back next to him. Looking up at him, she raised her index finger. “One week.”

“One week.” He replied. “Thanks for not asking. You’re too good for your own good, you know that, smoothskin?”

It was Percy’s turn to take his hand. Examining the different tendons and veins, she said,

“The way I see it, you’ve been unable to keep a secret for two centuries. I think you’re more than entitled to a few now.”

Smiling wryly, Charon leaned down to kiss her one last time before getting up.

Percy watched him get dressed and pack up his bag. At the door, he looked back one last time. She was sitting cross legged in the middle of the bed, stretching her chest and arms. Cracking one eye, she smiled and gave him one last wave.

“One week.” She said as he left the room, and Underworld.

Chapter End Notes

You can also find this work at fanfiction.net, And I have a Tumblr page devoted to posting updates and information, persephonetheparagon.tumblr.com/

Please comment and tell me what you think of the story so far; I'd really love to hear from all of you.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

This Chapter was Beta'd By Anti-Material Girl

I do not own fallout 3, or any real world aspects mentioned in this work.
You can find Images of Percy and Charon at persephonetheparagon(dot)tumblr(dot)com

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the door closed, Percy moved to get off the bed. She winced. She’d heard that the first time was always a little painful, but Percy always figured it was the fault of vault boys not being careful enough. Charon had practically treated her like glass, but her insides were still pretty sore. Moving over to her side, she pulled back the sheet only to cringe in disgust at the cloudy pink smear she found there. Disgusting. Luckily Charon hadn’t noticed before he left. That would have killed the entire mood. Carefully, she dressed in a more conservative blue dress than what she had decided on the night before. This one covered the shoulders, as well as a newly developing hickey.

Percy blushed as she thought of the night before. How he held her wrapped in his arms afterwards, whispering sweet nothings into her hair as he stroked her lower back. Any soreness she suffered today was well worth everything that happened last night. Just thinking about his hands grabbing her waist as her nails dug into his shoulders; her core tensing as she got closer to the edge…

She jumped as the door opened and the room was bathed in dusty yellow light.

Greta was at the door, decidedly startled by finding someone still in the room after Charon had passed Carol’s without a word.

Her surprise quickly turned into a sneer, however. “Well pardon me. I assumed Charon spent the night alone, clearly he had other plans when asking for a private room.” She quipped.

“He didn’t, I did.” Percy snapped back, not in the mood to defend herself so early in the morning. “How much to clean the sheets?” She asked, pointing to the sheets she’d thrown in the corner. “Thirty caps.” Greta answered, choosing to omit the fact that Charon had already payed pull room and board

“My bag is still with Carol, I’ll give them to her when I see her.” Percy hurried past the smirking ghoullette.

By the end of the first day in Underworld, Percy was bored out of her mind, and nearly out of money. She couldn’t afford to stay at Carol’s every night, and the woman quickly scolded her wife for charging Charon much less Percy for a room they never used. Grudgingly, Greta returned the caps before going back to the ninth circle. Carol gave Percy a knowing wink before the girl left the hotel as well. As she wandered the halls, checking out the old exhibits still left up, she couldn’t help but notice the stares of ghouls as she walked by. The Vaultie thought she had spent enough time in Underworld for the stigma to go away, but apparently not.
“Well it looks like you won’t suffer from the ghoulification process. The mutation you have is similar to ghoulification, but different on a few key levels.” Barrows showed Percy slides of the blood and skin cell samples he had taken the day before, and compared them to post ghoul samples he already had on hand. “And what are those, exactly?” Percy stared hard at the samples, trying to compare the two types. They were radically dissimilar, certainly, but she didn’t have enough experience in the area to know what the variances entailed.

“Well for starters, your skin won’t fall off. In fact, this mutation might even prevent ghoulification at higher levels of radiation. I would still be cautious about your exposure though.”

“What about fertility and offspring?” Percy tried not to get her hopes up. She didn’t have much experience with children aside from Bryan and the kids in Megaton, but living in the vault turned her off the idea of ever having any of her own. If she never had to worry about it? Well, even better.

“The mutation doesn’t seem to affect your fertility—although I’d keep an eye on your cycle if I were you—but this might affect pregnancy. Too much radiation might cause your body to reject the fetus as a foreign object. Hypothetically, if you were able to conceive and give birth to a child, this mutation appears recessive so you’re unlikely to pass anything onto the kid.” Barrows looked her up and down before he continued. She looked relieved, but he wasn’t sure about for which piece of information.

“Although…I doubt you should have anything to worry about in the conception area.”

Percy was so focused on processing what he said, she almost missed his last statement.

“Excuse me?”

“I don’t know how serious you are with lovers, but ghouls are blank shooters. You don’t have to worry about getting pregnant.”

Percy turned crimson. “How did you—?”

“A pretty young wanderer with no hold-ups about staying in Underworld, travelling around a behemoth ghoul like Charon? Ma’am, even if Greta hasn’t been telling everyone with ear holes, it was pretty obvious.” Barrows quipped.

Nostrils flaring, Percy got up to leave, but Barrows grabbed her arm at the last minute.

“For the record, I’m happy for the two of you. But a word of advice: Don’t go flaunting this. Not everyone—smoothskin or ghoul—is guaranteed to be as hospitable to your relationship (as I am?).

It was lunch break, and Greta was excited about having a quick moment with her wife. It was one of the few pleasures she had left in life. And oh how pleasurable it was, too. She had just opened the door to Carol’s place when someone called out to her from behind.

“You!”

Aw crap. It was that vault kid.

After Carol made her give the vaultie her caps back, Greta had decided to vent her frustrations at the
loss of money. Figures she would be a little upset, but Greta hadn’t expected her to make a scene out of it.

The girl’s ears were practically steaming as she stalked up the rest of the stairs. Marching up to Greta, she unceremoniously shoved her the rest of the way into the hotel.

“Everyone who isn’t Carol or Greta, get out. NOW!” She hollered when no one made a move to get up.

Once the last ghoul shuffled out, muttering about smoothskin privilege, Percy turned her fury back on Greta.

“What makes you think you can just tell everyone my personal life like that?”

“People like news, and I was bored. What is someone with such little income such as myself gonna do on a slow day like this?” Greta crossed her arms. This was the first time she had ever seen Percy real angry. It wasn’t scary, but it was certainly startling.

“Greta!” Carol scolded, but Percy was way ahead of her.

“Is that what this is fucking about?” she shouted, digging through her pockets for the caps. She threw them in Greta’s face. “Here take them. Oh is privacy extra? Here’s another ten then!” Greta shielded her face as the slightly rusty caps came near her eyes.

“Percy! Aren’t you overreacting just a little bit?” Carol’s hand went to the girl’s shoulder, not only to calm her down, but to hold her back as well.

Percy quickly shook her off.

“No! I’m not fucking overreacting! I don’t need more people think I’m some easy slut! I don’t need more people feeling entitled to my body!” Percy was shaking, tears coming to her eyes as she furiously began to strip down to her underclothes. Getting in Greta’s face before Carol could stop her, Percy turned around, pointing insistently at her lower back.

“And I sure as hell don’t need more branding for who I love!”

Greta’s smirk was gone as her eyes dropped to the jagged messy scrawl across Percy’s back.

Carol hurried over to have a look, seeing rage take form in Greta’s eyes.

“Who did this to you dear?” Carol asked hollowly.

“I made the mistake of sweet talking one mister Burke. He wanted blow up Megaton. I gave him something else to want.” Percy said, shrugging her clothes back on. “My fault for leading him on, I suppose. No wonder he decided to kidnap me for a gutter tunnel rendezvous. Didn’t like the idea that Charon might have gotten to me first. He was wrong about that—back then, at least.”

“Did he do…all of those?” Carol pointed hesitantly.

“Each and every one. I’m pretty good at not getting shot. Before I met Burke, that is.” She said bitterly, arms around her shoulders. The memories of her abduction coming back after all the work she had done to bury them. She missed the layers she had worn the other day. The desire to hide her body coming back with a vengeance.

Greta scoffed, fury still there. “That’s bullshit. It’s not your fault. I don’t want to hear that crap ever
come out of your mouth ever again, you listening?"

“But Moriarty, and Burke—”

“No!” Carol was shaking with anger, fists clenched at her sides.

“Don’t you ever buy into those lies! Fuck Moriarty, and fuck Burke! No matter what, your body is your own do you hear me!” Her voice was shrill. Greta actually looked a little frightened at her outburst. She rarely heard her Carol swear.

The silence that follows was palpable until Greta spoke up. “Well my lunch break is over. Sorry about what I did Perse, won’t happen again. See you tonight love.”

Greta moved to kiss Carol before she left. Her wife was better at handling delicate matters like these. As the door clicked shut, Percy collapsed to the floor, holding her arms trying to catch her breath.

Greta sat next to her on the floor, wrapping her arm around the girl’s shoulder. Percy didn’t push her away this time. “Did Charon,”

“No, he didn’t.” Percy cut her off.

“And he was very gentle.”

“You said you loved him earlier. Did you mean it?”

“Feels like it.” A smile played on her lips as she said it. “I know he’s not perfect. But in the time I’ve known him he’s made me feel safe and strong and…happy.” She sighed.

“I used to think I’d have to couple with someone out of obligation. But with him, things are always as fast or slow as I want. He’s never once pushed anything on me.”

‘Wow…If I had known there was actually a man under the contract, I would have been much kinder to him when he lived here. Guess it’ll be my turn to apologize when he gets back.’

Percy counted her caps the next day. A little over a hundred. Less than a week if all she did was buy food. There were still a few provisions in her pack, but that would only last a couple more days. Most of her best equipment was in Rivet, but all she had now was leather armor. She pursed her lips as she remembered that Charon hadn’t left her a gun either. A decent one plus a couple grenades, not to mention the ammo would cost well over a hundred caps. Groaning in frustration, she wiped the sweat from her forehead. The heat wasn’t helping her think either!

Back at Megaton she had managed to rig an AC unit for the house using refrigerator parts, old fans, and a whole lot of pipes.

Winthrop spends half the day working on keeping Underworld running, and yet it’s always sweltering in here. And muggy.

“Well it’s not like I have much else to do…” Percy grabbed her vault suit from the pack. It made great pajamas on cold days, and was just easy to wear on slow days like this. Slipping her legs into the pants, she cinched the belt tight around her waist and left the top half dangling around her hips.
“Winthrop!” The poor old ghoul practically fell off his ladder as the former vault dweller jogged up to him.

“Why are you yelling?! I didn’t say a damn thing against you!”

“Yeah I know,” Percy waved her hand, dismissing his statement. I’m not getting on your case for anything but the AC. When’s the last time you took a look at the vents?”

“When’s the last time bombs fell?” Winthrop asked drolly. “Ghouls produce too much heat, and the AC gets overheated. I tried fixing it a couple times around 2150, but it wasn’t worth it when the parts could go toward stuff that didn’t break so often.”

Percy looked around Underworld until she found the vents. With nothing else to do, she decided the air conditioning would be her new project. Buying new guns would be too expensive, so she made a deal with Quinn. If she managed to get the air working before Charon got back, he would lend her a gun and escort her to Rivet City.

Finding the vents wasn’t the tricky part, though. It was cleaning them out. Underworld was a relatively big place, and the ventilation surrounding it was just as expansive. Ten rotting mole rat corpses had to be cleared out, and by the time that job was done, Willow was kind enough to tell her she was too pungent even for a city of ghouls. That took most of a day and by the time she finished, she was almost too tired to wash the mole rat guts off herself. Almost.

With Winthrop’s grudging help, Percy set up bars and mines at the external intake vents to prevent any further intruders. Quinn helped her collect fans and refrigerator compressors from the surrounding ruins, setting them up at the intakes and wiring them through the vents to Underworld’s power generator. Fans also needed to be set up at the outtake on roof. Things were starting to feel like a group effort, and by this point, the scandal surrounding Percy and Charon had all but disappeared. Wiping her forehead with a rag covered in oil and dust, Percy was setting up the last of the ceiling fans. Four days of near endless labor. It was one of the longest times she had stayed in one place since leaving the vaults. She was getting restless and eager to get moving again.

Tightening the last bolt, Percy nearly flew off the ladder, rushing to the generator room. Winthrop had shown her what the various switches did a couple days ago. Timidly, she flipped on four switches. At first she was worried nothing had happened, until she heard a collective sigh from outside.

Walking into the main hall, she saw men and women collecting under the many fans.

Percy had turned them to full power as a test run. All of Underworld was breezy, almost like outside. Closing her eyes, Percy ran her hands through her sweaty hair, enjoying the how cool breeze on the back of her neck. Her knees began to shake as exhaustion from the past few days finally took hold of her. Collapsing onto the nearest bench, she watched the Greta and Carol set up tables in the middle of the hall, handing out wine to celebrate the new luxury.

“Well smoothskin, you did it.” Quinn settled down next to her, passing her a glass. “We can head out as early tomorrow morning if you’d like.”

The loner hadn’t expected Percy to stick to her little pet project as fiercely as she had.

“How did you get so good at climbing around tight places like those vents anyway? God knows
Winthrop would have fallen apart if he’d tried.”

Percy took aim, hitting bullseye on the target, causing it to turn around with a lazy *clang*. She had just finished work and needed to blow off steam.

‘Can I really call it that?’ She wondered, wrinkling her nose. Listening to confessions after each service was becoming a new form of torture. Janice Wilkins made it her personal mission to give the most lurid and obscene confessions, bragging about her escapades to Percy every Sunday. While the Chaplain doubted the validity of her confessions, she knew if they were true, 101’s breeding plans were fucked. Hearing footsteps down the hall, Percy rushed to cover the targets before diving for the nearest floor vent. Even if it was her dad, it was too big a risk for someone to catch her there. She just replaced the grate as Wally Mack stepped into the reactor room.

‘Huh? Shit!’ Percy wasn’t surprised to see the Vault loyalty inspector snooping around, no, her eyes were glued to the BB gun she had left behind. Dammit, she wasn’t usually this careless! Her stomach dropped as Wally picked it up.

“Daddy’s little angel, huh? I have a few unholy things I’d like to do to her…” Wally muttered, sneering as he hurried out of the room.

Fearing the worst, Percy hastily climbed through the maze of ventilation until she was peering into her room from above.

Trying her hardest not to shake apart, Percy covered her mouth as she watched Wally Mack look through her things.

She knew it, God, she knew it!

He started pawing through her dresser, picking through her underthings. Percy felt like she was going to throw up as he brought one pair to his nose.

“What the hell are you doing in here?!” Percy recognized her father’s voice before he came into view. Mack turned to face him, cramming the panties into his back pocket.

“Mister Carter,” Wally grinned innocently, holding up her BB gun. I found this in the reactor room. Guns are not allowed to civilians. The overseer would hate to find out his very own doctor is housing a criminal. And Persephone seemed like such a nice girl…”

James didn’t betray any fear as he replied, “I’ve never seen that gun in my life. Besides, my daughter is a woman of the cloth; do you honestly expect me to believe she would possess such a thing?”

“Oh course I don’t, but the Overseer surely will.” Wally pushed James roughly aside as he made for the door.

James thought fast. “You do that and I’ll reveal the abortion records, each and every one, I can assure you, you are the cause of.”

That stopped him. He may be skilled in lock picking, but Wally was useless with computers. He knew he would never be able to steal those files. Angrily he tossed the toy gun on the table nearby. “Keep a better eye on your girl next time.” He growled before stalking out of their apartment.
You can also find this work at At fanfiction(dot)net, And I have a Tumblr page devoted to posting updates and information, persephonetheparagon(dot)tumblr(dot)com/

Please comment and tell me what you think of the story so far; I'd really love to hear from all of you.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

gore warning.

I do not own fallout 3, or any real world aspects mentioned in this work.
You can find Images of Percy and Charon at persephonetheparagon(dot)tumblr(dot)com

It was hot as hell, but that paranoid dick-weed Jabsco was keeping everyone on red alert. Two lookouts to a tower. Every tower. Tristin was practically sweating through his armor.

It was so stupid! Some one-armed eunuch showed up blubbering about a shotgun toting ghoul ten feet tall, and Jabsco loses his shit! That’s bullshit. Tristin figured the guy had a bad run-in with a mutant and a worse run-in with ultra-jet. Jabsco clearly didn’t think it was as funny as Tristin though. Kept himself holed up the armory most of the day. Only coming out to take a piss and throw around the new recruits.

“Hotter than your dead mom, and not a day off in sight.” Brax groused next to him. He narrowly avoided Tristin’s right hook as he continued. “Jabsco’s finally gone off the deep end, I swear! I need a break; hell, my right hand needs a break!”

Tristin barked out in laughter. It’d been a while for all of them. But things were looking up. He was only a hundred caps away from getting himself a half-decent wife from Eulogy. A pretty one, too. Brax went back to look through the scope. Watch tower was easy money, after all. There was shade and he didn’t have to walk around all day. But there was the thing with Jabsco. If he really did go over the edge, Tristin didn’t want to stay long. But what were his options? Well, he was no good at catching without killing, so slaving was probably out. Maybe Jones would need a guard though. Then things would be nice and quiet.

“Hey piss-ants; trade out. Tristin, you’re on mess tonight.”

“Since the fuck when?” Tristin spat at the rounds officer.

“Hell if I know; maybe Jabs’ misses that secret sauce you like to add to the soup. Anyway, get to the kitchens.”

Tristin smirked. That was the one time he really got one over on the commander. Everyone else clued in and skipped dinner, but Jabsco ate every bite! Classic!

Cooking duty went by in a sweaty smelly flash. No one showed up to supper yet though. That was pretty odd. Usually, people were crammed to the rafters in the small dining area.

The last song ended with a fading blast of trumpet.

“Good golly holly, children. Here I thought Talon were big time… but this…”
“You got that right!” Tristin gloated to no one in particular, scrubbing at the burnt cram stuck at the bottom of a pan.

“My eyes in northern D.C were scouting out the goings on around Takoma Park…and well…the goings on, go on no more. Talon’s camp up there went from a population of 30 to a graveyard of the same.”

Tristin stopped scrubbing, looking to the radio in disbelief. Was Jabsco’s radio on? Was he hearing this?

“Now I don’t know who…or what…could have done this, but the place was covered in shotgun shells.”

“What the hell…” Tristin was getting scared. Was that eunuch really telling the truth?

*Schlik Klik*

In the brief static that filled the room between Three Dog’s report and his next song, Tristin heard a gun—no, a shotgun—being racked. Right behind him.

“Jesus!” Tristin jumped back against the stove, narrowly missing throwing his hand down on the hot burner.

How did he get in without the merc hearing the door open and close?

The kitchen door was notorious for being rusty and loud, what the hell!

The eunuch had been right though; the ghoul had to be at least 7’5”

“Shh…” the ghoul slowly lowered his gun until it was aimed directly at Tristin’s forehead. He could have moved, could have done anything. But he didn’t. He was frozen in place.

“I’ve had a long day…?” his voice trailed off, he looked at Tristin expectantly until he caught the hint.

“Tristin! My name is Tristin…sir.”

“Sir…I like that. I’ve had a long day, Tristin. Messy day. And I gotta say I’m a little tired. I was hoping you could make the rest of it a little easier by showing me where your boss is.”

…That was it?

“Uh…sure…but he’s locked himself up. I think he was expecting you, sir.”

He chuckled. It was almost infections, and Tristin’s cheek twitched.

“Good.”

As they made their way through the many underground halls, Tristin saw all that had happened. Corpses littered the halls. Some were even nailed to the wells with combat knives.

Tristin noticed one of the crucified as Cole, one of his old teammates. Cole’s own knife was imbedded to the hilt into his neck.
How had all this happened without him noticing?

Where were the bullets?

There were no signs of gunfire; no shells, no bullet holes—in flesh or in the walls.

As they got deeper and deeper, the amount of corpses decreased, but there were no signs of life until they reached the armory.

“Jabsco uses this place as his office. He keeps about a week’s worth of food in there in case of a lockdown.”

“Do you know the password, Tristin?”

“…If I do this will you let me go?”

Silence filled the hall.

“Please, don’t kill me.” Tristin’s voice broke against his will.

‘Fuck! You don’t need to be pussing out right now!’

“I don’t know what I did to deserve this. I just stay here, guard the base, and cook. If I ever killed someone you cared about I’m sorry but I didn’t know.”

“Open the door.” The ghoul finally spoke up. Tristin felt the gun lightly tap the back of his head.

Jabsco paced circles in the empty room. His nervous energy was made worse with jet, but it’s not like anything would have made it better. He needed a plan; a lone term one. This ghoul was serious. He had just heard the radio broadcast. This was all Burke’s fault! Fuck that guy! Jabsco hoped that even in hell, that slimy twat was fucked with an un-lubed cactus for the rest of eternity.

It wasn’t even Jabsco’s men who kidnapped the girl. That was Corbin’s work.

Tenpenny had send his men after the ghoul though. Some old world idea of revenge, solidarity, and keeping the nation pure or some shit.

How did Tenpenny ever really expect them to take him down though?

That was a name than froze the blood.

The monster had been around long before Jabsco was even born. Always on a leash and bound to the underground. Even before that though, there were legends of a monster bound to his master. Killing with the snap of a finger; travelling south and destroying whole villages of tribals. No flinching, no regret.

Jabsco froze as the armory door opened.

“Boss…” Tristin stepped.

“Tristin, what the hell—”

He was cut off as the boy’s head exploded, and Jabsco was showered with brain and blood.
Charon stepped over the fallen merc.

“I assume you know why I’m here.”

“Look buddy, I didn’t kidnap your girl, and after we got your message, we stopped sending guys your way! We’ll never go near you or Perc—”

Charon broke his cool, slamming Jabsco against the wall.

“DON’T SAY HER NAME! DON’T YOU EVER SAY HER NAME! YOU DON’T HAVE THE RIGHT!”

Charon took a moment to calm down, Jabsco whimpered pathetically.

“You know who I am. You know what I’ve done. You know what I can do, and why I’m here.”

“Please…“

Jabsco was cut off with the sound of metal scraping Kevlar. He looked down. The hilt of a knife was imbedded there in his stomach. He stared dully at his wound as Charon continued to speak.

“If it had been anyone else—some faceless wasteland savior, freeing slaves and killing mutants—I wouldn’t have cared. I wouldn’t be here right now.”

He pulled out the knife and Jabsco howled. The knife had teeth, and he felt them scrape farther into his organs and skin. In horror the mercenary leader watched blood mixed with acid seep through his clothes.

“But it was her. And I can’t ignore that. I can’t turn the other cheek and forgive you. I’m not that good. Not like her.”

Taking up the knife again, Charon stabbed the blade through Jabsco’s forehead, sawing it down the screaming man’s face until he reached his chin. The room was filled with screaming, and Charon was pretty sure it could be heard from the entrance three floors up. He reached with both hands, pushing his fingers deep into canyon of bone he had created. With little force, he split the two halves apart, finally silencing the man for good.

As Charon made his way east—the sun setting behind him—he tried to keep from thinking about what he had just done. His fingers tingled with nostalgia and he couldn’t get his heart rate down. He wasn’t sure if it was his mental conditioning…or…

He took a shortcut back home. If he hurried, he could grab something to eat before he had to leave for his next job. He looked down at his watch.

‘Shit.’

The wind howled and rain beat against his face as he broke out into a run. His coat collar flapped against his neck and rain dripped from his hair into his eyes. In the din of noise, he faintly heard something clink against the sidewalk, causing him to stop short. Turning back he walked up to the small broach. It had gotten scratched up by the rough concrete, but it still sparkled in the dim light. It was cheaply made—almost worthless—but his mom had loved it. It was an anchor set in glass.
with a glittery blue background. She said it was the last thing she had gotten from his dad. He barely remembered the man, but mom had always spoken kindly of him. Wiping the moisture from his eyes, he grabbed the broach, and walked the rest of the way home. He could be a little late.

The apartment building was eerily quiet as he made his way up the stairs.

The door to his apartment is ajar too. He hears yelling from the other side it’s his brothers…and some other people too. Slowly he reaches for the knob when a gunshot silences everything on the other side of the door.

“Aw fuck man! You weren’t supposed to kill one of them!”

“He was reaching for the phone, Matt! Besides he had brown eyes. Green eyes sell way better.”

All color drained from his face. He had heard of these guys. Only boys over sixteen were drafted, and he only got out of it by working in the artillery factories. But there were those who made use of children under that age. It wasn’t war, but it was hell.

He burst through the door. There were three guys. One holding down his brother and the other two frozen in the act of grabbing what little valuables the small family still had decorating the living room.

He was at least a foot taller than all of them, but he was still outnumbered.

And they had guns.

“Easy now, big guy. We don’t want any trouble.”

“Get out of here!! Don’t listen to them!” his brother screamed before the man behind him grabbed his hair, shoving the barrel against his skull. But his brother kept on struggling against the intruder. He slowly reached into his back pocket as the men were distracted. He always kept a switchblade with him for emergencies. But his brother made one great tug against his assailant, wincing in pain from his hair. A second shot filled through the room.

“Fuck! Jack! What did I fucking tell you!?” Matt turned back to Jack, who now stood over the dead boy. “My finger slipped…” He said defensively.

The last man howled in pain, drawing the attention of Matt and Jack.

He was stabbing the would-be robbers face until the gargling screams were quenched. He turned back to the last two men, rage and blood bathing his face.

“Big mistake, Jack.” He growled, rushing them as everything went red.

The police took an hour to arrive after the event.

‘Useless…’ he thought as they handcuffed him, dragging him to the station. He didn’t resist.

They questioned him, but he didn’t have much to tell them. They killed his brothers, and he assumed he killed them right back. Well, he definitely killed the first one.

“What I don’t get, is how you took down all three. They had guns, son. And all you had was this toothpick.” The officer held up an evidence bag containing his knife covered in blood.
“Well it must have happened, sir. After all, that’s my knife, and I’m the only one who’s still alive.”

The cop slammed his fist on the table.

“Dammit son, this is serious! You can plead self-defense, but those were three men! You can face a life-time.”

There was a soft knock on the door. Both he and the cop turned to look.

It was a stout woman dressed in purple with minimal make-up except for bright red lipstick. She flanked by two men in full S.W.A.T team uniforms.

“What the hell? I’m in the middle of an interrogation here!”

“I’m sorry sir, but that man is coming with me.” The woman purred, brushing past the cop, her eye’s never leaving him as walked up to the table.

“My my, aren’t you a big one. No wonder you were able to take down three all by yourself. I wonder what else you can take down.” Her eyes narrowed and a smirk ghosted across her lips.

He glared back up at her, refusing to be the first one to blink as he stayed quiet.

“Until we can get a judge and jury together, He’s under the custody of the BPD.” The cop insisted, trying to get the attention of the strange woman.

“Oh I’m afraid not.” She replied, for the first time looking at the officer. She gave him the same wide eyed scrutinizing look.

“The army has use of this…Bear of a boy, and it’s up to me to get him…into shape.”

One of her men took a key from the cop, un-cuffing him before both men grabbed him by the shoulders. As they walked him out of the room, he turned to the woman

“Thank you.” He breathed.

“That’s a little pre-mature, don’t you think?” she asked, sneering.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I do not own fallout 3, or any real world aspects mentioned in this work.
You can find Images of Percy and Charon at persephonetheparagon(dot)tumblr(dot)com

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The two stood before the giant aircraft carrier. Percy turned to Quinn, giving him a hug.

“Thank you so much! I should be back in a couple days. If Charon gets back before I do, make sure he waits and doesn’t go looking for me.”

“Sure thing, kid. Just don’t keep him waiting.” And with that, Quinn, who was never very wordy, turned and left.

Harkness was relieved to see her. “You’re alive!” he said ecstatically.

Percy became sheepish. “Yeah, I heard Charon turned this place upside down looking for me.”

“That’s an understatement!” He laughed. “I swear, that ghoul would have built a rocket ship if he thought you were on the moon. Where is he?”

“Oh, he stayed back at the Underground.” Percy lied brightly. Shorter than the truth, but it won’t be a lie for very long anyway.

As she walked the halls, she couldn’t help but notice the sighs of relief that seemed to follow her.

By the time she reached her room at the Weatherly, she was in a good, if not relatively guilty mood. She should have come back sooner. If nothing else but to set everyone’s mind at ease. The smile left her face as she inserted the key, however. The room was already unlocked. Everything was messily scattered across the floor.

Rushing to the duffel bags, she began taking inventory. But nothing was missing.

‘Who would make a mess and take nothing?’ she wondered, organizing meds and supplies.

It was then that something caught her attention. Or rather, the lack of something caught her attention.

The Ant queen pheromones.

The sample she had collected forever ago was missing. Percy was forced to blush. That stuff was relatively harmless, aside from the fact that it was a potent aphrodisiac.

‘A super valuable one too.’ Percy sighed, grabbing everything to lug to the market. She would have to sell a few of the heavier guns if she was going to be able to carry the rest back to Underworld. She didn’t want to risk leaving anything else here. Looking back at the now empty room, she got a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach. It was so strange. Not too long ago, she and Charon had moved
away from just being Employer and Employee. The few moment’s they had spent here, overjoyed at saving Harkness had felt like paradise. But then Sister and Talon Company came and screwed everything up.

‘But it hadn’t been very perfect before that either.’ She thought. Charon still had his contract then. And there was Project Purity a short walk away. Doing nothing but serving as a reminder that her father had left. Shaking her head, she left the room and slammed the door. What was the point of lingering on the past? The past wouldn’t change. All she had left was the future.

As she struggled down the stairs, she looked up and saw non-other than Abraham Washington. He was giving her a sour look.

“Oh, hey Abraham. Mind moving a bit? These are heavy.”

“Missy I’ve been waiting quite patiently. Do you have it?”

Percy’s mind was drawing a blank. “Have…what exactly?”

“The Declaration of Independence!” He stamped his foot like a child. “You said you would get it for me if I told you about Rivet cities history, remember?”

‘Hardly…’ “Of course! I’m so sorry! I’ve been…tied up recently and I haven’t gotten the chance to explore any of the ruins yet.”

Washington walked away briskly, grumbling about how the great George Washington would never have acted this dishonestly.

Everyone in the market seemed pretty surprised to see her, Especially Angela. For the life of her, Percy couldn’t wave the girl down in the busy diner. With a huff, she went to the bar to get a meal. “Gary, what’s with Angela? I’m starving and she practically ran from me.”

Gary tried not to show his annoyance. This girl was always a little too friendly, using first names with everyone. It seemed to work on everyone, but not him. She reminded him too much of his former wife. Too damn fake. “Don’t mind her too much; my little girl just got married. I guess the butterflies haven’t all flown out of her stomach.” He passed her a bowl of noodles and stew.

“Married?” Percy blanched. “I didn’t even know she was seeing anyone.

“Considering you’ve only passed by a couple times, that wouldn’t surprise me. But…it was pretty sudden for me too. Hell, I thought Diego had promised himself to the church.”

“Yeah…I remember visiting the church last time. He was hoping on becoming an elder wasn’t he?” Percy rested her cheek against one palm using the other to stir her soup contemplatively.

“Yes, but then all of a sudden I see him rush out of her room, completely flushed and ashamed. I was ready to sock him right there. But then she came out all happy, and he proposed on the spot. He’s not a bad kid, just a little wishy-washy I guess.”

Percy grinned at him before looking down to eat.

Gary hated that smug look. Why was she so happy now?
Percy caught up to Angela as she was making her way home after her shift.

She put her arm around the poor girl’s shoulders so suddenly, it looked as if she was going to jump out of her own skin. She probably would have, if only to escape.

“Wow you are really good with locks!” Percy laughed but kept her voice low. “You’re gonna have to tell me your secret. I here it’s all about the tumblers, but I still break five bobby pins at least on the hard ones. Wanna have a talk with me up to top deck?”

“I—I um—”

“Who am I kidding, of course you do!” Percy went on to chatter jovially about nothing as she dragged Angela upstairs.

“So,” Percy closed the door on them. The wind was too strong up there for them to be heard, even by the guards out on the bridge.

“You have a crush on an altar boy, but since he doesn’t feel the same way, you drug him into sleeping with you. Then he’s so guilty about it, he proposes.” It wasn’t a question.

“How did you—”

“What I don’t get is why you would go through all the trouble to steal from me when Quick Fix sells some. Oh wait!” Percy swerved around to point at Angela who was visually shrinking.

“Why would a pretty young single lady like yourself even need to buy such a potent aphrodisiac? That would be crazy suspicions, so of course Cindy Cantelli would ask your dad about it.”

Angela was just mad now. “Are you going to tell him?”

“Who? Diego, or your dad? I doubt either would be too happy to know you’re willing to rape, steal, and lie to get what you want.”

Percy watched her crumple to the floor, but there was no sympathy in the way she looked at Miss Staley.

“I talked to Diego before I saw you. Don’t worry, I didn’t tell him. But I should have. He seems to really care about you. But he cared about the church too. I doubt he’d leave you now, even if I did tell him. He’s just too good a boy for that. But you disgust me. And I hope that every time you lay eyes on your husband, you understand that love is earned. And you didn’t earn his love.”

Percy was so angry she would have walked all the way back to Underworld that night, But she wanted to stop by to see Pinkerton. She never got the chance to thank him for helping out with Harkness.

The Broken off bow was swarmed with mirelurks again. ‘This guy really needs to plug up his holes…’ Percy’s train of thought caused her to cackle loudly, only to catch herself and duck out of the way of a charging mirelurk.
“Dammit Pinkerton! I’m not your damn exterminator!”

A buzz went through the corridor and all the mirelurks collapsed.

“You’d think keeping mirelurks around would discourage visitors, but you just don’t take ‘no’ do you?”

Pinkerton stepped out from around the corner, holding a baby mirelurk in one hand. It was the only one still awake, making some sort of clicking purr.

They both made their way back to the doctor’s lab. Things were no less disorganized, but there were more mines and traps lying about.

“I wanted to thank you. Not just for helping Harkness, but helping me help him too.”

“Trust me it was more for my own work. Knowing what made him tick is how I keep all these lurkers under control.”

“Yeah…you seem to know the ins and outs of everyone huh?”

The way she said that caused Pinkerton to look up. In any other situation, he would have assumed she was trying to flirt for free chems. Trinnie used to do that. God knows it worked. but Percy wasn’t looking at him, just her palms.

“Tell me doc, how long should behavioral conditioning work? When the only thing to maintain it is a piece of paper?”

So that’s what it was…

“Depends on the methods used to condition. But nothing lasts two hundred years. Not on a man. But from what I’ve heard on the radio, I doubt Charon is even that.”

“He’s not an android, Pinkerton. I know androids bleed too, but they don’t have organs. Not like ours. You’ve seen that Harkness doesn’t have them, and I know that Charon does.”

“Now don’t get defensive. You came to me, so tell me what you know.”

She told him about the contract. The odd ink that seemed to shimmer without any cause to do so. The almost…robotic way Charon seemed to obey orders, the way nothing could stop him from protecting it.

“That sounds a bit like an android to me, but organs are organs, I suppose. Do you have it with you?”

“It…doesn’t exist anymore. I burned it. I don’t think he reacts if the owner of the contract tries to destroy the contract, just everyone else.”

“And what determines who the contract is bound to?” Pinkerton moved to his computer, looking through the different records there.

“Well…Ahzrukhal had me sign my name and put my fingerprint in blood next to it. He was very particular. He said I had to sign and print right over where the previous employers signed and printed.

“Nano ink…” Pinkerton muttered.
“What?” Percy moved to look over his shoulder. “…How do you know so much about androids, doc? You can’t have gotten all this from one surgery and vivisection.”

She sounded suspicious.

“Keep your panties on. I’m not from the Commonwealth. If you must know, I hacked into Zimmer’s computer while he was looking for our friend. He talked about wanting to work on applying Nano ink to androids to keep them from going rogue. The chemicals to make it are too hard to find these days though, and damn expensive to make from scratch.”

“Was this stuff pre-war?”

“It would have to be. Too damn advanced to be invented in this day and age.”

“What would it do?”

“Well Zimmer seemed to think that it could keep the Synths on a leash, regardless of gaining self-awareness. Like I said though, too expensive. Probably wasn’t too cheap two hundred years ago either.”

Percy stayed the night with Pinkerton before heading out. It was late, and she wasn’t stupid enough to run through D.C this late without some sort of backup. She knew the radiation healing had taken a lot out of her, and she wasn’t gonna rush things. But that didn’t mean she was going to stay in one place for too long.

She was just nodding off when one of Pinkerton’s baby mirelurks crawled up the side of the bed. He told her he had been working on domesticating them so he wouldn’t have to install remote tranquilizers every time a new one wandered in. Trying to keep still, Percy watched the little guy settle into the curve of her legs. She was torn between throwing it against the wall and…petting it.

“ Weird…” She muttered before settling back down to sleep.

Sneaking around D.C readily became a necessity for Percy as she took a detour for the umpteenth time. When it wasn’t raiders it was fucking mutants.

‘Well…I guess there not fucking mutants…but still.’ Geez her mind had been pretty deep in the gutter lately. But it wasn’t like the reason why wasn’t obvious. Percy was fucking horny. It appeared that gratification—however recent—only made things worse when her man was away.

Percy smiled. ‘My man…My big guy.’ Percy felt like she would jump him as soon as look at him.

She heard something as silent as a whisper behind her. Slowly turning, she saw a centaur creeping up. Did it see her? No…but it would soon. And where there are centaurs there are super mutants…

Slowly, she set up three mines in the path before rounding the corner. Taking two grenades in hand, she removed both pins with her teeth before spitting them on the floor.

Letting out the faintest of whistles, she cause the centaurs attention. As soon as the mines went off, all hell broke loose. Mutants were heard from the south. Chucking the grenades to the east and west. Percy belted north, looking for narrower alleys. Hopefully the explosions would draw away the
mutants. Off in the distance she saw the Washington memorial.

Home stretch!

Firing a few rounds to the sky with her laser rifle, Percy drew the attention of the Brotherhood solders milling about.

“Hey! Do your damn job!” She screamed at them, jumping over the mines scattered around the war zone. The explosions went off well behind her, some even hitting the Mutants now chasing her.

She made a B-line for the Museum of History. Diving for cover next to Willow before firing off more rounds at the oncoming muties.

“Glad to see your still the friendly type, tourist. But would you mind keeping your rowdier friends from coming to visit?”

“Would if I could, but you know how it is; when you make friends as close as these, they wanna meet all your other friends too.” She said wryly.

Gritting her teeth, she shot off the head of the last one.

“Glad to see you back so soon, tourist.” Willow and Percy walked through the piles of mutant bodies, picking up various weapons and ammo.

“Can you blame me? Charon said one week, and it’s been one week. Eight days, really.” Have you seen him?”

“Can’t say I have, but maybe I missed him. I don’t get a lot of time off though.”

‘It’s only been a day, everything is fine…’

“Carol! Is Charon back yet?”

Carol fidgeted nervously. “Ah no, sweetheart…But he was on the radio about an hour ago…maybe the broadcast will repeat soon.”

“On the radio? Why did he stop there before coming here?”

“He wasn’t on the radio…I guess you could say the news was on him.”

Percy slumped against the front desk, intent on waiting.

“…you look a little tired, want some soup?”

Percy nodded, disheartened. Wherever Charon was, whatever he did, it isn’t like him do be late like this. Everything about him was precise to a fault.

What if something happened to him? What if he was hurt or trapped or…something!?

‘What if he lied? What if he left you?’ Percy shook her head. “Isn’t—”

“Shh! It’s on!”
'Holy hell folks…this has been one busy day for someone out there. Remember when I told y’all about the shotgun slaughter in Takoma? Well get ready for part two…'

“I don’t know if I want to hear this, Carol…” Percy looked horrified, shoulders tensed she leaned closer to the radio.

‘Fort Banister—infamous to all as Talon Company’s base of operations—recently got hit. The scary part is there weren’t any shells on the outside of the building this time, just a lot of knife wounds. Now this next part is barely suitable for adults, so tell the kiddies to cover their ears. One of my bravest eyes on the scene, who wishes to remain anonymous, was valiant enough to take a look on the inside. Same deal. No shells, just knives. It wasn’t until they got to the armory that they even found shell. But inside the armory…And folks I’d really like to remind you that this is some heavy shit…there was a corpse that can only be assumed to be Talon’s leader, Jabsco. But his head…aw God children, his head…Was split clean open…right down the middle between his eyes.

I suppose we should be thanking this vigilante for making the capital wasteland just a little bit safer…But personally, I’d be too scared to look him in the eye, much less shake his hand.’

Chapter End Notes

You can also find this work at At fanfiction(dot)net, And I have a Tumblr page devoted to posting updates and information, persephonetheparagon(dot)tumblr(dot)com/

Please comment and tell me what you think of the story so far; I'd really love to hear from all of you.

PLEASE READ THIS:
As few and far between as my updates have been lately, I’m sad to say that due to finals, Chaplain, Exile, Paragon is going on a break for winter break.

The story has gotten to a point where I’d much rather get it all written and finalized before I post any new chapters. I tried to hold it off as long as I could, but with all the added work that school is putting on me, I feel like now is the time.

Thanks to all of you who keep reading! I promise I’m not abandoning you!

<3
Butcher Pete began playing as Three Dog’s voice faded out. Percy scoffed bitterly at the irony of it all, knowing that was the disc jockey’s intention.

“Um, Charon told me about how you managed to destroy his contract…that was very…brave of you.” Carol rubbed Percy’s shoulder gently. She had known how terrifying Charon could be. She had known of him long before he showed up in the Underworld. Terrifying…and efficient. Percy shook her head for two reasons. The first was to deny Carol’s words, the second was to try and shake off the feeling of regret that tugged at her mind. Regret for freeing him, regret for letting him go, for not insisting that he tell her his reason for leaving in the first place. She couldn’t control him. He wasn’t hers to command. She never truly had the right to govern the life of another human being in the first place, anyway.

“That wasn’t me being brave, Carol. That was me being selfish. I had been waiting for a good opportunity, a good excuse. He made the itch a little fainter, for a while; but that contract gave me a guilt free solution to all my problems. But it didn’t even work.”

“What are you saying?”

“Didn’t you think it was a bit odd that Charon didn’t leave me with any good weapons? Just a sledgehammer and some knuckles. Nothing sharp and certainly nothing with bullets. He wouldn’t even let me carry the stuff here.”

The ghoul hostess’s breath caught in her throat. “Percy—you wouldn’t—”

“Look, I know I don’t have a lot of good reasons for it. Life is hell, but I don’t have it that bad. I have food, water, shelter, and even people who care about me. But that doesn’t change how I felt. I was tired and scared, and when I wasn’t tired or scared, I was just…numb.” She began picking at her nails, peeling at the edges.

“My dad is gone, there’s nothing for me in the vaults, and I felt so useless out here. Charon was there, but every time I looked at him I felt so guilty! There was nothing I could do for him. Since getting his contract, I saw the best opportunity to make at least one person happy…just needed to work up the courage to get it over with.”

An uncomfortable silence followed her confession. Confession…seemed ironic to her that she was giving one now rather than receiving.

“Do you still feel this way?”

“Not all the time. I have my good days, and things…were…getting better…but everything is still so confusing to me.”
Carol could practically feel the distance between them. This was just a child.

“Please don’t push yourself, dear. Is there anything I can do for you here? I know it’s not much but —”

“Can you tell me about Charon? Before I took his contract, I had only met him once, but I was so new to the wastes, surely there’s more to him than just…this” Percy gestured sadly to the radio, which had been switched off.

Carol only knew of one employer before Ahzrukhal, but she told Percy everything she knew. If Az’ was bad, The man before him was far worse. There were stories about entire settlements being leveled. No survivors. And Charon’s master did not discriminate between his victims. Ghoul, man, woman, or child: no one was safe. At first the stories travelled among raiders, and then slavers and caravans. It was only when those caravans reached D.C. that the giant ghoul was learned to be someone to be avoided—as if anyone could avoid him after being pointed out by his ruthless employer.

“…And then Ahzrukhal showed up here with the same...terror we had heard such awful stories about. I don’t know how he managed to convince Barrows to let him stay, but he had a bar set up in only a week, and a trail of strung out junkies in two. From then on, the only trouble Charon caused was with the people in the bar.”

Percy continued to pick at her nails in frustration throughout the story. ‘Charon was under the contract during that time…the nano-ink…But how did that explain his actions now?’

Carol pursed her lips. Grabbing a package of chips from under the counter, she opened them with a pop before speaking up again. “Charon…told me before he left that he was going to take out Talon Company. He said it was the only way to keep you safe, to get rid of them…That he couldn’t stand by and let those men live after what they helped do to you. I never thought I’d be the one to rationalize his actions, but he’s lived a life filled with violence and bloodshed for so long, I don’t think he knows any other way.”

Percy tossed and turned in her bed at Carol’s. She couldn’t sleep in the room she had so recently shared with Charon. Not after this.

She hated to agree with Carol—it felt like such a cop-out. Why hadn’t he told her? But then again, why would he? How would she have reacted? Would she have still wanted to travel with him, or would she have only been able to see him as a merciless killing machine? Bigger question: was he?

Percy didn’t want to believe it—refused to believe it. He had been so kind to her. So gentle. She was just drifting into a restless sleep when her Pip-boy began vibrating so violently against the nightstand that it actually fell onto the marble floor with a loud clap. Thoroughly startled, Percy fumbled for it with jittery fingers. A new radio signal? No…a distress beacon. What? Most beacons she came across while traveling ended up belonging to folks long dead. But this…Percy’s blood went cold, fully awake now. This was from the vault. Her vault.

This message repeats: This is an automated distress message from Vault-Tec: Vault 101. Message begins: It feels like you left home a long time ago, but I know you’re still out there. I just hope you’re still alive to hear this.
Amata…Percy’s throat clenched painfully at the sound of her friend’s voice. It had been so long!

Things only got worse after you left. My father's gone mad with power. If you can hear this, please come back. I knew things were bad here, but they have only gotten worse. I need you. I can’t do…this…without you. I changed the door password to my name. If you're hearing this, and if you still care enough to help me, you should remember it. This message repeats…

Percy cut off the relay. Back? To the vault?

“You look beautiful, sweetheart…Your mother would have been so proud to see you like this.”

James stood behind Percy before the mirror.

Prom was the one time the vault allowed for wearing anything that isn’t a vault suit. Mister Brotch started class that day by dragging two bins full of dusty clothes to the front of the room.

“Ok ladies and gentlemen, two lines. Girls get dresses, boys get suits.” The rest of the class day was spend watching vault-tec sponsored videos on dance etiquette and how to tie a tie. Any other time, Percy would have loved to spend the class learning anything she could about the world before the bombs fell. But this was different. It was easy to avoid Wally Mack on normal days: the Overseer kept everyone busy with their jobs once they were assigned, even Wally. Especially Wally. And once it was time to clock out, it’s was just a matter knowing what the Tunnel snakes are up to and avoiding them. Sure Wally had a life outside the Snakes, and his hours were different from everyone else, but it was a big vault. Prom was mandatory, however, and with such a small room, interaction was inevitable. Percy shivered. To be stuck there with him…it made her skin crawl.

“Which color should I wear?... Perse?” Amata waved her hand in front of Percy’s eyes. “Earth to Percy!”

She rubbed her neck. “I dunno, blue? I think it would make your skin glow.”

“You think?” Amata smiled, grabbing a robin’s egg blue one. She bit her lip, glancing Butch’s way. Percy didn’t notice, but Amata noticed Percy’s lack of excitement.

“Maybe you can take this pink one then!”

Percy smiled, taking the dress from her friend. Amata had been her best friend for as long as she could remember, but how could she not be bothered by the monotony?

“Do you know who you’re going with?”

“Does it matter? There aren’t a lot of us.”

“Jeez, can you lighten up? We get to dress up and have a little fun! Why can’t you just enjoy yourself?”
“Aww let her mope; Churchy will probably just make room for Jesus the whole time and not have any fun.” Butch came up and put his arm around Amata’s waist. He gave her a sly wink and she blushed.

“I didn’t decide the results on the G.O.A.T, Butch.” Percy stormed out of the classroom.

“We both know you don’t mean that. Would she really be proud to see her daughter forced to go to a pointless ceremony simply to maintain appearances?”

She straightened out the front of her blouse and eased bobby pins into her hair to keep it out of her face. The heels took a few walks around her room to get used to, but she liked the added height and confidence they gave her.

James sighed, putting his hand on her shoulder. “I know, honey…I know.” James took her hand and wrapped a plastic corsage around her wrist.

“Dad, this can’t be the only vault. Maybe…”

“Percy, we are not talking about this. It’s too dangerous outside the vaults.”

“No! See, there are hazmat suits in storage, and with enough rad-x and rad-away, we could survive a week at least.”

“Percy…” But she was on a roll. Percy lowered her voice. “I bet if can bet a look at the Overseer’s records, I can see how bad the rad levels are outside, then—”

“Persephone Carter! SHUT UP!” James finally lost it. Percy jumped, inching towards the door.

“It’s…not that simple. You can’t just…Go to prom, I’ll see you tonight…go.”

The music had a good swing to it, and the lights had been dimmed for the occasion. Brotch was the only chaperone, but he seemed to share her opinion on the whole affair. The greatest effort he made towards keeping the event civilized was shooing Butch away whenever he tried to spike the punch. Amata had dragged Percy into the middle of the dance floor a couple times earlier in the night, but she had disappeared shortly after the last song. Someone cleared their throat next to her. Freddie Gomez. He was blushing and tugging at his collar nervously as his other arm extended towards her.

“Can I have this dance?” He managed to squeak out. Freddie hadn’t quite grown into his limbs yet, and the suit barely fit him. But he was kind to her. He was always quiet during her sermons and didn’t make her life difficult, despite being a member of the Tunnel Snakes.

She smiled warmly, taking his hand and trying not to wince at the realization that his palms were very sweaty. “Sure, Fred.”

He let out a nervous laugh as he led her deeper onto the dance floor. “No one but my dad calls me that. Makes me feel old.”

It was Percy’s turn to laugh. “Well I wouldn’t worry too much about that. Here, your tie is a little crooked, let me fix it.”

She moved his other hand to her waist and worked on undoing his tie as they swayed back and forth. Freddie’s breath caught as she worked. “I couldn’t follow those videos for the life of me. I can’t
believe people would actually choose to put on this stuff.”

Percy smiled. “As opposed to what? Blue jumpsuits?”

“I guess you have a point.” Freddie relaxed, loosening up a bit. Despite the circumstances, Percy began to enjoy herself too. After a few songs, her cheeks got a little red and she asked for a break. Freddie left her to lean against the wall, tapping her foot absently with the music while he got the two some drinks.

She watched him nervously weave through the crowd to the opposite corner and grinned. The night might actually end on a high note. Fanning her cheeks, Percy’s eyes drifted closed. Only a couple hours, then she could thank Freddie for the nice night and see herself home. She felt the room get darker from behind her eyelids. Freddie must be back. She threw a smile back on to greet him, but the man with his palms on either side of her head was not Freddie. “Wally…” she failed to keep the fear out of her voice. She was against a wall. There was nowhere to run. She couldn’t make a scene and draw attention to the situation, it would only cause more trouble. She was, in so many words, trapped.

“I thought you might have a dance with me.” He smirked, it wasn’t even a question, and hardly a request.

“Freddie was just getting me punch, he’ll be right back.” She replied, trying to keep her voice even.

“I doubt he’ll mind too much.”

‘Like you’d care if he did.’

I’m still tired from dancing. I need a break.” Her mind was running out of excuses; dammit, why hadn’t she planned for this? He took her by the wrist and dragged her back to the dance floor. He leaned in to whisper into her ear as they danced. “I’m really not as bad as you think, Percy. I could be a nice guy if you let me.”

“Let you? I know what you do! Both for the Overseer, and what you do for yourself.” She hissed back. Neither of them would gain anything from making a scene, but Wally still had the upper hand. His tightened his hold around her wrist. She winced in pain but didn’t make a noise. “And I know your less than holy actives as well, Chaplain. You think I haven’t noticed? Stealing radiation medicine from the clinic, storing them and hazmat suits in the reactor room. What would your father think? He’s been protecting the both of us, how do you think he would feel about his own daughter’s betrayal? Face it, we aren’t too different. We both work the system in our favor. Whether you’re willing to acknowledge it in yourself or not, we belong together.”

“What do you want from me?” She asked, trying to hide her face from him.

“I don’t want anything from you…sweetheart.” His lips curled into a sneer as he held her closer. “Between you and me, the Overseer doesn’t stand a chance. I have dirt and access to many... methods to get what I want. And you, you have the people. Even if they don’t think faith guides them, sheep always flock to their shepherd when times are tough. All you have to do, is be mine, and we can have it all. Together. What do you say?” his nose brushed against her neck and she shivered from head to toe. She felt sick. She needed to get away.

“I need to use the restroom.” She got out.

“What?” He pulled back to look at her. There were tears in her eyes.

“My period started. I need to go or I’ll start bleeding through my dress. Please…let me go.”
“Gross!” he sneered, dragging her out of the atrium.

“Make it quick! I’ll be waiting out here for you.”

As soon as the door closed on her she ran to a stall. She sat on the stool, hands clutching her mouth as she shook. One sound. That’s all it would take. He would hear her, then he would have an excuse to come barging in and everything would be over.

All over all over ALL OVER.

No!

Percy carefully stood on the toilet seat so as not to make a sound. Pulling a bobby pin from her hair, she broke it in half, using the flat piece to ease the screws of the ceiling vent loose until she could unscrew them the rest of the way with her fingers.

But how would she re-seal it? She couldn’t just leave it hanging open or she’d be found out!

Wringing her hands, she looked around something, anything!

“Hey what’s taking so long?” Wally called from behind the door.

“Wally what are you doing lurking outside the girl’s room?” Susie walked up, looking disgusted.

“None of your beez, sis! I’ll have you know my date is in there.”

“And I know you’re a liar…Doesn’t mean you should be lurking though. It’s gross! Move over, I gotta pee.”

The door slipped open with a hiss and Mack peeked in over her shoulder. The room was empty! There was no trace that she had even been there.

Susie opened all the stall doors before turning to smirk at her big brother. “I knew it.” She smirked.

Chapter End Notes

The hiatus is finally over! Thanks again to everyone, I really appreciate your patience. Please comment or criticize, I love hearing feedback and would really like to know where I could improve.
Percy kicked the grate off ventilation in the cafeteria and dropped to the floor. It would have to be fixed soon, but it could wait a day. She had been tempted to stay in the vents all night. After all, the dance didn’t end for hours and Wally was sure to be looking for her.

Amata was probably already home; maybe she could ask to spent the night, gush about the dance, etcetera. That way, she if Mack asked, she would at least have a reason why she didn’t show up for the rest of the night. She was passing the school room when she heard something on the other side.

“Butch…Butch wait…I’m gonna—”

Percy was in the room in an instant, pulling Butch off of her friend.

“You bastard!”

“Hey hey hey! Amata get her off of me!”

“Percy stop!”

Amata grabbed her by the shoulders, yanking her off Butch mid-swing.

“He was…you were…oh.” Percy’s face flushed to match her dress.

Butch was stuffing himself back into his pants. “Fuck Percy, you’ve got quite the punch for a nun!”

She decided not to correct him. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt you…I mean I did, but if I had known—”

“Percy!” Amata squealed, hiding her face in her hands. “What are you even doing here? The dance can’t be over yet.”

Butch scoffed “That shit was lame, I don’t blame you for cutting too. You guys can come to my house, my mom doesn’t lock the liquor cabinet.”

“I dunno Butch, if my dad smells liquor on me, I’m toast.” Amata tried to straighten out the wrinkles in her skirt.

“You don’t have to drink, Amata, but right now I could really use a few. Come on, It’s no fun to drink alone.”

“A drink sounds great.” Percy perked up. Turning to Amata, she said, “Chew some gum later, and he probably won’t even notice.”
“So-so-so…shit!” Amata collapsed in a fit of giggles against Butch’s shoulder.

“So…Wally pulls you into a dance even though you hate the slime-ball, follows you to the bathroom, and you escape through the ventilation and…what do you call the vent thingy, the-the—”

“Grate.” Butch smiled, running a hand through her hair. Kissing Amata’s temple in drunken affection.

“Yes! Grate! That’s great!” More giggling, Amata clutched her sides.

“How did you close the grate? Wouldn’t Mack have caught on?” Butch asked.

“Well,” Percy set down her glass. She stuck to vodka. It had the kind of smell that was easy to cover up with mouthwash. “Janice huffs wonderglue in the bathroom and hides it in one of the toilet tanks. That reminds me, I gotta put it back tomorrow before school.” Percy smirked.

“Where’s the glue? And what about the screws?”

“In the vent still. Hey, so are my shoes!” It was Percy’s turn to laugh, wiggling her toes.

“You are too wild, Perse! You know I could make you an honorary Tunnel Snake if you wanted, Jacket and everything!”

“No, way! Last thing I want is to spend more time around Wally than I have to.”

“He’s really not so bad!”

“How do you know? Do you even know the results on his G.O.A.T?”

“Yeah, he works with the Overseer, kinda like a secretary or somethin’. “ Butch leaned over to refill his drink, spilling some on the already stained coffee table. Amata was already asleep.

“And that doesn’t bother you? Mack is essentially working for the man.” Percy helped hold his glass steady before she refilled her own.

“Nah man, the way I see it, I got someone on the inside! Pretty soon, the Tunnel Snakes will be rolling in political favors and dirt on the Overseer!”

“You are quite the optimist, Butch.” Percy nursed her drink, effectively ending the conversation.

There was a knock at the door. Percy immediately jumped behind the couch with a loud thud. Butch unsettled Amata as he got up to open the door.

“Oh hey Mister Crotch!”

“Butch,” Brotch stood in the door way. “Would you mind telling me why you, Miss Carter and Miss Almodovar are drinking underage on a school night?”

Percy peeked her head over the side of the couch. Brotch was glaring right at her.

“And shouldn’t you be supervising impressionable teens as they grind up on each other?” Butch smirked, leaning against the wall to hide his lack of balance.

“The dance ended fifteen minutes ago. Now unless you would all like detention, I’ll escort you ladies back to your respective homes where your parents can deal with you.”
“Oh maaan!” Amata threw her head back in anguish as Percy climbed out from behind the couch.

Alfonse was furious to say the least, especially when he found out it was Butch who had been ‘pouring drinks down her throat’.

Brotch was immediately sterner once it was just Percy and himself.

“How can you be so stupid, Carter. I thought you were more mature than to associate with Butch and his crowd.”

“I fucking hate the Tunnel Snakes, if you didn’t notice. But Butch is harmless. Why do you even care?”

“Don’t swear.” Brotch snapped “It doesn’t look good for someone of your status to act like a delinquent.”

“And why the hell do I have this status, huh? I always pictured myself helping dad in the Clinic.” Percy veered dangerously to the left and almost fell down, but Brotch caught her arm just in time.

“Jonas is already working as your father’s assistant. As per the rules of the G.O.A.T, I assigned you to the second most applicable career. Trust me, the last thing I expected you to end up as was a priest.”

When they got to Percy’s home, James was nowhere to be found.

“Must be working late at the lab. Thanks Brotch, but I can take it from here.” She would have closed the door on him but he grabbed her shoulder and turned her around to face him again.

“Now listen here miss: There’s a lot riding on you staying where you belong. Don’t start acting out just because some kid with a power complex wants you get in your pants. I don’t care what you have to do, just don’t step on any more toes!”

Percy frowned, “Wait, what are y—” She immediately shut her mouth and rushed for the bathroom. Brotch closed the door and left as he heard her heave into the toilet.

She woke up with a killer headache, but James was none the wiser about the previous night. Everything after meeting up with Amata and Butch was fuzzy. They went to drink at Butch’s and Brotch caught them, but after that? Nothing.

The weeks after that were spent reading every book on psychology and human nature she could find. She did anything and everything to avoid Wally, and when she couldn’t avoid him, she filled his head with false promises and shy smiles until the fateful day when she was chased from the vault. When he asked her about prom night, she said Butch must have gotten something past Brotch and slipped something crazy into the punch like Mentats or Jet. Wally didn’t know a damn thing about drugs, so let the whole incident slide.

She just stood there, staring at the wooden shack door that hid the life she once lived. It gave her unwanted nostalgia to see the giant gear shaped door. How many years had she wondered what lie
outside it? Now she wondered what could possibly be inside for Amata to beg for her help. Clutching her 10mm pistol in one hand, she entered Amata’s name into the key pad. Assault rifles were no good in close quarters, and the last thing she wanted was for a stray bullet to hit someone who didn’t deserve it. What was she thinking? No one deserves to die here, not even—Percy shook her head. The Door screeched open before her. Everything was different on the other side. Papers were stamped into the floor with dirty boot prints, filing desks and chairs were thrown every which way. Percy winced as she noticed there was even blood splattered on the wall. She inched for the door, but it opened before she could hit the button.

“Who the hell—Jesus! Percy? What are you going here?” Officer Gomez lowered his gun. “Damn, I hardly recognize you! How did you even get in?”

Whose side is he on? Percy couldn’t be sure; Gomez was a good person, but everything was different now. He may not have shot at her on her way out, but there’s no telling what the Overseer had said about her after the mess she left.

“What happened here? Why is there blood on the wall?” She stalled, trying to figure out where he stood in all of this.

“After you and your father left, some of the youngsters decided that if James wanted to leave, it must be safe.” Gomez took a harder look at her. “But looking at you, I can’t find myself agreeing with ‘em. Good God, what happened to your arms?”

“And whose side are you on, Gomez?”

Gomez was about to answer put promptly shut his mouth. “You still haven’t answered me. How did you get in, why did you even come back?”

Nervous now, Percy slowly raised her weapon. “Gomez…is Freddie still ok?”

“What? Yeah my boy is fine, in a world of trouble, but fine.”

“Then I suggest—for Freddie’s sake—you back away, and hide in the bathroom until everything blows over.”

Gomez put his arms behind his head, turned slowly, and made his way for the restroom. “Please don’t hurt him…who am I kidding, you’ll probably side with him.” Gomez turned to face her before she closed the door on him. “I know the vault wasn’t fair to you, but Alfonse was just trying to do right by us. He doesn’t like outsiders.”

“I didn’t choose to be an exile. The vault threw me out. Don’t be sore because I thrived.” With that she closed the door and shot the controls—effectively sealing him in.

The rest of the vault was no better - ‘fuck you, Overseer’ was scrawled everywhere. Agnes Taylor and countless others were dead and left to rot in the halls. Percy was used to death but this…this had been her family—her home! As she got to the atrium, she found Freddie and Officer Palmer at a standoff.

“I’m getting out of here! You can’t keep us all trapped like this, the vault is a tomb!” Freddie hollered.

“Back off, son; I don’t want to hurt you!” Palmer’s pistol was shaking in his hands, but he stood firm.
Freddie spied her coming up behind the security guard. He was surprised but tried to keep the man busy.

“Come off it old man! You’re hurting all of us by listening to that madman!”

Palmer didn’t get a retort out. Percy eased his body to ground as she removed the drained needle of med-x.

“Percy!” Freddie rushed to her raising his arms for a hug. But Percy stopped him. “Later. I need to see Amata.”

“Oh Percy thank God!” Amata tackled her when they reached the clinic. “He’s crazy! He’s having them actually shoot at us! Shoot at us!”

“Amata, you need to tell me everything. When did all this start? Why won’t the Overseer listen to you?”

They sat down on the floor; all the furniture had been used to board up the windows and doors. Everyone was looking at her funny, eyes shifting from her, to Amata, and then back. Wally Mack sat in the corner, glaring. Percy chose not to look his way. That life was behind her. There was nothing he could hold over her now.

“It wasn’t all at once. After the radroach infestation, security just got tighter. Everyone started getting escorted to classes or work. Freddie was reassigned to the Clinic and found your dad’s notes about our birth rates.” She grabbed the printouts from a nearby desk. “Can you believe it? In just a few decades and we would need to open the vaults anyway to avoid inbreeding. That is if my dad doesn’t kill anyone first.” Amata muttered darkly. She ran her hands through her hair in defeat. “This is more than just about freedom. My father is running this place into the ground and he won’t listen to anyone. I thought…maybe you could talk to him. You’ve seen what it’s like outside, look at you! You’re alive!”

“Don’t sound so surprised.” Percy smile wryly, trying to diffuse the tension. “I’ll see what I can do, but he never liked my family.” Percy stood up, un-holstering her weapon and checking the magazine.

Amata’s eyes grew to the size of saucers. “Wait, what are you doing?”

Percy was lost until she followed Amata’s eyes to her gun.

“I…I gotta take my gun.”

“What if you kill someone!?” It was Freddie’s turn to speak up, rushing to Amata’s side.

“I won’t try to if that’s what you’re implying. But if your dad is as crazy as you say, I’m not going to go up against him and all the vault’s security without something to protect myself.” She didn’t have time to argue; who knows what the Overseer was planning while they argued?

“Fine! Fine…just…don’t kill him. Please don’t kill him Percy, Promise me that…please?”

Percy sighed. “I promise I won’t kill him, Amata.”

She was reassured, nodding shakily.
The vault seemed totally empty now. The sound system hissed white noise overhead, and lights flickered. Where was everyone now? She reached the door to the Overseer’s office.

Locked. Percy sighed. ‘Déjà vu.’

The terminal to open the door was just as easy as it had been years ago.

Readying her weapon, Percy raised her gun as soon as the door started to move.

“Alfonse! Don’t shoot! I’m just here to talk!”

“Talk? Is this how they talk out there in the wastes?” the Overseer held up his own gun, but moved to the protection of his desk.

“You’re holding the gun too close to your face.”

“…What?” Alfonse shifted on his feet.

“Your gun is too close to your face. The kick will give you a shiner and you’ll damage your hearing. At that angle, you might even break your wrist, too.”

“Oh…” The Overseer moved the gun farther from his face but still had it pointed at her.

“I promised Amata I wouldn’t kill you. I just want to talk.”

“What is there to talk about? It’s all your fault! You and your father!”

“Stop.”

“Now you come back, looking like a fucking savage! What do you want to do, raid us? Shoot us? Or enslave us? You think I don’t know about the monsters masquerading as mankind outside this vault?!”

“Stop!” Percy screamed stepping forward.

*BAM*

She gasped, running to his body and ducking for cover, but she was hauled back by the hair. Wally Mack threw her against wall, lips crashing against hers. Her fist connected with his jaw. He crashed to the side, but didn’t pass out. Percy was on him in a second, knocking his gun away and holding her own to his temple. “You killed him!”

Wally laughed. “No, you killed him.”

“Why are you doing this to me?! I wouldn’t even be back here if it weren’t for Amata!”

“You killed my dad!” Mack roared. Flipping them over. Percy hesitated. She shouldn’t have; she couldn’t afford to. Why did she hesitate?

He pinned her arms above her head, leaning one knee into her gut. “You killed my dad and you left me. You threw away everything we had! We were gonna take this place over!”

“I was thrown out! They were shooting at me, I had to get away! Your father was hurting Amata, and would have killed me if I let him!” She coughed, gasping for breath as he put more weight on
her stomach.

“I would have protected you against him! We could have killed the Overseer that night!”

“I’m not a murderer, Wally. And once Amata finds out about this. You’ll be thrown out just like I was.”

“And who do you think she’s gonna believe? You think you belong here anymore than I do? You weren’t even born here!”

Percy stopped struggling. A tear fell from her eye. “I know. But this was my home. You act like this vault is everything, but it can’t survive with the door closed anymore. Things need to change, Wally.”

“I know.” He stood up dragging her up by the throat. “And that’s why you are going to kill Amata, and we are going to run this place. Just like I planned.” He tightened his hold, her facereddened as she clawed at his fingers. “Better make your decision soon, before you run out of breath to reply.

“Fine!” He released Percy’s throat. “I knew you’d see it my way!” He smiled, watching her rub her throat and cough. He grabbed the guns. “Seal it with a kiss?”

Percy gave him a long look before pulling her face down to hers. He groaned as her tongue traced his lower lip. Percy squeezed her eyes shut, opening her mouth. She felt his hands in her hair, pulling her closer and deepening the kiss. Her leg crept up his side. No more hesitation. Pulling the Combat knife she kept hidden in her boot, she sunk it deep into his neck, slicing his tendons and arteries.

He fell to the ground, looking up at her as the blood gurgled out of his throat. She grabbed the gun from his belt. “I do not now, nor will I ever, belong to anyone—especially you.” She shot him twice in the head.

The Security officers avoided her in the halls. They saw the blood on her clothes, adding to the sick Percy felt in her throat and stomach.

The door slid open with a hiss.

“Percy!” Amata had been pacing nervously in the middle of the room, biting her nails. “Is that?...” She saw the blood splattered across Percy’s front. Her hands went to her mouth as she made a strangled gasp.

“Amata…” Percy stepped forward but Amata screamed, “Murderer! You promised you wouldn’t kill him!”

“I didn’t kill him, Wally did!”

“Mack?” Amata looked around frantically. When had he left?

“He wanted to take you out to—run the vault. We struggled but I had to...kill him.”

Amata collapsed to the ground, clutching her shoulders. “Get out! I need to think.”

“You have to take over for him, Amata. You were set up to be the next Overseer, everyone knows it.” Butch, for the first time in his life, it seemed, was solemn, putting his hand on her shoulder. “I said get out!”
“Butch, come on. Give her space.” Percy pursed her lips and made for the door.

Butch eventually caught up to her. She was making her way to the security office.

“You got a gun?” She asked, not bothering to look at him.

“What, no!”

She pulled one of the pistols off her belt. Pulled out and reloaded the magazine before engaging the safety and passing it to him. “Now you do. I want you to have my back when I talk to the guards. Amata is the new Overseer; they’ll have every reason to follow her like they followed Alfonse, but just in case…”

“Tight…” Butch took a closer look.

“Just don’t forget to turn the safety off if the time comes, ok?”

“Of course, what do you take me for?” Butch feigned hurt.
Despite Butch's "swagger and tough guy" act, Security agreed to follow Amata. They freed all the vault prisoners, including one Mr. Brotch, who had his arm in a sling. Percy volunteered to help him back home. Before they left the rest of the group, she called out to the guards going down the other hall. "By the way! Gomez is stuck in the men's bathroom closest to the main entrance. I shot the control panel, but the emergency relays should activate if you cross the blue and yellow wires."

"You've really done a number on this place Miss Carter. But I can't say it turned out too poorly, all in all."

Percy was too tired to argue. Too much had happened today. "People died, and the vault nearly destroyed itself, and you say things turned out all right? Now I know how you used to grade, but this is a new level uf fucked up." She went to his bar and pulled out two glasses before filling each with scotch. She handed him a glass.

"I assumed based on the grades I gave you, you would at least be able to see things from multiple perspectives. Does that armor come off, or is it just part of you now?"

Percy shot him a look before gargling her scotch and spitting it back in her glass. She was in no mood to drink, but she needed to get the taste of Mack out of her mouth.

"So why did everything turn out swell in your books?" She settled on his couch, letting the gunk of her armor stain his furniture.

"I never said it turned out good, just not bad." Brotch took a sip, trying to get his bad arm comfortable.

"Fucking elaborate."

"Language."

"Why did you grade my G.O.A.T the way you did?"

"I gave to the second best option for your abilities because the clinic was already staffed to capacity. It's all on record. Besides, your father could have recited the bible by heart if you asked him. How is he by the way?"

"Don't change the subject, you gave me back the results to my test. The second best option would have been marriage counselor."

"And considering divorce is illegal in the vault unless actual domestic violence was taking place, marriage counselor would have been redundant."

"How is that even your decision to make?"
"Why does this matter so much to you?"

"Why did all this matter to you three years ago?"

Brotch swirled his drink, drained the glass and sighed. "Because a marriage counselor holds no power compared to a woman of God."

"For fuck’s sake…” Percy leaned forward, running her hands through her hair.

"Language. Even back then, it was clear where the vault was headed. Another child hadn't been born for at least a decade, and too many people had the same last name. The Overseer even had a breeding plan to try and counteract the hole he had dug for us. Matching Day?"

"I know about Matching Day."

"So of course you know it's completely idiotic. I decided someone needed to take over sooner rather than later. Amata was too under the thumb of her father, and unlike everyone else, you were raised by someone who had spent most of his life on the outside. You were raised around different ideas. You were allowed to be a free thinker due to your home environment."

"What did you expect me to do? Did you think I would just turn everything upside down on a whim?!"

"I had hope that something would happen, and it did. It only took a year to see the unrest in your father's eyes. But I never expected for the Overseer to try to get rid of you when your father finally decided to leave. I suppose he knew about my plan all along…” Brotch became lost in thought as he got up to refill his glass.

He felt something hit the back of his head a few seconds before his front door slid open. "You're no different from Wally; you know that don't you?" The door slid shut behind her.

He turned to see what she had thrown at him. He picked the packet of cigarettes off the rug and lit one up. "Don't mind if I do."

Her room was just as she left it, if not a little empty. Percy had taken her bat with her when she left, as well as a couple of jumpsuits in a duffle bag. She pulled a clean one out of her dresser. Damn, it still smelled like fabric softener. She practically sprinted for the bathroom. Jumping into the shower, she got undressed as the water washed the dried blood, dirt, and grime off her armor. It was hot within seconds, no coppery smell, no sand, no rads, nothing! Once the armor was clean, she threw it over the side of the stall, letting herself get lost in the absolute ecstasy of hot water melting all the soreness from her bones. She stretched her joints and moaned as they popped. She missed this, "Sweet fuck!" she missed it. Vault-tec offered three scents of shampoo and conditioner: strawberry, mint and vanilla. Vanilla had always been her favorite. She popped opened the top to the shampoo and just let the scent fill her up. Percy took her time with her hair. Taking a brush, she coated the bristles with conditioner. It was so soft! The scent lingered in the room long after she got out of the shower. It had been so long since she had been this clean...there wasn't even dirt under her nails. Slipping into a clean jumpsuit, she fell into bed. Everything was falling apart around her ears, but for now, things were calm. Tomorrow she would talk to Amata about the future of the vault. Hell… maybe she'd stay a while, keep an eye on Brotch. She slipped under the covers, wiggling her toes between the sheets and digging her fingers into the soft pillow as her back arched into a well appreciated stretch.
Everyone was already working to clean up the place when Percy woke up. The bodies and the blood had been cleaned from the floor, walls, and the window overlooking the Atrium. The new Overseer had refused to even see the office before everything was put back in order. The reactor room had a furnace and since there was no graveyard in the vault to bury the dead, funerals were also cremations. The ash and remains would be mixed with the fertilizer for the green houses like always. Almost everyone but Amata and Percy was in the reactor room right now, praying for the dead. It was so odd to Amata: She wasn't religious by any stretch, and neither was the rest of the vault. Was it because their priest was back?

Amata was hard at work in the Overseer's office, looking through her dad's older records. 'What a hypocrite'…The vault had been opened at least twice, even before the Carters were let in. She took a sip of her coffee. Taking a break from the computer, she got up to look out on the Atrium. It almost worried her how quickly everyone jumped to her call now. The vault would have to open again soon. And when newcomers inevitably showed up at their front door, how would she be able to weed out the dangerous individuals? She needed to find a way to keep her people safe without caging them in like her father had…

"Knock Knock." Percy leaned against the door. How did she look so much older than herself? 'I'm older than her by six months!'

But Percy, she had so much certainty in her movements now. Did she even hesitate to kill? Amata tried not to glare when she noticed Percy was dressed in a vault jumpsuit. It felt like looking at a wolf in sheep's clothing.

"Good morning Carter." She walked back to the desk, absently looking at the papers scattered there.

"I'm so sorry about yesterday…I should have noticed Mack following me—"

"I don't need your apologies right now. Or your pity. But I'm glad you came by. I need to talk to you about something. This isn't easy…"

"I don't plan on staying here, if that's what you're worried about. Just a few weeks to help things settle down. This place is too small for my taste, anyway. I can send some friendly caravans your way, but I would keep off the radio if I were you. News travels faster than you'd expect out there, and not everyone who answers the call is friendly."

"I'd appreciate that…but that wasn't what I wanted to talk about. A week is too long and once you leave…you can't come back. There is still a lot of division among the people who wanted to leave and those who wanted to keep the vault shut. With you here, some might try to follow in your footsteps. I can't let that happen Percy; I'm sorry, but that can't happen after all this!" Amata tried to remain calm, but the sight of her once friend was more upsetting that she had anticipated.

Percy was thunderstruck. "Wait…You think I would choose this life for others? That I would tell people to leave the safety of their homes for the wastes?"

"No! I didn't say that! But these people—my people! They're scared and I don't want everything to go to shit again and…you're so different now. You're like a stranger, and the people…they seem so eager to listen to you, even after all the trouble surrounding your exile and return."

"You think I'd try to take over the vault…don't you?" Percy couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"I didn't say that; I never said that." Amata snapped, busying herself with papers again. "You're the one that put me in charge after all, with your wasteland justice."
"I didn't kill him!"

"NO ONE SAW YOU! EVERYONE WHO WITNESSED WHAT HAPPENED IS DEAD NOW!" Amata screamed, throwing the papers to the floor. "You think I didn't have someone look at the bodies? All the ammo used was the same; I can't ever know for sure! But I do know that Mack was on my father's side right up until you left us. You hated Mack, and you never cared for my father either! How do I know you didn't—"

A loud slap rang through the room and Amata stumbled, catching herself on the desk.

"Goodbye Amata," Percy rubbed her palm, easing the sting. "It was real fucking nice getting to see you again."

Three bottles of shampoo and conditioner each. Five bars of soap, three toothbrushes and four tubes of toothpaste. A nail file and clippers plus a pair tweezers.

Each new item was thrown in her bag with vigor as she furiously chewed gum.

"Like the girl I knew is gone now."

She should have expected this. The rational part of her brain knew Amata's reasons were sound. Things were unsettled and the last thing the vault needed was an outsider…unsettling further.

And that's all she was, really. An outsider. Everywhere she went, she didn't belong.

'But that's not the worst part.'

No. the worst part was being looked at like she was a killer. Being called a murderer. She could argue with her words all she wanted, but that didn't change the opinions of others…or herself.

'Is that how Charon feels?' Every single member of Talon Company would have put a bullet through her head without hesitation. But it didn't feel right to condone that level of death…

But Charon had lived. He lived through the war and the fallout and the wastes. He knows how cruel the world can be…is it truly wrong to protect the ones close to you, even preemptively?

"Stocking up for the winter?"

Percy turned. Butch was cleaning his nails with that metal toothpick he called a knife.

"Something like that." She muttered, moving to the canned goods. "What do you want Butch? Don't you know it's dangerous to spend time with outsiders? You might get weird ideas about leaving the vault for good."

"Hey now, that was the old Overseer's shtick. But he's dead now, and Amata's gonna let more fellas in."

Percy scoffed under her breath, but didn't say anything. She was getting closer to the fresh fruits and vegetables. Saving the best for last.

"Did you ever find your dad?"

"Nope…Heard he found another vault though, so he's doing just fine." She grabbed an apple from one of the coolers. Taking a bite, she closed her eyes in rapture. It was quickly interrupted when Butch spoke up again.
"Hey, I was thinkin’…Maybe I could go with you. Traveling I mean."

Percy turned around, mouth half full. "Why?"

"Well…Things are gonna be boring in here now. Even if the doors are open, I don't wanna have to hang with a bunch of chumps!"

"And you think wandering the wastes would be better? Living day to day, hoping that the meal you have won’t be your last? That someone won't sneak up on you and kill you for the gun at your hip? Does that sound fun to you?"

"No, but—"

"Then get out of my way. Be glad you get to choose."

She left the vault without saying goodbye to anyone else. It was still early afternoon when she slammed the door on the vault and the entire last twenty-four hours. The sun was still low enough to get in her eyes, so she threw on some sunglasses.

"God…it stinks out here!"

Percy groaned. "Butch! What the hell?"

"Wait up will ya?"

"Catch up!"

Eventually he did.

"So this is actually it huh? Lotsa…brown."

"Why are you still trying to follow me? Won't your girlfriend be a little worried?"

"Doubt it. She broke up with me last night. Said I wasn't mature enough for her. So I figured I'd leave and save her the trouble of kicking me out herself."

They were silent for a moment. "Well she's not exactly wrong, you know."

"Can it, Springtime! You think I don't know that? I figure, I can travel with you for a bit—learn about the world. Then when I know how this place works, I can go back and help her. I can be useful."

Percy sighed in resignation.

*Love isn't conditional.* If Amata didn't love him now, she wouldn't love him when he got back. Not truly.

"I'll take you as far as Rivet City. I heard they need a new hair guy over there. You can save up some money, then if you really want see the world as it is, fine. Just don't drag me along."

"Aw, hell yeah!" Butch didn't let her bum him out. "Why do they need a new barber?"

"Because as nice as they may seem, they are all fucking bigots."

"What do you mean?"
"We need to stop by Underworld on the way, I'll explain when we get there."

Killing didn't come as easy to Butch as it had to Percy. Then again, he hadn't had the crash course she had been forced through.

"OH GOD!" He jumped back. A raider nearly caught him across the face, but Percy managed to brain the Raider with a sledgehammer before he got the chance.

"I could say the same thing! Didn't I teach you how to use that gun?"

"Yeah, but I was trying to reload the mag and it—it didn't work."

"Percy snatched the gun from him, looking at the magazine. It was nicked at the end. Talking it to a nearby boulder, she filed the jutting edge down until it was smoother. It slid into place without trouble.

"You need to make sure everything is in good condition before you get into a fight."

"How the fuck am I supposed to know when some raider bastards are gonna jump us?"

"Just check up on your shit when things are quiet." It was like explaining things to a two year old!

Super mutants were no better, but they found a sniper rifle in some dead man's old stash, so at least he could freak out at a distance. Percy handled the mess up close.

"When we get to Underworld, you need to not freak out. The first time is always...a bit shocking. The people in Underworld, well, most others call them ghouls. Radiation can be a blessing and a curse. Most people just die. But ghouls, ghouls live forever—or at least two hundred years."

"Holy smokes! But...why are they called ghouls?"

"Eternity comes at a price. Their skin becomes mutilated by the radiation, skin comes off in chunks...hair too. I think it's the ears and nose that most people freak out about it."

"Christ...that sucks."

"And on top of that, some have the nerve to kick them out of their own homes."

"Is that why Rivet needs a new barber? Why are you sending me there then?"

"Because it's the only place I can think of who actually need more people, not fewer."

The Mall's entrance came into view. Willow was standing guard as usual.

"Hey toots, I'm Butch! I like your lipstick, real stylish!"

Willow smirked. "You're overdoing it Honey, but I appreciate the effort."

"I was nice when we first met; why is he 'Honey' when I was 'Tourist'?" Percy joked. It was a relief to be out of the vault, but it was even better to be where people were at least happy to see her.

"I like his style. You were a mess when you first showed up at our door."

"Fair enough." She laughed. But she couldn't beat around the bush anymore. "Is he back yet?"

Widow shifted, looking away as she took another drag from her cigarette. "I'm sorry, kid. No word,
"What? Are you sure? Nothing? At all?" Butch looked between the two. Who? This was the first time he'd seen Percy lose her cool since she came back to help the vault.

"I'm sorry, but I haven't seen hide nor hair of him. Are you going to stay long?"

"Just tonight." Percy felt weak all of a sudden. Why? Why hadn't he returned?

She went through the motions. Say hello, smile, sell the scrap. Go see Carol, buy a room for Butch, go to bed. She didn't eat, and as much as her soul itched for something to take the pain away, she didn't drink.

A very small part of Percy thought Charon might have actually left her. But the thought was growing.

'It wasn't as if he was required to return.'

A voice in the back of her head attempted to reason with the turmoil in the rest of her mind. That's right, he was entitled to leave. But why lie? He had said one week. He had smiled at her, they had been close…hadn't they? Percy felt used. He had called her beautiful. He had made her feel safe, hell, even a little loved.

Loved…yes, that was the worst part. She let the tears fall. After everything that had happened in the vault, the hope that he was waiting for her back in Underworld had been the light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

She was alone in the room they had shared. It felt like ages ago now. Time passed so slowly with him gone. She turned on her side, burying her face in the nearest pillow. A small wail escaped her lips as she threw the pillow against the wall. It still smelled like him.

"Charon…" She sobbed. "Please come back. Please be all right…"

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think about the story so far? I'd love you hear you complements or criticism!
She couldn’t stay. It hurt too much. Should she feel worry, anger, sadness, or all three? Butch never asked who it was that hadn’t returned. But after everything she’d done, for Percy to be so upset by one person? It wasn’t her dad; he ruled that out. The only option was that Percy got herself a boyfriend and didn’t tell him. In any other circumstances, he would have teased her till she shot him. But right now, it felt like he would get shot if he even brought it up.

The tiredness was gone from her eyes, but there was nothing to replace it. She was committed to getting Butch to Rivet City, but what would there be after that? She could look for Charon, but did he even want to be found? Percy left Butch with Vera Weatherly and five hundred caps.

“That will get you started, and feed you for a few weeks if you stick to simple meals, but after that, you’re on your own. Don’t eat or drink anything Angela prepares for you, only Gary.”

“Where are you gonna go now?” He took the caps, weighing them in his hand.

“Not quite sure. I think I need some new scenery. Might head west, but I doubt there’s much between here and the Mojave.”

Vera perked up. “There was a traveler hanging around the market selling punga fruit a few days ago. Said something about taking folks up to Point Lookout for two fifty a trip.”

Butch gave a low whistle but Percy was intrigued. “Where can I find him now?”

“I think…He said south coast behind the Arlington Library. But he had a funny look. Wouldn’t stop smiling, even when Flak told him to fuck off.”

“I can handle a little crazy, if the ferry trip isn’t too long.”

The market was slow, folks were just starting to open up their shops for the day. Hargrave was happy to see her, especially when she sold him some clean vault suits. “These will make great pajamas. Thanks, kid!”

Shrapnel gave her a discount on her ammo. “Just take it and go. You’ll put it to better use than most people that swing through here. You might even do a bit of good with it.”

“God I hope so.” Percy slid the caps over the counter. She paused biting her lip. “You really think I’m one of the good guys?”

Shrapnel leaned over the counter, dropping his voice. “I remember what you did for that little ex-
slave. And I heard about GNR. And I’m no idiot, but I’m pretty sure you had a hand in getting rid of
those Talon assholes—you or that fella you travelled with for a while. That was a lot of blood, I
won’t deny it; but it was spilt in the name of justice.”

Percy was taken aback. It was one thing to try to convince herself of it, but to hear those words from
someone else was…comforting.

Angela avoided eye contact as Percy passed by, rushing to the other side of the marketplace.

She was tempted to swim the channel, just to avoid the walk. But if Percy was going to run away,
her might as well do it walking, not paddling.

Because that’s what she was doing. There was no illusion in her head about that. Maybe in Point
Lookout Percy could set up shop as a repair girl, or maybe hunter and butcher. The prospect of
staying in one place for so long wasn’t very appealing, but it seemed that moving around as much as
she did was no better. Arlington was crawling with Brotherhood members. They weren’t so bad, she
supposed, but the strictness of their doctrine reminded her too much of the former Overseer. As much
as Percy wanted to check the library for books in good condition, she didn’t want to get wrapped up
in their sacred quest.

A nervous woman was pacing the docks.

“Would you go away already? You’re gonna scare away the customers.” Tobar scowled from his
ship.

“If one woman is keeping everyone else away, maybe I can spend my caps elsewhere.” Percy called
out, jumping down the rocks and striding towards the dock.

The woman was desperate. “Please you have to help me! My little girl—he took her away on that
damned boat!”

Percy looked over at Tobar, eyebrow quirked as the woman clung to the front of her armor.

“She’s crazy! I don’t let anyone on this boat without a ticket. Business isn’t so bad that I have to
make people take the ferry!”

She pursed her lips. He didn’t look like a bad guy, but this poor lady was getting hysterical.

“Hey, calm down.” She lowered her voice and held the woman’s shoulders comfortingly. “If I see
your little girl, I’ll send her your way, ok?”

“Oh, thank you! Thank you! Her name is Nadine. She has red hair and blue eyes. Just give her this
note for me please?” She thrust the piece of paper into Percy’s hands with shaking fingers.

“Of course.” Percy pulled a water out of her backpack. The woman took the bottle eagerly. She
watched at the dock while Percy negotiated price with Tobar.

“Two hundred and fifty caps is a little steep for a ride, don’t you think?”

He scoffed. “Miss, do you know how much boat fuel costs? It’s not exactly lying around these days.
Tell you what: two hundred, and throw in three of those waters.”

“Deal.” They shook on it and after paying her fare, Percy went up to the top deck. Nadine’s mother
waved from the shore as Tobar started the engine. Percy waved back before looking out at the horizon. This was it, no turning back now. She squinted, looking into the water.

Had nothing but Mirelurks survived the bombs? Something small moved under the surface, causing Percy to jump. She looked closer. It took a few minutes for her eyes to adjust to the movements of the water. Fish…so small…how did they survive that small? But there were so many of them. Huge schools moving simultaneously and with purpose. They nearly blended in with the waves, and probably would have if Percy wasn’t tracking them so intently. Eventually she found herself down the stairs and leaning over port side as far over the edge as she could. She could see the fish in better detail now. Silver scales reflected sunlight back up to her, much like the waves they hid under. There was something mottled and green near the gills and just under each fin and Percy understood. Everything was affected by the bombs. Everything would eventually be destroyed, or learn to adapt.

She jumped as Tobar rang the bell up in the wheelhouse. She turned as he pointed towards the new shore drawing up behind the fog.

“There’s the boardwalk.” He called out. “There are a few sights to be seen farther north, but I’d stay away from that there mansion if I were you. Most of the locals tend to avoid it, but then again, I tend to avoid the locals too.”

“How will I be able to tell the locals from everyone else?” She shielded her eyes from the sun as the fog began to clear.

“Oh trust me: You’ll know.”

The marshlands stunk of rot and were so wet that Percy had to cling to the trees and roots; otherwise she’d be swimming in muck. The boardwalk had something similar to a general store, and a few kooky establishments and motel rooms with little more than a hundred caps worth of scrap between them. She hadn’t seen much in the way of people beyond the boardwalk however, and with the swamps taking up most of the eastern areas, she was more inclined to wander closer and closer to the mansion Tobar had warned her about. What could be so dangerous about a big old house? And another thing: she hadn’t seen much in the way of fellow tourists, much less locals. This entire place was getting to be one big disappointment. There was game, but no tourists to sell to. If there were no tourists, and she couldn’t sell to locals, who the hell was she supposed to sell to?

“I bet hardly anyone’s touched that place if everyone keeps away…” She mused, looking in the direction of the looming mansion by the seashore. “Could probably find some old world stuff to sell…or not to sell…” Musing turned to longing as she thought of all the clothes, books, and other pre-war baubles she could find in a place like that. Tobar had sold this area so up it was practically through the hypothetical roof, so was anything else he said that trustworthy? Maybe he just wanted to save the scrap for himself.

“Looks fancy. The people who owned it forever ago probably had a wine cellar in the basement.”

Back in the vault, she had read about all the preservatives businesses would put in their edibles. Fruit, steak, even eggs would last indefinitely past their natural expiration date. With the nation constantly living in fear of bombs falling, preservation of necessities became a craft well perfected. And the label of necessity quickly extended to spirits as hostilities mounted. Pre-war scientists made it such that the alcohol wouldn’t evaporate from the rest of the solvent, and so long as nothing bad got into the bottle, even wine would stay good until it was drunk.
Percy had thoroughly made up her mind, when she heard a loud guttural holler from far behind her.

“Hoooweeee! Brother! I found another one!”

“Hot damn, son! Let’s git’em!”

Percy had just enough time to turn before they began shooting at her.

‘Shotguns…’ Percy dived for cover over a shallow cliff as a bullet whizzed by a foot from her ear. ‘And hunting rifles.’

What the hell were they? From a distance they looked deformed, but as they got closer, she was able to make out boils, lumps, and tumors so big and numerous, they made up at least half of one of the fucker’s arms.

There were two of them, and the one that wasn’t big was fast. And he had the long double barrel. The muck weighing down her pants was also keeping her boots from separating themselves from ground. She wouldn’t make it far running. With one well tossed grenade she was able to take out the bigger one—either because he was too slow or because he was too stupid to realize the danger of the explosive that settled at his feet before going off. He melted in a chunky mass of irradiated plasma.

The faster one was almost on her. It would take too long to pull out and ready her own rifle, so the ten millimeter sub would have to do. She dashed for the mansion, shooting off rounds at her assailant as he gained on her. Her thighs burned and she very nearly tripped over her boots as she turned to aim for his legs. Her heart thumped in her chest, her shoulders shook and she tried to steady her breathing as she was left with no choice but to let out a shuddering breath and fire.

Her aggressor wailed as his left leg was mangled in a rain of bullets. It barely slowed him down, but it did give her enough time to run for the front porch and more cover. Pulling the rifle off of her back, she rounded one of the support beams and took a knee before steadying her gun against the railing of the veranda.

“You have one last chance to back off before I blow your brains out, you hear me?!”

He didn’t hear her. Or didn’t care. The latter was more likely. He was blinded by rage and bloodlust, not even bothering to reload his gun as he ran for her. His face exploded in a shower of skull and brain as the rest of his body took a few moments to realize there was no head to guide it. Thoroughly freaked out by this, Percy started firing into his chest until a voice rang out through the crackling speakers.

“For fuck’s sake, he’s dead! Now get in here and help me with these damn invaders if you’re so eager to kill.”

She jumped, turning to see a camera pointed right at her. “I thought this place was empty!”

“Well it bloody well was before I got here! Now get in here, Killer, and help me!”

The main room was huge, and would have been in pretty good shape if it weren’t for all the people trying to kill her. They weren’t very good at it but man were they desperate. She was right about the wine cellar, and tried to avoid shooting at the stores as tribals climbed through the walls and dropped from the ceiling. Half the time she couldn’t tell where that man who demanded her help was, but he had dogs with almost as large a body count as she.

As the last wave was finally taken care of, Percy collapsed against the stairs, nursing her leg. Her right ankle was twisted from when she fell through a floor, and a few bullets managed to scrape her upper thigh. Wrapping the ankle for later, she numbed her leg and was just starting to sew the skin
back together when her host finally made an appearance.

“And here I thought you were bullet proof by the way you kept on mindlessly running into the fray.” He growled, looming over her and blocking her light. Despite being a ghoul, he didn’t seem to be missing much in the way of hair. He wore thick rimmed glasses, a white striped suit, and a stern expression. Percy wasn’t intimidated, but she was annoyed.

“Tough talk for someone who so recently begged me to help him.” She muttered, biting off the string before starting on the next laceration. “Move over, I may be good, but even I can’t sew in the dark.”

“You did not save me, missy. Just because I don’t want to waste my own ammo doesn’t mean I needed your help.” He moved out of her light, but didn’t sit down. “Regardless, you and I have a common interest now. Those tribals are trying to kill me and I don’t know why. I don’t like being ignorant. If you’re as good at infiltration as you are at killing, then I think we can help each other with a common enemy.”

“I just got here; why would I start off by making enemies?” she shot a stim into her ankle, hissing as it readjusted and healed the muscle. Pushing herself up, Percy left to walk through the library she had seen earlier. But the ghoul wasn’t willing to let her go.

“And what makes you think you haven’t already? There are quite a few bodies around here that are a testament to the contrary.”

About half the books were ruined by unchecked rot, and a fourth were too riddled with bullet holes to be legible. What was left was mostly fiction, plus an extensive encyclopedia and geography book. Closing the latter, she sighed and turned to face him.

“If I do this for you, I expect payment. I have a feeling I hit a dead end coming to this place, and I don’t plan sticking around for much longer.” Cramming the books into her bag, she turned and made her way to the cellar, but her host grabbed her before she could go.

“Now listen here, you mouthy tart: Whether you like it or not, you are involved. Depending on who or what is behind these attacks, I’m sure we can split whatever they have between us.”

Raising an eyebrow, Percy waited for him to continue.

Getting impatient, he spat out, “And you can have whatever’s in this damn place for all I care. All I need is the information on the terminals and any notes laying around, anyway.”

“Including the wine?”

“A killer and a drunk. I should have known. Funny how often those go hand in hand. Yes, even the booze.”

She gave him a searing look before thrusting her hand out. “The name’s Percy, and I’m not a drunk. You got a name, or did the bombs destroy that too?”

“Cheeky. Desmond Lockheart, but Lockheart is good enough for your kind.”

Percy chose to ignore that comment. “Now how exactly am I supposed to infiltrate these tribals? Can you tell me a little bit more about them?”

“Not much to tell except they seem to be fanatics over some local fruit. As for infiltration, there are a convenient amount of disguises no longer in use just laying around. I’m sure you can find one that fits; just grab it before rigor mortis sets in, will you?” He left her without another word, and Percy
was reminded why most people were referred to as little more than assholes out in the wastes.

The faucets worked, but barely. Percy was able to get just enough water to fill a bucket and wash most of the dirt off her body. The hair couldn’t be helped, so she wrapped it tight into a bandana to keep it out of her eyes. The dried mud could only be beat off of her armor, but since she would be dressing in what could barely pass for rags, that was a task for another time. Blood wasn’t something to avoid, and she might be able to get it to work to her advantage, so when she found a get-up with splatters across the sides, she got dressed and made her way to Desmond’s study.

“I’m headed out, Lockheart. Don’t touch my things till I get back.”

Desmond waved her off without turning as he began rifling through old paperwork with added vigor.

Percy was unused to traveling without her Pip-boy, but she felt the disguise would work better if she didn’t stick out so obviously. Running the last lap to the church the tribals based at, Percy began rapping on the front gate, playing up being out of breath.

“Help! Help! Please open the door! Oh God, everyone else is dead! That Mansion is a deathtrap!”

“Who are you?” A voice replied over the intercom after a pause.

“Percy, I’m new.”

“I don’t remember you.”

“I was let in last time!” She whined.

“By who?”

“I dunno, I didn’t get their name! Come on, let me in!”

“Look I don’t know you, but I do know you haven’t been initiated yet. Now go do that unless you never wanna see the inside of this place!”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“Did they not tell you anything? The great and powerful Mother Punga! Deep in the swamps to the east!”

Percy rolled her eyes as the man continued with his spiel.

“There, in the inner sanctum of the swamps, you will find our great mother. Inhale her spores, and you too shall see her wisdom and find yourself!”

Chapter End Notes
Please let me know what you think of the story so far, I'd love to hear your thoughts and criticism!
Chapter 27

This chapter was proofread by Groovymarlin and Anti-Material Girl, whose works you can find here on Ao3.

“That’s forty caps, sir!”

“I don’t know why I should pay you so much…you cut it too short on the sides.” Gary groused, looking at his hair in the mirror.

“It looks better this way, asshole, now pay up.” Butch growled back. It had been four days since Percy had left him in Rivet City, and he was already tired of it. Plenty of people needed haircuts, sure, but few of them cared for his style, and none of them saw the value in paying their barber enough to live on.

“And what if I don’t want to pay for a lousy job?” Gary was taller than Butch by six inches and he had the look in his eyes of someone who wasn’t to be trifled with.

Butch was pissed, but let out a sigh as he said, “Then I suppose I could offer you a discount…sir. Twenty caps please.”

He was given ten. Butch sat down hard on the barber stool. He began angrily combing his hair. This was bullshit. He was almost through the caps Percy had given him, but the rest of the ship seemed intent on starving him out. “I need a drink.”

The drink burned down his throat, calming his temper. He hated alcohol. He hated the taste, its power over him, and what it had done to his sorry excuse for a mother. And yet he had a glass every month. He wanted to prove to himself that it wouldn’t ruin his life like it had hers.

“Long morning?” Harkness settled next to him at the bar, giving him a smile and a nod. There was no judgment in his eyes, but Butch didn’t find that a particularly good thing. He nodded without a word. Harkness did a good job protecting Rivet, but it seemed like his free time was spent either at the bar, or in his room with Cherry. Noise traveled far in the large metal aircraft carrier, and there wasn’t much to be done about soundproofing.

Harkness broke the silence again with a laugh. “It can be pretty tough etching out a place for yourself here, I suppose. Most people are nervous about outsiders, and rightly so, I’d say.”

“Look are you gonna tell me something I don’t know, or are you gonna let me drink in peace?”

Butch had thought about reporting to the guards the first couple times, but since it had been several of the guards who had short changed him in the first place…and he doubted Harkness would be much help with the little things like this anyway.

“Don’t get testy, I was just being honest. Most fellows like you wander through with supplies, but rarely stay.”

“I was told you needed a barber; last one get kicked out too?”

Harkness stopped smiling. “Yeah…yeah he did. But that was different. People were getting nervous.”
Butch finished off his drink before slamming his glass on the bar. “So what am I supposed to do, huh? Starve to death, or eat a bunch of rads and make it easier for you?” he asked calmly, looking straight ahead.

“That’s not really fair, you know. Most people out here are just scared. Anything could kill you at a moment’s notice. People have a right to be cautious.”

Butch let out a sigh. There was no point arguing this, as much as he wanted to. “Is there some outside work I can do then? Anything the lazy sons of bitches here are too scared to go out and do themselves?”

Harkness grinned. “Now that you mention it, old Washington has been bitching a little extra since Percy dropped you off…”

Percy stood at the outskirts of the inner bog. The smell was unbearable here and she wanted nothing more than to get this over with. Was the entire area just ferals and locals? And that was another thing—were all the locals crazy?

The mud was especially thick here and there was no avoiding the slop. She was practically swimming in it a mile into her journey, or at least she thought it was a mile. Percy was a little afraid that she would get lost in the bog without her map and regretted leaving it with that irate ghoul. How could someone live this long in the wastes and still expect everyone to jump at his beck and call? Then again, hadn’t she?

‘Sort of…but it was a deal! And it’s not like I had anything better to do anyway.’

Percy was up to her shoulders now, moving slowly in case there was a sudden dip. There was the occasional mirelurk that would wander into her sight, but they were all so sluggish and seemed to not even notice her until one of her bullets was between their eyes. The air was getting thicker and it became harder to see, but the path was revealed to her now by low burning torches. Who lit the torches? Did the people tasked with lighting the torches not also have to clear out the mirelurks, or was that part of the initiation rights? Percy got the distinct feeling she was being watched, but who would be able to sneak up on her in this swamp?

The bog slowly shallowed out until she was walking on semi-dry ground again. The path widened until she saw it: The Mother Punga. The air was most thick here with a strange smell somewhere between rot, musk, and something sharp. It felt like she was going deaf, as if all sound was choked out by the density of the atmosphere. Leaning one hand on one of the punga plant’s thick roots, she looked up into the center.

‘Green spores—’ was her only thought before the spores swallowed Percy up in their cloud.

Sandy grit rushed into the back of her throat, her nose, and sinuses. She grit her teeth and tried rubbing the spores out of her eyes, but it was no use. She became light headed to the point that she grabbed blindly at the ground for some sort of purchase so she didn’t float away.

Finally her eyes flew open with a gasp and the world was a flurry of colors and sound. The ground beneath her shook with the sound of buzzing. Her heart thrummed in her chest as she dug her fingers into the technicolored earth, trying to escape from the mother punga that was ever-looming behind her, threatening to swallow her whole until she drowned in its spores. She finally came to the swamp’s still waters. Someone was floating face down in the center of the pool. Forgetting all self-
preservation, Percy rushed through the murky water, grabbing the body and struggling to turn it up. She let out a strangled scream as it was revealed to be Amata. Her best friend disintegrated in her shaking hands. “Amata, no stop no! I’m sorry please no don’t!” She babbled as Amata’s eye socket hollowed out around her fingers.

More bodies drifted closer to her trembling form.


No matter how hard she tried to wipe it off into the muddied waters, the ash clung to her arms and neck, creeping up her neck until she was tasting it between her teeth.

Percy swam as hard as she could for the opposite shore, jabbering frantic nonsense and apologies that reached no one’s ears but her own.

She ran, wildly searching for the path. Giant saws, needles and thread gained on either side of her and the sky became the ground and she was running through the branches as Nuka-Colas exploded at her feet and a child’s laugh filled her ears. Percy came to a clearing.

It was a gurney surrounded by balloons. A bobble-head was nestled between its femurs. She picked it up and the deafening sounds stilled to a single high pitch.

Flat line.

She read the words carved into its base.

“Blech. If my kid looked like that, I’d abandon it too.”

The pit of her stomach clenched with ice and the figurine fell through her fingers like a specter.

“My, my, you certainly kept me waiting, Songbird.”

She turned, frozen in place by that voice.

That voice.

“Come here, I want to show you something.” Burke put his arm around her shoulders before lifting her up, bridal style. She was terrified, hate boiled in her throat and yet she didn’t move—didn’t struggle. Her body wouldn’t let her.

"Any moment now, you could die. Aren’t you a little excited at the idea? Just to see what it's like?” He asked, looking ahead through his tinted glasses. “At any point in your journey, you could be shot, stabbed, or tortured to the brink of death by a madman.” Burke smiled calmly and Percy continued to mutely stare up at him, watching his face shift and refocus in an endless dance. “Or perhaps you might be instantaneously disintegrated by a bomb. Wouldn’t that be odd? Some might call it irony, or karma—if you believe in that sort of thing.”

“My father believed in forgiveness.” Something eased its way out from between her lips like a bubble.

“Ah yes. I heard about that pre-war monotheistic superstition during my own travels. How convenient for a race that is constantly tripping over its own feet to believe in a god that will forever forgive and forever forget. And isn’t that the godliest of abilities, my dear girl? Not only to forgive the wrong doings of others, but to never remember they even happened? Show me a being in this
world who won’t hold a grudge and I will kiss the irradiated dirt they walk on.”

“You died.” ‘Did I die?’

Burke chuckled in a way that brought bile to Percy’s throat. “No, you are not dead. But I have a feeling you won’t meet me when you finally do die. Then again, if this is indeed all in your head—which is a thought just becoming plausible to you isn’t it?—then aren’t you the hypocritical one. Didn’t you preach of a forgiving god once? Who’s to say I’m not deserving of forgiveness and paradise? I never killed anyone.”

“I never gave you the chance to,“

“And yet your missing lover did kill. Many times without remorse, if I’m correct. Not to say justice is a bad thing, but his ideas and what I define as true justice are very different, I suppose. And what about your own sense of justice? Surely a smart young thing like yourself would have her own ideas on who deserves life or death. Do you not realize your own namesake? Never mind; we’re here.”

They stood before a giant nuke. Several feet taller than the one that had been in Megaton. It pulsed in a slow, deep, beep.

“No…” Percy finally struggled out of Burke’s arms, rushing for the bomb. Her limbs were impossibly heavy, and her movements seemed unnaturally slow. “I disarmed this! I need to—”

“Wait!” Burke called out to her, but his voice was not his own anymore. Who was that?

“No, no. Don't try to get up yet. You'll only hurt yourself!"

The bomb went off, and Percy was thrown to the ground, and everything went black.

205 years ago

“Left, left, left right left!” The drill instructor shouted in the distance. He had been told to run in a larger ring around the rest of the soldiers in training. Hard work and near isolation had been the primary order given by the strange woman who had taken him away six months ago. Saved would have been one word, but the way she had looked at him before handing him over to the U.S. army had been something born not entirely out of kindness. He was given a strict diet of bland but nutritious foods that were specially shipped in. He ate in a private bunk and was not allowed to openly socialize with the rest of his supposed troop. Every week the mysterious woman in purple would return and give him a full medical check-up.

“My, aren’t you growing big and strong.” She mused, taking measurements of his arms and testing the muscle density with a poke. “And how do you feel?”

He was silent. He didn’t understand the question. What was he supposed to feel? He was not grateful for what she had done for him, and the mourning he had experienced for his brothers had dulled quickly over the last three months. It bothered him. Did it have anything to do with the drugs she was pumping into his system? What were her plans?

The woman smiled at his silence. The dark red of her lips never revealing the white teeth underneath. She took a vial from a nervous looking man in a blue suit, filling a needle before flicking the stray bubbles out of the solution. “Hold him down.”
Four men who had been standing at all corners of the room moved in to restrain him but he did not resist. There was no point.

He let out an involuntary shiver as he felt her fingers trace the veins where his head met his neck. “Do you know what today is?”

Silence.

“Why, it’s your birthday! And I have a very special present for you.”

His muscles tightened as he tried not to react to the burning liquid being injected into him. He was allowed to stand up as the men removed his restraints.

“From the moment I saw you I knew: here’s an effective killer, and I thought: This is a boy deserving of a great name. One that will assure his adversaries that their fate is inevitable when they see him. So from now on, your name is Charon…isn’t it?”

“Yes ma’am.” It had not been his name before, but it certainly was now.

“Tell me your name.” She insisted, not even flinching from his intense gaze. If anything, she relished it.

“My name is Charon.” It already seemed so familiar to him.

“Good…now I want you to do something for me, Charon.” She purred his name as she broke the vial against the wall. “Take this and slice your wrist three times.”

His blood went cold and yet, something in his mind compelled him to take the broken glass from her. Charon continued to stare at her, begging with his eyes for her to tell him to stop. But she didn’t; she just watched him with that hungry stare. “Do it now, Charon.”

He groaned as the glass cut deep, blood trickled down his arm onto the harsh white linoleum floor. The woman allowed her eyes to flutter closed as she listened to his pain and a shiver visibly shook her frame. The puddle of blood grew, reaching her feet as Charon struggled to stand. He was losing so much blood.

A finger crept to her lips as she watched him intently. The men around them simply watched, unreactive to either of their actions. The man in blue was busy cleaning his glasses and didn’t look up.

Finally Charon fell to his knees and would have collapsed completely if it weren’t for his good hand catching him. “Please…” He managed to gasp as darkness clouded his vision and he fell completely to his side.

“Excellent! Oliver, you were taking notes, right?”

“Yes Dolores, I’m not an idiot.” The man in blue grumbled, adjusting his glasses before scribbling furiously in his note pad.

The woman chuckled under her breath, kneeling down to stroke Charon’s hair, unconcerned with the blood seeping into her clothes. “Alright, take him to his room.” He felt the slight sting of a needle entering the skin near his self-inflicted wounds and his arm jerked as the gashes started to heal.

She followed the men as they hauled him away. She spoke to the man in blue, uncaring if anyone
heard her. “I want him to train here for another year before we move on to stage two. The serum seems to work excellently, but I want his mind to follow orders on instinct, not just from the drugs. Drugs are fine for military use, but I want to test something more...lasting when he returns with us.”

“Word has it that the troops here are going to be deployed to Anchorage as soon as they are ready, are you sure that’s wise?”

“Are you kidding? That’s the perfect scenario to get him ready for my uses! Will you have the prototype bugs fixed by then?”

“I should, but I’m running out of test subjects...you keep taking them for your own work.”

“For you, I’ll try not to be so greedy.” She purred before Charon fainted completely.

The next months were more training and dull food, only now the rest of the soldiers were avoiding him on principle rather than orders. Every week, before the last dose had a chance to wear off, she would return, only now instead of making him torture himself, she would have him work to exhaustion. ‘Run the laps until you fall.’ ‘Wonderful, now pull-ups until your fingers can no longer hold onto the bar.’

“You are quite possibly my most favorite toy, Charon.” She stroked his hair as he lay in bed. Now, he never spoke unless to ask for orders or answer a direct question.

“Tell me sweet: What do you live for?”

“I live to take orders.” He parroted back to her, too tired to clench his fists beneath the blankets.

“Until?”

“Until I am no longer in your service, ma’am.”

“Wrong. That is incorrect, and do you know why?”

“No ma’am.”

“Because you will never leave my service, Charon. You will serve me until you die.”

“What if you die first?” He didn’t know why he asked. He had no desire to speak to her. He hated her with every fiber of his being, and yet he was powerless against her will. For weeks his favorite dreams had been when he was finally allowed to wring her neck. Or slice her chest open. Or tear her face off with his bare hands so he never had to see that smile ever again.

“Oh sweet...you’ll never have to worry about me leaving you first, because I will never die.”

And to his core, he was convinced she was right.
The armor was too big for him. The boots were too loose and the plates dug into his arms and chest every time he took a step. But there was no going back now. Butch stood before the national archives. He had managed to snipe the surrounding mutants with the help of some brotherhood solders. Surely there wouldn’t be any muties inside the place? They wouldn’t be able to fit through the door! He let out a breath as the door creaked shut and the inner sanctum remained silent except for him. The place was a mess, and he had seen a good deal of messes by now. He wandered the exhibits, flipping switches that wouldn’t turn on. He was beginning to wonder how much farther it would be as he turned a corner, when he heard—and quickly felt—the rusty crunch of a bear trap.

“Oh hell, oh fuck that hurts!” He howled, grabbing for his leg. Mutants shouted in the distance; he wasn’t alone, and he was trapped! Someone looked over the banister, just as shocked to see him as he was to see them.

“Please, you gotta help me! Oh god they’re gonna kill me!”

“How did you get in without the muties getting to you?!!” It sounded like a woman.

“I killed them! Got some help, but I cleared them out! Please help me get this thing off, I can help you kill the ones up ahead!” He called, trying not to move his leg too much, but yelped as one of the razor teeth pressed against a bone.

“I doubt that.” He heard the sneer in her voice. The muties came around the corner, screaming and roaring at him.

“OH come on, help a guy out!” His voice was quickly drowned out by the hail of gunfire, but not at him. The scavver fired short blasts at the monsters with frightening accuracy. Six bullets in each head and the bodies fell three feet from him. The girl jumped over the rail, rifling through the Mutants rags looking for ammo and heaving their guns over her shoulder. He ignored his complaints as he struggled to free his leg. The teeth finally slid out of Butch’s leg and he winced to see bone sticking out. He panicked watching her leave him behind.

“I have a job! The guy is willing to pay big caps for this thing called the Declaration of Independence!”

She stopped in her tracks, turned her head to listen.

“I’ve got a map and if you let me out, I’ll split the caps when we get back!”

She turned, rushing to help him to a chair. He panted as he watched her set to work elevating his bad leg, laying out a variety of drugs, and unwinding a length of rope from her backpack. She didn’t even hesitate to pump a full dose of med-x into his leg. Winding the rope around his foot, she moved behind him with an end in each hand. She passed him a piece of wood. “You might want to bite onto
“This.” was all she said before she pulled. His muffled screams filled the halls as his bones were reset. As soon as they were back in place, she rushed back around with a stimpak, slamming it into his leg.

“Don’t be such a baby! Hell, I know kids who handle worse better than you! What’s your name, anyway?”

“Butch. Butch DeLoria.” He panted, resisting the urge to wipe his forehead in case it ruined his hair.

“Sydney’s me.” She looking over her shoulder. “Map huh? Did this map tell you there’s a secret elevator right at the entrance of the building? Leads straight to the store room where the Declaration is kept.”

His jaw dropped. Why’d you bother to help me then? Not complaining or anything…”

Revealing a toothy grin she helped him up. “Did the guy who sent you here go by the name Abraham Washington?”

“Yeah.” Butch winced, expecting to need to limp the rest of his life, but the pain was mostly gone now.

“Well it seemed like he wasn’t too trusting of my own abilities, and I’d like a witness when I clock him for trying to give my prize money to someone else.”

“Hey now, I still want to spit the caps! I need that money!”

“Don’t we all?” Sydney sighed handing him one of the assault rifles at her back. “But…I suppose I can give you half if I can beat twice as much out of him. He did hire two scavvers; he should expect to pay for two, right?”

Fucking robots…Butch glared at the freaky protectrons. He shared Percy’s distrust of the things. That suspicion was only made worse when the vault Handy-Man, Andy slaughtered one of the resisting citizens in order to ‘fix’ her. Butch shivered at the memory, clenching his teeth.

“You must be Button Gwinnet! Butch, this is the second sigher of the Declaration!” Sydney elbowed Butch in the ribs, her eyes demanding that he play along.

“What are you talking about? He’s a fucking robot!” Butch asked, not entirely under his breath.

“Good sir, whatever a “robot” is, I do not appreciate the implication. I am Button Gwinnett, distinguished representative from Georgia. I would appreciate it if you followed your fairer companion’s example, but I am not above engaging in fisticuffs should the need arise.”

“Mister Gwinnett, please forgive my friend; He’s not accustomed to polite company. If you would excuse us a moment?” Sydney grabbed Butch’s arm so hard he was fairly certain a bruise formed instantaneously.

“Of course my dear! All men need the gentle guidance of a woman once and a while, after all!”

Sydney dragged Butch around the corner. She was about to say something, then thought better of it. Taking a pencil and paper out of her bag, she began scribbling furiously against the wall before thrusting the note in his face.

*Will you just play along?? Did you not see the Sentry bots and Robobrains?? Just smile and act all*
Butch raised an eyebrow. “But they don’t even have noses.”

Sydney ground her teeth, miming pulling out her hair. She scribbled some more

Just play along, or are you too dumb to act a little?

‘Oh I can act, I’ll show her! Who says I can’t act??’

Butch sneered, brushing the dirt off his shoulders.

“My good fellow! I’m so happy you’ve been keeping Declaration safe all these years!” Butch swaggered out from around the corner. “It’s so good to see you again, too.”

“I’m sorry, have me met before?” Button’s light’s blinked in confusion.

“Maybe once or twice; I’m an agent of Thomas Jefferson. He send me to come up with a plan. You see, that bastard King George has plans to steal the Declaration of Independence.”

“Saints alive! Really?” the Protectron explained in surprise. “What would he possibly want with it?”

“He has plans to steal it and thus lower the morale of the troops.”

Sydney had to admit, Butch was better on his feet that she gave him credit for.

“Good heavens! We must do something!”

Couldn’t agree more. Say, you robo—I mean signers must be real good with paper and ink; why not just write up a fake?”

Sydney took it back. This IDIOT! What was he thinking?

“I do believe I can! Excellent idea sir! Just get that ink off the table for me, we may fool George yet!”

She couldn’t believe her ears. Butch turned to sneer at her before giving Buttons the ink.

“Here you go old boy. Say, I seemed to have lost my powered wig, can I borrow one of your spares?”

“Anything for a true patriot! Give me just a moment and I’ll have this fake for you.”

Butch arranged the wig on his head, giving Sydney another shit-eating grin in the reflection.

She rolled her eyes, but nodded.

“I’ve gotta hand it to you; you’re not as stupid as I first thought.”

“Serves you right for judging by appearances…” Butch adjusted the wig. He had worn it all the way to Rivet City—even under his helmet. After watching Sydney sock it to Abraham for trying to short change the both of them, Butch took his share and was eager to put Rivet City behind him. Not before paying a visit to Gary’s stock room, however. Taking a leaf out of Percy’s book, what he couldn’t stuff in his bag, he stuffed down the front of his pants before putting back on the shelves.
“In my defense, you did have your foot trapped in something meant to fool less rational animals.”

“It was around the corner!” Butch threw up his hands but Sydney laughed.

“So what are you going to do with your share?” She jingled the bag of caps in her own hand.

“Not too sure…know of a place that needs a barber?”

“Can’t say I do. Most people where I’m headed don’t give two shits about hair.”

“Well what about you? There’s aren’t a lot of fools out here willing to pay worthless pieces paper is there?”

“You’d be surprised.” She grinned, “Actually I think I’m gonna retire, take up shop with my sweetheart.”

Butch decided to stick with her a little longer. Not like he had anywhere else to go. But the way Sydney kept on bragging about her woman made him wanna gag one minute, and run back to the vault, the next. Listening to Sydney go on and about how sweet she was, how good she was at listening, how pretty she was, “Even in the mornings!” Sydney laughed. It made Butch miss Amata all the more. But then again, Amata had never been one for spending the night, ‘Well her dad woulda’ blown a gascet…’ or being affectionate if public, ‘She didn’t like people staring…’ but she was always willing to sneak away somewhere when things were slow ‘And boy, do I aim to please!’ Butch smiled to himself, but his heart wasn’t in it. He was too distracted by his own thoughts to notice as they approached Underworld. The super mutants were at bay, at least for today, and they got to the front door without trouble. Sydney made a Beeline for Underworld Outfitters. Butch followed after her, turning the corner just in time to see Sydney swallow any greeting Tulip would have given her with a kiss. After making a small squeal, Tulip pushed her away with a frown. “Did you have to be gone so long this time?”

“Is that any way to welcome me back? He didn’t exactly give me a map, love, I had to look around a bit.” Sydney grinned, pressing more kisses against Tulip’s cheeks and neck as the latter grew red, seeing Butch in the doorway. “U-Uh, welcome to Underworld Outfitters!” She squeaked, “I’ll be with you in a minute!”

“Not if I can help it!” Sydney practically threw her girlfriend over her shoulder and headed for the back room.

Tulip was a fit of giggles and half-hearted objections until the door slammed behind them.

Willow smirked at the bulge in Butch’s pants and his general level of discomfort and embarrassment. “Sydney’s back, I see.” She smirked wiggling her eyes at Butch as he stole a smoke. “I didn’t know you two knew each other, or do all smoothies know each other these days?”

“I just met her. Saved me from a jam.” Butch squinted into the sun, trying and failing to adjust himself with any form of subtlety.

“What happened to the Rivet deal?”

“Hard to eat when I keep getting short changed by a bunch of bigoted ass-hats.” Butch growled. He told her about what he did to Gary’s store room.

“Serves them right, the pricks!” Willow cackled, raising a whiskey bottle in toast. “Here’s to Staley’s
new soup of the day: the Spunky surprise!”

“Here here!” Butch raised his cigarette.

Sydney and Tulip reappeared later that evening, flushed, grinning, and holding hands.

“S-Sorry about earlier.” Tulip sat down in the empty chair next to him at the Ninth Circle. “Syd can get a little affectionate when she comes back from her trips.” Tulip shot Sydney a look, but there wasn’t much venom. Sydney winked back before going to the bar for food. She came back with two hot bowls of soup and a bottle of wine.

“You wouldn’t have me any other way, and you know it!” She uncorked the wine with her teeth, pouring them each a glass. “Besides, I’m not leaving you ever again, Tutu. I’m staying, and you know I’m in it for the long haul.”

“Tutu?” Butch looked between the couple as Tulip covered her face in embarrassment and Sydney grinned into her drink.

They drank, and talked, and Butch laughed at the lengths Sydney would go to to embarrass her woman. She and Tulip got steadily drunker while Butch ignored his drink and stuck to water.

“Look, if you’re not gonna finish your drink, I’m gonna finish it for ya’” Sydney grabbed his drink with a huff. At some point in the evening she had stolen his wig and was now wearing it sideways.

“Take it, being with suck lovely ladies is intoxication enough.”

Sydney scoffed, leaning against Tulip as she nursed her new drink.

“So you’re a vaultie huh? What’s that like down there?” Tulip stroked Sydney’s hair as she nodded off.

“Hot showers, and everyone wearing the same stupid jumpsuit. Clean water, but the pre-packaged stuff is still pretty stale.”

“And no radiation, I assume?” Tulip quirked an eyebrow.

Butch suddenly looked uncomfortable. “Oh, uh…shit yeah…sorry.”

“Don’t mention it, Smoothskin. It isn’t so bad as all that; not for me, anyway.”

Butch leaned forward, praying that no one tried to punch him for asking, “What’s it like? Being a ghoul, I mean.”

She rubbed a spot just above the bridge of her nose while she thought. “Well…it really hurt at first. And it didn’t happen all at once, either. Skin starts to dry up and fall off in places. The cartilage of the nose and ears degrades until there isn’t much left. The nails fall off if you’re not careful. I caught that early on and only lost a thumb nail.” She help it up to show him. “You can wince if you want; it was pretty gross to me too when I first saw it.”

Butch grimaced apologetically as she continued.

“It doesn’t hurt when things stop falling off though. And water tastes a little better now, because it has a lot of radiation and that’s good for me now. Everything below the belt works fine, too, as I’m sure you’ve gathered. And in all honestly, if the ghoulification hadn’t gotten to me first, I would have
swam laps around Rivet until it happened.” Sydney’s grip on her glass loosened and Tulip grabbed her glass before it dropped to the floor. She took a sip, smiling at her sleeping lover.

“Why?” Butch blurted out. “Why would you choose to do that to yourself?”

“I’m immortal, Butch.” Tulip smiled exasperatedly. “Immortal and immune to one of the biggest threat the wasteland has to offer.”

Butch had so much more to say, and would have said it all if he was as drunk as his dinner mates. The pain, the social shaming, watching as your own body changed beyond your control, but he didn’t say any of that. “What about Sydney? What happens when she dies?”

“Sydney wants to get ghoulified soon. She’ll probably talk to barrows about it in a couple weeks if she really plans on staying here with me.”

“Still—”

“Look, hormones are really hard to come by in the wastes, especially in the more populated areas. I didn’t choose this, but I wouldn’t change the results for the world. I never have to fight through hordes of ferals just to get another dose, or explain to caravans what estrogen is and come up with an excuse as to why I need it. Hair doesn’t grow in the wrong places, and I don’t need to worry about cutting my face up with a rusty old razor. I like my body, and so does Syd here. Stop trying to convince me that I’m in need of your pity for who I am.” Tulip didn’t raise her voice, and the smile remained on her face as Sydney was roused. “Say my name, Tutu?”

“Good morning, Sydy.” Tulip cooed, turned her attention to her sleepy girlfriend. “What do you say we get out of here huh? You look beat.”

“You take such good care of me, Tutu!” Tulip put her arm around Sydney’s waist and helped her up so they could leave. “I love you, you know that?”

“Of course I do, I love you too Sydy!”

Percy woke up in complete silence. The swamp. She stood up, looking around. She was just outside the deeper bog. Rubbing her eyes, she wincing at the pain in her head. Her head! Where she once had hair, there was soft stubble. She gasped, running her fingers up and down her scalp, trying to find something, anything, but it was all gone. She let out a choked sobbed, stopping her search because the pain was too much. Percy felt a long scar on her left side.

“Don’t mess with it so much, smoothskin. You’re gonna hurt yourself more.”

His gravelly voice broke through the thick silence.

“Percy turned and her jaw dropped. ‘Charon…’

“You…You’re not real either, are you?”

“Why are you still wandering?”

“I’m not! I’m gonna stay here, now. Lockheart said I could have anything in that mansion, Why not just live there? It has a library and plenty of food.”

“Yesterday you said this place was a dead end.”
“Why do you care?” She yelled, tears coming to her eyes. “You’re gone! Where even are you, Charon?!?”

His face didn’t change. “What are you running from?”

“YOU!” She screams, falling to her knees. “I don’t know where you are, or if you’re even alive anymore. I don’t want to go back and find your body rotting in a building somewhere, or baking in the sun. I don’t know what I’ll do if that happens. And if you’re alive? What then?? Why did you leave? If I knew what happened, then maybe—” She looked up and she was alone.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I'm a tease, but chapter 34 OR EARLIER! Charon will come back I promise.

As always, I'd love to hear feedback from all you lovely people!
The locals were easier to avoid, despite their frustratingly strong sense of hearing. Percy avoided the houses, and did her best to keep quiet anytime some of them wandered close. They always traveled in packs. Her head was killing her, the sun had broken through the clouds and was perpetually in her eyes, and with every step, mud squelched and oozed between her toes, out from her pants, and would have dripped off her hair in messy clumps if she still had any.

She saw the Ark and Dove cathedral up ahead, but turned south at the widening of the river.

Desmond startled as the front door slammed shut. His dogs usually alerted him to intruders, but he quickly remembered his guest, and by the sound of wet stomping down the hall, her scoping out of their little friends had been less than pleasant. He found her in the bathroom, stripping down and furiously scrubbing the caked mud off her skin. He leaned against the door as he watched her get, if not clean, than a little less dirty. She was a little too young for his taste. Young and thin. He hated the trend of wiry muscle and sharp joints that had perpetuated the world since it ended. He liked fat. The plumpness, and curve of the arse and the rolls on their stomach as he bent them over the nearest surface in the heat of passion. The shake and quake and ripples of skin over all that softness...oh yes...it was the softness he missed. And the give.

But an ass was an ass, and he enjoyed the view all the same. Percy looked over her shoulder at him, neither impressed with his blatant staring nor caring enough to cover herself up. She scrubbed extra hard on her arms, between her fingers, and under her nails. She knew there wasn't any ash—there never had been in the first place, not really—but she just wanted to make sure. She wanted to scrub it out of her mind. "Got any irradiated water?"

"Why would a smoothskin like yourself want that poison? Or is that rust water not killing you fast enough?" He asked snidely, eyes drifting to her chest as she turned. At least there was something there. Small, hardly a handful, but there was curve and perk.

"Do you have any or not?"

"Of course I fucking do, but I'm more interested in what happened out there. You look a little worse for wear, which is saying something in this hell hole. What is the devil happened to your hair...and how did you get that scar?" His tone changed with the last question, but she ignored him. The kitchen was fully stocked with so much food and drink, that Percy wondered if Lockheart had collected it all, or if this mansion had really been untouched for this long. She grabbed a bottle of the glowing water from the shelf and emptied it out onto a towel before wrapping it around her scalp. She took another bottle and downed in it in a couple gulps. The tingle as it fell down her throat was so strong, it would have driven her pip-boy crazy.

"I said, how did you get that scar?"
She didn't look at him as she said, "Those tribals had this ceremony that involves getting high on punga spores. I went on a really bad trip from it, but I have no idea how I got the scar. Based on where it is, they probably messed with my head—which I'm not too happy about. Nice to see you too, Desmond."

"I'm not talking about that one, I'm not a bloody idiot. All the other tribals had one to match, or did you not fucking notice? No, I'm talking about that one on your back. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that a killer like yourself would enjoy bringing knives into the bedroom, but I'm a little more surprised that your other fetish hits closer to home." He sneered.

Percy craned her head to try and see the scar he was referring to, but like before, it was just out of her sight. She knew what he was talking about though; how could she not? She had been so recently reminded of what that monster had done, after all.

"It's not a fetish, Des. I didn't get any of my scars voluntarily."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, and trust me: no one lives long enough to regret giving them to me." She didn't mention that it was Charon who had killed Burke, but since Desmond didn't know either of them, Percy didn't think it mattered whether he knew the truth or not.

"And the same goes for this one." She pointed to her head. "You said the other tribals had these scars, wanna take a closer look so we can figure what the hell is going on here?"

"Calvert house was once owned by a rival of mine. He was getting up there in years even before the bloody bombs fell. If he is still alive—and I am positive he is—then he should at least have a bloody medical room in the house."

They searched the rooms. Every so often, Percy would pour another bottle of water onto her toweled head and Desmond was beginning to wonder if she was one of those Child of Atom freaks. He'd had the misfortune of running into those wankers, as there seemed to be a growing following in the Capital Wasteland. It was all fucking ridiculous, but being an angel of God in their eyes had its occasional uses.

The in-house clinic was dusty but in good condition and more importantly, fully stocked. It took going back and carrying a generator up three flights of stairs, but with a flick of a switch, the MRI came on with a loud rumble.

"Is that thing even safe?"

Desmond scoffed. "People from my time used to bitch about potentially getting cancer from the radiation. Seems pretty ironic how that all those sniveling pricks are dried up husks now." He moved to the control panel, looking to see what they were working with. The X-ray paper was no good, but the terminal was enough to see what had happened to her brain.

Percy unwrapped her head, gingerly poking at the scar.

"Stop that! Do you want to be reduced to a drooling vegetable? I swear to Christ if you touch that fucking scar one more time I'll throw you out the window!" He covered his surprise with rage at the sight of inch long hair covering her scalp.

'How the bloody hell?'... 'Percy seemed just as relieved as he was shocked. The last time she had tried this, the injuries were more serious, but the exposure was longer and more intense. Her memory
drifted to the initial feeling of Charon wrapped protectively around her, acting as rad-insulation. His warm steady breath against her neck, with a stern worried expression even in sleep. She shook her head and moved to lay down on the machine's lightly padded bed.

"How does this work anyway?" She was cut off as the bed creaked closer to the giant machine until it enveloped her. Her knuckles went white as they balled into fists.

"Try not to move so much. The image is fuzzy." Desmond snapped, out of sight.

He scrolled through the different depths of images until he found a shadow. 'Good God…' There was an entire chunk of her brain missing; more importantly, it was the part that regulated how easily one was influenced by outside orders. "No wonder…" Those tribals had no sense of self preservation. They just attacked in mindless waves until they were gunned down.

'Mind control…that clever bastard…'

"So what does it say?" Percy had climbed out of the machine—Des had been too wrapped up in his own work to remember her.

He looked at her with suspicion. Anyone with average or lower intelligence would have been under total control by now. If she had been influenced, she would have likely killed him by now…unless…

"Nothing. Whatever it was, it looks to be harmless. Enjoy your new scar." He turned off the machine before she had a chance to get a good look.

Percy knew he was lying to her, but since she wasn't drooling on the carpet, she must be fine.

"Don't you have somewhere to be?" He asked, taking a bored tone as they walked back to the main hall.

Percy grabbed things absently from the tables they passed in the halls. An old book here, a pack of cigarettes there. 'Fucking scavvers…every one of them a damned kleptomaniac.'

"Do you not see me going? I want to get this over with as much as you do, Des. Pardon me for checking up on you."

"What?" Desmond asked incredulously.

Percy turned to him "Not a fan of the nickname? Fine, Mister Lockheart, I'll get right on bashing in some tribal skulls, sir. They screwed with my head, so now it's really personal."

"Listen, you lobotomized bitch, I'm paying you to scope the place out, not to run back here every time you get a splinter. I'm over two hundred years old: I don't need anyone's protection but my dogs."

"No," Percy smiled, packing up her bag and checking the magazine in her gun. "You said we both had something to gain from figuring out what these guys are up to. I haven't gained a damned thing expect this new haircut, and I'm not too fond of it. And if my memory is correct, the first time we met, you demanded I help you with these people, which is what got me into this whole mess in the first place."

The back of Desmond's hand came flying for her cheek, but Percy caught it before it connected, stepped out of the way, and twisted the wrist until it was thoroughly sprained.

Desmond growled in pain, but didn't call his dogs. He had a feeling they wouldn't do much against
"You've made your point." He snarled. "Now get the fuck out of here, and don't come back until you've got some real news."

Lockheart watched Percy through a telescope in the top most tower. She headed north just like she said she would, but that could be the mind control telling her to re-group.

Could she be trusted? Absolutely fucking not. No one could. But did he trust her enough for this damned business to get resolved? Perhaps. She certainly seemed to trust him plenty, traipsing around half naked. Romance may have disappeared with the bombs, but his standards certainly hadn't.

Shaking his head, he went back to check her brain scan, more specifically, the readings on her brain waves. For the most part, they were normal. But why?

Desmond knew why, he just didn't want to admit that such a bloodthirsty savage could possibly hold a candle to his own intelligence. There was no way to prove it with just a brain scan, but the fact that she seemed completely unaffected...either she had had a shoddy surgeon, or he would do well not to underestimate her further.

They let her back in easy enough, now that she was sporting a matching scar, but they still gave her odd looks because of the hair. Percy looked around the rundown church. Planters full of punga fruit were everywhere, and any power the tribals had was going straight to caring for and growing punga. The people who weren't tending to the plants were either eating the product, or gathering around small fires. They would throw sliced punga into the flames and huddle over the resulting smoke. But the fumes spread through the church, and it was clear that everyone was very high. There was a woman with fiery hair sitting on one of the few intact statues. Leaning languidly back, she was blowing into a small device.

'Music...' Percy leaned against the statue, looking up at her as she played. Musical instruments were so rare these days. And for one to still be in playable condition seemed like a miracle. The song was slow and low, and sounded as if she was breathing more than playing if it weren't for the tune.

"Is that a harmonica?" Percy asked when the song ended.

She smiled at Percy "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but I've never heard it called by that name before."

"I read about them in a book once." It was so rare to meet another well-read person. Percy just met her and she admired her.

The girl eased off the statue, the tribal clothing clinging to her skin a little tighter that the people around them. "And I read that line in a book once. Found it in a library before those damn Brotherhood tin cans started crowding everyone out. You the new girl? Matt was venting about you earlier—said you weren't playing by the rules. Here let's talk outside."

They walked along the church fence, the woman running her hands along the rough stone, examining the dust that came up. "My name is Nadine. I'm sorry for what you had to go through."

"How did you—"

"We all have to go through it as part of the ritual, but no one else here seems to remember anything about what happened...or what they saw."
"But you know I do?"

Nadine laughed. It was loud and coarse, but it made Percy smile alongside her. "Because you replied like that! You're the only clear headed one in this place. Everyone else is so loopy, even when they aren't stoned off their ass. I came here hoping to see a bit more of the world, but everyone here is crazy! I only stuck around so I could maybe figure out why they are acting so strange. But I can't figure it out…"

"A man I'm working with is trying to do the same thing. I'm Percy by the way."

"Can I meet him? You know, pool our notes."

Percy scoffed. "We can, but I doubt you would like him."

Nadine laughed again, unbolting the gate and pulling it closed behind them.

"No one's impossible."

Charon slouched, bloodied and tired in the snow, standing over the body of General Jingwei. He felt the occasional jolt through his body from where Jingwei had slashed into his skin. He had run out of shells for his gun and had lost his knife somewhere on the battlefield. Jingwei would have committed suicide. He knew he was beaten, but didn't want to go out by anyone else's hands. Charon was relieved. After all this time, maybe he wouldn't have to be the one to end it. He hated killing now. He hated violence. He hated war. He only wanted it to end. But he heard that damned woman's voice in his ear again. "Stop him, take that damned sword before he runs himself through!" And within an instant, he did. His hands bled and jolted in pain, but they remained clenched around Jingwei's throat.

"Good…now kill him."

"Why…" Charon's voice was hallow, horrified as his hands moved on their own.

Jingwei's eyes were filled with anger and rage as he scrambled against Charon's hold, but it was no use. His face grew red, then purple, then it went sideways as the woman in his ear said, "I said, kill him NOW, Charon! When I command, you obey!"

He stayed like that in the snow as soldiers moved around him. He was not commanded to move, and he had no desire to. For just a moment, he wanted to do nothing.

An hour later, a vertibird landed in the clearing before him. The woman in purple scrambled out of the craft, running towards him as her companion in blue struggled to keep up.

When she got to him, she slapped him across the face. "Don't you ever do something like that again! I know what you were doing; you were trying to delay the inevitable. But when I tell you to do something, you do it. No hesitation!"

"I am sorry." Charon said, refusing to look at her. It revolted him that she knew him so well. It felt like an invasion into his soul, not just his body.

The woman turned to her companion. "This is insane! You said it's ready now, I say we move on to the final stage."

She never bothered with him overhearing her words now. After all, she knew he couldn't do anything to her. She had him bound and chained and carried to the vertibird. With a bag over his
head, he was taken away.

Desmond couldn't believe what he was hearing. "I tell you to go get more information, and you get a girlfriend! I'll stick my dogs on you if you don't fucking get back out there!" Well, she probably wasn't under any mind control at least, but she had been getting on his last nerve since the moment he had the displeasure of meeting her.

"Why didn't you show me the brain scans? Those tribals are seriously messed up in the head." Percy leaned against the table, cleaning her gun. One of Desmond's guard dogs came up to her and sniffed at her bag. She pulled out a can of cram, opened it, and petted him behind the ears as he ate. Desmond bristled at this.

"They've done something to your head. I wanted to make sure you weren't under someone else's control."

"Someone else's? Let's get a few things straight, you porn-stashed prick! I'm not under your control—or anyone else's for that matter—I don't work for you, and I sure as hell won't stand by as you ridicule me every time I step through the door! Let's not forget you asked for my help, and the only reason I'm still here is because they decided to make it personal by cutting open my head! Nadine has more experience with those tribals than I do, so why waste time sending me out if she's here with all the information that I might not even be able to get?"

Percy stomped out of the room and made for the stairs. Desmond followed her to the railing. "Where the hell are you going now?"

"To bed! I'm exhausted from running everywhere and doing your dirty work! Nadine is in the kitchen; go introduce yourself and for fuck's sake, play nice!"

Desmond straightened his tie as he entered the kitchen. It did not escape him that Geri had followed Percy up to bed, wagging its tail. 'Traitor.' He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Nadine. She was leaning against the counter, reading one of Percy's books and sipping a cherry nuka-cola. She looked up as he entered. She smiled at him with a mouth full of drink, but he wasn't looking at her face. Rolls...she had rolls. His eyes drifted down that beautiful belly of hers, down the ass spilling slightly over the stool she was sitting on to the thighs clenched together from her crossed ankles.

"Howdy partner! You must be Percy's boss. Boy, did she have a lot to say about you!"

Desmond's eyes shot back to her face. Then her hair. He had seen that hair before. He had seen her before. She had been nosing around the mansion grounds a few weeks ago. He hadn't gotten a good look at her at the time, but he wished he had. Filling his lungs with much needed air, he strode over to the bar. "I doubt she did me much justice. Although," leaning in casually, he smirked, "she had nothing but kind words in regards to yourself. But I'd say she's done no one justice today. You must be Nadine."

Nadine nearly snorted cherry cola out her nose, but blushed all the same. Desmond liked that color on her. He wanted to see more of it. "And you must be that 'Porn-stashed Prick' I heard her yelling at earlier."

Desmond clenched his knuckles, but the smile stayed in place. "We've both been a little stressed over recent circumstances, saying things we wouldn't normally say."

"Which is why we should get this business sorted out sooner rather than later, huh?" Nadine jumped
from the stool, not wholly oblivious to his attention.

"Percy said you had done some brain scans?"

"Yes that's it!" Nadine leaned against him as she pointed at the screen. "That bastard! They stole from my head too, then?"

If it had not been for the delicious warmth on his arm, he would had burned with hate for her twisted assailant. How dare they harm even a single hair on this gorgeous woman's head?

"I didn't see a scar on you." Desmond turned to her, looking hard at her hairline. The gold that stopped at her ear. It looked so soft, he couldn't help put run a hand against it...to help look for the scar, of course. He found a tiny indent in her skin, about the length of a toothpick, running up and disappearing into her hair.

"I had a few stimpacks with me when I came too." She breathed. His fingers felt so good. She could stare at those eyes of his for hours. Nadine had never seen a ghoul with so much hair before. She briefly wondered how that mustache would feel against her skin. But she shook herself, turning back to the terminal.

"So you think this part of the brain affects how easily people are influenced to do things?"

Desmond cleared his throat, following suit. "Yes, and my theory is that those tribals are being controlled by something akin to radio waves. The frequency travels far, but can go unnoticed by the unassisted ear."

He showed her a paper tape with two lines. "There are always sound frequencies occurring that we can't pick up, but these have a pattern. See?"

Nadine felt a shiver down her spine. "How do you know Percy and I aren't being controlled?"

"I wondered that when Ms. Carter first came back, but from what I've seen, and what you have observed about the tribals during your time with them, I think the control only works on a primitive level: Increasing aggression towards one or more targets. And memory loss. If you and Percy had been under someone's control you would have probably either killed me already, or had no recollection of any sort of spore based hallucination."

Nadine shuddered to think of her own vision. Trapped, nowhere to go, no future, no past. No exits. Desmond watched her. He had never cared for freckles before, especially ones so numerous. But the way they caught the light on Nadine's face was quite lovely.

"Not to mention—and this was just my initial theory, but it seems to hold water—that level of control would only work on weaker minds, and yours seems anything but, my dear."

Nadine had been around, and she picked up what he was laying down. Smiling, she bit her lip and pressed a little closer. "But how can you be sure…Mister Lockheart?"

He smirked, moving his knee between her legs until she was leaning against the desk. Running his fingers against the bare skin at her hip he whispered into her ear.

"I could run another test...or two...or three."

Nadine blushed as she felt Desmond's mustache move down her neck as he pressed a kiss against her
collarbone. His fingers dragged along her top, loosening the wrappings on her chest.

"Mmm, Right there…" Nadine climbed a little farther onto the desk, dragging one leg up and around his waist to pull him in closer. She grabbed his tie in one hand, pulling him up for a proper kiss as her other hand made quick work of his belt. Desmond pulled away to shuck off his jacket. "Gorgeous, where have you been all my life?"

"Travelling the country looking for you, handsome."

He leered, tugging off her pants and giving her bare ass a nice squeeze.

"So, any of those filthy tribals acting especially odd?" the last word was punctuated with a grunt as he entered her in one thrust. Nadine grabbed for his collar, moaning into his ear, driving him crazy.

"They're already—ah!—a cultist drug farm, hard to get much stranger than that."

Desmond pulled one leg over his shoulder, tipping her back until he was the one in control of her balance. "Try, sweetheart."

"Ohhh…Jackson, the head guy, likes to go on these spirit walks. I was gonna follow him before Percy found meEEE!" Nadine squealed, clutching the desk with one hand and running her fingers through Desmond's hair with the other.

"Good girl..." He growled out, pounding into her as he took a pert nipple between his teeth.

"Yes, yes, Des, I'm so close! If you send Percy to follow him, she'll probably find whose behind all this." She moaned, head falling back in rapture as she felt her release building up.

Desmond watched smugly as she shook apart in his arms, groaning his name. He committed every jiggle and shake of that warm flesh to memory before pulling out and spilling all over Calvert's once expensive Persian rug.

"You could have done it inside me, I don't mind." Nadine stretched languidly across the desk before hopping up, avoiding the mess on the floor.

"Trust me, I get more pleasure out of it this way." Desmond grabbed his handkerchief, wiping himself off before passing it to her. He watched a bead of sweat roll down her neck before disappearing into her cleavage as he re-dressed himself. He had never been more jealous of the liquid state in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Did y'all like that pairing? Yes, No, Maybe?

Chapters are going to be a little longer up to 34, just so that things don't feel rushed.

Also let me know what you think of the backstory I've given Charon so far!
Percy woke up to a heavy weight on her chest, and squinting one eye open, she saw Geri drooling and fast asleep. Letting her head fall back with a sigh, she began scratching absentmindedly behind Geri’s ear. She thought about where she would go after all this. Where could she go? She might stay in Calvert mansion for a few months until the food stores ran out, but that sounded boring. She could always go back to D.C., but that felt like giving up. She had travelled out all this way only to go crawling back? Percy missed Carol, and Greta, and Gob and Nova. She hadn’t seen Gob in forever! She hadn’t been to Megaton in forever. They probably only remembered her as being weak and broken…was she any better now?

‘Yes…much better now.’ Her scars were healing, even if they were still clearly visible. She didn’t drink anymore, even if she really wanted to. She missed her dad, even though she really didn’t want to. Going back to the vaults had only reminded her of how close they had been when she was young. They hadn’t always seen eye to eye, but he raised her, and protected her when she got into trouble—that had to mean something, right? How could he have just left her? No note, no sign, nothing to tell her why or where.

‘Why am I thinking of this now? It’s been months. No one has seen or heard of him. He could be dead too…’

A knot formed in her throat. No, not too…he couldn’t be dead, neither of them. They were both stronger than that…weren’t they?

Shaking her head, she gently nudged Geri off her chest so she could get up. Percy checked her pip-boy. She had slept for three hours. Not much, but it was enough.

Re-dressing in her tribal disguise, she walked barefoot down the stairs to Desmond’s study. The rugs lining the halls were stiff with dirt and age, and Percy’s toes were still sensitive from sleep.

“Desmond?” she called, knocking on the door. She heard rustling and knocking around before Desmond answered. “About time you dragged yourself out of bed. Get in here, I have news.”

He was sitting at his desk, looking at old papers and photo albums. Lockheart looked a little exasperated when she walked in, but she chalked up to his temper.

“So? Were you and Nadine able to make sense of any of this?”

“Oh, we straightened things out,” He smirked, but went back to his papers. “Jackson, the leader of those tribals, apparently he goes on regular spirit walks. Tail him and see what he’s up to.”

“Please?”

Desmond looked annoyed, opening his mouth, he was about to tell her off when he stiffened. He closed his mouth, straightening his glasses. “Please go do this for me, Ms. Carter. If you run into
trouble, you’re more likely to handle danger without any hiccups. I…trust you to get the job done. Hurry back when you find out who’s behind this.”

Percy was floored. “Well look at you, an honest to God request; please and everything!”

She grinned, turning on her heel waving behind her. “I’ll probably be back by nightfall with a few molerat steaks and we can have a feast.” She ran back up the stairs to grab her things. No point in pretending to be a tribal now.

“Charming.” Desmond grimaced, but turned his attention to his lap as soon as he heard the front door close behind her.

“You little minx. Having fun down there?”

Nadine smiled up at him, lips hollowing out around his throbbing cock as she took him deeper.

Leaning his head back, Desmond ran a hand through her hair, gently thrusting his hips.

She licked his tip before kissing her way to his sack. “Tell me about yourself,” she muttered, before taking a ball in her mouth and sucking gently. “What kind of accent is that? Do you travel often?”

“Oh yes…” Desmond felt his knees begin to shake. “All over the world, pet. I’m a man of great power,” his hips bucked involuntarily, but Nadine didn’t seem to mind. She closed her eyes and focused on the task at hand.

“Was before the war, and still am. And I’m not alone. There are still a handful of my rivals out there. And I plan to outlast every single one of them.”

A growl escaped his throat as she stopped her ministrations, making her way teasingly into his lap.

“I read that other places had other languages; can you speak some to me?”

“Maybe if you can get it out of me.”

Nadine beamed, aligning his cock with her opening. The sun was shining into her eyes, and he realized her eyes were so deep a brown, they were practically red.

“Mochiron gengo wa hanasu.”

“Yes…” She sighed, lowering herself onto his length with agonizing slowness.

“Voulez-vous me doute jamais? Por qué confiar en m?’”

She began rocking her hips, whimpering as the course skin of his belly rubbed against her clit.

“Sie sind so unterschiedlich. Così rotondo, così bella.”

She kissed from his ear to his upper lip, paying special attention to his mustache without stopping his flow of speech.

“’Ana la ‘aetaqid ‘annani sawf tasmah ‘abadaan tadhhab. Nǐ hūi gēn wǒ dào tiānyâhâijiǎo? Budu li ya protiv, yesli vy sdelali?”

As each new language passed through his lips, Nadine’s thrusts became more urgent, her eyes falling shut as she listened in ecstasy. Desmond’s eyes glazed over as he watched her hips—those lovely hips—and felt that delicious weight across his legs. His voice got quieter and quieter as he was
mesmerized by her entire being. Then he felt that fire; that penetrating all-encompassing flame. He grabbed her hips with new fervor. Driving his hips to meet hers, he grabbed the back of her neck, fingers tangling in that golden red hair, pulling her close. She swallowed his moans, teeth crashing, lips dragging, tongues dancing.

Nadine’s fingers grew white against his shoulders and she rutted desperately against him, moans becoming whimpers, and whimpers becoming a high pitched keen as he rubbed furiously against her clit.

“Ohhhh De—” She wailed, clenching around him so tight Desmond saw white. His sight cleared with her brushing the hair away from her eyes. She grinned dazedly down at him. Settling on his lap, head resting against his shoulder, breath ghosting across his ear. “Hope you don’t mind if I stay here for a bit, but I don’t think I could move if I tried.”

He sighed, but there was little annoyance behind it. Glancing to his desk, Desmond made sure there was a gun within hand's reach in case things went south.

What was this girl’s angle? There didn’t seem to be one. But she was no fool, so surely there was something she was using him for. Feeling his eyes grow heavy, Desmond allowed himself to nod off.

Charon would have been happy to get an empty cell without even a place to piss. He would have been overjoyed to have a cell filled with roaches, rats, and no light. But he did not get any of this. During the time he was taken from Anchorage, Canada, he was gagged with noise cancelling headphones taped against his head and a mask covering his eyes. From there he felt them wrap his arms and legs so he couldn’t feel anything. He was thrown into what felt horribly similar to a casket. As the drugs the woman had given him wore off, he began to scream. He would scream through his gag until he ran out of breath, then scream some more. He struggled, against the walls of his box, slamming his feet against the sides. Every time he moved around too much, a white hot electrical current flashed through his system.

He didn’t know how long he was in that box. He had no way of knowing. But he continued slamming against the sides, if for nothing else than to feel something—even if it was intense pain. He thought of his brothers, and his mother, and even that bastard of a father who “died at war”. He missed all of them. The lack of drugs in his system finally allowed him to mourn. He mourned for the months his mother had spent in pain as thyroid cancer wasted her away into a hallow husk. Until she refused to let him use their money to pay for her treatments. Until she waved him off to work, and his brothers to school, and wasn’t home when they returned. He mourned his brothers, who never finished school, whose lives were almost ruined by a group of kidnappers, and when it mattered most, he still wasn’t able to do right by them. He failed them as a brother and now they were long dead. He mourned his father, who until the last moment he could remember, had been a good man. Who knows...maybe he did die in the war. There was no telling now.

He didn’t know how long it had been, but he didn’t care. He was jostled and dragged. Clamped to something hard and metal. The wrappings were removed and his eyes were blinded with light as his mask was the last think to be taken away.

“There we go, sweetheart.” The woman smiled up at him. They were in the middle of a large domed building. They were alone and Charon noticed he was completely naked before her.

“Are you happy with yourself?” She asked demurely, running a finger along his chest.
“Why?” He resisted the urge to shiver against that long polished finger.


“I’m going to miss working with you, Charon. I have a feeling you’d be my greatest accomplishment.” She moved to a rolling counter nearby, grabbing a petri dish. One of many. It was filled with microscopic specks suspended in gel. There was a container next to the counter filled with still more. She looked at them before turning to admire him once more.

"Such a perfect physique. Better than any of the test subjects I’ve been given to play with before."

Taking a syringe from the table, she walked back to him.

“Do you know what this is?”

“More of your damned drugs?”

“Oh, a foul mouth! I’m glad to see it’s all out of your system—it would have made the next few tests flawed and inaccurate. No, this is just something to put you out for a few hours. By then the procedure will be complete! You will be America’s greatest solder, and with enough funding, I expect to see thousands of men like you fighting for our country.” She slid the needle into his arm and everything went black.

She couldn’t help but admire his body as he went limp. Even scarred and battle-marred, he was quite handsome. A little young for her, but in another world, she would have been happy to make him her lover.

“Are you done toying with this one yet?”

Oliver was hauling a giant machine towards her. It had many arms with long needle-thin rods.

“Don’t say that!” Dolores pouted. “His name is Charon! Have a little respect! He’s the beginning of a whole new breed of super-solder, after all.”

She began turning a crank until Charon’s body was horizontally level and his arms were outstretched on either side. Leaving Oliver to set up the equipment, Dolores quickly changed into a pair of pale purple scrubs and matching gloves.

She grabbed a scalpel from the counter, practically skipping in anticipation.

“You don’t need to make the incisions, you know; the machine has a ninety-nine point nine nine percent accuracy rate.” He grumbled.

“I know, but the nano-bots were your idea and mine was inserting them inside the soldiers’ muscles. At least let me have a little fun.”

“I bet you’ve had plenty fun with this one. Don’t you have any integrity, Dolores?”

“Not a bit. But you have my word I didn’t touch Charon in any sexual way. Affectionate, sure, but how could I not? He’s my most very favorite teddy bear.” She ran a hand down his slack cheek.

Oliver shivered, but didn’t comment. He let her work and turned to map out the insertion coordinates. The machine—his own invention—did most of the work, but mapping out where each nano-bot would go was something only he could to.
“Alright,” she pinned back the last piece of skin, and Charon’s muscular structure was completely exposed. “Your turn.”

“Make sure to put them in deep enough so that control of an arm is lost due to a major injury.” Dolores nagged as she loaded yet another petri dish into the machine.

“I know, I know…” He muttered. Over ten thousand individual nano-bots. Oliver glanced to where Dolores was now printing out Charon’s “contract.” He had scoffed when she first called it that. Contract implied Charon had signed and agreed to any of this. Oliver noticed a bandage on her arm. “Where’d you get that?”

“Just now. I’m adding some of my own DNA as a failsafe. The contract may pass from one holder to another, but none of them will be able to command him to harm me. I’m not an idiot.”

“How many holders do you think he’ll have?” He resisted the urge to shudder. All that blood on one piece of paper? So unsanitary!

“Who knows…?” She mused, blowing on the paper until the ink dried. “Truly ingenious, O’, you’ve really outdone yourself this time.”

“Don’t call me that…” Oliver blushed, turning back to his work.

“After all that, I could really use a snack. You interrupted me before I could get a good meal earlier.” Nadine yawned, easing off of him and grabbing for the desk when she nearly lost her balance.

He smirked, buttoning his pants and adjusting his glasses. “I’ll join you. I love to see girls eat.”

She winked him. “The distraction was worth it, anyway.”

She re-buttoned the yellow sun dress he had found for her in one of the many bedrooms in the mansion.

He was glad it was relatively clean. It helped him forget that the world had burned around his ears, even for just a moment.

He walked behind her as she skipped to the kitchen. His eyes never left her ass, even when she turned back to him.

“Devilled eggs or Dandy Apples?”

“Whatever you want, I’m not hungry.”

Hopping on the counter, she grabbed a few packages of apples from the cabinet.

Desmond pulled a stool near the counter, allowing his legs to stretch.

He drank from his personal flask as she ate with one leg lazily resting on his shoulder. What a view. Desmond idly ran a finger up and down her inner thigh.

“Hungry already?” She asked raising an eyebrow.

“What is a starving man to do when such a feast is laid before him?” He returned planting a kiss on
her knee.

Her hums of pleasure turned needy as he got closer to his prize. He was a gentleman after all; the least he could do was return her earlier favor.

Her fingers stroked his hair as he worked.

Desmond ignored the low rumbling he heard coming from somewhere else in the house. Probably just Geri and Freki roughhousing.

“Des...” God, he loved to hear her call him that.

“Desmond...” Her voice sounded a little more strained, he looked up as her fingers began pulling urgently on his hair. “Patience, lov—” Nadine’s eyes were screwed shut and she looked in pain.

“Shit! Desmond, he’s in my mind! Someone’s in my mind!”

Desmond jumped up from his chair, whistling for his dogs. Taking her shoulders, he shook her

“What are you talking about? What is he telling you?!”

Nadine struggled in his grasp, trying to get away. “He wants me to kill you! I won’t! I won’t do it!”

He heard the front doors crashed open, then the yelp of his dogs... damn they were in trouble. He dragged Nadine with him down the stairs, shotgun in hand. The damned tribals were everywhere! He released Nadine’s hand. “Run for my office, now!”

She covered her head, clearly still in pain from the voice raging in her head.

Desmond fired blast after blast into the tribals’ chests. He saw his dogs fall, one after the other by tribal axes. Cursing, he ran after Nadine, barring the doors to his office behind him, pulling the carpet out of the way, he began inputting the panic room passcode.

The door opened with a hiss. He turned to Nadine, curled in a corner. “What are you waiting for? Get in!”

She shook her head, eyes clenched shut. “No! Go without me, I don’t want to hurt you—I don’t want you to have to kill me!”

Desmond didn’t have time for this. He shot her full of Med-x before catching her limp form.

Calvert! That bastard! He knew that madman was behind all of this. Neuroscience? Why didn’t he think of it before?

As soon as they were safe in the panic room, he didn’t hesitate to detonate the C-4 he had stored in the walls. The room shook, but they were safe, for now.

An hour later, he heard Percy slamming her fist against the hatch door. “Desmond, you fucking better still be alive!” He let her in. She was covered in blood, some of it hers.

“What happened?” he asked shortly.

“That Calvert guy. He’s behind everything. His tribal minions were setting up a signal beacon on the boardwalk. He was going to try to spread his mind control across the entire east coast! I jammed the frequency though. Better, I know where he is.” She stopped to catch her breath, noticing Nadine for the first time. Desmond had laid her on a cot as soon as he knew they were safe.
“Where are Freki and Geri?”

“Where do you think? Those bastards killed my dogs!”

Percy watched him gather ammo and stims. He was already dressed in combat armor.

He pointed to the computer terminals in one corner. “I’ve found where that fucker is hiding. Help me take care of him, and you can have whatever we find. But Calvert is mine.”

“What about Nadine?” Percy took the stims he passed to her before strapping on a helmet and armor, herself.

“She’ll be out for a while, but she’s fine. Are you coming or not?” Desmond was completely calm, and it scared her a little.

She watched him scribble a note, leaving it for Nadine.

Desmond was a man possessed. Percy finally got to see him in a fight and it was truly a sight to behold. She had his back as he hacked computer terminals, shutting down turrets and tossing pulse grenades until any robotic foes were rendered useless. He was accurate, efficient, and deadly. When they finally came upon Calvert, Desmond wasn’t even fazed to see his foe was nothing more than a brain suspended in a giant aquarium of plasma, he simply shot until the glass broke and the brain was splattered across the floor. He couldn’t hear Calvert’s voice in his head after all, demanding that Percy save him before begging for mercy. He didn’t hear Calvert’s screams get cut short shortly after the glass broke.

She watched as he stomped relentlessly on Calvert’s brain, swearing and cursing about his dead dogs, Nadine, and things a long time coming. Percy didn’t turn away, but watches him until there is hardly anything left of Calvert.

After he’s done, Desmond looks up, as if just noticing her. "What the hell are you still doing here? There’s a store room down the hall: it’s a Scavver’s wet dream. I’m sure it’s more than enough to compensate for your troubles."

He brushed past her, following the cables that once connected Calvert to a vast laboratory. All his notes, every record right until he died. It was all here. Desmond would have been overjoyed if not for the circumstances that led to his victory.

"What, after all this? You can just wave me off. It’s done, Desmond. Shouldn't we go get Nadine? What if she wakes up and we aren't there?" Desmond paused. He was actually surprised that he agreed with her. Nadine was upset enough as it was. She would be relieved to know that Calvert is dead.

He followed Percy into the store rooms, helping her carry some of it. This rival had been particularly trying. And yet he wasn’t relieved that he could strike another name off the list…not quite. He was tired but also restless, and he had a feeling Percy felt the same. Her shoulders were tense, and she was slow to take up any new weapon before packing it away in her bag.

When they got back to the panic room, Nadine was nowhere to be found.

“No sign of a struggle.” Percy said, as if that would reassure him.
“Nothing seems stolen either.” He sneered, kicking a nearby empty water bottle. He wanted to do more than just kick a fucking water bottle, but throwing a tantrum wouldn’t change anything. Taking off his glasses, Desmond settled on the cot as Percy laid out a bed roll on the opposite corner. Rubbing what was left of the bridge of his nose as he took off his glasses, he asked “So what is the cold blooded killer going to do now that her job is done?”

Percy scoffed. “Says the man that stomped a brain into grey jelly just a few hours ago?”

She stretched, staring at the ceiling as her nerves settled. To have someone invade her mind like that had been…violating. Percy had been through a lot, but that was a totally different experience. One that she hoped to forget soon.

“I’ve been wondering about that for a while. When I came here, I was running away from my problems. Any now, there’s nothing for me here and I’ll probably go crawling back.” She rolled over to face him. “What do you do with your problems?”

Desmond laughed, a hollow, barking sort of laugh. “I shoot them in the face then piss on their corpses, what does it look like?” Percy just stared at him until he calmed down. “I chase them down and I get rid of them, because if I don’t they will find me. And I don’t want to be the one caught unawares. I going to give you some advice, killer. Running only delays the inevitable. Face whatever is coming for you, or have the decency to make it easier for them to put a bullet through your head.” With that he turned over, ending the conversation.

They trudged in silence towards the boardwalk. The locals stayed out of their way, and the tribals were nowhere to be found. The silence was palpable. Percy was still shaken from the night before, and Desmond was practically steaming. Not because Nadine had disappeared—no, he had expected that—but because she hadn’t done anything! He had expected her to steal like Percy, or drill him for information. But he had given away nothing of importance, and she had never asked anything of him. Desmond hated to admit, but she had been more than just a much needed shag. Percy was looking at him funny. “How the hell do you walk around in a three piece suit, and only get mud on your shoes?”

“Pardon me for having some sense of self awareness.” He snapped, lighting up a cigarette. They were coming to the docks, and Percy heard Tobar ringing the bell. She waved towards the figure in the wheel house.

“Where are you going after this, Desmond?”

“South. There’s an oil baron in the Texas commonwealth I need to put down.”

“What are you going to do when the last name is scratched off your list?”

He smiles wryly, thinking of one man in particular “I will live in the lap of luxury. Somewhere warm, but not so southern.”

They got close enough to hear the ferryman calling to them.

“About time you two showed up! Percy, There’s a man in the brig I think you’d like to talk to! And Desmond, I appreciate the note, but next time a gun or two would be more appreciated.”

He stopped in his tracks. He couldn’t help grin playing across his face as she ran up to them.
Throwing a wink at him, Nadine turned to face Percy. “So when I woke up alone,” she gave him another look, “I thought to myself: who on this God forsaken beach do we know who isn’t stoned off their ass, a local, and has connections to the tribals and the outside world?”

“Tobar…”

“Bing bing!”

“I’m going to kick his ass.” Percy zeroed in on the boat, stalking down the docks.

“Why didn’t you stay in the panic room? Percy and I had everything under control.” They followed after her, but kept their distance.

“I wanted to be useful. I didn’t trust myself you help you take out Calvert, but I had to do something. And,” Nadine kicked a piece of trach into the water. “If I have a boat, I can travel anywhere. If you’d like, I can travel with you.” She refused to look at him. She let him make the first move as he did before. Nadine leaned into him as Desmond wrapped his arm around her waist.

Tobar was sweating bullets. Nadine had had the presence of mind to tie him up, but the rope was chafing his wrists something awful. He glared at the door as it finally opened. “You fucking—oh, it’s the other bitch. Come to finish the job?”

“You’re a sick motherfucker, you know that? What did you even stand to gain, helping Calvert?”

“We all have our little trophies, mine are just a little more medical in nature. What is an ear or a finger compared to stealing from the mind? Why, when you were under, you should have heard some of the things that came out of your mouth!” He nodded to the shelf full of jars in the corner. “Yours is the one with the red cap. Even in your sleep, you wouldn’t stop babbling about this Burke guy. What is he, your dead lover?” Her fist connected with his mouth and Tobar fell to the side, still bond to the chair. Laughing, he spit a tooth at her face.

“Who was Charon? Was he your rebound fuck?” Her fist crushed his nose, but he wouldn’t stop laughing.

“See? You condemn me for keeping a few trophies, but the kicker is—” Percy hauled him up by the collar, blow after blow; She couldn’t stop herself.

“You’ve probably killed more than me! And I’m not just talking raiders! You’ve probably fooled yourself into thinking you’re a hero, haven’t you?!”

Screaming, she throwing him against the wall. The chair breaks from under him and her heel is on his throat, gun leveled at his head. “Shut your damn mouth! I didn’t mutilate hundreds of people for the hell of it! I don’t keep body parts in jars!”

He opened his mouth to say something else, but three shots rang through the small room and he said no more.

Chapter End Notes
Blame google translate for any weird dialogue of Desmond's, but I couldn't resist!
Her hands were shaking as the pistol clattered to the floor, and Percy was quick to follow. She examined her shaking hands. Tobar’s blood and her own was mixing where she had cut herself on his face. She really was a monster wasn’t she? It didn’t matter what good she did, actions like this negated all of that.

But that’s just how the world was, wasn’t it?

That didn’t mean she had to be.

But could she survive if she didn’t fight back?

What would she be if she did indeed survive?

After a week at sea, Percy was thoroughly aware of Desmond and Nadine’s relationship. There was only so much you could attribute to the motion of the ocean, after all. Tobar’s body had been tossed over the edge halfway through their trip, along with the brains of his past victims. All of them except for Percy’s—she couldn’t bring herself to get rid of it. As they neared the docks in the capital wasteland, Nadine passed her a letter. “Will you give this to my mom? I love her, but there’s no way I’m going back.”

“Not even a goodbye in person?” Percy took the note, looking uncomfortable.

“I’ve always sucked at goodbyes, but I don’t want her to worry.” Nadine rubbed at a hickey on her neck. She left to help Desmond secure the boat to the docks.

She exchanged her goodbyes and Desmond gave her a firm handshake. “Remember Carter, take care of your problems before they take care of you.”

“Right… take care, you two.” She gave him a nod, but didn’t smile.

She trudged the coast north for the day until she got to Grandma Sparkles diner by nightfall. Nadine’s mother was there, and Percy was there to hold her while she sobbed. “I just wish she would tell me herself.” She dabbed at her eyes.

“What’s your name? I never got it last time.” Percy passed her some water and she drank it up eagerly.

“Catherine…and you?”

“Percy. Catherine was my mom’s name.”

“Uncanny,” Catherine hiccupped “And your father?”

“James.”

“And what happened to them?”

“Mom’s…she died when I was born. And I don’t know where my dad is. He left a while ago.”
That only made her sob more. “Why can’t families just stick together?” She moaned.

The rusted metal groaned as she pushed Megaton’s gate closed. That was one thing she didn’t miss about this place. She rifled through her bag. She couldn’t have left her key in underworld, she always kept it with her. Percy felt a small tap on her shoulder. “Excuse me?” She turned.

A woman was standing before her, a bit too close for comfort.

“Um, you’re Percy, right? The radio’s been going crazy over you these past couple weeks. No one’s seen or heard of you. I—just wanted to say I’m glad you back. People around here feel a lot safer when someone like you is around.” She was clutching five stimpacks in her palms.

She presented them to Percy before running off. Feeling guilty, Percy set them on the table inside. She had plenty of first aid, and stims were so expensive. And she didn’t feel like she deserved them. What had she done for Megaton, really? Decommissioned a bomb and taken up a sporadic residence.

She was surprised to see that nothing had been stolen while she was gone. Nothing she would miss, anyway. Percy looked up the stairs, but didn’t go up. Setting her pack down, she changed into loose clothes.

Gob stretched his tired limbs, smiling at Nova as she leaned against the bar. “Another round of beers, sweetheart; that caravan might end up drinking us dry.” She passed their caps to him and he gave her the drinks. It was so rare to see a ghoul caravan so far west, since most ghoul settlements stuck to the D.C. area. But here they were, and with a smoothskin guard even. The radio was blaring GNR and the group had begun singing loud and off key to the songs. None of them were pre-war, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t enjoy old world tunes. A crowd entered the bar in a rush and huddled in front of the counter for a drink.

“…and one nuka-cola over here please?” a voice cut through the rest and Gob made a face.

“Sure we got soda, but don’t you want something mixed with it, smoothie?” he popped the lid and was about to pass it when he did a double-take. Red hair, pale skin, “Percy!” He couldn’t believe his eyes. “It’s been ages!”

Percy smiled shyly, taking her drink. “Yeah…sorry about that, I got held up in D.C. for a while, then I did some travelling.”

Nova grabbed her from behind after elbowing through the crowd, pulling her in for a bear hug. “It’s been too long, Hun! The radio hasn’t said a thing about you in forever! Where have you been?”

“Travelling, apparently.” Gob quipped, but he was happy to see her. Happy? He was overjoyed. But… “Where’s Charon?”

Percy stilled, looking away. “We… parted ways…shortly after we got to Underworld.”

Gob clenched his fist against the bar. “That…”

“Gob, no,”
“NO! That bastard was supposed to help her! First he dumps her on us, then he just leaves her with Carol? What kind of asshole does that?”

“Gob!” Nova hissed, but Percy pushed away from her, grabbing her drink. Taking a deep breath, she counted to ten in her head before speaking up. “I appreciate you for taking care of me then. I was in a bad place. I’m also thankful to Charon doing what he could. But I don’t own him—not anymore. So…if he wanted to leave…he had every right to.”

She gave a weak smile. “It’s been a long walk back, I’m gonna sit over there.”

She elbowed her way through the crowd. Luckily it was too loud in the place for Gob’s outburst to disturb the rest of the bar. Percy moved to the side room, easing into the comfy armchair across from the caravan group.

“So this guy over here! He and Sydney are wandering the wastes like a couple of jackoffs until they wander themselves right to Paradise Fall’s front doors. Smooth talker over here gets them in—just to see what’s up with the place!”

The group howls with laughter, and more people gather.

“So of course neither one of them are too keen on slavery, but they can’t start firing because their surrounded by heavily armed sons-o-bitch slavers. So, buddy here is getting the slaves to hide indoors and schmoozing big man Eulogy Jones while his crazy partner is laying mines around the entire strip mall. How did she even sneak all that shit in?”

“I’m telling you man, Syd’ is beast!”

‘Butch??’

Percy pushed her way through the crowd, stumbling against the caravan’s table as she finally got through.

“Woah, Percy!” Butch grabbed his drink as the table shook violently and put his other arm around the startled girl next to him.

“Long time no see!” She panted, “Caravan, huh? Rivet city not good enough?”

Butch scoffed, taking a swig of his drink. “Those assholes were bleeding me dry. What happened to your hair?”

“Like it? You should see the guy that gave it to me!” She laughed, running a hand through it. The ends were just starting to curl slightly. She settled down to drink her soda with them. Butch went into more detail about how, after leaving for Underworld, he met Sydney.

“I stayed in underworld for all of two days before she got restless. We heard about Paradise Falls over the radio. It did take a little asking around, but getting there was anything but accidental. You must have heard the interesting parts from Quinn. Yup, all the slaves were freed. Only one of them stuck around, though—whoa, hey! Clover, babe, we’re in public!” The woman Clover was nuzzling into his neck, her hand clearly nestling into his lap, despite the table hiding most people’s view. Butch was blushing all over, but he moved her hand from his pants, not before kissing one of her knuckles.

Anyway, Tulip was pretty pissed when Sydney and I got back, so she’s practically got her in a ball in chain now. Not that Syd ever had nothing against bondage!” The group around them hollered and whistled.
“So, what have you been up to, my fellow vaultie?” Butch’s cockiness had come back in full force, but Percy was happy to see him.

She told him and the caravan about her time in Point Lookout. She left out what she saw in her vision.

“Damn…” One of the caravan’s men spoke up, taking a drag from his cigarette, the smoke blowing and spreading across the middle of the table. “So that bastard cracks your head open and you cap ‘im?”

“Then dumped him over the side of the boat, yeah.” Percy pushed a drunk who was trying to pour some of his rum into her glass.

“That’s wasteland justice, right there. I woulda’ set him on fire and pissed on the flames.”

“I’m not too beat up about you never getting the chance.” The caravan laughed at that, some of them slapped her on the back good naturedly.

“So, Perse…Gob’s and the common house are all filled to capacity. Mind if Clover and I stay with you tonight? Must be plenty of room in that double decker of yours.”

“I’ll be waiting for you, Lover.” Clover’s finger’s traced along Butch’s shoulders before she swayed up the stairs. The door closed with a quiet click.

“I know what your gonna say, Springtime; If you freed the rest of the slaves, why is Clover sticking with you?”

“Uh. I wasn’t going—”

“When I was distracting Eulogy, I knew what if Syd’ and I started anything, Clover would fight tooth and nail defending that asshole. You should have seen them, Percy! She was draped around him constantly. I got Jones to tell my why. She was brainwashed. She’s in love with whoever owns her, isn’t that sick? The other girl there didn’t give two shits about Jones, but…look I didn’t want to be forced to put a bullet in her head out of self-defense!”

“So you bought a slave.” Percy leaned into her seat, pressing her lips together and examining the faded pattern if the rug.

“I get why you’d judge me—I’m not too happy about it either—but I didn’t know what else to do.”

“I’m not judging you…well I am, but I get why you did it. You wanted to give her a better life, even if she might never be free.”

“Brainwashing fades eventually, right?” Butch traced the lip of his beer. “Come on, you’re the Brainiac…will she?…”

“Eventually, maybe.” Percy thought back to the psychology books she had read back in the vaults. “If you encourage individual thought and give positive reinforcement. But that takes time, and a whole lot of effort. What about Amata?”

“Screw Amata! I mean, someone else, not me. I’m done with her. She broke up with me and there’s no changing that. I see that now. And Clover…I can’t just get rid of her. I bought her so I gotta take
“Care of her, don’t I?”

“Come with me.” Percy jumped up, stretching and pacing as she let out a long breath. “I’ve decided I’m going to find my dad. Wherever he is, alive or dead, I want closure. I want to know why he left me behind, and made it so damn hard for me to find him in the first place. And I want you to come with me. You and Clover.”

“Why me? We were never friends in the vault. Our only connection was Amata, that’s why you dumped me in Rivet City.”

“I hate travelling alone.” There was really no other reason. Percy uncapped a water and drank as she fiddled with her pip-boy. They would have to go back to that same city. Surely Madison Li would know something. There had to be something she wasn’t sharing.

“I know you’re running with a caravan right now, but it was just an offer. Always good to have back-up, right?”

Butch looked over to the room where Clover was sleeping. The caravans gave him a steady cash flow, but it wasn’t the safest place for Clover, surrounded by a bunch of lonely guys.

“Alright, I’ll bite. I wanna see where the old fart ran off to, always. This was supposed to be our last stop before heading back to Canterbury commons, so it’s fine if I ditch now.”

Clover clung to his arm as they walked through the crowded halls. It wasn’t just that the walkway was so narrow, but there were just so many people! More than Clover had seen in a long time. With the slave trade there were plenty of people, but most of them had slave collars on and were easy to control. Here there were so many variables. Too many. At any moment someone could stab her lover in the back, and then where would she be? Clover didn’t even want to think about that. Percy stopped in front of the laboratory door.

“Ya gonna go in?”

“Yeah,” Percy began popping joints through her fingers, shoulders, back, and even hips. “All right…” She heaved the door oven and strode in. Madison was looking over a fresh batch of vegetables from her purified garden.

“Any luck, Maddie?”

“And what are you doing here?” She signed turning to the walking reminder of what she missed out on. “I thought I told you that he isn’t here. He left to work on that passion project of his. I told you went looking in another vault.”

“And don’t you think it’s a little odd that he’s been gone for months?”

“He was always a strange man,” She turned, trying to ignore Percy.

“Come on, Madison! My father leaves me in a vault where everyone—”

“Hey!” Butch protested from the top of the stairwell.

“Almost everyone was trying to kill me, He leaves me a vague note and expects me not to go looking for him? Can I not get a little closure over the massive fucking turn my life has taken??”
“No!!” Madison threw down her clipboard, fully turning to her. “You don’t! Because let me tell you, the world is fucking. People can stop caring—for no reason—and world keeps fucking spinning. So you can fall down and cry about it, or you can move on! Now get out of my lab.”

Butch followed her as she practically ran out of the lab.

“Hey, Perse, you giving up already?”

She laughed, taking a turn and jumping down a small flight of stairs.

“As if! Watch for guards.” She snarled, stopping at a door and began working at the lock. She was in in five seconds.

Clover peeked over Butch’s shoulder and whistled. “Wow honey, you’re almost as good with your fingers as Butchie over here.”

“Thanks, but I don’t even want to think about what you’re alluding to.” She began looking through the desk and chest of drawers.

“She’s hiding something. And if she’s a scientist, she probably keeps notes on everything. She knows where my dad is, but she just wants everyone to be as unhappy as she is.” Percy ranted, riffling through the papers on the desk. “Clover, did you used to hide things from Eulogy?”

“No honey, I never hid anything from him.”

“Ok, but if you did?”

“Well, I probably would have put it under the mattress.”

“Jackpot!” Percy grabbed three tapes from under the bed. “I knew it…that bitch!”

She popped the first holotape into her pip-boy.

We’re back at work after a full week of delays. Jefferson Memorial was a good place to set up the project—plenty of space and ready access to the water. The Brotherhood Soldiers were able to repair the sentry guns, much to my relief. I know Madison isn’t comfortable having them here, but there’s no denying that we’d be lost without them. We’re still waiting on the full analysis of the last three small-scale purification tests.
Catherine hasn’t been feeling well, and it’s slowing down our research. I don’t mind, but I can tell it’s bothering some of the others.

“All this time? In that memorial? Isn’t that just down the way?” Butch was incredulous.

“No, Madison said he was in a vault, but she didn’t tell me where. If anything, I’m likely to just find more of his breadcrumbs in Jefferson Memorial.”

They slipped out and re-locked the door with no one the wiser.

The wind blew as they trekked the sidewalk to the memorial.

“Say, Perse, don’t you think she had a point? Some people just leave. My dad did,”
“Oh, baby…” Clover crooned.

Percy shook her head. “No, people don’t just leave! There has to be a reason. We had history, he knew how bad the vaults were, and he only leaves behind a lousy note?!”

She opened fire on the super mutants patrolling the catwalk, and Butch set up his sniper rifle on a nearby boulder. Clover watched his back.

The memorial was a wreck.

“The muties sure did a number on this place.” Butch kicked at some rubble. They had cleared the mutants out, and were busy looking through the notes. James had definitely been here.

“Well I think these are it, There were a few more in the med-bay.”

Clover set the remaining holotapes on the floor between them. Butch was starting a fire in a nearby pot and opening cans of cram.

“Are you sure you wanna do this? You might not like what you hear. Maybe there was no good reason for him not taking you.” Butch passed her warm cram, but she shook her head.

“Even if there wasn’t, I need to know.”

Most of the tapes were just filled with technical babble about getting the pipes working and recoding software. In the fifth personal log:

…So one night, after half a bottle of scotch, I broke into the Overseer's office. It was easy enough to hack his console, gain access to the restricted files. Most of it was garbage: propaganda, spy reports, just plain rambling bullshit, really—

“See, I told you the Overseer was crazy!”

“Look, we can all agree you were right about a lot of shit, Brainiac, let’s just listen to the holotapes!”

..But there was one thing, one name that stood out amongst all the others... Dr. Stanislaus Braun. I knew of Braun's work, of course. He was a celebrity in his day. Vault-Tec's sorcerer-scientist, leaving his peers in awe of his technological wizardry. But it was in Vault 101 that night in the Overseer's office that I first learned of Braun's involvement in Vault-Tec's social preservation program, and his work on something called GECK: Garden of Eden Creation Kit.

Percy quickly switched to the next tape. James seemed to think that Braun had the secret to pure water, and was maybe even still alive.

“But where?” Clover passed her the last tape.

I'm off to Vault 112 to search for anything of Braun's that might help me get this purifier up and running. All I know is that it's West of some place called "Evergreen Mills," and it's well hidden in some sort of garage. But I'll find it, I have to. It's so close, but that's the story of Project Purity, isn't it? An eternity of "almost there's". Let's see if Braun has the missing puzzle piece.

Percy ejected the tape and turned it over. Sure enough: coordinates. (3, 5)

“Another vault?” Butch groaned, “I never want to see another vault door for the rest of my life!”
‘He’s been gone too long…He would have at least returned to the project…’

Something was wrong. Something was very wrong. Her father had never meant to stay away for so long.

“Tough, we’re headed out first thing tomorrow” Percy grabbed her bag and moved to another room. She wanted to give the two privacy, and the last thing she wanted was to overhear their private moments.

Percy settled into her sleeping back. There had been one last holotape in the pile. It didn’t seem to have anything to do with project purity; it was simply titled Better Days.

So much was running through her head. All that stuff on the first holotape, Dad really seemed to think he had been doing the right thing. But he knew what it was like in that place….

‘It’s so humid here…’ She fanned herself, looking at the last tape.

Percy played the holotape, if nothing else than to distract herself.

...that batch of tests was inconclusive, but Madison and I are convinced it's a problem with the secondary filtration system. We're going to re-calibrate the equipment and try again tomorrow, so that... James, please,

Percy sat up straight. That voice! She had never heard it before, but it was so familiar.

I'm trying to work. Now's not the time... So that's the next step. Assuming we get the results we need, we'll move on to... James! Stop! I need to finish these notes... We'll move on to diagnosing the issues with the radiation dampeners. That should... Ow! James! Now? We really shouldn't... Ha ha ha ha ha!

She felt tears in her eyes. That was the first time she had ever heard her mother’s voice. She suddenly felt so guilty. Dad had a life before; it was silly to come the realization so suddenly, it was so obvious. He had a life, and dreams…and love.

‘But all that’s gone now’ She had taken that all away, hadn’t she? No wonder he left without her… No wonder he was trying to fix Project Purity. After she grew up, there was nothing left for him in the vaults.

She let the tears fall, settling in for a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was posted a little later than usual but you can blame last minute exams on that!
“Oh, for the love of—this can’t be the place!” Butch angrily lit up a cigarette, passing it to Clover before starting one for himself.

“The tape did say it was well hidden…let’s at least look inside.” Percy hauled the door open. The place was full of mole rats, cockroaches, and Clover’s screams as soon as she saw them.

“Disgusting!” She screamed, firing off shots with frightening accuracy. The beasts were dead within seconds.

“Woah, Clov’, chill babe. Those guys weren’t gonna hurt ya’.” Butch wrapped his arm around her waist.

“I know…I just really hate pests!” She leaned into him, kissing his neck.

Percy groaned at the sight of the two and began looking along the walls. There was a hatch on the ground, but the terminal was busted to shit, so that wasn’t an option. There was something that looked like an old busted light switch. Some of the parts must have rushed over, but she finally got the lever to move. The door opened with a loud screech. As the stairs led deeper and deeper into the ground, with each new flight the dust and grime thinned out until there wasn’t a speck to be seen.

“Vault one-twelve…” Percy tried not to be impressed. The thick lead door even had a slight gleam. This place really hadn’t been touched since before the war.

They were greeted within seconds of entering the vault.

“Welcome to Vault one-one-two, Resident! According to sensors, you have arrived two-hundred and two point three years behind schedule.”

“Percy…What the hell is that?” Butch had never seen a robot like that before. There was a brain sticking out, and everything. And long clawed arms, and it moved on caterpillar tracks.

“A robo brain…I’ve seen them around…but it isn’t attacking us, so play cool.” She whispered.

She turned back to the bot. “Yeah, sorry about that! I got a bit lost coming here. Anyway, can you help me get settled in?”

“Please re-dress in your Vault-Tec issued Vault suit before proceeding. If you misplaced you suit, I am authorized to distribute a new one.”

It seemed to ignore Clover and Butch, but they stuck behind Percy just in case.

“You know, I did just that! Can’t keep track of anything these days.” Percy let out a nervous laugh. The robot gave her a vacuum sealed suit.

“Please proceed down the stairs to the main floor. Once dressed, you may enter your assigned Tranquility Lounger.”

They followed the bot into the main atrium. It was filled with thirteen pods.
“I’ve seen these before…” Percy examined one of the occupied pods. Despite being in stasis, the occupant was under high levels of stress. What was going on in this simulation? This wasn’t a battlefield, shouldn’t it be…tranquil?

“Perse’, I found him! Your old man!”

Percy was already changing into the vault suit.

“Are you sure you wanna go in, honey? They look awfully excited in there!” Clover was looking in another one.

“I’m sure. He’s gotta be pulled out from the inside. The simulation has to end somehow. How much buffout do we have between us?”

“Uh, about three bottles, why?”

“Last time I was in one of these, it completely wore me out. Dad has been in there for months.” ‘He might not even be able walk again…’

Percy looked into the empty pod. This wasn’t any time to hesitate and yet…If dad was stuck in the simulation, there’s no telling what she would be up against. Taking a deep breath, she climbed in and sealed the pod.

His panic finally subsided as he found Catherine working on the piping. One of primary intake pipes had blown, and rather than have one of the younger hands re-seal it, she—seven months pregnant—was using a welding iron in a cramped pipe, no bigger than five and a half feet in diameter!

“Cathy! What are you thinking?”

“Everyone else was busy!” She called, her voice metallic through the face guard.

James sat down next to her as she set down her equipment. “I know the brotherhood have been pressuring us for results, but you shouldn’t be pushing yourself!”

“I know, it’s just…I hate that I’m so slow now! I can’t work too hard, I’m eating all the food, and I can’t concentrate on a single thing! Can’t you take the baby for a while?” She joked, wiping the sweat from her brow.

“I would if I could; but since I can’t, why don’t you let me finish this? You can go work on the rotunda where it’s nice and cool. You were always better than me at coding. One of the guys hit a block in the software. Can you fix it?”

“I think I can,” Catherine grinned, leaning into his kiss. She felt his hand against her hair.

“I’ll miss it long…” James muttered against her lips.

“I told you it was too hard to manage with everything else on my plate. Besides, with all these hot flashes, I need a cool head.”

“Can’t I work in the memorial?” Catherine was exasperated, looking over the different charts and
numbers. They still hadn’t figured out an efficient way to filter the radiation out large scale. And what little they could filter, took too much energy.

“I’m sorry, Catherine; James was worried about you. With a month until you’re due, he doesn’t want to take any chances.”

Madison set down a dinner tray. Catherine liked her, but she knew about Madison’s feelings for her husband. They had a professional working relationship, but they weren’t friends by any stretch.

“Thanks anyway.”

She was getting weaker by the day…she loved the child, but she wished they would stop kicking just as she was trying to sleep.

“So what are you going to name them?” Madison sat against the bed, looking through her own notes.

“I always liked those names that could work for girls and boys, that way it fits no matter what they are. Jordan, Erin…but I’ve always had a soft spot for Manniah…If they’re a girl, I mean. I guess I have to decide before James gets a chance—he’s terrible with names!” She laughed.

“Catherine! She’s a girl! A beautiful baby girl!”

“Really? Oh James, let me see her, my baby…”

James was enraptured; she had his hair, but Catherine’s eyes, so brown and lovely.

“James…” Catherine felt her hands shaking, they were going numb. The machine alerted them to her plight.

“James…”

“Catherine!” He came back into her sight, blurry and distorted. She grabbed for his jacket.

“Please, make sure she’s safe, take care of her, James…”

“We both will! Catherine, stay with me!”

Catherine felt droplets of water on her face. ‘Why is it raining inside?…’

His voice faded out, she didn’t feel cold anymore. Everything was getting warm…a soft light filled her vision…

“Catherine!” James tried shaking her, but she was gone.

“James, the baby!” Madison tried calming her, but she was wailing uncontrollably.

James wiped his eyes. He took the little girl in his arms, holding her close.

One of the mothers in Rivet City was kind enough to donate milk, but the baby was still fussy.
“What had you thought about naming her” the woman asked, making light conversation.

“I haven’t the foggiest” James sighed, “Nothing seems to fit…”

She started crying again, and he had to take her back. James wondered if it was just colic, or maybe she missed her mother as much as he did.

“Selfish?? This is my child we’re talking about, Madison, my child! I’m sorry, I am. But what choice do I have?”

“Your child? You haven’t even named her yet! I don’t see why you can’t stay with us! Project Purity needs you! It needed both of you! Don’t abandon Catherine’s dream!”

“And leave her all alone in a strange vault!?"

“Better than abandoning all of humanity! The world needs fresh water, James.”

“The world, or you?”

Madison did a double-take.

“Face it, Madison, we’ve hit a road block ever since…ever since she was born. And right now, she is my priority.”

The damned Overseer finally let them in after a full day of screening. Their room was small, but at least it had two separate rooms for when she grew up. He set her in the cradle once he finally rocked her to sleep.

“Not so bad, huh? A little chilly maybe, but we’ll get used to that. A few decorations, some donated toys, and this place will feel…just like home.” He whispered into the cradle. She had already developed tiny freckles. He would miss them when they inevitably faded. Poor child would never know the sun. The dark auburn fuzz she was born with was already growing into a full head or hair.

“I’m sorry I had to take you underground…You would have loved the spring…Persephone.” He smiled at the name. It fit so perfectly. She would be his spring and summer now. His warmth and sunlight.

“Catherine would have hated that name.” He chuckled, wiping away a stray tear. “I’m sure she’ll forgive me.”

Percy got off the bench, and was immediately stuck with how out of scale everything was. Wait… she was even shorter now! Everything was monochrome too. She saw someone in the middle of the cul-de-sac. The girl whose face had flashed across her screen before she went under. The girl was talking to a dog, but all it did was growl at her. It never bit, however.

“Ah, you’re here! I’m Betty! I’m so very happy I have a new playmate.” There was something very odd about this girl, her eyes were dark with eyeshadow, and she had a sadistic smile.
“Where’s my dad?” Percy groaned internally as she heard her own voice. It was so high pitched!

“I was just starting to get bored!” She mused, ignoring Percy’s question. “Let’s play a game! If you make Timmy Neusbaum cry, then come back and we can play another game.”

“Why would I ever do that? That’s sick!”

“Because I said so! You’re new here, so you might not know how things are run, but they are run by me and you’ll do whatever I tell you to!”

“Just tell me where my dad is!”

“Only if you play with me!”

Percy bit her lip. “Fine.”

In the Anchorage simulation, she had to kill a lot of fake people to get out. But these people weren’t just part of the simulation. If Betty asked her to kill them, would they die in real life?

She walked the sidewalk, looking at the names on the houses. One of them didn’t have a name. The dog had followed her after she left Betty.

“Hey, boy…” She checked his tag. “Doc huh? Can you tell me where Timmy’s house is?”

He whined, leading her to one of the houses.

“Dithers’ residence? No, Neusbaum, boy!”

But he just kept barking at the door.

“Fine…seems like everyone is ordering me around these days.”

An old woman grabbed her as soon as she got inside. “You! You don’t belong here!”

“Uh, no.” Percy moved her hands off her shoulders. “Are you miss Dithers?”

“No here! No one is anyone here! We aren’t even here…”

“So you know too!...” Dithers looked so relieved. “You need to get to the failsafe! Braun locked me out, but you can find it—You have to!”

“Where’s the failsafe?”

Dithers grabbed her head. “No…” She clenched her teeth in pain. “He made me forget.”

Percy closed the door with a sigh, looking down at the dog. “Waited for me, huh? Dithers was a dead end. But she said something about a failsafe?”

The dog cocked his head. Was he…thinking? Did he really understand her?

He looked back at Betty, but she was watering her plants, facing the other way.

He walked back the other way down the street, as quiet as possible with his nails clicking on the sidewalk. His tail was even between his legs! “Poor boy,”
If looks could kill, this dog knew how to give one hell of a death glare.

Percy put her hands up in surrender. “Sorry, uh, Doc. Lead the way.”

They stopped in front of the abandoned house. He looked relieved when she opened the door, probably because he couldn’t do it himself.

The place was full of junk.

“Please tell me there’s more to this.”

Doc walked to the pitcher sitting on a nearby coffee table. He tapped it with his nose. It let out a light chime, but a false note followed. Percy tapped the radio. Chime, no false note. She tried each item in the room with lots of trial and error before finally,

“Radio, pitcher, creepy gnome, pitcher, cinder block, gnome, bottle…”

Doc started to bark frantically. A Giant computer had materialized against the far wall.

“Good boy…”

The terminal was full of records. Apparently Braun had used the simulation to torture its residents over and over, each time creating a new world. Each citizen dying and re-dying in new and more horrific ways.

“Christ…”

Doc growled but Percy made a face at him. “Oh hush! You left; I think I’m allowed to swear once and a while. Yes, I figured it out. You and I are gonna have a long talk once I get you out of here.”

He whined moving closer to the terminal.

“I think I found something. The failsafe seems to be this ‘Chinese Invasion’…Fucking General Chase! And it’s…it’s going to kill everyone! Well, everyone but us…We’re logged as guests.”

She rubbed her temple with the palm of her hand. “There has to be another way!”

Doc whined, shaking his head and putting his tail between his legs again.

“Fine…” There was no other option. These people had been suffering for two-hundred years; at this point, their only options would be to live in the simulation, or die as soon as they were exposed to the elements of the wastes. She input the order, looking out the window at the ensuing carnage.

She shut her eyes. “Nope, don’t want to see that.” She slid against the wall, covering her ears waiting for it to pass. Percy felt pressure on her knee.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” She asked incredulously, pushing his head away. She went back to covering her ears, but Doc nudged her again, this time more insistently.

“It’s done then…”

The cul-de-sac was empty, all except for Betty.

“Braun!” Percy snarled, pushing her against a tree.

“Do you realize what you’ve done?” Braun choked out, his voice switching between a little girls and
a grown man’s. “You triggered the failsafe!”

“What?” Percy pretended to act surprised before punching Braun in the stomach. He cried out in the girl’s voice.

“The subjects are all dead! And I’ll be stuck here in this hell! Alone!”

“Good!” Percy gave him a sound kick and he when he tried to get back up. “Death is too good for someone like you!”

She was about to stomp on his head, but Doc pulled her back by her dress. He whined, yanking her in the direction of a door that had appeared in the middle of the street.

“Right…sorry. Let’s go.”

Percy gasped, falling to the ground with a thud.

“Butch!” She groaned, “Buffout! Fuck…” grabbing her sore ribs, she took deep breaths.

“How long was I in there?” She asked, swallowing the pill dry.

“Only a couple hours. What about the doc?”

They heard another pod open with a hiss. “Shit! Don’t let him get out! He needs Buffout even more than I do.” Clover and Butch held him down until Percy got there.

“Dad, you need to take the medicine. You were in there for months. Your muscle has probably all but completely atrophied.”

“Months! It only felt like a week, maybe two…”

“Your perception of time was distorted in the simulation. It was meant for people to remain in stasis until well after the radiation levels fell.” She passed him three pills and some water. “Hold still, I’m going to try and find you a wheel chair.

“A wheel chair?? We can’t just wheel him through the wastes!”

Clover had a point. They stayed the night while Percy thought of a solution.

Eventually with some re-wiring and a lot of wonderglue and duct tape, she was able to fix one of the pod beds to the wheels of one of the robots.

Butch and Clover had gone into another room to sleep.

She worked next to James’ pod.

“Would you like to talk now?” He asked, doing his best to move closer to the edge so he could look at her. She was so different now. She had always been a strong girl, but now…there was something about her. Something assured yet also dangerous. The woman before him certainly wasn’t the girl he left in the vault.

“I’m not sure there’s anything to talk about anymore…” She sighed, setting down her wrench and looking up at him.
“I listened to your Project tapes. Project Purity had been your passion long before I was even conceived. Of course you’d return to it as soon as you thought I could handle myself. But why didn’t you take me with you?”

“I thought you would be safer in there. The wasteland…it’s a dangerous world out here. I didn’t want you getting mixed up in it.”

“But you knew how fu—crazy it was in there. Did you really think Almodovar would just let you go and everything would be fine?”

“I didn’t know what he would do.” He admitted “But I knew it would be better than what lies out here!”

“They shot at me!” She was standing up now, leaning against the pod. “He turned the entire security force against me! If it hadn’t been for Amata and Officer Garza, I’d be dead or tortured until I told them where you were! Dad, he was torturing his own daughter just to find out where I was!”

James was stuck at that. “What? That bastard! How could he—what gave him—His own daughter!”

“Yes his own daughter!” Percy threw up her hands. “How could he possibly maintain the title of father when he does such a thing? And the funny part? He actually believed he was doing the right thing. For the vault, I mean.”

“…I honestly thought the vault would have been a better place for you…”

“Anywhere would have been better than the vault. At least out here I would have had you. But you didn’t even give me a choice.” Percy snapped. After a beat she sat back down on the floor. She continued worked on the motorized wheel chair in silence.

It was an hour before he spoke up again. “…You were rather tough in that simulation. You did what you needed to do, and I’m proud of that.”

“You didn’t like how rough I was with Braun did you?” She scoffed, refusing to look up.

“No, I suppose I didn’t. You are so very different now, but I doubt I have the right to say who you should and shouldn’t be anymore.”

“…No you don’t. You left that right behind in the vaults. But I want to help you. With Project Purity I mean. Did Braun have a G.E.C.K?”

“No,” He sighed, accepting her compromise. “Another dead end. But for now, I need to work on getting the Memorial back in working order before I can even think of that step. Will you come with me?”

She gave him a weak smile, handing him another dose of pills. “I’d like that. We can leave in a day or two depending on how you’re feeling.”

The motorized wheelchair worked perfectly. Clover and Butch even took it on joy rides

“To test the weight capacity, I swear!”

Percy added the pod dome after testing it with ballistics. It was completely bullet and grenade proof.
“Just like guarding a caravan!” Butch teased, looking back at James as he moved behind them. Between the three of them, they were enough to protect James, even if he still couldn’t walk yet. Percy insisted that he have regular doses of buffout, and psycho when they tested his legs. By the time they got back to Project Purity, he could only walk short distances, but he insisted on using a cane wherever possible, even after they cleared away the rubble.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to add a ramp up to the rotunda? It wouldn’t be much trouble. Just some wood and nails. Easier than the stairs.” Percy watched him struggle up each step.

“No, no I need to do this. I’ll never get my strength back if I don’t work for it. Did you check out the pipes in the sub-basement? And pump control?”

Percy wiped her hands on a rag, following him up the small flight of stairs once he had cleared them.

“A few of the pipes in the basement have been corroded beyond repair. As for pump control, there’s a gaping hole in the main intake pipe.”

James chuckled.

“I don’t see why that’s funny,”

“Catherine was working on that hole when she was pregnant with you. She insisted on working just as hard as the rest of us, no matter how big you got. You should have seen her; belly as big as the moon, welding torch in hand. The pipe must have opened up again.”

“Regardless,” He settled into a chair with a groan and a sigh. “It’s as I feared. We will need all new pipes and material if we want Project Purity to work.”

“And where are we supposed to find these parts? Even if we did find materials in good condition, it would be impossible to find the right parts for what we need.”

James pursed his lips. “There’s a place up north. Before the war it was known as Pittsburgh, but now it simply goes by the Pitt. Then and now it is a large scale producer of metal works. There’s only one problem. It is run almost entirely by slavers and raiders, with slaves as the workforce.”

“And you’re asking me to do what, exactly?” Percy asked suspiciously.

“I’m asking you to not pick a fight when you go to the Pitt and commission them to make the parts we need. It is not some small settlement like Paradise Falls, this is a gigantic city we are talking about. I’m asking you to turn a blind eye for the greater good.”

Percy was fuming. “I don’t like this. Even if I did pretend what they’re doing isn’t completely fucked up, those parts would cost a fortune. You expect me to lug all those caps miles through raiders and slavers—then try and trade with raiders and slavers?”

“I have a large sum of pre-war money hidden in the walls here. Seven caps so a bill. It’s light and the Pitt is, in its own funny way, an organized government. I’m positive you will be able to convince them of it’s worth.”

James spent the next three days, tirelessly working on blueprints for what they would need. Butch and Clover collected the cash, having too much fun smashing into the walls with sledgehammers. Percy came to terms with what she would have to do and collected equipment for her journey. James
had informed her of the airborne toxins unique to the area. All she needed now, was a cover story.

“Are you sure you don’t want us to come with you? Clover knows these types of people.”

“Thanks for the offer, but my best shot is pretending to be an envoy from Paradise falls. The Pitt is outside the range of GNR so more than likely, they haven’t learned about what you did there.”

Butch flipped his knife in thought. He had gotten much better at it since the vaults.

“Well, if that’s what you wanna do, you’re gonna need proof. Here.”

He pulled a gold chain from his leather jacket. “Eulogy had a killer jacket. I sold it for a hefty load of caps, but decided to keep this. You can show this as evidence that Eulogy sent you.”

She took the chain, wrapping it around her wrist. “I know you’re about as excited as I am about what I’m about to do, but thank you. I’d like to believe James—that this is all for the greater good. But I’m not so sure…”

“Leveling the place was Sydney’s idea. I was too much of a coward. All I could to was distract them. You can’t fix the whole world, Perse’. Not all at once. And certainly not alone.”

‘Watch me.’ She thought defiantly.

Finally, she was ready to set out. Two duffle bags in hand. One filled with money and blue prints, and one for her. Facing the northwest, Percy set out with the sun in her wake

‘That’s right…’ Charon remembered the arrest that started it all. Even before he had gotten wrapped up in the war…He was dangerous. What if…what if he hurt her? And now…with nothing to control him…nothing to hold him back…

He rubbed his head in frustration. He spent decades dreaming of this, and now that he finally found someone as amazing as Percy, he was afraid he was gonna destroy it all!

‘Because I’m a killer. It’s all I’ve ever been, all I ever will be.’

He heard a struggle up ahead. Raiders? Too organized…Slavers…

Charon rushed into the fray. They were too surprised—and way too scared—to put up much of a fight. They went down quick.

“Oh, thank you! Thank you!” The man they had been attacking was wallowing, face against the dirt before him. He finally looked up. “Y-you’re huge!” Charon cocked an eyebrow.

“What happened to your eye?”

“Old wound. That’s not important! Say, you goin’ anywhere?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I mean, big guy like you…most people would be too scared to approach ya’. You’re wandering out in the middle of nowhere with a huge load. Either you just set out from somewhere nearby, or you wander. And there’s nowhere nearby worth livin’ at.”
Charon scowled, stepping past him.

“Wait! Come on man, I was only teasing! Look I’m really thankful. I was wondering…Could you help me out a little more? Maybe kick a little more slaver ass? You look like the type who likes wrecking wasteland assholes. And once the job is done, I’ll be more than able to pay you!”

Charon kept walking.

“If you aren’t getting your hands dirty, you aren’t making a difference. Come on, man, you’d be helping a whole bunch of people in need!”

Charon paused before turning. “Where is this place?”

“North. Just past the train tunnel.”

Charon looked in the direction the man pointed. He was a killer. That’s all he would ever be. Maybe Percy would forget about him. Maybe she would grow old. Forget about him. Find someone to love. They would love her back. Of course they would. Someone who she could grow old with, and who was safe, and gentle. And maybe…just maybe…eventually he could forget about her too.

He held out his hand to the man, helping him up. “You gotta name?” He growled out.

A grin spread across the man’s face. “Wernher.”

They shook on it.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what y'all thing about Catherine's little cameo? As you might have guessed, Charon's returning earlier than I estimated, I.E, chapter 33!

Anyway, I hope you liked reading this chapter as much as I liked writing it!
James was right. There was so much shit in the air, she was coughing more than she was breathing. Throwing on a gas mask, she took in the sight of the bridge. It wasn’t as big as the ones she had seen in the capital wasteland, but unlike the others, this one was still all in one piece. And crammed with cars. Someone was up ahead, running for her at a break neck pace.

“Please!” They called, “You can’t let them take me ba—” they didn’t get another word out as they exploded.

How!? They weren’t wearing a collar!

Percy got her answer as more explosions were set off in their wake

‘Mines! Dammit!’ No wonder they didn’t have collars. There wasn’t much need if they couldn’t pass the bridge.

She jumping from car to car, careful not to jostle them too much.

She cleared the bridge and followed the tracks until she came to a gate, guards and lookouts on the other side.

“I’m here to talk to Asher!” She called out, assault rifle resting on her shoulder, head tilted to the side.

“Oh yeah?” The surly man behind the bars smirked. “And who sent ya’, little lady?”

“Eulogy Jones. He got it in his head he wants to repair some of the piping in Paradise falls. Fucking waste of time, if you ask me. But he pays, so who am I to complain, right?”

He laughed, “Sure enough, toots. I’ll let ya’ in, but someone’s gotta escort you to Ashur, no wandering around, ya’ hear?”

She gave him a sloppy salute as the gate opened. The Pitt was sweltering, and she immediately regretted wearing leather. Machines screamed and laborers passed her by, eyes cast down.

She forced herself to keep her eyes straight ahead. Show no sympathy.

But there was something about these people. Their skin was dry, and falling off in places. Was everyone here in some stage of ghoulification?

“Lord Ashur! Some broad from Paradise Falls is here to see you about a job.”

Ashur’s eyes narrowed. He nodded to his personal guard to stand behind him before he said, “Let
Her in.”

His guard eyed the girl suspiciously as she entered Ashur’s office. She looked too small to be an envoy, how the hell did she even manage to get past the bridge?

Her masked face turned slightly. She must have been looking at him. Her entire body stilled. He glared at her, nodding to Ashur.

“So, what does Jones want this time?” Ashur smiled warmly, crossing his arms.

The envoy shook herself, dropping her load, pulling out the blueprints. Her voice was muffled by the mask, but she spoke with confidence.

“Eulogy needs these parts for a new project to improve the water system in the Falls.”

“And how does Eulogy plan to pay for this? I don’t see any slaves with you.”

She must have smirked because she sounded very smug. Holding up a stack of bills, she said “He thought pre-war money would be easier to transport. Up for the challenge?”

Ashur nodded to the guards flanking her. “And what proof do you have that Eulogy sent you?”

She held up her arm. No doubt about it; that was Eulogy’s fob chain. It glinted in the dull light.

Ashur’s eyes narrow into slits. “A few weeks ago I might have believed you. But I am no fool. Guards!”

They grabbed her by the shoulders, forcing her to her knees. Ashur’s guard smirked. A slaver and a traitor, this girl deserved whatever Ashur had in store for her.

She writhed, snarling in rage as she threw herself back and forth to get free, but it was no use.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t find out about Eulogy’s fate?” He yanked her head back by the roots of her hair. Ripping off her mask, he leaned in close. “Tell me why I shouldn’t avenge him with your blood right now…”

‘It’s her…Wha…What the hell?…”

“Ashur.” His guard spoke up. There was a choked urgency in his voice. “Hear her out.”

Ashur glared at him, but turned back to the defiant woman before him. “You heard Charon, why are you really here?”

“In D.C, there is a group working on a mass water purifier. We need the parts to get it to work. I thought you’d kill me or enslave me if I told the truth.” Percy’s heart was going crazy in her chest, her eyes kept shifting between Ashur and Charon.

“I wasn’t involved in Eulogy’s death. I just needed a cover story.”

“Then how did you acquire this little piece of jewelry?” Ashur gripped her wrist like a vice, forcing it to her face.

“I bought it from a caravan! They told me it was from Eulogy!” She winced in pain, but refused to cry out.

“How convenient. Charon, what do you make of this?”
Percy refused to look at him; she glared at the ground and waited for her fate to be decided.

“If she didn’t have anything to do with Eulogy’s death, then you shouldn’t hold anything against her. Take her job, and she might be willing to provide the Pitt with some of this fresh water.”

Asher turned back to Percy. “Is my guard correct in his assumption?”

“Once Project Purity is complete, fresh water will be distributable across the Capital Wastes, and with enough caravans, it can spread as far as the west coast.”

Percy had no idea of Project Purity’s potential, but she would say anything to get out of this alive.

Ashur gave her a wry smile. “We shall see about that. But I’ll take your job. Charon! Show our guest to a room.” He looked over the blueprints as she was lifted back to her feet. “It may take some doing, but I can have these parts ready for you in a few days.”

Charon nodded, keeping his distance from her as he led her through the halls. Everything was in disrepair, but there was little rubble, and the upper levels were a small city all on their own.

“How’s your room, Perse—?” She slammed the door in his face.

Charon kept his eyes straight ahead as he made his way back to Ashur, but his mind was reeling. How did she get that scar on her head? Was that why her hair was so short? What was she doing here? …Had she been looking for him?

She didn’t look as thin as before…that was good. More tone. The dark spots were gone from under her eyes, too. She looked healthier. He had made the right choice.

Ashur looked up as he returned. “That girl, she kept looking at you. How do you know her?”

Charon shifted in place. “We used to travel together. I was her protection.”

Ashur smirked but didn’t press the issue. “I assume she isn’t too fond of you guarding someone like me. For the sake of a peaceful stay on her part, I’d appreciate it if you explained the situation to her. I want her to understand the reasons behind my methods, and my intentions for the future of the Pitt.”

Charon knocked on her door. “Persephone, can we talk?”

Silence.

He sighed, of course she would be mad. Furious. But it was better this way

“Persephone, open up.”

After more silence, he gave up and looked for her elsewhere.

He had missed her. God, he’d missed her. All the memories he had worked to suppress came back with a vengeance, flooding his mind with her voice, her face…her scent…the smoothness of her skin…her taste…

He found her on the roof of one of the more bombed out buildings. Somehow, in the time between him leaving and getting back, she had acquired five bottles of scotch, already downed an entire bottle, and was rapidly finishing a second.
He sat down next to her, taking one of the bottles for himself. He studied her face before he spoke. What could she be feeling right now? How best should he broach the issue?

“I’m glad to see you haven’t changed too much,” he nodded at the empty bottles and glasses surrounding her. “That hair had me a little worried.”

She gave him a withering look before focusing intently on her drink.

Charon looked ahead, taking a sip. “It looks good, though. What got you involved in that water purifying project? I thought those scientists had given up on it a couple decades ago.”

Percy threw the empty bottle into the sky, pulling out a gun and shooting it before it got out of range. She stood at the edge, toes right at the drop off. Her eyes followed the glass shards twinkle before crashing in an empty alley.

Smirking, she blew the tip of the barrel before grabbing another bottle and unscrewing the lid. Swaying dangerously at the edge as she took another large swig.

Charon felt his blood go cold. Grabbing her shoulder, he spoke carefully. “You should slow down.”

“NO!” She shook his hand off, clutching her bottle. “No! You don’t get to tell me what I can and can’t do! You LEFT me Charon! I didn’t know what I did! I thought you were hurt or dead! I always came back to Underworld to check for you, but nothing! But now you fucking care?”

She screamed as he yanked her from the edge, her arms and legs flailing, desperate to climb out of his hold as he held her like a child.

He didn’t let her down until they were back in her room. His nerves were on fire after her display, and sweat prickled on his shirt.

“You shouldn’t let your guard down here. Nor should you be so reckless that close to the edge. It isn’t safe.”

Once they were safely back in her room, he let her down. She slapped him across the face. He flinched but didn’t move.

“Fuck you, Charon. Fuck you. If you gave a damn about my safety you wouldn’t have left. You wouldn’t be here. Slavers?? You of all people—”

“It isn’t like that.”

She scoffed. Throwing her hands up in the air. “You are honestly going to tell me that an entire fucking city of slavers isn’t an entire fucking city of slavers? But then again the last time I saw you I was pretty gullible wasn’t I? To think you actually cared about me.”

Her voice cracked on the last word. She raised her hand to slap him again, but he caught her wrist. Tears stung her eyes and she looked down to hide them, but it didn’t work.

“Why did you leave? You promised you would come back. One week, Charon. One week!”

“I thought you would be better off without me. Even if you had been…intimate…with a ghoul, no one would have to know about it; you could have lived a normal life.” He was very quiet, taking in everything she said.

She thought he didn’t care about her. That she wasn’t his entire world. That to have been away from
her this long hadn’t felt like drowning.

She looked up at him angrily. Her eyes were red with alcohol and pain. “We both know Burke fucked that option. I call bullshit. Tell me the real reason.”

He felt anger well up in his stomach. He hated how well she could read him after all this time. He turned on her with a glare.

“I’m a ghoul. I’ve been alive for centuries. Did you really think I would want to be around long enough to watch you grow old? To watch you die?”

“That’s not it either. Charon…after all this time I think I deserve the truth.” She looked hurt, but determined.

She was way too close. He could smell the sharpness of alcohol on her breath, and feel her warmth through their clothes. How his fingers itched to touch her—to be as familiar as a month ago.

He finally lost his temper. He was angry at her for finding him, for making her feel like this all over again, at himself for letting her do this to him.

“Because I couldn’t protect you when you had my contract!” Charon yelled, gripping her shoulders and lowering himself to look into her eyes. They were surprised, but not frightened.

“That was my one job. To protect you. I’ve spent centuries guarding employers, and I failed right when it mattered. Now the contract is gone; how the hell was I supposed to protect the woman I—” Charon stopped short. His face hardened again.

“Persephone…you don’t know what they did to me; what they did to make me like this. You’ve seen me kill. You’ve seen me lose control. Do you really feel safe traveling with a monster? Especially one you can’t control anymore?” He took a step towards her, but she didn’t back away. She was defiant.

“We both know that’s not true either. You’re not a monster. Asshole, definitely, but you can’t scare me.”

“Can’t I?” was the only thing he managed to growl out before slamming her against the wall. Lips crashing against hers before forcing his tongue down her throat. He let out a snarl as he felt her struggle. Good. Soon she’d push him off. She would hate him. After everything that had been done to her, this above everything else would repulse her—he would repulse her. Then she would leave…

He tried to make the most of what he had in this moment, dragging his hands up and down her sides before pushing his knee between her legs. She was amazing, so soft…so smooth. The leather of her armor did nothing to hide her figure. Her scent flooded his nostrils. He squeezed her muscled hips, stroking her thigh.

She leaned into him, grabbing his neck.

Charon moaned, jumping back. She wasn’t supposed to that!

They stared at each other for a moment. Charon was panting. Percy wasn’t. Her lips were swollen and red and her cheeks were wet. She looked completely sober now.

He couldn’t look at her anymore. His eyes burned at the sight of her.

He focused on a piece of loose plaster in the wall behind. “I…”
Shutting his mouth with a grimace, he stalked towards the door, grabbing for the knob.

Her hand grabbed for his wrist, even if it couldn’t wrap completely around it.

“Don’t you dare leave.” She whispered.

He let her pry his fingers off the door knob. She looked up into his eyes and saw the struggle there. His lips were pressed shut. She made him sit on the bed, and he didn’t resist.

“Alright…you were probably trying to scare me away just now. But I’m not going anywhere until I get some answers.”

Percy could feel him shutting down in front of her, closing himself off and putting up walls. But she pressed on.

“I know why you left—even if I don’t like it—but…why here? You of all people…why take up with a bunch of slavers?”

“I didn’t…not at first. After I…took care of Talon Company, this escapee—Wernher—was being attacked. After I helped him out he told me about the Pitt. I figured, after you heard about what I did, you’d want nothing to do with me.”

“If you didn’t intend to join slavers…what happened between now and then?” Her brow furrowed. “Please, Charon. I’ve been so scared for you. I want to know everything. You’re going to tell me.” It was no longer a request.

Charon let out a breath through his nose. Standing up, he led her back to Ashur’s office. He tapped a code into the keypad on the wall. A door opened into a completely spotless lab.

“Who—Oh Charon! Come to see Marie again?”

A tired but cheerful looking woman smiled at them as they entered the small lab.

“She just woke up from a nap, so she’s very affectionate, here!” The lady handed a baby no more than five months old to Charon.

Marie looked up at him and smiled sweetly, cooing as he let her grab his ruined finger.

“What are you feeding this kid, Sandra? She’s getting so big.” His face softened. He looked up at Percy.

“This is why I couldn’t help Wernher. They wanted me to kidnap Marie as ransom.”

“But still…there are other ways to take out slavers.”

Sandra looked up sternly. “We are not slavers! Rather, we won’t be for long.”

She took back Marie back. “I’m sure you’ve noticed the necrotic disease most people in the Pitt suffer from. Marie has a natural immunity. I want to harness her gift to create a cure for our people. Once there’s a cure, Ishmael is going to slowly get rid of slavery in the Pitt. Make this place a real civilization.”

“How can you know for sure that he’ll do what he says?”

“He’s my husband. If I can’t trust him, I can’t trust anyone. He’s a good man. He used to be part of the Brotherhood. He had honor beaten into him.”
Charon walked her back to her room. She needed time to think; this was a lot to take in.

Leaning against the door, Percy opened her mouth, but hesitated, looking down. “If…Wernher hadn’t asked you for help…would you have come back?”

Clenching and unclenching his teeth, he managed, “I don’t know. I think I would have found another reason. Percy…I’ve been remembering a lot about my past recently. Things I wish had stayed buried. I wasn’t a good person. Not even before the bombs fell. You saw me lose it with Burke, and you know what I did to those Talon bastards. Would you have taken me back?”

Percy’s brow furrowed. “Maybe not at first…I know why you did it now; wasteland justice isn’t always clear cut…or clean. But you didn’t let me decide that for myself. I thought you used me, that you had never cared about me…that you hated me.”

After Charon left, Percy paced her room. He had only been gone for a few minutes and she already missed him. She hated it.

‘You know why…You’re afraid he’ll disappear again. But it’s not like you’ll see him after this. His has a life here.’

Clutching her head, she dropped against the bed trembling as so much emotion wracked her system.

Percy woke up to the sound of machinery and buzz saws. She turned, trying to cover her ears…but, wasn’t the upper level too far from the construction to hear anything?

She heard people running through the halls outside her room, yelling, and the buzz got louder.

Percy screamed, shielding her face as shrapnel flew from her door. Someone was beating it down with an axe. Grabbing her gun from under the bed, she put two in their head. Rushing into the hall she tried to take stock of what was going on.

It looked like a riot. She ducked behind a wall as three slaves got mowed down. She saw Charon up ahead, he was doing his best to disarm them without actually firing any bullets, but they were all armed with those weird chainsaw axe things. Someone had snuck behind him, they were raising their axe to strike.

“Charon!!” ‘No, no not him!’ She shot at the slave’s shoulder, and he dropped his weapon.

Charon looked up in time to see Percy running towards him in her underclothes—and one of the arc welders connect with her leg.
He watched in horror as Percy’s blood spread across the ground. She was falling and he watched the slave lift his arc welder to finish her off. *Her blood, she’s losing so much blood!*

He grabbed the dropped arc welder, sawing the man down before he could hurt her more. Cradling Percy in one arm, he ran at breakneck speed for Sandra’s laboratory. It doubled as a bunker, and only he and Ashur knew the code to get in. The slavers could take care of the riot. Percy’s life was more important than yet another rebellion.

He slammed the code into the keypad, trying not to look at the giant trail of blood behind them.

“Charon! What’s going on out there?”

“Another insurrection! Percy’s hurt, I need your help!”

He laid her out on the medical bed. She was so pale; the wound looked awful.

“Was this one from an arc welder? It’s a miracle her femur wasn’t damaged. Charon, bring that medical tray over here.”

He watched Sandra work; Percy’s eyes kept fluttering closed.

“You need to keep her awake. She’s lost far too much blood. Give her a blood pack.” Sandra worked fast; it was clear she was quite used to such wounds these days.

She whined as the needle entered her skin. He brushed the sweat-matted hair from her forehead. Percy let out a sigh, squinting up at Charon, she gave him a weak smile that made his heart skip a beat. “I missed this…”

“What? Getting horribly mangled?”

“No, watching each other’s backs. We made a good team.”

He couldn’t deny that.

Sandra finished the last stitch. She applied a stimpak before pouring more antiseptic over the wound and wrapping it in bandages.

Percy winced, gritting her teeth. Without thinking she grabbed onto Charon’s shoulder from the pain.

“It sounds like the riot’s quieted down. Take it easy for a while.”

They left Ashur’s haven. Charon’s living quarters were closer than Percy’s, so they went there. Ashur could be heard over the intercom giving a speech to the slavers and slaves. She settled against his couch as he looked through the fridge.
“Does radiation still heal you?”

“Well… and I could really use some right now.”

He handed her a bottle of irradiated water. She poured some on her bandages before downing the rest. She felt the couch shift as Charon sat next to her. She felt his fingers on her hair.

“So, why the change?”

“That is a long story.”

She told him about wanting a change of scenery; he seemed affected by that. He knew it was his fault, after all.

This time telling the story, she didn’t leave out her Punga vision, or his involvement.

“Why the hell was Burke there?”

She didn’t have an answer for that. He didn’t ask why he was there; he knew why.

“Christ, after all this time he was trapped in that vault?”

“Yeah, but I managed to get him out. He wants to finish his work, and I want to help him. That’s why I came here. I had no idea where you were… And I had given up on waiting.”

She felt his arm pull her against his shoulder. She didn’t resist. Tears stung at her eyes and she took another sip of irradiated water. She felt secure under his arm, a feeling she hadn’t known in a long time. The familiarity was strange, but she couldn’t help but welcome it.

The adrenaline from the morning was finally leaving Percy’s system. His fingers rubbing circles in her hair was bliss.

They laid like that for hours. Ashur hadn’t called for him, so he knew he wasn’t needed.

‘What am I doing?’ As he pressed his nose against her hair, he had no answer. He couldn’t scare her off, and Charon was beginning to not want to anymore. What would happen when the parts were ready? She would go her way… and where would he be? If absence made the heart grow fonder, then he was obsessed. When he wasn’t stuck on the past he was stuck on her. Percy roused slightly, nuzzling closer into his chest before looking up. She licked her lips, glancing towards his.

‘What the hell am I doing?’

She leaned up and they were kissing. It wasn’t as intense as yesterday, but it was better, oh it was worlds better. Charon was mindful of her leg as she climbed into his lap. Sighing, he opened his mouth to her probing tongue and she was everywhere. Soft but firm, sweet but strong, shy but sure. Always making the first move, thinking ahead. Getting trapped but getting out. Never the same person twice but always, always, herself. She knew what she wanted, and for whatever reason, she wanted him. He was a fool to leave, and an idiot to think he could truly get away. He was tired of running; the last person he wanted to run from was her. As his hand climbed beneath her shirt, Percy arched her back, breaking away for air. Eyes hooded, she stroked his cheek, thumb lightly grazing his bottom lip.

“We shouldn’t be doing this… It’s going to make it that much harder when the parts are finished…”
Charon pressed a kiss to her thumb, closing his eyes as he leaned into her palm.

“I could come with you, if you’d let me.”

“And have you think of another reason leave “for my own good”? I don’t think I could take that again, Charon.”

God, his name on her tongue made him shiver. “I don’t think I can take being away anymore.”

“And you wouldn’t leave me?”

His other hand crept up her leg, fingers drawing circles on her inner thigh. “Not unless you ask me to.”

“Prove it.”

Charon gave her a wry smile, his thumb pressed gently against her clit. He kissed his way from her shoulder to her neck. He felt her pulse speed up, and his thumb drew circles against her, quickening his pace. Charon sucked her pulse, reveling in the tiny moans she made as she grinded against his hand.

“Charon…ahmm…” She pulled him back up, kissing him passionately as her legs began to shake and her toes curled. He swallowed her moans as she came, collapsing against him, trembling.

Percy grabbed his shirt as he moved to get up.

“Oh no you don’t; I’m not falling for that again. Stay with me for a bit longer.”

“We need to change your bandages, Perse’. Let me up unless you want to lose that leg”

“My leg’s fine. Besides…I wanna return the favor.”

Percy slid to the floor, working the buckles on the bottom half of his armor.

“You really don’t need to,” Charon put his hands on her shoulders in protest, but he didn’t put up much of a fight. He had been straining against his pants for a while now. Just her presence was… exhilarating.

“Don’t tell me what to do; I’m still a little pissed. It’s gonna take a little more than that to get me to trust you again. Although…”

Percy finally freed his cock, her fingers tracing up and down the shaft before thumbing the crease just below his tip.

“…you having my back wasn’t the only thing I missed.”

She looked up with a smirk as she flattened her tongue against the tip, and if ghouls could blush, Charon would have been completely crimson. His mouth watered and hips jerked involuntarily as she took him in her mouth with agonizing slowness. He stiffened as he felt her nails dig into his inner thigh. A frustrated whine escaped his throat, but he didn’t care about that moment of weakness when it was her causing it.

“Patience, big guy.”

He nodded wordlessly and she took her hand away. Charon clenched his fists against the couch. Giving her control was proving harder and harder with each stroke of that silky hot tongue. He
couldn’t stop the groans and moans as she slowly began to bob up and down, hollowing her cheeks and swirling her tongue across his seam in wave patterns. The blood in his veins burned as she moaned alongside him. Looking up, the realization that she was touching herself while she worked made his cock twitch.

Charon threw his arm over his eyes, trying to control his breathing as Percy’s lips reached his pelvis. Her velvet lips…fuck he couldn’t think straight when he could feel his tip rubbing against her scorching throat.

Suddenly her teeth came into play, brushing against his base as she moved her lower jaw back and forth.

He tensed, looking down at her. She was looking back up at him with a somber and bitter expression, and for the first time in his life, he was truly scared of the tiny vaultie with her mouth…and teeth around his cock.

“I am sorry. You know who’s good for you and who you can trust…even if it’s me.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Mhmm”

She went back to bobbing and sucking with such fervor, his head flew back, panting and gasping.

“Shit! Perse’ waitwaitwait—ah, damn!”

One of her hands moved back to stroking herself while the other worked his balls.

“Percy, no I’m gonna—”

She must have come, because she let out a loud ravished wail, choked by his member and he couldn’t stop himself.

His hips bucked uncontrollably as his seed shot down her throat.

She couldn’t hide the smug look in her eyes, climbing back into his lap. Charon was shaking and sweating, holding her close as he breathed in her scent, heady from arousal.

“I could have told you that, dummy.” She drank more irradiated water, rinsing his taste away as Charon caught his breath.

“Serves me right for doubting you…”

Percy’s wound began to itch, so it was time to change the bandage.

“My hero.” She smiled as he unwrapped her bandage. Percy finished another bottle of water as he worked. She wondered if she would actually start to glow if she drank too much.

“So what are we doing to transport the parts? They are too big just to carry.”

“There are a few repurposed truck hitches we can use. It will take longer than walking, but it’s doable. So, Jefferson Memorial, huh?”

“James wanted to be close enough to the waterfront, but still get the occasional mutie visitor.” She wiggled her toes playfully as he finished.
The slaves were back to work by now. Percy went to take a walk and stretch her leg. Charon went to talk to Ashur. He wasn’t sure how the man would react to him quitting, but it was already a long time coming. Charon couldn’t stand it; he was practically a slaver himself!

Ashur was with his wife and child. Charon listened at the door.

“None of them got in here, did they?”

“No, but that girl, Percy? She got hurt pretty bad during the riot. Charon brought her here and I patched her up just fine, but…Their relationship is as you suspected. If she asks for an escort back to wherever she’s going, he will more than likely volunteer, and never come back.”

“I was afraid of that…”

Charon backed away as he heard footsteps getting closer to the door. Leaning casually against the wall of Ashur’s office, he looked up as the door opened. He wished he was as good at lying as Percy when Ashur said “You heard everything?”

“I didn’t mean to eavesdrop.”

Ashur scoffed. “Cut the bull, Charon. After what we’ve been through, I’d like to talk with you honestly.”

He sighed. “Percy wants me to go with her.”

“And you’re going to leave? Just like that? You know how good this girl is at lying through her teeth. How do you know she isn’t playing you?”

“This isn’t about her. Not completely. Ashur…I admire your dream, but between Wernher and the riots I don’t think Marie’s cure will be the answer.”

Ashur’s eyes narrowed. “What are you saying, Charon?”

“I’m saying that your followers are hardly any better than slavers and raiders. You may want to end slavery, but do they? I would hope the trust you have in your men is well founded, but I have my doubts. We have been through a lot, and I don’t regret helping you, Sandra, and Marie. But I won’t stand by and watch this continue.”

“So you’re just going to walk out? You are many things, but I never took you for a coward.”

“I know there’s nothing I can do to change the way things are here. I’m leaving because there’s nothing left for me here. There’s everything with Percy.”

“My God. You’re in love. I don’t mean to be crass, but there are certain bodily aspects that are…difficult to look past.”

Rage welled up in Charon. After all this time, another fucking bigot.

“Percy’s been able to look past a lot for me. Even if she found me completely repulsive, I would follow her to the ends of the earth. I owe her that much.”

Ashur crossed his arms. “I’m disappointed in you Charon. But I won’t stop you; even if you are making a mistake. The parts are ready. I want you out of my city sooner rather than later.”
Percy looked down as they walked through the lower levels. No one was happy to see them, even if they were leaving. She felt sick. The radio might call her a hero, but now, when so many people needed help…she was useless. Ashur had escorted them to the outer gate. Percy turned to him.

“You better do right by your citizens, Ashur. People aren’t tools for your vision, no matter how idyllic.”

“If you were so concerned, you wouldn’t be taking my right hand man. But I’m not going to argue with you now. I only hope that you will honor your words and supply us with clean water if the time comes.”

“Only if you aren’t still a slaver when the time comes.” She retorted.

It had only been a day, but Percy already missed the sun. The smog of the Pitt blocked out all light. Charon shielded his eyes against the light. Damn…too bright.

Percy noticed his discomfort. Fishing through her bag, she threw him some sunglasses.

“Don’t go blind on me, big guy.”

The cart was heavy, but they made progress, even if it was slow.

“I wish the freeways were still whole…and for that matter, I wouldn’t say no to a car either.”

“How long would this have taken two hundred years ago? You know, with cars and freeways.”

Charon chuckled. He was pulling while she pushed. Looking back, he admired the otherworldly glow of her hair in the sun.

“About an hour, maybe two if there was traffic.”

“Shit…One more reason to curse the bombs, I guess.”

They stopped when the sun finally dipped below the horizon.

Percy fiddled with the radio while Charon heated up some pork and beans.

“What’s with Enclave radio? You’ve been around, any weight to their words?”

Charon poked at the camp flames. “I thought they’d been wiped out back in the twenty-two forties…But about fifteen years ago, that radio station started playing. Seems like a sick joke if you ask me; those Enclave bastards were the real deal.”

“GNR it is, then!”

They ate in silence except for the radio, but it was a comfortable silence. It was strange to feel so familiar after so long. Charon opened a bottle of whisky, taking a sip before passing it to her.

Percy blushed. “Oh…no thanks. I’m trying not to do that anymore. The other day was a slip up.”

“An understandable one, but it’s good that you’re easing up now.” Charon rubbed his head, looking up at the sky. If there was one thing to be grateful to the apocalypse for, it was the stars. There weren’t any streetlights to hide them. The breeze was pretty nice too. Charon watched Percy lay
down a perimeter of mines.

‘Always thinking ahead.’

She settled down next to him, her head resting against his chest.

“After you left, my friend Amata sent out a distress signal. The overseer, her father, he had gone mad with power. Half the population of the vault was dead when I got there. When I was growing up in the vault, I knew there was corruption, and I honestly prayed that somehow I would be able to leave that place. This boy Wally Mack, he was a sick fuck. He’d had this plot that involved me and him taking over the place. Secrets and plots were so common there. Even I was part of a plot. I just didn’t know it at the time. My old teacher was apparently training me to replace the overseer. I only became a preacher because Brotch knew people would flock to a religious leader during times of unrest. He probably thought the Overseer and Mack would burn each other out; then the only person left would be me. Mack tried to pick up that plan when I returned. I never felt safe around him…and I’m not proud of what I had to do to keep that horny bastard at bay when we were kids.”

“You did what you needed to do.” Charon lit up a cigarette, taking a long drag. “But if I ever see him and he tries anything…”

“You won’t need to worry about that.” Percy accepted the cigarette when he passed it. She slowly blew out the smoke as she said, “He’s dead. He wanted me to kill Amata, so I killed him. I want to feel bad about what I did, to have come up with a more peaceful solution at the time…but if I had left him alive…he would have been a danger to everyone.”

She shifted closer to him, shivering as the wind picked up.

It was little comfort to know she had been sleeping with one eye open all her life.

“Why are you telling me this?” He asked, putting his arm around her and hiking up the sleeping bag.

“Because I understand why you killed those Talon Company guys. Someone has to stop monsters like that from hurting more people. Even if it means you being the one pulling the trigger. You aren’t the monster, Charon. They were.”

‘I want you to know I don’t hate you, and I’m not scared of you…only what you do to me.’

As she drifted off, Charon thought about his own past.

The things he had done, and the things done to him. He remembered the woman in purple’s words. That she would outlive him; that she would never die. Despite his ghoulish state, a part of him still believed her. That she was out there, somewhere. Making someone else’s life hell. His eyes grew heavy as he watched the stars above, praying that if she was still alive, she would never find him. And if she did, that it would be by his hand that she finally died. After what she’d done to him, Charon deserved that much.
Another early posting! I hope you guys liked it!

My friends wanted me to tag this, but i'll just throw this here: This chapter is tagged for "Domination Beej"
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proof-read by the wonderful Groovymarlin!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Percy was the first to wake up. Looking at him asleep next to her, it was hard not to believe that the past month hadn’t all been a dream. But she knew it wasn’t a dream. She was different now, and so was he. Her chest hurt just thinking about it. She thought back to his words the day before; how he was remembering his past, after all these years. That she would be better off without him…What had he done to believe he was a monster?

When she had first bought Charon from Ahzrukhal, he had warned her that chains were earned.

What did Charon do to earn his chains?

As if on cue, Charon opened his eyes with a start. He always woke up like that. What did he dream about, or did he dream at all?

Turning to face Percy, surprise flashed across his face before he slowly said, “Hey…”

Percy’s mouth quirked with a smile. “Morning.”

He watched in silence as she got up and stretched in the morning light. Her lean muscles rippled slightly as she stretched. Percy didn’t mind, she let him watch as she pulled breakfast out of her bag and walked back over to where he was just starting to sit up.

“I’ve got snack cakes and dandy boys. Do you want nuka cola or water?”

Percy looked up just in time to see Charon reach out and grab her. He pulled her into a kiss, hot and urgent, his fingers trailing from her hair to the nape of her neck. His rough and calloused fingers drew patterns in the tiny tufts of hair there. Percy gasped, but couldn’t stifle her laugh.

“A little early for this, isn’t it? Plus I prefer a roof over my head.”

Charon chuckled against her lips. “Just…wanted to make sure this was real. My dreams get pretty vivid these days.” He kissed the corner of her mouth before releasing her.

“So he does dream. Nothing good either it seems.’ Percy wanted to ask about his past, what had been done to him to make him feel like a monster, what he had done…

But he would tell her when he was ready. And if he was never ready…well, it was his past. Not hers.

Percy fiddled with her map. The terrain in DC would be nearly impossible without more people. On top of that, they had gone farther south than she originally intended. The closest settlement from which to pick up a caravan’s help was…Tenpenny Tower.

“Shit…”
Charon looked up from where he was picking up their mines.

“It was Tenpenny who put a price on my head, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, but I killed his hitmen. You won’t need to worry about that old fool anymore.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

She told him about her plan.

“Assuming no one recognizes you—”

“They won’t; Burke never had a picture of me, and I hardly look anything like what I did when Burke was alive.”

“And assuming,” Charon went on, “that they won’t try and steal all this valuable metal work for themselves, ghouls aren’t allowed in Tenpenny Tower. If you get into trouble, I won’t be able to protect you.”

“We look for somewhere secure to put the stuff on our way there. I can handle myself, Charon. If I survived brain surgery and a vault coup, I think I can handle some old man.”

“And his security.”

Percy raised an eyebrow.

“…But I see your point. Fine.”

As they got farther south, the terrain became less rocky. Something caught Percy’s eye as she rounded a ridge.

“Hey wait a sec!” She ran to a shed door that stuck out of the cliff face. She opened the door, shining her Pip-boy light into the darkness.

“I thought so…” She said. “Wait a moment.” She disappeared into the darkness. After a few moments, there was a loud screeching and groaning of metal and she reappeared. “There’s a Vault here. It looks like it was gutted out years ago. We can hide the parts here.

Abandoned was right. Even though they had found the vault door closed, the interior was rusted and filthy. The door must have still been air tight, because the inside reeked with decomposition unable to air out.

“I don’t like the look of this place.” Charon grumbled as they set down the last piece.

“I don’t like the smell of it.” Percy straightened and stretched her sore back. She was looking forward to not having to drag that stuff all the way to Tenpenny Tower. And yet…

“Hey… Do you want to see what’s in here?” She asked, looking towards the door to the rest of the vault. The main entrance looked just like one-oh-one…but dirtier.

“Why would I want to do that?” Charon asked looking with disdain at the filthy room.

“I dunno, we might be able to find some scrap to sell. You’d be amazed how much people are willing to pay for a vault suit. Plus, why is this one abandoned? What happened here? I’m curious to see if it was like my vault.”
Charon wasn’t convinced, but he followed her anyway. He kept his shotgun at the ready, just in case the place wasn’t quite empty. Oddly enough, the ventilation system was still working, even if it was only circulating the stench of age, rust and rot. He didn’t like vaults. There was something sinister looking about them. On top of that, they reminded him of—

Percy drew his eye. She was standing stock-still in the middle of the hall between two output vents.

“Wally…” her shoulders were shaking as she reached for her gun. But there was no one there.

“Percy…The only ones here are—” He stepped up, putting his arm on her shoulder.

She shot around. Her eyes were blown up in fear and surprise. But it wasn’t Percy.

It was Noel.

“You…” No, this was wrong—she died! He…

As Charon backed away, he felt something crunch below his feet. His stomach dropped. Dead, everywhere dead bodies. Charon looked up, looking for Percy—they had to get out of here!

But she wasn’t there, only blood and bodies.

All those settlements…all those people. He killed them all! They were all dead because of him…

Three faces stood out against the piles of corpses. ‘Mom…’

His mother and two brothers were there among the dead. But unlike the rest. They were looking right at him.

“You did this. You couldn’t protect us.” His brothers said in unison.

“Why didn’t you save them, son? I even took myself out of the picture, and you couldn’t even save them. Did my sacrifice mean that little to you?” His mother looked at him with shame and disappointment. He backed away. Their eyes began sinking in, their skin growing tight against their skulls.

“I tried, Mom…I wasn’t fast enough…”

Long nailed fingers crawled lightly from his back to his shoulders to stroke along his neck.

“You’ve changed so much, Charon. So big and strong! Say what you will about me, but my teddies are built to last!”

Charon roared, raising his gun and shooting into her face, but she dissipated into smoke and dust. But her laugh remained. First low, but it steadily grew louder, higher, more chaotic. Her laugh was deafening and the bodies were everywhere. Hanging from the walls—the floor could not be seen below them. Hall after hall, there was no escape! Her screeching, screaming cackle faded out as a man’s low chuckle filled his ears. It became coupled with shrieks of pain and agony.

‘Percy!’ “PERCY!”

Charon ran through the halls, each corner turned made her screams louder, but so did the man’s chuckle. The sound of fabric ripping echoed through his hears and he found them.

Burke was now laughing like a maniac; Percy’s clothes were gone, but he kept ripping away at her flesh. Percy writhed in pain and with each toss of her head, the face changed from hers to
Noel’s and back. Her face was the only thing untouched by Burke. Left untouched to leave no illusion of her agony. Charon could no longer think; he wrenched her body from the phantom, ignoring her screams and struggles as he thought only of the exit. He waded through bodies and blood, the scent choking him as he resisted the urge to retch. He finally scrambled out of the vault, slamming on the button to reseal it. He no longer cared about the parts, he only wanted to get away.

Percy was thrown roughly to the ground as Charon collapsed, gasping for air.

Mack was alive! ‘No, he’s dead—but th—the vault…’ Percy turned to face the vault. Her heart was pounding, but with each breath she took, the faces grew fainter. Sighing with relief, she got up to find Charon. He was in a worse state by far. His eyes were screwed shut as he continued to hyperventilate.

“Charon?” Percy went up to him slowly, making as much noise with her feet as she could to help him keep track of her spatially.

His fingers dug into earth as he attempted to ground himself.

She gently put her hand on his shoulder, talking all the while as she kneeled down in front him.

“Charon, can you look at me please?”

He shook his head urgently. “No,” He choked out. “They are everywhere. I killed them. They’re here. I can’t look—I can’t see that again.”

He pressed his forehead into the ground. “I’m so sorry, we don’t have enough stims to fix you this time. That sick fuck! He ripped it all off!”

“Charon…” Percy carefully took his head into her arms, cradling him to her chest. “I’m completely fine. I’m not hurt, just a little scared. I think the vents were pumping some sort of hallucinogen in that vault. Please open your eyes.”

Charon shook his head, holding her closer. She winced as his fingers dug painfully into her back.

“I can’t see you hurt anymore Percy, this…” ‘This is what I was afraid of…’

“You said someone was ripping something off of me; what was it?”

“Your skin.” He hissed.

“My skin is fine. Here feel.” She moved his hand to touch her arm from wrist to elbow.

“I don’t know what you saw in there, but it wasn’t real. Charon, please open your eyes.”

He hesitantly opened one eye, still stroking her arm.

He looked up at her, but held her even closer.

The thing with Burke may not have been real, but everything else was. Even if it wasn’t real anymore.

“We need to move.” He said brusquely, standing up and grabbing their packs. “There’s a subway station near Tenpenny tower. We can stay the night there.”

He moved stiffly as they traveled, constantly listening for any signs of danger and eyeing the horizon. Percy kept pace with him, but didn’t say anything. She had seen Wally, and a few other
people: Amata, Officer Gomez; but also Wally’s father. They didn’t say anything, only watched her reproachfully. It was only Wally that tried to attack her, chasing her through the halls as she ran like a coward. Charon had grabbed her just as Mack was about to strike.

She snuck a look up at him as they walked. There had been anger in his eyes. Anger, fear, and such overwhelming guilt.

Charon chained the subway gate closed behind them. They had arrived just as the sun was dipping over the horizon. As expected, the place was crawling with ghouls, but they didn’t expect to meet non-ferals.

“Stop right there! You there, ghoul; why the hell are you travelling with a smoothskin?”

“We just need—”

“I was asking the ghoul; be thankful I didn’t just blow your head off.”

The guard trained his gun on Percy, but Charon would have none of that. He stepped in front of her, completely hiding her from the guard.

“You do that, and we are going to have a problem. A big bloody problem.”

“Shit…Don’t tell me you’re Charon? I thought you were in the Underworld!” The guard got decidedly uneasy. Unsure whether to lower his weapon to appease the giant ghoul, or keep his aim trained just in case. Not that he thought he could actually put up much of a fight against Charon of all people.

“You probably also think Ahzrukhal is still alive.” Charon growled out, fixing the guard with a crushing glare. “We need a place to stay the night. The smoothskin’s name is Percy and she’s with me. And if you even look at her funny, I’ll rip your throat out.”

“Charon!” Percy pushed past him, looking up to the guard. “We just need a place to stay, we won’t cause any trouble, I promise!”

The guard, Michael Masters, lead them through the subway into the safer feral-free area. The situation reminded Percy a lot of Meresti station. Only instead of vampires, there were about twenty or thirty ghouls. Charon followed silently. When Percy asked to speak with their leader, Michael looked nervous.

“Roy doesn’t really care for smoothskins…”

“I don’t care for accepting hospitality without a ‘thank you.’”

‘It was hardly offered…’ Michael thought, rubbing his neck, but took them to Roy’s room.

“Oh hello, I’m Bessie Lynn. Michael, have they talked to Roy yet?”

The woman smiled shyly, before nervously looking to Michael.

“I thought he’d be here. Where is he?”

“Last I heard he was wrangling some of the ferals together.” She moved closer to Michael. “He’s planning something, he just won’t tell me! I’m scared, Masters…”
Michael cursed under his breath. “Keep an eye on these guys, I’ll go find him.”

Bessie seemed to shrink in place as Michael left. Charon leaned against the wall, lighting up a smoke.

Sensing that Charon had officially shut down for the day, Percy sighed and turned to smile warmly at Bessie.

“It’s so nice to meet you, I’m sorry we’re imposing like this.”

“Not at all!” Bessie seemed relieved at how nice the smoothskin woman was. She rushed about the small room that must have belonged to her and Roy. She began heating Brahmin milk over the stove. The place looked lived in and homey, despite being in a subway tunnel. Lamps cast warm light and faded carpets covered the floor.

“Roy is a really nice guy; he helped all of us ghouls who couldn’t make it to Underworld. He’s even coming up with a plan to get us into Tenpenny Tower, it’s only a matter of time! Oh am I rambling? He told me I shouldn’t do that…” She handed Percy a mug of warm Brahmin milk and a few fancy lad cakes. She glanced up at Charon nervously, thinking of offering him some, but thought better of it.

“Tell me about yourself, Bessie…how’s being a ghoul?” Percy took her attention away from Charon. It was clear that he was still on edge after what he saw in the vault. She was worried, but decided to give him space first.

“Oh... well... it's not so bad, I guess. Once you get used to it... but, it's not like before.”

Bessie dropped her head to look at the hands holding her mug. The ragged red against the smooth ceramic. She took extra care to keep what little dishes and silverware she had shining.

“I used to be pretty, you know! Everyone used to come around all the time! People stop wanting to be around you, though... when it starts to happen... when you start to change, I mean...”

Even if Roy would break some of her pretty bowls, she would always do her best to put them back together with wonderglue.

“Roy changed all that for me...he made me feel pretty again. I'd go anywhere with him. I just like the way he looks at me.” She raised her head with a dopey grin. “He gave me this dress, you know. Told me he liked the look of my shoulders. Told me I should show them off more.”

“That’s so sweet!” Percy never got to gush with a woman, not since the vaults. “Charon used to be so nervous touching me when we first met.”

He made a noise of surprise, causing Percy to look back at him with a teasing wink. “Of course I noticed, big guy. Do you know how jarring it is to see someone as tall as you so skittish around someone as small as me?”

Bessie was frozen in her chair. “You mean you two are—”

“Bessie that smells amazing! Is there enough for me?” Roy was in the doorway. He was glaring at the newcomers, but his tone was kind with Bessie.

“Of course Roy, I’ll heat you up some food!” Bessie jumped to attention, rushing for the kitchen.”

“Who the hell are you? Didn’t you get the memo? Smoothskins get to stay in Tenpenny while us
ghouls rot away in the sewers.”

“I have heard that. Charon and I were hoping to stay the night while we look for a caravan.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of Charon.” Roy scoffed. “What, do you shut your eyes tight when you ride that ghoul dick. But hey, why should I judge; anything for some protection, right?” He sneered at Charon, giving him a depraved wink. Percy grew quite red, but didn’t say anything.

“Finally off Ahzrukhal then? I’m surprised you didn’t do it years ago.”

“Can we stay here or not?” Charon managed to get out. He was practically shaking in anger.

“That depends on what you can do for me. Those Tower bigots have gotten on my last nerve. I have enough ferals here to completely wipe ‘em out, I only need a way to get them in. There’s a tunnel that leads to the basement of Tenpenny Tower. All your little smoothskin needs to do is get in, open the hatch in the basement, and flood the place with ferals. Smoothskins die, we move in, win-win.’’

“That doesn’t sound like a win to me.” Percy glared at him.

Bessie had just walked in with a steak for Roy.

“Bessie, are you ok with this?”

The ghoullette looked at Roy before hunching her shoulders and looking at the ground. “I’m sure it’s for the best…Those humans didn’t leave Roy with any other option…” She gave Roy his dinner and sat down next to him.

But Percy didn’t back down. “No, there has to be a better way. Let me talk to them! I can’t just let you kill all those people, even if they are assholes!”

Roy looked up at Charon. “Can you put a leash on this one?”

“Enough!” Charon grabbed Roy by the shirt collar, slamming him against the wall.

“Roy!” Bessie screamed but Percy held her back.

“Percy is not some cheap fuck! You will not talk to her like that unless you want to lose your tongue! Neither of us with help you with your sick plan!”

Throwing Roy across the room, Charon took Percy by the arm, dragging her the entire way out of the subway. Once they were out in the wasteland night, Percy finally managed to wrench herself from his grasp.

“That really hurt Charon!” She rotated her sore shoulder. “And there were better ways of handling that! Now we have to sleep outside.”

Charon’s eyes softened. He rubbed her shoulder gently. “I’m sorry. I lost my temper. But the things he was saying…”

“I know…I appreciate you standing up for me like that…” Percy looked at the tower in the distance. “It’s not that far. Let’s walk a ways from here and settle down. Tomorrow I’ll get into Tenpenny. Who knows? Maybe I can prove Roy wrong and convince them to let the ghouls in.”
Charon held her close as they settled down for the night. Her hair smelled faintly of mint. It couldn’t be her natural scent. He would ask her about that later. But for now,

“I’m not letting you go to Tenpenny Tower alone.”

Percy rolled in his arms until they were face to face. He could count the freckles on her cheeks.

“We talked about this. They won’t let you in. Tenpenny won’t recognize me because he’s never seen me, and I’ll use a different name. I’ll be careful.”

Charon tried a different tactic. Rolling her onto his chest, he kissed her slowly and tenderly, running his hand from her back down to her ass before stroking up and down her inner thigh. She trembled against his touch, retaliating by rolling her hips against his. There were too many layers between them, but getting undressed out here was suicidal. Charon rolled them over again until he was on top. Taking both her wrists in one hand, he ghosted his fingers across her crotch. Percy whined, squirming as she tried to increase the friction between them. Charon smirked, leaning forward until his lips ghosted against the shell of her ear.

“Imagine doing this in a bed…warm sheets and soft pillows. Or over a table. Or in the shower…” Percy moaned as he dragged his teeth across her earlobe.

“Charon, tell me what this is really about.” She gasped, turning her head when he tried to kiss her again.

‘Dammit.’

Charon pulled away, sitting up. “If you’re in there, I can’t protect you. I won’t know what’s happening, or if you get hurt, until it’s too late.”

“Why the change of heart? She got on her knees so she was eye level with him. “Charon, I didn’t want to ask this, but what did you see in there?” She held his face in her hands.

Charon avoided eye contact, tracing the veins of her hand with his calloused fingers.

“Before the war—before I even had a contract…I had a family. Two younger brothers and a mom. We didn’t have a lot of money, but enough to get by…Until mom got sick.”

Percy pulled him back until they were lying down again with Charon resting his head on her chest. Now, more than ever he needed to hear her heartbeat again. She stroked her fingers through his tufts of red hair.

“She was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Day after day, we watched her get thinner and weaker until she needed help just to eat. I tried taking care of them, believe me I tried! I dropped out of school, took on as many jobs as would hire me…but even that wasn’t enough to pay the bills and keep the boys in school.”

“What happened to her?”

“I wish I could know for sure. She hated that I quit school. She even tried hiding the bills to make me think everything was ok. Then one day, she just disappeared. All her clothes were there, all her nice things. The only things missing were her coat and hat. She left me a note. ‘Take care of your brothers.’ And that was it…”

“What happened to your brothers?”
Charon’s arms grew tight around her, his muscles stiffened.

“A break-in.” She could hear a crack in the deep rumble of his voice.

“Back in the day…you always heard about kids disappearing. Army recruitment was normal, but this…this was sick. They were barely in their teens, goddammit!”

Charon went on talking, he couldn’t stop himself. Someone had to know their story. It couldn’t just disappear with the past. They had lived!

“Kidnappers could make a lot, selling boys and girls to the highest bidder. But they never got the chance this time. I killed them, Percy. Three guys against me and all I had was a lousy knife. I wasn’t even thinking about what I was doing. All I can remember afterwards was that I was too late to save them.” Charon sighed, “After that, I was arrested and turned over to some scientists who turned me into what I was when you met me. If there was one thing in my life I could have changed, it would have been that. If I have been home during the break-in…”

Percy listened in silence. He couldn’t blame himself for something he couldn’t have controlled, but her heart broke for him. No wonder he sided with Ashur. She thought of all the times Charon had interacted with children in Rivet City and Megaton. Despite his size and appearance, he was always gentle and kind. Even Simms’ boy had warmed up to him eventually.

Charon was tense, breathing stiffly, despite his exhaustion.

Percy began to hum a song. It was familiar, from a brighter time. But rather than being bright and cheerful like the song was known for, Percy sang it slow, low, and calming.

“Somewhere, my love, there will be songs to sing. Although the snow, covers the hopes of spring.”

Her fingers traced gentle circles on his scalp, and she felt the muscles in his arms loosen.

“Someday, we’ll meet again, my love. Someday…whenever the spring, breaks, though…”

His breathing slowed, Percy covered his shoulders with the blanket as she sang on.

“Warm as the wind, and as soft as the kiss of snow. Till then, my sweet, think of me now and then… Godspeed, my love, till you are mine again.”

Percy’s eyes grew heavy. Soon she followed him to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

"Somewhere My Love” used to be a lullaby for me, so it's the epitome of soothing.
Chapter 36 (smut)

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proofread my Groovymarlin!

Percy woke up to find Charon completely concealed from head to toe. When he woke up he’d felt… lighter.

“I figure a storm-chaser hat, goggles, and some more concealing merc armor will do the trick.” He looked at her, sounding oddly sheepish through all the layers of cloth. A bandana was covering most of his face. She got up, walking to him.

“I already miss your face…” pulling down the bandana, she pressed a kiss to his dried and chapped lips. Percy loved the texture of his body. It was rough but firm. Stable and reliable. His hands grabbed her hips pulling her closer, but making sure they didn’t get too excited. Sighing as she leaned back, Percy looked to their bags. “I think I still have a clean dress somewhere in there.”

Charon sat back and ate, watching her get dressed and ready. He could never get over how gorgeous she was. His eyes traced the muscles on her legs, up her thighs, and rested just below her back. She covered herself with a light blue dress and slipped on a pair of old weathered heels. It was a relief to his tightening pants. With bobby-pins, charcoal dust from the campfire, and some of the lipstick Snowflake had given her, Percy slowly transformed herself into something beautifully pre-war. She turned to him with a wink.

“Think they’ll let me in?”

“They might not let you back out.”

Percy blushed at that, before her face fell. “I’m gonna have to be a bitch in there, just a heads up. You’re going to need to carry everything and not speak unless I allow it. Let me do the talking, ok?”

Charon grabbed their things, standing tall before her. He felt oddly playful, despite the circumstances.

“I’m not sure,” He mused, reaching around to squeeze her ass; it was so soft without all the armor. Charon leaned in, growling softly, “Do I get a reward after?”

Percy grew extremely hot, down to her core. Pulling him close, she attacked his mouth, tongue slipping through his lips with a moan.

‘Make-up be damned, I’ll fix it later…’

Charon rubbed her ass with one hand, the other worked on the buttons of her dress before slipping his hand through the folds to cup a breast, rolling her nipple between two fingers.

Percy whimpered, arching into his touch. Growling something that sounded very close to ‘Fuck it,’ Charon dropped to his knees before her. He roughly hauled one knee over his shoulder, steadying the other one as he yanked down her underwear.
“Watch the horizon.” He commanded, to which Percy could only groan an assent.

His fingers drew along her wet curls, her aroma intoxicating him as he dipped a finger into her warm center. Her fingers clutched his scalp, impatient and wanton as her hips bucked forward.

Flattening his tongue from her opening up to her clit, Charon moaned in ecstasy at her taste. It had been too damn long. Curling two fingers inside her, he switched between sucking on her nub and catching the ambrosia that slipped from her core. Percy was a quivering mess, shamelessly grinding against his head as she tried to keep her balance and watch out for approaching enemies. His fingers, oh God his fingers! The texture made her jolt as he pumped them in and out of her. A strong wind blew through, raising goosebumps on her thighs as it cooled the moisture there.

“Yes, yes, yes! Right there…so good, oh, Charon!” She felt as if she was drowning in her own orgasm as it crept up her body. Percy shook apart, screaming his name and falling to the ground. But Charon wasn’t done with her yet. Tongue and teeth climbed up to her breasts, lapping and nipping against the quivering flesh as Percy caught her breath. He claimed her mouth just as hungrily as he’d claimed her cunt, and she could taste herself on his tongue.

“Don’t you need to…you know…?” Percy asked as she fixed her make-up and brushed the dirt off her body.

Charon fixed her with his hungry stare as he tried to calm himself down.

“Last time I checked, tonight you’ll owe me a reward. Now, the reward is going to be that much sweeter.” He smirked as he licked his lips, still tasting some of her there. Percy put on a wide brimmed hat and tinted sunglasses to cover her blush.

The Tower was much bigger up close. Charon stood behind Percy, face hidden, but glaring all the same. He resisted the urge to look at her ass as she stuck out her hip, resting a hand there as she pressed the button on the intercom.

‘Showtime.’

“Yes? Who is this?”

Percy lowered her sunglasses, looking into the camera with impatience. Good thing the camera was a little higher up—better angle.

“Yes this is Trisha Therot; I’m here to inquire about residence.”

“We are fully booked. Go to Rivet.” The voice said gruffly.

“Are you kidding me? The people are packed like sardines there! Besides,” Percy brushed her fingers against her neck as she leaned her head to the side, the collar of her dress dragging against her cleavage.

“The briny air is terrible for my skin.”

Tapping her full lips, she smirked slightly. “Surely we can come to...some sort of arrangement?”

The gates opened. The gears must have been well oiled, because they hardly caused a whisper. The man at the front desk stood to greet them as they walked in. He couldn’t help but balk at
“Welcome to Tenpenny Tower, I’m security chief Gustavo, Who is that?”

“Oh him?” Percy turned slightly, looking back at Charon a moment. He noticed the man eyeing her waist as she turned and Charon seethed.

“This is Harpocrates. He is my protection out in the wastes.”

“Funny name. Wouldn’t he be more comfortable without all those clothes?”

“I’m sure he would, but for your comfort he is covered. You see, Harpocrates was horribly burned from head to foot some time ago, and it can be quite difficult to look at him, even for me. As for his name, well, when you pay him as much as I do, you can name him whatever you like.” She smirked, handing her hat to Charon and folding her glasses. The guard was utterly shameless as he watched her tuck them into the dip of her collar.

“Anyway…about that room?”

Gustavo sighed. “There really isn’t anything I can do, ma’am. Only Mister Tenpenny can give out rooms here. However, such an elegant woman like you would have no trouble convincing him of your worth, I’m sure.”

Percy’s painted lips curled into a closed smile. “I might just. Could you arrange a meeting for me? I’d love to get to know Mister Tenpenny a little better.”

Gustavo straightened, returning her smile. “That I can do. I’ll speak with him right away.”

With that, he held out his hand as if to shake hers, but when he took it, he raised it to his lips in a less that chaste gesture.

“If you like, your body guard can set your bags at the desk here; I promise no one would even think to touch them.”

Percy settled into a chair in the Federalist lounge and crossed her legs. Sitting up straight with a bored expression, she picked imaginary dirt from under her nails as she said “Harpocrates, I’d appreciate a glass of wine. Get yourself a beer as well, if you’re so inclined.”

“Ma’am?” Charon hesitated. Hadn’t she stopped drinking? She didn’t look up, but her eyebrows raised.

“I don’t believe I was unclear.”

“…Yes, ma’am.”

While he was gone, a clearly intoxicated man sat down next to her.

“Well hello! I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure of meeting you! I hope you’ll pardon me if we’ve met, but I’m terrible with faces when I’ve been drinking, and well,” he took a rather large gulp from his glass before grinning jovially. “I’ve been drinking! Michael Hawthorne at your intensely inebriated service.”

Charon set down Percy’s drink between the two, but once again she seemed to ignore him.
“Trisha Therot. Is it true what they say? The Tower is completely ghouls free?”

“One hundred percent, my dear! No need to worry your pretty little head inside these walls.”

“I don’t know about worry. Aside from their looks, I’ve heard they can be quite nice if you’re kind to them.” Percy took a delicate sip of her drink, and for the first time, much to his relief, Charon saw a crack in her façade. There was a slight pucker of her lips that only he seemed to notice.

“Oh. I see.” He leaned forward in interest. “Well. I’ve never met one, so I wouldn't know. I just always thought... I guess I really don't know what I thought...”

“It takes a pretty face to make you see reason, I see?” An older man sat on the other side of Percy, grinning ear to ear. His face was flushed, but he wasn’t nearly as drunk as Hawthorne.

“Daring! You magnificent bastard! How are you, my good man?” Percy seemed completely forgotten. The two spoke as if they hadn’t seen each other in ages. Apparently, Hawthorne had been perpetually drunk since he was a toddler.

“Daring? Surely you aren’t Herbert Dashwood?” Percy finally got a word in.

“Yes I am! Good to know my celebrity has lasted so long! It’s also refreshing to see someone as refined as you isn’t a bigot!” He patted her lightly on the shoulder, flashing Hawthorne a look.

“You've heard the stories I'm sure: About the mindless ones eating brains and the like. Well, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with all that.” He tried to defend himself.

“Oh those are just the ferals! If I had my way, every ghouls in their right mind should be allowed in; God knows there’s plenty of room. Besides, the pre-war ones probably stayed here before the war. Can you imagine that kind of injustice?”

Percy began talking with Dashwood with renewed interest. “Is it true you had a ghouls companion?”

“Ah, Argyle…” Dashwood’s eyes glazed as he was swept up in the nostalgia. “Yes, he was quite the friend for a confirmed old bachelor like myself, even before I was old. I do miss him...”

“Enough of sadness! Herbert, you need another drink!” Hawthorne pushed a shot his way and began talking emphatically about local betting pools.

Percy leaned back, seeing that she had been thoroughly cut from the conversation. She noticed Gustavo standing at the door. Excusing herself, she walked over to him.

“Good news, I hope?”

“Of course, ma’am! You seem to have caught Mister Tenpenny’s interest. He says you may have a room for the night on the condition that you have dinner with him this evening...alone.”

Percy couldn’t help but show her surprise, but quickly recovered.

“Sounds reasonable. Harpocrates, take my things up, I’ll join you shortly.”

“Oh what the hell? It's not like anything interesting happens around here anyway: Let the ghouls in!” Hawthorne and Dashwood began swaying to and fro, singing off-key to whatever was playing on the jukebox.

As the elevator doors closed on Charon and Gustavo, Charon watched as Percy moved to the next room. She seemed to have a system, but that didn’t dispel his concern.
Percy slammed the door with a groan, rubbing her temples. Susan Lancaster and the Wellingtons had been a handful, but she managed to convince them of an imaginary unanimous opinion against them. If she managed to convince Tenpenny himself, then their qualms would be meaningless anyway. And if Allistair truly had the last say, then he was her trump card in all of this. The smoothskins would be spared, and the ghouls could live in some level of humanity. Kicking off her shoes, Percy collapsed onto the bed next to Charon. He was reading one of the many books from the shelves here. Even though the room showed its age—wallpaper peeled, plaster chipped—great care had been done to hide this. The rugs were picked clean of dirt and the plastic flowered vases were dusted. Had Charon done this, or had the room been made up for them? Charon himself had taken off his disguise and was relaxing in a t-shirt and slacks. The image was almost...domestic.

Charon pulled her close as he continued to read. “You’ve been busy.”

“I just hope it’ll be worth it in the end. I’m sorry about earlier, by the way. I hate that I treated you like that.”

He pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Sometimes I forget how good an actress you are. If you’d been around before the war, you’d have been in all the best movies.”

“You’re not mad?”

“Not at you. But Harpocrates? Really?”

“God of silence and secrets,” she teased.

Charon smiled, but sighed as he turned back to his book. “Although, I have been fantasizing about cracking the skulls of those wandering eyed men for the past few hours.”

Percy groaned. “That reminds me: I still need to have dinner with Tenpenny. I can’t imagine what he will be like if his men were so shameless.” She stretched, taking a deep breath through her nose to stretch her lungs. She noticed something.

“Is that...mint?”

Charon smirked, turning a page. “I found some toiletries in your bag. The tub runs hot rad-free water, by the way.”

She practically squealed as she scooted the edge of the bed, running to the bath. As she stripped off the rest of her clothes, Charon admired her leaning over the tub to start the water. He knew he had no right to be jealous, but he couldn’t help the feeling of pride that welled up in him at the idea that she had chosen him, despite it all. His eyes found the crude scarring on her lower back, narrowing for a moment before softening.

Despite it all.

Percy lined all the different soaps and lotions around the tub before sinking into the steaming bath. She looked to him with a smile.

“I wish we didn’t have to leave this room. I wouldn’t mind staying here forever.”

The room filled with the scent of vanilla as she cleaned herself off. She curled the ends of her hair with bobby-pins until they were dry enough to stay curled. Applying the same makeup as before, she
was once again the picture of pre-war beauty before him.

“Here I go,” she said sadly, giving herself one last once over before the mirror. “If I’m not back in two hours, come get me. I don’t trust this man, and I haven’t even met him yet.”

Charon stepped forward with a long piece of ribbon and a small snub nosed forty-four magnum. A silencer had been screwed onto the tip.

Kneeling, he lifted her skirt and Percy was immediately reminded of that morning.

“Easy big guy, I just got cleaned up; I don’t think I have time for another bath.”

Percy watched with interest as he attached the ribbon to her underwear before wrapping it around her thigh and then the gun. She hummed as he kissed her inner thigh.

“Just in case.” He said, barely above a whisper.

He straightened up, rubbing her shoulders reassuringly. “Be careful.”

“Always.”

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Percy tapped lightly on the door. She was amazed by the indoor flower garden just outside his suite. They were real, not plastic. She had never seen real flowers before!

“Come in!” An accented voice called from the other side of the door. As she entered, Percy was met with an elegantly laid table, filled with wine and food which smelled far too appetizing for the wastes. Her mouth watered despite herself.

“Well? Don’t just stand there, sit down, my dear girl!”

Percy stiffened but smiled, taking a seat as he pulled out her chair. He smelled of whiskey and mothballs, but also gun oil…strange.

“So,” He sat down next to her rather than across from her, on her armed side. “What brings such a pretty young thing to my tower?”

Percy leaned her chin against her palm. “The Boston commonwealth has become boring; I thought I’d like somewhere a little warmer. I heard about this place and thought it would be perfect to relax for a few months. I love the view from my suite, by the way, Mister Tenpenny.”

“I’m sure this place will meet, if not exceed, your expectations. And please, call me Allistair. We are friends here.”

She attempted to cover her glass as Tenpenny made to pour her some wine.

“Um…I’m sorry, but I don’t drink.”

Allistair snorted under his breath. “I must insist you try this bottle. It may change your entire outlook on spirits.”

Percy giggled lightly, but her eyes followed his every tiny movement. “If you insist, Allistair.”

Throughout the dinner, Tenpenny talked about the most boring things, from the difficulty of
maintaining a pure water well, to the going prices of fresh mirelurk. Percy tried to listen with interest, but focused mostly on her food. He didn’t know who she really was, but all the same, she tried to find an off-taste about her food and drink. The wine must have been very strong; she’d only taken a few sips and it was already going to her head. Then again, her tolerance wasn’t what it used to be, either.

“To this day, I refuse to pay more than thirty caps for a pound. But enough about that. The view from my own suite is quite a bit more impressive, I can assure you.”

“Oh my…” She exclaimed, feigning shock as she leaned against the balcony, taking in the sight.

She stilled as she felt his hand against her lower back. “My former employee thought the same thing when he saw it. You can see everything up here through a scope. Even as far as that eyesore, Megaton.” Passing her a pair of binoculars and taking up his rifle, Allistair looked through the scope in the direction of the Warrington train yard, where the ghouls were holed up.

“Filthy things…The world would be a more beautiful place without those abominations.” He trained his sights on a couple of them who were milking a brahmin.

“But I suppose you wouldn’t have any problem with that, would you…Persephone?”

“…How did you know?”

“You think I don’t have connections? That I wouldn’t look into the death of my most devoted employee? That I wouldn’t see that hulking abomination try to consume you through your cunt?” Percy rushed to the door, but it was locked. She felt woozy. Falling to her knees, she watched in horror as he took aim at the unknowing ghouls.

“How did you…drug me…?”

“I lined the glass with med-x, of course. But no matter. Burke had taken quite the liking to you; went on and on about his little song bird who would be the herald of spring in these barren wastes. So… Paragon of goodness, what is it like? Being powerless to save those animals you are only too willing to lie with?”

Percy began to laugh weakly. He was so wrong. She was not good, and there was nothing she could do to right this hell-scape.

Allistair turned to her in disgust, but froze as he saw the gun in her hand.

“Allistair…Persephone was never the goddess of spring; that was her mother. Persephone ruled the underworld. And I…”

She cocked the hammer.

“…am the Paragon of Justice.”
Chapter 37 (smut)

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proof read by the lovely Groovymarlin!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Percy kicked his rifle off the balcony and shot him twice more in the gut for good measure. Struggling to stay awake, she crawled towards him and took the key from his pocket. Clinging to the walls, she looked around the suite, unnervingly tidy despite what was now lying on the balcony.

“Charon!!” she called, choking on the last syllable.

The door flew open with a bang. He rushed towards Percy, catching her as her legs gave out.

“How did you get past the guards?” she asked faintly.

“The bastard must have insisted they leave the floor.” Charon was shaking with rage, he knew something like this might happen!

“Charon, this is bad, this is really bad! You need to get Herbert Dashwood! He’s the only one who might believe me.” Percy tried to stand on her own, but failed.

Charon laid her on Tenpenny’s bed. Scrunching her nose at the smell, she clung to the front of his armor.

“Don’t leave, please don’t leave…”

Charon’s face burned with anger and fear and relief.

“Wait here, I don’t want to draw attention by carrying you around. I’ll only be a few minutes.” He carefully pushed her arms against the bed.

“Please, please don’t leave!” Her eyelids fluttered as the adrenalin caused the med-x to spread faster through her body.

“I promise I will come back, Percy. I promise.”

There was no feeling like the quaking of her body from fear and adrenaline as the med-x fought to calm her. It could have been seconds, minutes, or hours, but finally, finally she heard Charon and Dashwood in the other room. Charon was telling him everything, from Burke’s murder to the ghouls in Warrington station. Thankfully, he left out what Burke had done to her.

As Charon led him into Tenpenny’s room, he looked to Percy and she nodded.

“There’s one more thing.” He pulled down the bandana covering his face. Dashwood wasn’t even remotely surprised.

“Son I’ve travelled and done enough other intimate things with a ghoul to know one when I hear one.”
“Good,” Percy said, struggling to sit up. “Then maybe you’ll be willing to help us.”

He paused, rubbing his beard in thought.

“We need to make this look like he was trying to take advantage of you…I mean more so. Allistair has a history of being a lech, even more so than myself.” He laughed at that, but stopped when Charon was clearly not amused.

“Harpocrates, go make the balcony look more disheveled and hide his rifle. I’ll lay down evidence. Trisha, what did he use to drug you, did he tell you?”

“Actually, it’s Charon and Percy. It was med-x.”

Charon could be heard smashing apart furniture with the occasional feral growl as Dashwood laid out the med-x in easy to find places. Percy really wanted some water, but Dashwood thought it would be better for their case if as much of the drug was still in her system as possible when other people saw her.

After the stage was set, Dashwood left to grab the guards and cause a general scene. As soon as the door closed behind him, Charon was at her side.

“How did you get here so fast?” she asked weakly as she felt his fingers entwine with hers.

“I listened outside the door. I couldn’t take the waiting. How did he know?” he asked, hands visibly shaking as he pulled her close.

“He found out about what you did to Burke…and he saw us…this morning.”

Charon held her closer as her shoulders began to shake.

“He was going to shoot two ghouls; they would have died if I didn’t have that gun.”

Charon kissed the tears from her cheeks, rubbing her back.

“But that didn’t happen. You and they are alive and safe.” He reassured her—and himself—punctuating each word with a kiss until his lips were pressed insistently against hers. She was warm, and her heart was beating, and she was alive and she was safe. Her fingers were cold against the shriveled shell of his ear, her breath puffed through her nose against his cheek, her nails pressed into his neck as she urged him closer still. They both heard guards in the distance. Charon stood up and re-covered his face. Percy moved to the mirror in the corner. The makeup on her face was smudged, and while her cheeks and nose were flushed, the chalkiness of her skin beneath was difficult to ignore. Flinching slightly, she ripped open the front of her dress. Two buttons flew to the ground and she kicked them under the bed before going to join the party in the main room. The next few hours were a blur as Tenpenny’s body was carried out and buried. The male tenants were quick to accuse Percy of foul play, the women less so. When Gustavo moved to take over in place of Allistair, Hawthorne was quick to volunteer Dashwood instead. The tenants rallied behind him, pulled in by Dashwood’s charm and disarming personality.

Gustavo grumbled, but as long as he was still getting paid…

Charon wouldn’t let Percy out of his sight until they were safely behind the bolted and barred door of their suite. Marble scraped loudly against uneven tile as Charon pushed one of the heavy column nightstands against the door. Percy was in the middle of the bed, dress discarded with her knees tucked under her chin. It was quite warm in the room, but she was shaking none the less.
“Dashwood seems like he’s been waiting for something like this to happen…can’t blame a guy for grabbing an opportunity when it presents itself, I suppose.”

“Do you think he can lead this place? Do you believe in his opinion of ghouls?”

“I’m not sure…But I don’t want to think about that right now.”

She leaned into him as he took his place next to her.

“Thanks…for coming back this time.”

Charon’s hand stilled for a moment before resuming gently rubbing her back. “I owe you that much.” ‘And so much more.’

“Sorry…that was cruel…I know you had your reasons, however misguided they were. But I couldn’t help but feel a little nervous.”

“I know.”

Percy rubbed at the remains of makeup still on her face. Charon moved to wet a rag with warm water. Taking her chin in one hand, he washed the last smudges of charcoal and lipstick from her face. Leaning his forehead against hers Charon looked into her eyes, trying to read her as well as she seemed to read him.

“What was that book you had earlier?” She asked, barely above a whisper.

They settled with Charon’s back against the bed post, and Percy straddling his lap, ear against his heart as he read about a world that never had the chance to be bombed. Where logic was simple because there was little of it to begin with. Where beasts spoke, and people acted like beasts. Where children made as much sense as adults were fools. If there was a moral by the end of it, Percy certainly didn’t catch on as she was lulled to sleep by the beat of his heart in one ear, and the rhythm of his calming voice in the other. His chest rose and fell, his breath ruffled the tufts of her hair, his warm fingers rubbed circles into her back.

“Now hear me out!” Dashwood slammed his palm upon the front desk as tenants gathered.

“We don’t know the logistics around ghoulification! Some live their whole lives eating irradiated food with no ill effects, while some lose their noses after a hundred rads. Hawthorne! Even alcohol has rads, and Lord knows you’ve had enough with nothing falling off.”

“Here, here!” He called from the back of the lobby.

Percy and Charon watched from the middle of the crowd; guards leaned against the columns, watching in mild amusement.

“Julius, wouldn’t you agree that living with ghouls would offer a fantastic opportunity for medical advancement?”

Everyone turned to Doctor Banfield.

“Well, yes” he stuttered, embarrassed at the sudden attention. “Most of my theories have been based on second-hand stories and feral ghouls.”
“Thank you, Julius. Now I’m not saying this has to happen all at once,” Dashwood raised his palms in defense. “I’m saying we ease into it—take shifts. Ten hours for one group, ten hours for the other, four hours for both parties to interact if they so desire.”

‘He thought this through.’ Percy wasn’t surprised. ‘What else has he planned?’

The crowds were still in disagreement, with louder dissent and quieter assent. The Wellingtons were completely against it.

“We can’t trust them! Where will we be if they all turn feral on us?!” Millicent accused.

“I honestly think you are more likely to get killed out of sheer annoyance than one of them going feral.”

That earned him an indignant gasp from her, no help from her spouse, and low snickers throughout the throng.

“I’m saying,” Millicent stamped her foot insistently, “how can we know for sure? Only you’ve ever known an alleged non-feral personally, if those radio plays can be believed.”

“More than you could ever know of the former!” Dashwood laughed, “But as for the latter...”

He turned his eye on Percy then Charon, and she was too late to realize what he was getting at.

‘Sneaky bastard...’ She squeezed Charon’s hand, unnoticed by the tenants surrounding them.

“Harpocrates, or should I say, Charon. Aren’t you a little warm? How can you even breathe through that rag?”

Charon sighed as the crowd turned on him, not catching on as fast as Percy had.

Tugging down the bandana covering his face, it took three whole seconds before the lobby filled with gasps, and a long drawn out scream from Millicent.

Everyone backed away from the two, and the guards raised their weapons.

“Easy!!” Dashwood hollered over the crowd, waving to Gustavo to get control over his men.

“You heard the man! Cool it!”

Hesitantly, they lowered their guns.

“As you can see, he’s been the calmest out of any of you, and he’s the ghoul. Percy—how long has your bodyguard been like this?”

“You’d have to ask him for the exact year, but he’s definitely pre-war.”

Charon remained silent, glaring at Dashwood.

In the end, Percy and Charon were sent back out into the wastes to tell the Warrington station ghouls the good news.

“Could have been worse I guess.” Percy mused, fingers threaded behind her back.

Charon nodded. “The last thing I want to see is more unnecessary bloodshed.”
He was tired of killing.

Bessie was overjoyed at the news, even if the other ghouls were more skeptical.

“Didn’t think you had it in you, smoothskin.” Masters slapped her on the back as they traveled. Bessie counted on her fingers the things she was going to do once they settled in.

“I’ll take a nice warm bath—oh it will be so nice! I haven’t had a hot bath in ages! I can’t wait to meet the neighbors, and invite them over for dinner, and sunbathe! Won’t it be nice, Roy?” She looked over her shoulder at him, wincing slightly as she adjusted the heavy load she had packed for the trip. She seemed to have brought everything she could carry and then some.

Roy kept his distance, but nodded in agreement. He was looking at the Tower, thinking.

Percy and Charon walked on either side of the group, shooting the occasional radscorpion and mole rat that got too close. She looked over at him from across the group of ghouls, but his focus kept switching between Roy and Bessie. She couldn’t see it, but his fingers tightened on the grip of his shotgun.

The ghouls’ welcome went exactly as expected by everyone except perhaps Bessie. Cold stares by half, nervous or curious by some, and about a handful including Dashwood himself actually made an attempt to greet them properly.

“Oh my, you’re Herbert ‘Daring’ Dashwood!” Bessie squealed, shaking his hand excitedly. Dashwood seemed just as happy to see her. “I am! Welcome to the neighborhood, Miss…?”

“Bessie Lynn—!” Her face burned as Dashwood moved to kiss her hand. Roy wrenched his wrist away with a snarl.

“Watch it smoothskin!”

“Roy!” Bessie was pushed roughly aside as her boyfriend raised his fist. He stopped short as he heard the cocking of a shotgun behind him.

“Back. Away.” Charon growled, the barrel of his gun pressed firmly against Roy’s lower back. Roy laughed nervously, letting go of Dashwood and turning to face him.

“So this is how we’ll be treated in Tenpenny Tower!” He raised his voice and the lobby became silent at his words.

“Try to defend yourself and your kind, and they turn on you. No…worse than that.” He shot a look at Percy, who was helping Bessie back up.

“They have their lap dogs do the dirty work for them.” Bessie shrieked as Charon’s fist connected with Roy’s gut and he collapsed to the ground, coughing and wheezing.

“Are you really so prepared to fight the smoothskins here that you would jeopardize the lives of your people, Roy?” Charon asked, circling the fallen ghoul.

“Against their better judgement, they let you in. And now you’ve gone and made us ghouls look bad.” He looked to Percy, and then Dashwood who was keeping the guards down.
“You’ve relinquished your welcome, Roy. You’re too much of a loose cannon. In this situation, a
good leader—one who actually cares about his people—would leave.”

Roy gave a feral snarl, launching himself at Charon, knife in hand.

In one swift and fluid movement, Charon threw his gun to Percy, grabbed Roy’s wrist with one
hand, and his jaw in the other, squeezing on either side until Roy dropped the knife, screaming in
pain.

“Fuck you, you bastard! Turning on your own kind!” Roy spit at Charon even as he was lifted up by
his neck.

“Charon stop!!” Bessie pulled herself free from Percy, tugging in vain against the arm holding Roy
aloft.

“Please,” She sobbed “Let him go. I’ll go with him, we’ll leave peacefully and you won’t see us
again!”

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Charon looked her hard in the eye. Bruises were harder to see
on ghouls, but he had noticed. All over her arms and neck. She made no effort to hide them, and
Charon didn’t know what was worse: the fact that Roy beat her, or that no one had tried to stop him.

Bessie looked back, just as determined. “Yes…I’m sure. We’ll leave now. Quietly. Just let him go.”

Roy dropped hard, catching his breath. The surrounding ghouls and tenants watched in silence as he
got up and walked to the doors with his head held high, throwing his bag over one shoulder and
looking back at Bessie expectantly. “Ya’ comin’ Bess?”

“Yeah Roy, I’m right behind you.”

Charon noticed Michael Masters slip her a gun as she passed. Bessie turned to him, and she looked
truly afraid. Whether it was of Roy or the gun, he wasn’t sure.

After the door closed behind them, Dashwood took the ghouls up to the room floors, showing them
to their rooms, and informing them of the new living arrangements.

“It’s only temporary, I assure you! Some people just need to get settled into the idea of new
neighbors! No need to rush things and cause undue stress.”

After that, the other tenants went on their way, as if trying to forget what had just happened. They
avoided eye contact with Charon as he stood in the middle of the hall. All except for one.

Dr. Banfield coughed behind him.

“Pardon me, Charon, is it? You’re bleeding. I would be more than happy to look at that for you.”

Charon turned to look at Percy. She was smiling at him with a strange look in her eye.

“Go on, Big Guy; Let the good doctor patch you up.”

The doctor seemed more interested in examining his hand, rather than bandaging it.

“Fascinating!” He exclaimed with only a slight wince as he held Charon’s hand in his own.

An hour and seven stitches later and he was outside to have a smoke. His eyes scanned the horizon,
looking for any sight of Bessie and Roy. But they were gone.
He rubbed his temples as memories of Noel and Theo flashed through his mind. Roy, but more than anything, Bessie.

Her choice to go with him left a bad taste in Charon’s mouth. She could have stayed here and been safe. But she chose to leave with that beast. Was it guilt? Or perhaps some sort of twisted love for a twisted man? Unlikely…Fear? But what could she fear from inside these walls if he was outside of them? Charon hated the idea that someone like Roy could have messed with her head that much. Stamping out his cigarette with a sigh, Charon went inside to look for Percy.

She wasn’t in any of the stores and he was relieved to see she wasn’t at the bar either.

When he got to their room, he found a message stuck to the door. It was written in her messy slanted scrawl.

Charon,

Dashwood decided that since he’s the new head honcho around here, he deserves the room to match. But hey, he also decided we deserved a bigger room after everything that’s happened, so I won’t roll my eyes too hard. We’re on the top floor, right next to Dashwood’s place.

You can find me there.

Your, Persephone.

Percy felt the silky fabric rustle across her hips as she looked over the balcony. It really was a fantastic view. She could even see Charon, even if from here he looked more like an ant. He made a movement before heading back inside. Soon he would see her note and find her up here.

Rushing to the mirror, she plucked at the hair that was just beginning to grow over her ears. She thought about putting on makeup and curling her hair again, but thought better of it. He would like her regardless of how dressed up she was—although the pink sleepwear was a nice touch. Percy couldn’t understand why she was so nervous. It wasn’t as if this was their first time by any means. It was, however, the first time in a long time where they were both completely safe. No need to rush, no need to watch each other’s backs. Dashwood had said a caravan would be expected to arrive tomorrow, but until then, there was nothing to do but wait and…

The elevator dinged in the distance. Nerves and excitement shot through her stomach as she jumped onto the bed, stretching languidly just as Charon opened the door. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched him grow still, slowly closing the door behind him. His eyes raked her body, and she couldn’t help but blush. He was so handsome; the way he looked at her made Percy get warm all over. She loved his strong jaw, his broad shoulders, and those arms! He could probably hold her over his head with one arm.

“Like what you see?”

He didn’t speak, simply shucked off his armor until all that was left were his underclothes. The sun had only just dipped below the horizon, but it wasn’t like they had anywhere to go, or anything to do at the moment. Well…there was something.

Percy smirked, crawling on all fours across the bed until she was eye level with his crotch. She could
see him growing before her eyes. She pressed a kiss against his bulge before making her way upward. Palming his length as she kissed her way up to his abdomen.

Tracing the edge of one strip of exposed muscle over his abs, she looked up at him with a smile.

“It’s so much warmer here. Can you feel more without all the skin to block it?”

“Yes.” He watched hungrily from above, not moving an inch.

“Then come join me so I can appreciate you.”

When he still didn’t move, she began drawing her tongue in different patterns along the exposed muscle. Charon let out a choked moan, falling to the bed at her side, hands yearning for her, but she batted them away.

“No, you always get to touch me. Let me touch you.”

Charon chuckled in disbelief, but leaned back for her. Something had gotten into her, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to question it.

Her hands were like silk against his sides and shoulders. Charon sighed with each brush against his exposed muscle. Her touch was mesmerizing. Eyeing her chest—the nightgown leaving little to the imagination—he asked, “Where did you find…this?” his rubbed the fabric between his fingers, brushing against her warmed skin teasingly.

“New Urban Apparel. Anthony didn’t want to sell it to me at first, he’s still a little pissed about the ghouls, but I figured a few extra caps would be worth it.”

Her lips found his nipple, and Charon jerked at the new sensation. He couldn’t keep his hands off her any more, and she let him stroke up and down her shoulders until his calloused thumbs were pressing into her inner thighs. She whimpered grinding against his hand until she found a spot on his neck and sucked maddeningly until he couldn’t take it anymore. Rolling them over, he was so heavy over her, pressing her further into the soft sheets. He sucked and teased at her clothed breasts, his knee pressing into her center had her writhing.

“Oh Charon, I love how you feel against me” she panted, watching as he peeled the nighty off of her reverently. Wrapping his arms around her back, he took one of her breasts in his mouth, circling his tongue around the tiny nub. Percy’s skin was on fire with his touch. He was everywhere, and she couldn’t get enough. Her knee brushed against his strained member, and in desperation, she toed his underwear off until his hot length was finally freed. Stroking his erection with her leg, she felt precum drip down her calf.

“Charon please…”

Charon sat up, spreading her legs on either side of his hips, pulling her close.

Cock in one hand, he shook as he felt her heat against his tip.

“What do you want of me…Mistress?” He smirked, watching her go red as she looked up at him.

“I…” it was more than a little surprising to hear that! But if he wanted to play games, she could definitely play along.

“I want you fuck me Charon.”
Charon grabbed her wrists in one hand, raising them above her head as he continued to torture them both.

Percy bucked against him, but he grabbed her hip to still her.

Panting, Percy looked up into his eyes, he was inches from her face, lustful but stoic.

“Please fuck me Charon? I’ve been aching to feel you inside me for—”

Her wail was swallowed up by his lips as he bottomed out in her in one swift thrust.

Oh, oh oh! He filled her up completely! His thrusts were quick and shallow as he groaned into her mouth. Each movement of his cock hit parts of her she forgot she had.

“You’re my entire world, you know that?” He growled, throwing her legs over his shoulders to get a better angle.

“Yeah?” Percy could barely get the words out through her moans of ecstasy, “Tell me about it—just keep talking!” his voice sent shot white hot sensation straight to her core, and as much of him as there was, Percy needed more.

His breath was scorching against her ear.

“Staying away was the biggest mistake of my life. Being away from you was like drowning. I couldn’t get you out of my head, no matter how much I tried. Percy I—”

“…Yes?” She gasped.

Charon stopped thrusting. It was too soon. It wasn’t soon enough. What if she didn’t believe him?

“Charon?”

He began thrusting with new fervor until she was screaming his name. He released her wrists and they were all over him, nails digging into his arms as she tried desperately to bring him impossibly closer. Her walls began to clench, and she was already so tight! His rough fingers went to her clit and she was tipped over the edge, falling apart as he held her together. Charon roared his release, slamming into her erratically, holding onto the headboard to keep from falling on top of her. Percy pulled him down, kissing him frantically, as her legs fell shakily from his shoulders. Charon recovered from his small death in a daze, watching her as she peppered his chest with slow passionate kisses. Her heart ached at what he almost said, but at the same time…She was all too willing to say it back, and that scared her. She wanted to forgive him— truly she did! But…there was still a small part of her that warned. Guard your heart, harden it against him. If he left once, couldn’t he do it again? Wouldn’t he? But being with him again, like this…it was like regaining a part of herself. Percy had felt so hollow…now she was alive and whole. She looked back up at him. Charon’s eyes were hooded as he watched her, trying to stay awake. She stroked a sweat soaked tuft of hair away from his face. He leaned into her touch, pulling her closer. She felt his breath grow steady against her face as she drifted into darkness.

Chapter End Notes
I'll be going on hiatus for a short time. Finals are looming and between summer classes and a job, I won't have much time for writing. During the summer I'll try to post regularly, but it will be more on an every other week basis.
Somehow in the night, Charon had settled with his arm wrapped across Percy’s chest. In the morning light he roused, face nuzzling into the warmth of her back. His tired eyes followed the crisscross of scars down to the base of her lower back.

“I can never make up to you for this…” His thumb traced the words that soiled his memory of the night before the scars came to be a part of her.

Percy stretched, crinkling the damaged skin in the act. “Don’t blame yourself for a mad man’s actions; I don’t.”

“I…but I could have done more…after. I just stood by and tried to ignore how much pain you were in. Then I just passed you on to Carol…” ‘Like a burden…’

“You left me behind because I was still recovering and you left to destroy the entirety of the Talon Company. That was a little frightening to find out about, but wasteland morality isn’t black and white —the Vault’s wasn’t either. I was concerned more than angry. After you didn’t come back, I tried to rationalize with myself. I didn’t hold your contract, after all; what right did I have to expect anything of you?”

Charon listened in silence, kissing the freckles up to her shoulder. Percy’s hand reached over and began stroking his hair as she continued.

“On top of that, I hardly knew anything about your past or what could have possibly made you go to the conclusion that you did. If I had, I might—no, I would—have gone looking for you sooner. But I didn’t, so I had to get better by myself. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t resent you for that. But I’m willing to forgive you…and eventually forget.”

That was more than he deserved, and Charon knew it. He felt her run her fingers through his, bringing her back closer against his chest.

“I only ask that if you ever do leave again, give me a reason and then never come back. Because if you return after that, I will hate you.” Her voice choked at the last syllable.

‘I’ll never leave unless you push me away…and maybe not even then.’

Charon’s arm grew tighter around her waist, rolling to push her into the soft mattress as his lips travelled from her shoulder, up her neck, until he buried his face in her hair. He took a deep breath, filling himself with their mixed scent. His harsh and spiced, hers fluid and gentle. The whole wasteland could fuck off for all he cared, as long as Percy was with him. This…this was paradise and more than he could ever deserve. Charon raised their joined hands above them, humming low as Percy arched, pushing her arse against his growing length. He slid his other hand down to her core, pushing one knee between her legs.

“Patience.” He whispered, nipping at her ear.
“You’re one to talk,” She shuddered. She ground against his hand. “Come on, don’t be a tease Charon.”

He pressed his nose hole against where her shoulder and neck joined.

“You aren’t the only one who likes voices. Talk to me. What got you so riled up for me last night?”

Charon slowly pressed himself into her while drawing tantalizing circles on her clit. “Well?”

Percy sighed at the relief of feeling so much of him. His hair was probably the softest part of him and she couldn’t get enough of it. Reaching back, she pulled him even closer.

“The way you handled Roy.” She panted, sweat forming between their rocking bodies.

“You could have killed him, or at least beat him to a pulp. But you gave him a chance to leave on his own. If things had escalated further, who knows what would have happened. More than likely, the rest of the ghouls would have been killed out of fear—”

She cut off, moaning. Her knuckles growing white against the worn sheets. Percy didn’t know whether to lean into his hand, or arch into his torturously slow thrusts. He was drawing this out and it was heaven and hell on her nerves. Charon wasn’t doing much better, the heady scent of their sex was making him lightheaded. She was like silk beneath him. He let out a ragged breath, speeding up until the bed was creaking in protest.

“So is that what you like? Tough guys, showing everyone who’s boss?”

“No,” Percy began shaking, screwing her eyes shut as she was torn apart and held together by the gigantic ghoul on top of her. “But I like you.”

Charon groaned, pressing hot open mouthed kisses against her neck, fingers digging so tight into her hips, there would be bruises there for a week. Percy whimpered into the pillow. Charon set a brutal pace, jerking her hips back as he bucked into her. Her moans were driving him to the edge.

“There you go, Doll: Come for me.”

Percy came and he was quick to follow. Gathering her up in shaking arms, Charon pressed kisses against her shoulders, stroking her through the last waves of her orgasm.

“Doll, huh?” Percy laughed breathily, melting into his touch.

“When I first met you, you were as white as porcelain. Too clean to be anything but green to the wastes. Pale and scrawny. Doll.”

She raised his hand to her lips, kissing each ruined knuckle. “I like it.”

Michael Masters was sneaking out of Dashwood’s room just as Percy and Charon left theirs.

“I uh…” He said dumbly.

“Please,” Percy laughed. “We are the last people in this entire hotel who would judge. By the way,” She pointed to his neck. “I didn’t know ghouls could bruise. Charon doesn’t seem to.”

Charon made them take the stairs to give Michael privacy.
In the day it took for Percy, Charon, and the caravan to return to vault one-oh-eight, Percy rued the night she sold all her med-x. Her entire lower half—and a good part of her upper half too—was horribly sore. Charon wasn’t any help; every time she caught him watching her walk funny, he just turned away with a smirk.

“Proud of yourself?” She asked as they let the caravan walk a little ahead.

“A little.” He admitted, keeping his eyes straight. Just looking at her seemed to rile him up, and that wasn’t exactly appropriate when surrounded by a group of smoothskins.

“Next time I’ll make sure to stretch first.” She winked at him before running ahead to stop the caravaners from opening the vault door. Charon kept his distance, not even entering the cave.

“You need to put on your gas masks first, and cover your eyes and ears too for good measure. The gas in there’s still potent after two hundred years.”

“Is that why your companion is waiting outside?” One of the men sneered, “Can’t handle his high?”

Percy didn’t have time for this nonsense, throwing on her mask, she opened the door. “That man is a veteran from the great war. He’s seen things that would keep you awake and in diapers. Cut him a little slack, huh?”

Brahmin were stronger than they looked. It only took two to pull the bigger pieces. Within three days they were back at the Jefferson memorial. James met them at the front door.

“Another wheelchair? James, did anything happen while I was gone?”

He grimaced. “Not quite. I got hooked on that damned buffout, and Madison thought it best if I stuck to the chair for now.”

“And you’re fine with that?” Percy waved to the caravaners. “Leave the main pipe out here, but take the rest inside.”

“There are men and women inside to help you.” James added as they disappeared inside. He turned back to her, noticing the rather large ghoul that stayed behind. He went to lean against the door and light up a cigarette.

“There are plenty of ramps here in Jefferson, and maybe when enough work is done, I can speak to Pinkerton about this.” Gesturing weakly to his body, James led them inside. His chair was smaller than the one she had built for him, more streamlined; must have been Madison. It annoyed her, but Percy wasn’t going to fight someone who had similar goals…even if that woman annoyed the hell out of her. James looked back at the ghoul who stood so close to his daughter.

“Pardon, but your men should be in the basement.”

Charon raised an eyebrow, looking over to Percy. “So I’m guessing you didn’t tell him about me?”

“About you?” James cut in, realization itching at the back of his mind.

“No, I thought you were gone for good.” Percy reasoned. “James, where do we set down our things? Are the showers working yet?”

“Your things? Percy, who is this man? Why didn’t you tell me about him?!”

“Charon is my…companion.” She wasn’t sure what to call him.
Charon scoffed. “More like lovers.”

“You…I’ve heard of you! Charon. The one responsible for half the settlements in the South Eastern Commonwealth being destroyed. Percy this man is a murderer! He’s dangerous, a—”

“A what?” She cut in, “A monster? You think I don’t know about his past? About what he was forced to do?”

“Perse, you don’t need to—” Charon put a hand on her shoulder.

“I know I don’t need to defend you.” She looked back at James. “And I don’t need to defend my choices either, do I?”

James pressed his lips together in a thin line. “No you don’t. I’ll find a room for you two. Would you mind getting to work on installing the new parts?”

“I’d be happy to.” Percy smiled in victory. “Where’s Butch?”

“He left in search of the Temple of the Union. He seemed to think that being around other free slaves would be good for Clover. That poor girl is going to need more than good company, I fear.”

James watched them via several cameras he had set up in the public areas of the memorial. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. This…urban myth—more like urban horror—was…gentle, with his daughter at least. He was gruff and short with everyone, but there was no malice behind his actions. That night, he ate and even laughed with the rest of the scientists. Madison ate in silence, refusing to look at Percy. James knew why she was upset; Madison always valued the project above everything else. Percy had always been his reason for not pursuing it. But she also valued professionalism above all else, so they could work together.

“So how long have you been intimate with your bodyguard, Persephone? Seems less than professional to me.” Madison took a bite of fresh carrot from her plate.

Charon choked on his drink. The room went silent. James looked between them.

“Off and on for a few months now. But that’s not nearly as bad as pining after an uninterested widower for twenty years, is it?”

Madison went red.

“Enough.” James slammed his empty glass against the table. It didn’t make much of a noise, but it got the table’s attention “We are all tired, and we are all desperate to get Project Purity working again. What’s worse is the Brotherhood isn’t helping any more. But that means we only have the people here. The last thing we need is to fight amongst each other.”

Madison slammed down her fork, leaving the mess hall muttering about program calibrations. Percy began talking emphatically about the crazy things she saw in Point Lookout, until the rest of the workers joined in and conversation went back to normal. Eventually, everyone filed out to work or sleep.
“Well that could have gone worse.” Percy sat down on the bed, taking apart her gun to clean out the barrel.

Charon began organizing the things in their bags. “So you’re fine? With everyone knowing about us?”

“You’re the one who brought it up first. And what’s the worst they can do? Kidnap me? Torture me? Been there, done that, and I can handle them if they actually tried. I can certainly handle Madison. And she doesn’t have anything against you—not really.” She looked up at him. Apparently that wasn’t exactly what he meant. She set down her gun and walked over to him, taking his face in her hands. He leaned into her touch.

“I’m not ashamed of you. I just…didn’t know what to call us. We are a little more than partners, but calling you my boyfriend seemed kinda childish. Man-friend?” Charon snorted despite himself. “Companion seemed to fit at the time.”

He kissed her abdomen, pulling her closer by the back of her thighs.

Percy winced in pain. “Maybe not tonight, Charon.”

‘Great, I’m already hurting her…again.’

“Hey, don’t go all dark on me.” She kissed his temple. “Not the worst reason to be sore, so how about a nice shower? This place has a generator, and the rads will make us both feel better.”

Percy pulled him into the shower as she undressed him and herself. Charon took the soap from her, massaging it into her arms and legs. Percy sighed, leaning back against his chest. He rubbed the pain away, muscles loosening until nearly all her weight was supported by his arms. The steam of the shower was clouding her senses. He was so warm, and they were practically glowing with rads. Percy looked up at him, smiling lazily.

“Feeling better?” He asked quietly.

“Much better.” She pulled his head down for a kiss, water streaming down both their bodies. Her fingers entwined with his, bringing his palm to her breast. Percy used his rough fingers to tease her until her nipples pebbled between their efforts. Her tongue searched his mouth until they were sweetly intertwined.

She really was beautiful in her sleep. The little freckles on her nose were getting darker. Her full lips were open slightly and the smallest snore ghosted through the small room. His hand stroked her hip and Percy made a small noise as he brushed against the small bruises he had left there. Charon winced; he should have been more careful. She said she was fine, but the marks were there. An implication of ownership he had no claim to. He needed a smoke.

James was out on the cat walk. He waved to Charon as he approached. Even in the cool air, he was peppered with sweat.

“Could you help me with this?” A lighter was shaking in his hands. Charon took it and lit two cigarettes and passed one to him. James muttered thanks and they looked over the horizon in silence.

“I…met Catherine in the Southwestern Commonwealth. I’ve never been a true vault dweller, but she was. Vault 21—one of the few that wasn’t screwed up by Vault-Tec. She was the most beautiful
card dealer in the place, but the thing that drew me to her was her eyes…they seemed to read me
better than they did the cards. I used to play at her table every night, and every night I lost all my
money. The games were supposed to be perfectly fair, but somehow she always out played me. After
the third day though, she would slip me my money back. After that she started showing me around
the vaults. The place was huge…I would have gotten lost if it weren’t for her. One could argue that I
was pretty lost when I first met her.”

“Why are you telling me this? She’s Percy’s mother.” Charon asked, leaning against the railing.

“She died in childbirth. Percy never knew her. Catherine may have birthed her, but she missed being
able to be Percy’s mother. I’m sure you noticed she doesn’t call me ‘dad’ anymore, either.”

“You abandoned her.”

“Didn’t you?”

“You’re the one who thinks I’m a monster, I was doing it for her!”

“And she never asked you to, did she?” James replied calmly, eyes front as Charon stamped out his
smoke angrily. He continued after Charon lit up another one.

“Men like us could never deserve women like them, but damn us if we ever give up on trying to be
worthy. I can’t say I trust you, but Percy seems to, and I want to as well.”

Charon opened up to the man about his contract. He felt he owed James that much; he was Percy’s
father after all. Even if she didn’t care about James’ approval, he did in a way. James told him about
how, as he got to know Catherine, he learned that she wanted to join the Followers of the
Apocalypse and leave the vault. He helped her to join and after sharing notes, they began making
plans to for a massive purifier.

“The east coast seemed best, since we wouldn’t have the NCR breathing down our necks. But then
the BOS found us. No endeavor is free from bureaucracy, I suppose.” James snuffed out his cigarette
before turning to go back inside. Charon pushed him to the door. Before they went their separate
ways, James spoke up one last time.

“Charon?”

“Hmm?”

“I’m sorry about earlier. I should have trusted my daughter’s judgement. It’s not easy, letting go of
her like this.”

Charon rubbed the back of his neck. This was awkward.

“You don’t need to let her go; she forgave me, surely she can forgive you too.”

James gave an odd smile. “I’d like to think that. And another thing…” He gestured to the chair.

“I didn’t stop taking the Buffout because I became addicted. It stopped working. I have a feeling I’ll
be stuck in this damned chair a little longer than anticipated. Please don’t tell Percy. She doesn’t need
to worry about me.”

He looked especially frail, hunched in his chair as he wheeled away.
Percy curled into him as Charon got back into bed.

“I was cold without you.” She muttered, nose pressing into his neck for warmth.

“I’m sorry I woke you.” He pulled her close, letting her put her icy toes between his legs.

Even half asleep, her fingers fluttered across his chest, tracing each scar and exposed muscle. Charon’s heart jumped as she traced the scars made by that damn reaver ghoul so long ago. Percy kissed the scar on his arm from the first time she had patched him up.

“I told you I’d do a good job, didn’t I? If I wasn’t there, you might have used a dirty knife to get it out, then it would have gotten infected for sure.”

“I love you.”

Percy stopped her ministrations. Leaning on her elbows, she looked up at him solemnly.

“You…what?”

Charon looked her in the eye. There was no point in beating around the bush. They both knew by now. But saying it out loud was…different.

“I love you. The way you are, the way you make me feel. You make me feel like everything I’ve done never happened—like I can forget. I…” He sighed, looking up at the ceiling. “I know you can’t say it back yet…I probably wouldn’t believe you if you tried. But that’s fine. I can live with this, so long as it’s with you, Percy.”

She was quiet, staring at him with an odd mix of…something. She put her head back on his shoulder, looking up at the ceiling with him.

“…I was thinking about what we would do after the purifier is working. I think I’d like to move to Tenpenny. Tensions are still gonna be pretty high, and I want to help Dashwood keep the peace. Maybe we can kill local game for caps and…settle down or something.”

Charon wrapped his arm around her.

He loved her.
Percy winced as she switched on the nearby light. There were no windows in the memorial. Charon grumbled, pulling the blanket over their heads.

"We have to get up, Charon." She hummed, trying to rub the sleep from her eyes. "We are installing the major intake pipe today, that's going to take all afternoon at least."

"I'm hungry."

"Then get up and go eat."

Charon dragged her close, kissing down to her breasts.

"Are you still sore?" He asked in that ragged low voice. He sucked a nipple into his mouth, sucking hungrily between small bites.

"N-not very." She gasped, stroking the hot exposed muscle of his abs.

"Then I think I want breakfast in bed." He growled.

In a flash she was straddling his face, cunt inches from his watering mouth, his firm hands holding her thighs in place. Percy was no longer tired.

"You really do like the taste of me, don't you?" She shook slightly, shy despite their established relationship.

"Don't you?" Charon's tongue traced patterns into her inner thigh, always getting a little closer but never quite reaching his target.

"I-I mean…" Percy grabbed the wall for balance, even though she doubted Charon would ever let her fall over.

"You…are…ravishing." He whispered harshly, leaving open mouthed kisses on her inner thigh after each word.

Charon pressed his nose hole into her curls. Her scent wasn't strong or potent, but soft. Like sweet water. He took one of her outer lips gently between his teeth, pulling slowly and reveling in the heat radiating from her. Percy let out a ragged breath, watching him. He looked up, maintaining eye contact as he drew his tongue from her slit upwards.

"Mmm…" She bit her lip, hips jerking slightly in his tight hold.

Charon wrapped his arm around her waist, lowering her onto his face, his other hand reaching around her thigh, grasping his cock.

He groaned as her taste dripped down his chin, thighs desperately squeezing around his ears. Percy
was a mess, grinding wantonly against his tongue, stroking his head with one shaking hand.

"Play with yourself." He commanded, as he briefly came up for air.

Percy obeyed, pushing her sweat slicked breasts together and playing with her dusky nipples. She was so close, trying to pull away in a vain attempt to stave off the inevitable.

Charon was just as loud as her, sucking desperately on her clit as Percy cried out, "Charon!... I'm so close I'm—I'm—" She gasped, feeling something hot splash against her back. Dragging herself up against the wall, she looked down at him as she took some of his hot cum from her back. Tasting him, she flushed an even darker red. 'Not bad...savory...'

Her ghoul lover was just wiping her cum from his chin, licking his fingers clean.

"You're pretty good too big guy, wanna taste?"

James winced when he noticed Percy and Charon come in late. Madison was bad enough but this… was stressful.

"Oh good! You're...here." He forced a smile, passing Percy the blueprints for the intake pipe.

"It's basically just a welding job, but once it's done, you can go ahead and set all the intake pipes to drain. We can do a soft test to see if the hardware is working."

Percy looked over the readings on the terminal. "Wow, you got a lot done without me. Not that I'm complaining. Well, call us over the intercom if you need anything else while we're out there."

The pipe was just big enough for Charon to fit while they welded the inner seam. He looked over to Percy. He loved her, and whether she felt the same or not, she still didn't trust him. Oh she trusted him to watch her back, but not to skip out on her again. Only time could prove himself to her, but until then, he wanted her to know more about him—at least to know what she was getting into.

He coughed and Percy turned off her torch to look at him with a soft smile.

"Did Carol tell you about how I became employed by Ahzrukhal?"

She shrugged, wiping the sweat from her neck. She was wearing her old vault suit again with the arms tied around her waist.

"She told me about some merc type guy who had your contract for a while when you lived in the south, but not how you got from him to Ahzrukhal."

Charon scoffed. "More like raider with a brain. The psycho was merciless…"

"Are you sure you want to tell me about this?"

"Are you willing to listen?"

Percy checked the time. Ahead of schedule. She went over to sit next to him. "We could use a break."

Compelled, he walked through ruin after ruin of cities fallen. Each one empty of sentient life. The feeling wasn't as bad, but his legs would not stop moving. Not until he found his next employer. The
last one had gone and died. Not that he was incompetent, but there wasn’t a lot Charon could do when some teenaged idiot runs head first into a minefield. It had been like this for over a century. Passed from hand to hand, each new employer shooting the last one in the face ‘For good measure.’ And here he was. Capable as ever after all these years. Charon didn’t know if it was because of what that crazy bitch had done to him, or the radiation that had turned him into a ghoul, but he stopped aging a while ago. Even if his looks hadn’t exactly held out. It was a goddamn miracle the contract had survived the explosion, but something in him had lead him to the yellowed piece of paper. A little burnt around the edges, but still in one piece. It was like a throbbing in his bones that only got worse with inaction. He could ignore it long enough to eat, and sometimes for a few hours’ sleep before it forced him up again, but always the same pulse of need, of urgency.

More buildings loomed in the distance. Gunfire could be heard. This wasn’t a good idea, but what could he do? His feet seemed to drag him deeper into the ruins. It was all but deserted until he rounded a corner. There in the center of town. There were all the people. All bound and on their knees. Only one was free, pacing back and forth along the line of stone faced wastelanders. The man noticed him, turning with his gun leveled at Charon’s head. The man was dressed in a fine tailored suit. White with pin-stripes. The man was immaculate. With his hair combed back with grease. There was only a little bit of dust on the lower half of his legs but the way the man stood, he seemed to act like every particle belonged there for a reason.

"Ah! So good of you to join us! The party already started, but I’d say you’re fashionably late!" Charon moved forward slowly, trying to turn, to run away. There was nothing he could do for these people—the best he could do was run away. But that man—that…man—was the closest living human. And the contract zeroed in. He never lowered his gun, but he let Charon step forward until they were only two feet apart.

"Can I help you, or would you mind helping me? I’ve been painting the town red you see, and I’m halfway done."

Charon held out the contract, muscles clenched and shaking with the effort.


The man was taken aback, but took the contract regardless. A flash of metal and his blood spilled across the cracked concrete road.

"You seem nuttier than a Child of Atom, but what the hell." He used the blade to write his name, occasionally dipping the point into his fresh wound for more ‘ink’.

"Now, let’s test this out. What was your name?"

"Charon."

"Spooky." The man smirked. "Charon, as your first order, I command you to shoot each and every one of these lovely people in the fucking face. If they try to run, catch them and stomp the head in."

He did as he was told. Every poor soul gunned down. Only one had tried to run away—a little boy, probably too young to understand the hopelessness of his fate, only understanding and reacting to fear.

"Good show!" The man clapped. "I think I’d like to take this on the road. What do you say?"

Charon wiped the blood from his face, glaring at the man who only smiled an eerily white toothy
grin back.

"I serve you."

Percy shivered despite the heat. "Did he have a name? That man?"

"If he did, He never told me. He was my employer, but there was rarely any need for me to speak to him, so I didn't. He did most of the talking. He dragged me south to find more villages to slaughter and pillage, but only the small ones. The isolated ones that couldn't fight back."

"Whatever happened to him? How did you get free?"

Charon chuckled. Lacing their hands together, he brought her palm to his calloused lips.

"I was never free until I met you. But I was with that bastard for ten years before Ahzrukhal came along."

Ahzrukhal stood shaking behind the corner, fist clenched over his mouth as he watched his neighbors get slaughtered before his eyes. Some did try to run, but that Charon...monster stayed true to his orders. A ghoullette in a torn red dress with curly black hair that was mostly there and tied back in braids got it in her head to run, heading for the cover of the town hall while Charon's back was turned.

'Sandy, no! For the love of God don't!' but it was too late. Charon caught her by the shoulder before throwing her to the ground and—

Ahzrukhal shut his eyes. They would find him. Somehow that maniac hadn't dragged him out of his home in the night like the rest, but there was no hope now. He had planned a rescue, he would shoot the fucker and save everyone. The last settler fell, brains splattering against the pavement.

'No...' He still had two shots. He leveled his gun. If not for Sandy, than for his own sake now. The man turned, and there was a split second that felt like an eternity where they just stared at each other. The man opened his mouth to call, "CHA—"

*Bang*

Right between the eyes. He fell to the ground. Charon turned on him, his face unreadable as he went to the man. Rifling through his pockets until he found the contract.

As he walked towards Ahzrukhal, cowering in the corner, the would-be hero raised his gun for another shot. The gun clicked, but nothing came out. The bullet got stuck in the chamber.

"Here is the Contract." Charon said, almost robotically. "Sign it in blood and I will do as you wish."

Ahzrukhal couldn't believe what he was hearing. He replayed the giant ghoul's words in his mind over and over until he said, just barely above a whisper, "You mean to tell me...after all this time...all those settlements you slaughtered, and it was just orders—just business?" He raised his voice incredulously, and Charon only nodded, holding out the contract. Ahzrukhal stared at the paper, then at Charon, then back at the paper before snatching it up. Looking around, he found a rusty knife. The rads would heal the wound, but he howled in pain as the jagged metal cut into his arm.

"Alright..."
"My name is Charon, but I may go by another name if you so wish."

"Charon. Your first order is to find any and all supplies and pile them in the town center. That includes anything you find on bodies. You may not eat or drink without my permission. Hell, you can’t even take a shit without my say so from here on out." He listed off the orders on his fingers, shaking slightly as he looked up at the intimidating ghoul who loomed before him.

"As you wish."

The town was isolated, but was a large producer of chems. By that evening there was a sizable pile of buffout, psycho, and med-x. The two ghouls ate in angry silence. This was not how things should have turned out. He was going to take over the chem production, and marry Sandy, and get rich and leave this damned place for good. Ahzrukhal looked to the fallen man. The bullet must have stuck in the man’s head because there was no exit wound, and almost no blood had gotten on the suit. He threw a box of Abraxo at his new bodyguard.

"Go clean off that suit." He snapped before turning back to the camp fire.

"Would you like me to bury the dead?"

"Why bother?" Ahzrukhal let out a barking laugh. "What will they do? Spread disease to the rest of the community? Let them rot. Let the whole damned place rot for all I care."

The next day, Charon found a mostly intact mirror at his employer’s command. The suit fit even if it was a little big in the arms and legs.

"Where are you from? Any major cities there?" He asked, packing all the drugs into a suitcase.

"There’s a city for ghouls up north, in the Capital Wasteland." Charon said warily, eyeing how few supplies Ahzrukhal seemed to be taking with them. As if on cue, he thrust the case full of drugs into Charon’s arms.

"Guard that with your life. If anything happens to those, I’ll shoot you."

"Violence on your part invalidates our contract."

"Then I’ll make you walk across broken glass!" He wheezed, packing more supplies into a backpack for himself.

"The population of Underworld grew by a third from the sheer number of junkies that bastard hooked on his way to D.C."

"How many people did…That Man make you kill?" Percy asked quietly, hesitant to ask.

"I lost count, but it must have been tens of thousands. He tended to lay low every so often. Sometimes he’d stay in a town for months before setting a plan in motion. He called it performance art."

"Oh my God…" She could tell why James was so mistrustful of Charon, and she’d be lying if she said knowing more didn’t change her opinion of him, but it didn’t change how she felt about him—not really. She knew he was a dangerous and deadly effective killer. But he was more than that. Charon could be gentle and kind. He had become more opinionated since his employment to her and subsequent freedom. But this explained why offing the entire Talon Company was so easy for him. At least in this situation the fallen wouldn’t be missed. The wasteland might actually be safer from his
actions. But…

'No…' Percy shook her head.

"Thanks for telling me." She smiled pressing a kiss to his cheek before holding his face in her hands. "And thanks for being patient with me. Everything about this situation is hard but…I really care about you and I don't want you to feel like the things in your past you had no control over will scare me away."

She took up her blow torch, feeling suddenly very cold

James stilled as he watched the vertibirds on the screen, his crew huddled around his chair H-how? After all these years! They survived. There were too many of them, and they were coming in too fast. The intercom buzzed to life.

"Hey, James? We finished the pipe, Ready for drainage and testing?"

"Y-yes sweetheart! But the tech needs to warm up for about ten minutes before we power up. Just stay down there and I'll call you again when we are ready up here."

"Okay…Are you alright?"

"I'm fine Percy. See you in ten. I love you."

"I…love you too James."

The intercom buzzed out and James turned to his crew.

"If you value your lives, evacuate. I'll hold them off as long as I can. We can't let Project Purity fall into the Enclave's hands."

"I'm not leaving you!" Madison cried, standing her ground as the others gathered as much equipment as they could carry.

"I—I can't leave either!" One of the scientists, Janice, crossed her arms. She was too young to have known the Enclave.

"Janice, if you stay, you will either die, or be taken and tortured for information." James rubbed his temples, trying to keep the panic out of his voice.

"I don't care! I've worked too hard for this! I can't just…run away!"

The sky roared with flying war machines.

"What is—" Charon pushed her to the ground as he peered through one of the portholes.

"It's the Enclave…" He growled.

"I thought they died off years ago!"

"Apparently not…"

"We have to get to James!" Percy scrambled to the gate…just as it locked on them.
"Shit no no no!" She pulled desperately on the bars, but they wouldn't budge.

"Over here!" The bars were more rusted on the other gate and Charon pulled them apart with little effort" Percy dived through as soon as an opening was made.

"That bastard! He knew! He's gonna get himself killed without me!" Charon followed after her.

They were outnumbered; Enclave soldiers filled the memorial. Charon had never seen Percy fight with such earnest, utilizing grenades and aiming for the power cores on the back of their armor. There was no trace of stealth about her combat. She wanted them to know she was coming, and she was pissed.

They finally pushed through the rotunda just as the inner sanction was closed off. James, a young woman, and more soldiers on one side; Madison, Charon, and Percy on the other. James caught them out of the corner of his eye, but refused to look at them through the glass divider.

"James! Open this door, open this fucking door right now!" Percy yelled banging against it furiously.

"Listen to the girl." A man in a long coat sneered, arms casually behind his back.

"Not on your life, Autumn!" James said defiantly.

Colonel Autumn sighed, pulling out a gun and shooting Janice twice, right in the heart.

Percy's blood went cold as Madison screamed in horror. Grabbing her gun, she shot at the wall, until Charon pulled the gun from her hands. "It won't work, Perse! It's bullet proof."

"I know, I know! But I can't just stand here and watch!"

"I hope now you realize that we are quite serious, Mister Carter. Work for us—give us the purifier, and no one needs to die."

"James, just do what he says!" Madison pleaded.

He sighed, wheeling over to the console. He pressed a few buttons before looking to Charon.

"Be there for her where I failed." Charon's eyes widened, but he nodded.

James activated something, but it wasn't the purifier. Radiation pricked Percy's face as it flooded the inner sanctum. James sagged in his chair struggling just to lift his eyes to look at her.

"Catherine would have been so…proud of you. I'm…proud of you, sweetheart."

Tears burned at her eyes. "I love you, dad."

"You need to go, Persephone. More soldiers are coming. But always remember: Alpha and Omega—that's very important." He clutched his chest as he struggled to get the words out.

"Alpha and Omega." With that, James went limp, and was gone.

"He's right." Madison choked grabbing Percy's shoulder. "There's a secret evacuation hatch in the memorial. It leads straight to the Brotherhood's Citadel. I hate to say it, but we need their help.

"Right…Show me the way, Li."
There were Enclave soldiers everywhere. Charon watched Percy fight from the corner of his eye. She was getting reckless, even tripping over rubble.

He pushed her out of the way of a plasma blast.

"What are you doing, we need to move!" Madison screamed from behind them.

"Then maybe you can help us!" Charon called, pointing to pistol she was white knuckling.

"Forget her!" Percy snapped running ahead. Madison turned pale but followed close after them.

"What's going on?! Where's Anna?" Madison was furious the crew was standing before the citadel, but it was on lockdown.

"They won't let us in! Anna was shot on our way here, we had to leave her." Daniel Agincourt said defensively.

"You cowards." She pushed past them, ignoring the Brotherhood soldiers that told her to stay back. "Can it, tin man. Owyn? Owyn let us in! James is dead, the Enclave has taken over the Purifier, and we need your help! Owyn Lyons open this damn door!"

The door opened. Owyn and Sarah were waiting on the other side.

"It's been a long time, Madison." Elder Lyons said tiredly. He had his men stand down. The crew were let in and sent to the medical bay. One of the soldiers stopped Charon.

"Stop right there, Ghoul. None of your kind are permitted to enter. Go back to the Underworld where you belong."

"Are you kidding me? I'm with them! Percy—"

But she was nowhere to be found.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proofread by Groovymarlin.

Percy was nowhere to be found. There had been too many people, Brotherhood soldiers rushing in
and out, helping the purifier crew. And now she was just…gone. Charon turned on the BOS soldier.
Tall though the man was, Charon was still a foot taller.

“Let. Me. In.” He rumbled menacingly. “Or you really will have a feral on your hands.”

He moved out of the way, but kept his gun raised. “Any sudden movements, and you’ll be dead
before you hit the ground, ghoul.”

Charon feared the worst. He stopped the Lyons woman. As calmly and politely as he could manage,
Charon asked, “If there a…bar or something here?”

She smiled at him tiredly. “The mess hall has some of the stronger stuff. Need a drinking buddy?”

“I appreciate it, but I think I’m meeting someone already.”

The place was full of bigots leering at him. All in power armor and itching for their guns as he
passed. The halls were dreary and poorly lit, but otherwise clean and orderly. He was partially
relieved when he didn’t find her in the mess hall, but she was still missing. He checked the laboratory
next, but no luck. No sign of her in the barracks, either. Shooting off flares and gathering a search
party wasn’t far from his mind when he heard heavy breathing from the gymnasium. Her heavy
breathing.

She stood before a punching bag, wailing on it feverishly. As he got closer, he noticed the blood
dripping down the front and mix with sweat down her arms. Her knuckles and nails were bruised
and bleeding.

“What are you doing here?”

“I was itching for a drink.” He noticed how chapped her lips looked. Her eyes were hooded in
exhaustion.

He watched her in silence, not sure how to proceed. She ignored him, increasing the rate of her
punches.

“You…need to wrap your hands, they are getting torn.”

“I noticed.”

Charon shifted. “Do you want to walk about what happened?”

“What’s there to talk about? James is dead, the mother I never knew is dead, some poor scientist who
I didn’t even know is dead too. Everything about my life in the vault was a lie, and not just what my
dad told me. I tried staying in the vault when they asked for my help but even after all I did for them,
they kicked me out again. I don’t belong there, and no matter how hard I try, I can’t seem to find peace out here either. I’m losing everyone I ever cared about. Tell me, Charon, does wrapping my hands seem like much of a priority now?”

Charon stepped in front of the punching bag just in time to get a hit square in the gut. It was a little harder than he expected.

“You still have me.” He said quietly. Taking her hand

“But for how long?” Her voice caught.

Charon let go of her hand and she resumed her punches. They got steadily weaker and shakier until she broke down, falling to her knees. Charon gathered her in his arms, holding her close as they stayed on the floor.

“I’m sorry. James was a good man.”

“He was… I just wish—why did he—why couldn’t I just—” her voice broke off as she sobbed against his chest.

“We shouldn’t be doing this…” She whispered against his shoulder. “The fucking bigots here might shoot you just for touching me.”

Charon lifted her, carrying her toward the door. “Let them know. Here, I have an idea.”

It was dark outside. The sun almost completely set, causing the horizon to look like a dusky rainbow, going from red to green to blue. Charon carried her along the rocky shore, finding a shallow current pool hidden from prying eyes. He set her gently down on the rocks before undressing down to his underwear. Percy followed suit, sinking into the water with him. The cold felt good against her worn muscles, and the rads tingled pleasantly.

“I’m so sorry…” Charon looked up to see Percy washing her face in the cold water.

“I’m not being fair to you. Everything you’ve done for me and I just—”

“No.” He broke her off. “That may be true, but I didn’t consider whether you wanted me to do all those things. When you first hired me, you insisted we were equals. That should have been even truer after you freed me.”

Percy smiled weakly, swimming over to him and leaning against his shoulder as they watched the stars come out.

“I’m not sure what I did to deserve someone like you. Maybe I gave away enough of my water bottles and scrap metal, or maybe I’ve just killed enough bad people.”

Charon didn’t know what to say, so he just said, “The wasteland is a hard place. It’s never easy knowing whether what you’ve done is the right thing.”

“I love you too, big guy. With everything I have, with everything I can give. Without you, I’m just not…me. Fuck, that’s terrifying.”

“Same here, doll.”

Charon felt like all his nerves were on fire. He hadn’t felt like this since Burke had touched his contract. But this was different. So entirely different. This feeling, he never wanted it to end.
“What did you just say?”

She climbed onto his lap and kissed him for all she was worth, pressing impossibly close to feel as much of him as she could. Charon wrapped his arms around her and neither wished to ever let go. The last remnants of their clothing were tossed against the rocks and the next thing he knew Percy was sliding down his length, moaning into his mouth until she needed to break away for air. She chanted those three words into his ear and soon he was joining her. They were both quiet. Despite the circumstances, they knew how dangerous this was so close to the Citadel. Pressing hot kisses against her shoulder, he rubbed her to completion. Percy covered her mouth, as she climaxed against him. Charon followed soon after her.

“And as you can see here, there are several vaults in the D.C area, but only one has a GECK. The catch: The area surrounding the vault is completely irradiated. There are several interconnecting caves in that area, however, so you might be able to find your way in. Questions?” Scribe Rothchild turned to the two wanderers with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah. Why are you sending us out, and not retrieving the damn thing yourselves?” Charon asked. He didn’t have much against the Brotherhood—aside from their blatant bigotry—but he didn’t like their methods of operation. They were too closed off, and only helped others when it directly benefitted them. If it wasn’t for this purifier they would probably just let the whole world rot around their ears.

Rothchild rolled his eyes. “Because the Enclave is a major faction that until recently, everyone thought was long gone. We know nothing about them, and they could know everything about us. If we make it known that we are after the GECK and the purifier before the time is right, they could destroy us before we even have a chance. The only people who know that you two are involved died at the memorial.”

“When will be ‘the right time’ for the Brotherhood to become involved?” Percy asked getting fed up with all his orders.

Rothchild rubbed his temples. “Are you blind? Look behind you.” He pointed to the giant robot in the center of lab.

“Liberty Prime was a secret project from before the war that never got a chance to fight on the field. The Enclave was huge when they were in their prime, but they could still be quite a formidable foe, even now. By the time you retrieve the GECK, Liberty Prime should be operational. We can take back the purifier and find out where their base of operations is from there.”

“This sounds like a shitty excuse to send expendable outsiders to do your dirty work.”

“Maybe it is.” He sneered. “But we have a common goal. I’m sure you would want to finish your late father’s work, wouldn’t you, Miss Carter?”

Percy bristled, but nodded. “Fine. Where’s the armory? I need to stock up.”
“Are you sure you want to do this?” Charon asked, looking over shotgun parts for repair.

“What choice do I have? He’s right, I need to finish this. If nothing else, then for James.” Percy counted out the caps for her ammo and they made their way back to the room provided for them. The Brotherhood soldiers they passed intentionally looked the other way. Madison had been uncharacteristically kind when she insisted that Percy and her ‘companion’ be given privacy during the girl’s time of mourning.

“That’s not what I meant…”

She sighed, “I know.”

He didn’t trust the Brotherhood and quite honestly, neither did she. At first they seemed harmless, if not bigoted and overly tied up in tradition. But being here with them for the past few days had been…unnerving. Every minute detail of the day was scheduled down to the letter. To call the constant training and exercise rigorous was an understatement. She noticed a simultaneous trust and suspicion between the members. Always watching each other’s backs, but every other movement they made as well. They had an almost zealous sense of obligation to collect old world tech and “keep it out of the wrong hands”. But who was the Brotherhood to judge whose hands were wrong? If they took back the purifier from the Enclave, would that help the wasteland overall, or only the select few that the Brotherhood deemed worthy of pure water?

“Excuse me,” Percy turned around to see a small boy dressed in an oversized trench coat. He was staring up at her with an impossibly stern expression.

“Why are you travelling with a ghoul? Are you going to become a ghoul too?” He asked bluntly.

Charon sighed. He wasn’t one to tell off a kid, but this one was already making a case for it.

“Uh, no. That’s not how ghoulification works.” Percy replied, not sure how to proceed.

“But ghouls are full of radiation! You’re putting my home in danger just letting that thing walk through these halls!”

Percy grew impatient. “Look, you…what’s your name?”

“Arthur Maxson, direct descendant of Roger Maxson. The very founder of the Brotherhood of Steel itself!” He recited the lines as if he chanted them before bed each night. He stood tall and proud, glaring at Percy, daring her to challenge the validity of his lineage.

“Well, Arty,” Percy held up her pip-boy. “This right here has a Geiger counter on it. Now, if Charon really was flooded with radiation, don’t you think this little guy would be ticking like mad?” She held it closer to Charon, running up and down his front and sides.

“Do you hear anything? Anything at all?”

Arthur glared at the ground shuffling his feet. “No.”

“So there: Charon may have been irradiated, but he currently isn’t.”

“H-he’s still a blight from the bombs! He’s lived way longer than humanly possible.”

“Arthur?” A tall woman in power armor walked up to the group. “You’re supposed to be studying the archives right now. I hope you aren’t bothering these two; they’ve done a lot for the Brotherhood.” She turned to Percy and Charon after Arthur left.
“I’ve heard good things about you two. I’m Paladin Cross.”

“I’m Charon and this is Percy.” Charon spoke up, watching the child go remorsefully.

Cross gave him a firm smile with a confident handshake before turning to Percy.

“I’m sorry for your loss. I helped your father when he first began on the Project Purity endeavor. He was a good man, and very driven. It was a shame when he left the Project, but if you had been my child, I would have done everything to keep you safe as well.” She said solemnly before leaning in and lowering her voice.

“And don’t let Rothchild pressure you into jumping to his orders. The Enclave and Brotherhood are essentially at a standstill. Dr. Li told us James had code locked the Purifier, and not even she knows what the access code could be. And the fact that the enclave hasn’t come here yet means that the losses would be too great on their end. Finally some good news, right?”

There was something very warm and disarming about Cross, and Percy smiled back. “Thank you. It’s good to know people like you exist in the Brotherhood.”

“I’ll let you two be, I should check up on Arthur. But I just wanted to say: I don’t agree with the Brotherhood’s official stance on ghouls. And I know there are others who stand by me in my opinion.”

“That’s…very kind of you.” Charon was genuinely shocked, Percy was beaming from ear to ear.

“It’s not kind, it’s a simple respect for humanity! If anything, pre-war ghouls should be revered for their knowledge of the past. There is only so much we can find in the archives, after all,” Cross said insistently.

Charon relaxed, sliding his hand from Percy’s back to a little farther down.

“I wouldn’t say I don’t get a little revered already.” He said smoothly. Percy blushed, but didn’t recoil from his touch.

“Oh! So the rumors are true. Well, I’m happy for you two. But I should warn you: Tension is already high around here between the Enclave and letting you in; I would be more subtle about my public displays of affection if I were you.”

“We’re used to that, but thank you, Cross.”

The room was very bare, with an open shower, toilet, and sink in in one corner. There was a bunk bed in the other. There were two pairs of four rust tracks to and from the bunk. Charon raised an eyebrow.

“This place looks like a cell without bars.” Percy took the words right out of his mouth.

“So,” She sat down on the creaky bed. “What’s the plan?”

Charon saw it in her eyes. Percy was tired. More than tired, exhausted. As much as she wanted to help with the purifier, it was clear that no one except maybe that Cross woman wanted either of them here. Maybe if they both just…disappeared, the Brotherhood would be forced to find someone else to do their dirty work. They both needed a break, maybe lay low for a while and let the wasteland
deal with its own problems. Percy turned on GNR radio just as one song ended and Three Dogs voice crackled in:

*Here’s a question for all you faithful listeners. Have you guys and gals ever seen... a tree? No, no, no. Not those shriveled black things. I’m talking real trees. Brown bark, green leaves, photosynthesis, all that good stuff. Now what if I, the all-powerful Three Dog, were to tell you that somewhere right here in the Capital Wasteland, there’s a place with LOTS of trees. A veritable Oasis of green in that depressing sea of brown. Look, it was years ago, and I MAY have been experimenting with Jet at the time, but I’m telling you, it’s out there...* 

“...Trees?” Percy was incredulous. “That’s just...no...That place—if it even exists—has probably been raided years ago.”

“Wouldn’t you say it’s worth taking a look?” Charon pulled her onto his lap and she immediately relaxed. She never got tired of just looking at his face, watching the muscle of his jaw as he spoke. Her thumb rubbed circles in the exposed skin on his neck. Mesmerizing loops of heat and affection as he said,

“Wouldn’t it be worth checking it out? Doing something for ourselves? Cross is right; the Brotherhood and Enclave are just sizing each other up right now. And...you need time to grieve. Really mourn.”

“But what if it’s just a waste of time? What if the place is barren and empty? And how can I think of running away from it all when they—when they need me?”

“Trust me,” Charon leaned back until she was lying flat on top of him. “Take it from someone who couldn’t mourn the loss of his family. You can’t just pretend everything is fine. It’s not your job to save the wasteland.”

As he felt something warm and wet spread across his chest, Charon ran his hands through her hair and just held her while she wept.

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“...Well well well, if it isn’t the little vault girl turned dealer of justice! Want to sock me in the mouth again? I don’t want to blush, but honey, I think you gave me a new...hobby.” Three Dog gave her a filthy grin as they walked through the door.

Percy grimaced in disgust. She forgot how unpleasant he was in person behind all the radio charisma.

“Oh, I’m sorry, but as much as I’d love to do the honors, I think my companion here would be more suited to the job.” Percy gestured to Charon as he slammed the door closed behind him.

The disk jockey let out a low whistle. “Hmm, now that I think on it, I’ll pass. So, what can I do you for?” He cleared his dirty laundry and some old papers from the couch and table for them. Percy unstrapped her pip-boy and set it on the table.

“I was hoping you could tell us where that...Oasis is. The one you talked about the other day on the radio.”

“Yeah I mentioned it. And I said it might not even exist.”

“Estimate where it might be.” Charon sat next to Three Dog while Percy settled in a chair across
from them. He was a full foot and a half shorter than the ghoul.

“It was uh, somewhere to the north. There on top of a mountain like fucking Zion I think. There’s only one path up, and it’s surprisingly well hidden…if the place hasn’t been raided by now.” Three Dog said nervously, picking up the pip-boy and eyeing the topography along the top of the map.

“This looks like it might be it.” He tapped a pin in the middle of a peak.

They stopped in Underworld to see Carol and Greta before they left the D.C area. They both had words for Charon but welcomed him back at Percy’s insistence. Once she left to grab food and water for the journey, they cornered Charon.

“Alright, speak up. Where the hell were you and why are you back?” Greta snapped, locking the door to the hotel and turning on him.”

“I was in Pittsburg. I thought…staying away from Percy would be better for her. You’ve heard the stories of what I’ve been forced to do. Trust me, I’ve done more than just that.”

“So why the hell are you back?” Carol was just as angry, balling her hands into fists.

“She found me. And for whatever reason, she wanted me back. Demanded it, really. And I couldn’t stay away. Hell, if it had been a few more months, I might have run back to her.” He admitted. He winced when he remembered when Ashur had pulled her gas mask off. The anger and betrayal on her face had shot through his heart like a laser. All the walls he had built up while he was away had crumbled down with one look.

“The fact that she even forgave your sorry ass is beyond me.” Greta snapped.

“Believe me, I can’t understand it either. But we are all the other has out here.”

A flash of doubt itched at the back of his mind. What if she was only with him now for that reason? They were both lonely. They both needed someone. And they were both readily available to each other.

“What happened to her father? Three Dog said she had found him, that they were going to rebuild the Purifier together.”

“He died. Very recently.” Charon pushed the destructive thoughts away as he insisted, “She loves me. For whatever crazy goddamn reason on this fucked up earth, she does. And more than anything, I love her.” He stood a little taller as if that would prove his honesty.

Carol was taken aback, but shook her head. “Love isn’t all it takes. Love itself takes time. And work. Far more time than you two have spent together. It’s not right for you to take advantage of her loss to reassert yourself in her life. It isn’t right, Charon. Even you should know that—”

“Enough.” Charon slammed his fist against the counter. Not enough to damage anything, but certainly enough to quiet the both of them.

“You think I don’t know that? You think I didn’t try, despite myself, to stay away from her even when she found me? I know there is nothing I have ever done, or ever will do to deserve that woman. But for whatever reason…she has returned my feelings…despite…me. After the complete fucking shit-show that has been my life for the last two hundred years—murder and violence forced
upon my hands, torture, and death—I’m not going to deny myself the chance at being for her. Not anymore.” The room was filled with silence. Greta moved behind the counter and pulled out a key on a string. She pressed it into Charon’s hands.

“Should you two ever decide to come back to Underworld, the room in the Ninth Circle is still open for you. Your motorcycle is in the storage closet. Don’t. Mess this. Up”
The Wasteland blurred past them as they rode down the ruined roads. Miles and miles covered, and it was all so oddly quiet. What little wildlife there was, kept its distance from the loud pre-war monster that raced and raised dust. Mutants seemed withdrawn and out of sight, ghouls were easily out run. Percy spied the mountain in the distance. There must have been a bowl at the top, because she spied something soft and green swaying just over the crest. The path was hidden by winding boulders and slopes, but eventually they found it. As they climbed the steep road, the grass turned thick and green, the air became crisp. Even the wind picked up slightly. Percy was in awe, rubbing the leaves of one bush between two fingers. It had a softness she had never felt before. As the thick of the trees and brush reached their peak, they came across a large wooden gate guarded by people in robes. They looked to raise their weapons until someone from inside the gates pushed through and whispered in their ears.

"You there! He has been waiting for you!"

Charon did a double take. They were pointing right at him. He turned to Percy. She was surprised too, but asked. "What do you want with him?"

They ignored her. "Outsider, may I ask how old you are?"

"Uh…” Charon rubbed his head. "About two hundred and twenty-six."

The three before them gasped, and seemed to only get more excited.

"Excellent! Once again, His predictions were correct! Please, come inside; He will be very eager to meet you!"

Charon gave Percy a questioning look, but she shrugged and they walked through the open gate. Charon wasn’t used to people noticing him—at least not in a positive light. Usually it was Percy that they would rush to, begging for help. He would be lying if it didn't feel like a nice change for the both of them.

The forest was even thicker here, with a clearing in the center of the Oasis. Percy checked her Geiger counter as they passed a puddle.

'Still irradiated…and yet these trees…' The plants surrounding them showed no signs of mutation. Glowing mushrooms popped up here and there, but even they weren't irradiated.

"Charon,” She whispered. "Look at this place. Everything here is…adapted to the wastes. It's like the forest is taking the radiation from the water and converting it into something…pure."

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"Excellent! Once again, His predictions were correct! Please, come inside; He will be very eager to meet you!"

Charon gave Percy a questioning look, but she shrugged and they walked through the open gate. Charon wasn’t used to people noticing him—at least not in a positive light. Usually it was Percy that they would rush to, begging for help. He would be lying if it didn't feel like a nice change for the both of them.

The forest was even thicker here, with a clearing in the center of the Oasis. Percy checked her Geiger counter as they passed a puddle.

'Still irradiated…and yet these trees…' The plants surrounding them showed no signs of mutation. Glowing mushrooms popped up here and there, but even they weren't irradiated.

"Charon,” She whispered. "Look at this place. Everything here is…adapted to the wastes. It's like the forest is taking the radiation from the water and converting it into something…pure."
They were urged to sit in a small gazebo before an old man. A strange fountain was in the very center.

"After all these years, His predictions were correct all along." He sighed in relief.

"Outsider. You have been chosen to meet with our great leader! He wishes to speak with you."

"You keep on saying 'He'. Who will I be meeting, here?" Charon asked.

The Elder seemed nervous to continue. "That is a bit of a delicate subject, outsider. It would be easier to show you. But to do that you must undergo a ceremony of purification. You must cleanse the body and mind so as not to harm Him when you speak."

He held his arms up and Percy was reminded of Confessor Cromwell back at Megaton.

"Would that ritual have anything to with that?" Charon pointed to the font in the middle of the gazebo. A crystal bowl covered thick sap that rested in the basin beneath.

"Indeed! The holy sap will take you to a temporary plane of existence from which you will awaken in His grove. From there he may instruct you in the mechanisms he desires for this land."

'So in other words, they will knock him out and drag him off somewhere.' Percy moved to speak.

"I don't like th—"

"Ok I'll do it." Charon stood up and robed men rushed up and began asking his height and weight, his weekly alcohol intake, and taking his pulse. They took down notes and began making dosage calculations for the sap.

"Wait, what?" she asked incredulously. They had been left in a small alcove for privacy while Charon changed into robes for the ritual.

"These people seem harmless enough. They don't look like cannibals or raiders, so worst case scenario, I get high and take some sort of spirit walk." He explained.

"And you're ok with that? What if you overdose?"

"You saw them, they were jotting down notes about my size and all that so that I won't."

'True…' "But since when do you just randomly trust strangers?" Percy crossed her arms, not liking where all this was going.

Charon moved to rub her shoulders reassuringly. "This trust isn't random. I'm just curious to see where all this goes. Let's not forget you permanently changed your genetics just for some rad-away and a meal," he ended teasingly.

Percy pressed her lips together. She shivered. Why was she so tired?

"Fine, on one condition: I'm doing it with you. I'd like to see this spirit walk."

"You may imbibe the sap, but you cannot be taken to Him unless he has requested it. And he has not."

Percy was given a shawl over her clothes, and they were both given crowns of leaves. The Oasis villagers circled around them, chanting some mix of many religious creeds all focused on their "Tree
Father." Hooded figures poured sap into carved wooden chalices, one for Charon, and a much smaller one for Percy. They looked at each other one last time before downing the strange substance.

It was incredibly thick and Charon nearly choked trying to get it down. Sickly sweet yet unbelievably bitter, it stung its way down his throat and burned his stomach as the edges of his vision blurred. Then everything went dark.

Percy winced, it was too bright…wherever she was. She stood up, and tried to take in her surroundings. She was in the vaults. Which one, she couldn't be sure. The halls seemed endless—left, right, then left again, until Percy came to what looked like…a bar. It was packed; some were drinking at the counter, others were playing pool or speaking quietly in corners. Every face was cast in shadow. All but one.

"Hey…hey. Wake…up. Shit…did those fools kill you?"

The ghoul before him was only just beginning to stir, grabbing his head and clutching the ground.

"Ok buddy…take it real…slow."

The ghoul threw up, a mere two feet from where Harold's roots ended. The bark of his face nearly cracked as he tried to wince. "That's fine…I'm sorry about those people out there. Nut cases…every one of them."

The ghoul finally got to his feet, pushing the sweat drenched hair out of his eyes. He was taller than the rest of them. Was that because he was pre-war, or just genes? Didn't matter, he supposed, all that mattered was that he was finally here.

"Are you the 'Him' guy those Treeminders were talking about?"

Harold groaned. It sounded like branches breaking.

"Those people out there…think I'm their god… or something. They hold onto my every word…but don't listen to a single thing I say."

Charon looked him up and down. A thick branch seemed to have grown out of one eye, and the other was nearly bulging out of its socket. Who, or what, he was talking to was hunched and covered from head to toe in bark with more branches and leaves sprouting from his head, and roots digging into the earth where his feet should have been.

"How the fuck did you get here?"

Harold explained the relationship he had with Herbert, or Bob. How he had travelled all the way from the west coast, Bob growing bigger all the way until he was forced to "take root."

"After that, Bob started seeding…and more trees started growing. By the time the Treeminders found me…there was a whole…forest."

"Sounds like you have a nice set up here. A whole group of followers to do whatever you want. What do you want with me?" Charon asked.

"Did you not hear me?...They worship me…but they don't listen to…a damn thing I say. I want you…to kill me."
Charon didn't say anything, but he glared at Harold. Was this a test? Did this…Tree asshole think his whole group could take him and Percy out?

"…Great…Over a hundred years of waiting…and they bring me the one wasteland asshole with a conscience."

He was serious.

"Why do you want to die?"

"It would be quicker…to give you the reasons…not to. Can you imagine…being stuck in one place…for years…and years?"

"I can imagine," He said shortly, crossing his arms. "But I don't do that anymore. I've killed enough assholes in my lifetime. Mercy killing isn't my thing."

Harold sighed. "Then send your friend in…maybe she'll help me out. You know…I thought…a pre-war ghoul would know where I'm coming from…that someone…stuck like you…would help a guy…stuck like me…"

"Mom?" She asked hoarsely to the woman reading alone at a booth. She was…beautiful. Large eyes, full lips, soft skin. Her hair only came down to her shoulders, but it was so tightly wound that Percy was sure that if it was straightened, it would likely reach the end of her arm. Catherine smiled. The kind of smile that only a mother could give.

"Hello sweetheart. Your father was right."

"Huh?"

"I knew if I let him name you, if would be something big and over the top. No wonder you shortened it. Percy fits you much better in my opinion."

Percy laughed wiping at the corner of her eye. "What are you doing here? You're—"

"Oh I am," Catherine reassured her sadly. "But don't worry, you aren't. Now would you mind telling me why I'm here? James is missing me."

Percy took a seat next to her, smoothing the slacks and button down that she was apparently wearing.

"I was hoping you could tell me. Why am I here? Who are all these people?"

"Look around one more time."

The place was mostly full of raiders. She could tell not by their clothes, which were suits and dresses, but by their hair, shaved and sloppy. Individuals who must have been Enclave soldiers by the buzz cut they each sported were throwing darts. Tobar was also there, playing pool with a man who must be Calvert—Lockheart's dead rival. Wally Mack and his father were having a quiet argument at a table opposite them. Almodovar was scribbling on a torn piece of paper. Tenpenny was drinking scotch and with Doctor Braun.

"What is he doing here?" She asked. 'Braun isn't dead."

"He wasn't dead when you left him, but he will eventually die after one of the robobrains will malfunction and run head first into the reactor, short circuiting the entire vault."
Catherine saw the confused look on her face. "This is clearly your dream—in your head—so of course whatever you "think," I know."

"So you know what I'm thinking now?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," Catherine cleared her throat. "This bar is housing every person whose death you had a hand in."

Charon slammed the door to the gate. "Where's Percy?" He growled at the nearest Treeminders.

They took him to where she was lying, coated in sweat.

"She's been out since the ritual. She had a fever, she shouldn't have taken the sap," they explained, dabbing a rag at her forehead.

Even in her sleep she looked troubled, panting slightly despite the cool air of the mountain.

"Our elders would like to see you," the young Treeminder said nervously. "About what He said to you. He's never wished to speak with an outsider before. He must have sensed you through his roots. That's how he's protected us from slavers and raiders all these years."

Charon laced his fingers with Percy's trembling ones. Her grip tightened around his, like he was a life line.

The Treeminder cleared his throat. It made him uneasy to leave Percy alone like this, but she was in safe hands, if clueless ones.

"I promise not to leave her side until she's awake," he said before taking Charon into a separate part of the forest where the elders Birch and Laurel were seated on thrones of wound vines.

The nut-jobs were not as clueless as Harold had assumed. But they couldn't decide among themselves on Harold's fate, nor were they willing to act on the issue themselves, preferring "outside help" like Harold had. Birch wanted to stop Harold from spreading any farther in the wastes. He thought the wastelanders didn't deserve Harold's gift and would only destroy what they had worked so hard to build. Laurel wished to speed up his rate of growth. After all, he was everyone's god, not just theirs.

Charon was torn as he made his way back to their private alcove. Usually it was Percy's job to make these decisions. He noticed her shiver and tucked the blankets tighter around her arms and shoulders. Siding with Laurel seemed like the best option, but forcing Harold to stay alive, trapped like he was, didn't seem right either.

"Well," he muttered, "You probably would have left these people to decide for themselves. Or maybe you would have actually killed the fucker out of pity."

"What?!" The Treeminder from earlier had snuck up on them somehow. "Y-you can't hurt Harold! What will we do without him? He keeps us safe here."

"Your god is just a man. He's been mutated by the wastes like me. He's been trapped in that spot for years. What would you want in that situation?" Charon asked.

The man looked down. "I'm not sure. But I can't imagine wanting to die. Harold always seems so peaceful when I see him. I was only let into Oasis just a few years ago, myself. Harold saw something in me, despite being a former Brotherhood Outcast." Linden's eyes grew soft as he moved
to moisten Percy's lips with a damp cloth. She drank from the rag hungrily, but her mind was still far away from them.

"Harold would listen to my stories of the outside world, even asking questions about my own travels and sharing some of his own." Linden looked to Charon pleadingly. "Please don't kill him. Give him Leaf Mother Laurel's liniment—let me talk to Harold. Surely he doesn't want to die, not really."

"Why? Why am I here? Why a bar? Why are you and everyone else here? Mom, what's going on?" Catherine laced her fingers through Percy's, warming her hands.

"Well... You have a fever. And despite this, hid it from Charon and took the ritual because you didn't like feeling left out. So now, I'd say you're having a very bad dream." Catherine seemed to reason it out alongside Percy.

"As for why those of us that are here are... Perhaps you feel guilty about us."

"But I didn't mean to kill you!"

"I know that, and therefore you know that. But do you really believe it?" She asked calmly. She rubbed Percy's back reassuringly.

"I don't know, but I suppose since you're here, I do. Everyone calls me this...'Paragon of justice'... like I was enlisted to fix the wasteland without my say so. I don't... want this."

Catherine scoffed. "Of course you do. You wouldn't be here, if you didn't want to feel important in some way. But what do you want?"

"I don't know! For the longest time I just wanted Charon back. After I found him, I lost James. I'm always in the middle of some sort of trade off that I never agreed to, and I'm tired."

"Everyone's tired, Percy." Catherine said. "But we all have to keep moving. You can't continue to feel guilty over what has happened in the past. Not like this. Whether in self-defense or out of a sense of justice, or in my case by pure accident, you have killed." Everything went black.

"What are you going to do about it?"

Charon waded through the murky waters that tingled with radiation. He could hear Harold's heart beating in the distance. In fact, the roots he was following pulsed slightly in their own way. He wondered if it was the liver that filtered the radiation out and made the trees grow, and if Harold grew from the radiation he sapped from the earth.

'With Laurel's liniment he'll only grow that much faster. I wonder if he will feel anything...'

He reached out and pressed his palm against the organ no longer pumping blood, but something else entirely different. He couldn't imagine Birch's solution to be any better. If Harold had been able to sense him and Percy before they even arrived in Oasis, then inhibiting his growth completely would be preventing him from ever seeing anything new for the rest of his life...as long as that would be.

The heart was much larger than his hand, and yet somehow so delicate, he could easily crush it.

That would certainly solve Harold's problem, but not the Treeminders...or his. He had enough blood on his hands, even if this blood would be willing.
He pulled the liniment from his pack and poured it over the heart. It immediately began beating faster.

Linden was lying on his back facing Harold, who seemed slightly more energetic now.

"So…you're back." He said without turning.

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't do what you asked."

"No…I know. I sensed a change and I feel…better now, actually."

"I knew the liniment would work." Linden smiled knowingly, loosening the dirt around Harold's roots with his toe.

"So you're ok with staying alive. Growing and stretching farther out into the wasteland?" Charon asked. He wasn't nervous about what Harold's reaction would have been, but it hadn't been an easy decision on his part. Not that it should have been his decision to make in the first place.

"Those poor fools would be helpless without my protection. I…kinda feel like I owe it to them at this point. And I think…things will be better now." Harold's entire frame creaked as he turned to face Linden, whose eyes dropped to the ground. He began loosening the dirt more insistently.

Percy was eating some sort of vegetable soup when Charon joined her. She was looking much better, if a little solemn at the moment. Her voice was hoarse and sore when she said,

"The Treeminders caught me up. So you didn't kill him?"

"Couldn't bring myself to." Charon took the bowl she passed to him, taking a sip and feeling it scorch his throat.

"I'm glad for that. I knew you'd make the right choice."

He finished his soup in a few more gulps before settling with his head in her lap.

"Did you?" She nodded.

"What would you have done?"

"I'm not sure; no one has ever asked me to kill them before—and he has all these people relying on him. I don't envy you your decision."

She leaned back on her hands, spying the moon beyond the thick cover of trees. It was full, and Percy's eyes had long since adjusted to the light.

It was a few more days before Percy felt well enough to travel, and Charon insisted she rest as much as she could. They spent more time in their own personal alcove than they did out of it, even to talk with Harold, who was spending more and more of his time talking with Linden. Any time Percy tried leaving their little corner, Charon would pull her back with quirk to his smile, and a look that communicated everything he planned to do to her if she would just give up her feeble attempt at escape. Percy found her will weak against his eyes, or mouth, or hands…or other parts of his anatomy. During their time in Oasis, Percy worshipped his body and every aspect of it and Charon returned in kind. If any part of him doubted her attraction…or her love…it was swept away with
She was left a sweating, giggling mess after a particularly pleasant morning when he had woken her with his mouth. Her ankle dug teasingly into his back as he sucked hickies into her inner thigh.

"We—we really do need to leave eventually." She gasped, trying weakly to pull away from his attentions.

"And wherever my mistress goes…or comes…I shall follow," he said, climbing up her body and resting with his head in his palm next to her, hooking his leg around her hip and effectively trapping her.

"I mean it. As much as I love this place, and you, and being here with you…There's a world outside those gates. And I don't want to ignore it anymore."

Charon sat up and stretched, more serious now despite her slick still moist on his chin.

"What did you have in mind?"

"I want to go back to Megaton. Get our bearings there, listen to the radio for a bit. If the Brotherhood and Enclave are still at an impasse…then maybe we can help wastelanders but not get too involved."

"What about the purifier?"

Percy wrapped her arms around her legs. "I don't know…I wish I had a better answer, but there's so much at stake, and what can we do, really? If anything, being here has told me that the wasteland is healing already—slowly but surely." She watched him as he got dressed, shading her eyes in the morning light.

"Are you ok with lying low for a little bit longer?"

He turned, a certain softness in his clouded eyes, as he said, "I would be at home on the moon, if you were there to share it with me."

Chapter End Notes

I commissioned some art based on this chapter from zeichenkohle. You can find it at

If you want more images of Percy and Charon, go here:
It was nightfall when they made it back to Megaton. They managed to slip through the gate without causing too much of a stir after Percy threw a bag full of caps up to Stockholm’s watch tower, pressing a finger to her lips with a wink. Few people were outdoors, especially at that hour. After changing a few wires by the light of the pip-boy, Percy was able to get most of the lights back on in the house. Charon began unpacking their things sorting them into the various lockers and filing cabinets as she slipped upstairs and turned on the Jukebox. The place was dusty, but despite their long absence, it still looked homey and lived in. A knock sounded at the door.

“Would you mind getting that?” Percy called from the bedroom. She peeked around the corner, wearing something low cut that just barely covered her hips. Biting her lip with a smile, she nodded towards the door. Shaking his head with a whistle, Charon turned to pull the door open.

It was Gob. Gob looked up at him in shock, noticed Percy in the background, and all he saw was red.

“You motherfucker!” he hissed, punching Charon square in the jaw.

“Gob! What the fuck!” Percy screamed as Charon pulled him inside by his wrist.

He yanked himself free as soon as the door slammed shut behind him. Turning to Percy, he didn’t bother trying to keep his voice down.

“I can’t believe this! After all this time? He’s been gone without any word on where he is, but as soon as he comes crawling back you welcome him with open arms?!”

“Gob, listen—”

“No!” He was tired of Percy trying to excuse Charon.

“He abandoned you! He was gone! He left without a word!”

“But he came back.” Percy came down the stairs, threading her fingers in Gobs, leading him to the couch while Charon went upstairs. He could see it wouldn’t do any good for him to try to defend himself with Gob this upset.

‘At least he didn’t bring the gun.’

“How can you let him walk all over you?” he asked as Percy pressed a whiskey into his clenched fists.

“It isn’t like that. I was mad at him. Furious. But we made our peace. Despite how it might seem, he does care about me.”

“How can you be so sure?” he asked, refusing to look at her. “He could be using you—ever think of
that? Not a lot of smoothskins look twice at a ghoul.”

Percy crossed her arms. “We both know I could say the same thing about Nova. After Moriarty died, and you were left to own the bar? She would have been stupid not to get with the man who inherited one of the only four shops in Megaton.”

Gob looked like he was about to say something, but Percy held up her hand.

“But we also both know that’s not how it happened. You two have been through too much not to trust each other. Charon and I…We’ve been through a lot too. But what we’ve been through is between us. I don’t need you coming to my rescue. I’m not weak. Not anymore.”

Gob took several drinks out of his glass while she talked before slamming it on the coffee table before him.

“I know that! Of course—I know that! You fucking saved me from that bastard!”

“Percy…” Charon’s voice drifted down from upstairs, but she ignored him, choosing instead to get in Gob’s face.

“Then what is it? I know who Charon is, I know what he’s done—probably more than you could possibly imagine—and at the end of the day, who I’m with is none of your business!”

“Just because you aren’t weak doesn’t mean you can’t be used! Look at him for Christ’s sake! Walking weapon on a leash for fifty fucking years!”

“Guys…”

“Don’t call him that!”

“Guys!”

“What?!” they both screamed at him. The room was filled with Three Dog’s voice as Charon turned up the volume on the jukebox.

“Holy hell…Children…this is just…” There was silence followed by rustling of papers and the shatter of a glass thrown at a wall.

“Ok…Now you know I’d never give y’all bad news unless I had to, but this…y’all need to hear this. Arefu—the city rumored to be protected by fucking vampires, or fancy cannibals, depending on who you ask—is gone. And when I say gone, I mean fucking leveled. The bridge where Arefu once resided is all but dust and rubble now. Not much is known about what took place, but eyes on the scene found several drained energy and micro fusion cells. Kiddies…Fuck I don’t want to say any more than that. You need to hear it, but…what if they are listening too? Girdershade, and the Republic of Dave were also taken out. Dave and his people managed to take out one of the Enclave’s men…somehow. Keep safe out there. Lock your doors, but keep your eyes and ears wide open. The Enclave is real. And they are out there and they are dangerous. Here’s Skeeter Davis with, The End of the World.”

The music was overpowering.

“Turn it off.” Percy couldn’t see straight, she was so upset.

“Turn it off!” she screamed. The silence was even more suffocating.
Charon began pulling supplies back out of the lockers, brushing Gob out of the way as he ran back and forth getting things together. This seemed to break Percy from her stupor. She went to the fridge, sorting out a week’s supply of food and water. She left the old and rotted food and grabbed as much of the pre-packaged pre-war foods as she could find.

“What…what can I do to help?” Gob asked, drink held limpily in his hand.

“Those bastards, those fucking bastards!” She didn’t seem to hear him, knocking a bottle on the floor. It shattered and she kicked it under the shelf in the crowded kitchen. Blood splashed against the floor but she didn’t notice that either. His question finally registered in her head.

“No…there’s nothing you can do. There’s probably nothing I can do.”

“Then what are you doing?”

“Trying! I’m trying because that’s all I can do!”

Gob suddenly felt very much like he shouldn’t be there, like he was intruding.

“Well… you just got back,” he said lamely. “Shouldn’t you rest first? It’s late. Look, I’m sorry I came barging in like this. You’re right, you’re right it was none of my business, but…what are you going to do? You can’t stop them, you can’t take them all down. The Enclave is…bigger than you—bigger than any of us!”

“Oh yeah?” She laughed, despite how she felt. Deja vu. Who was he to tell her what she was capable of? Who was anyone? Charon handed Percy her travel bag.

“Watch me, and lock up for us.”

Charon winced as he scanned the horizon. The sun was always in his eyes when he was driving. Not matter what time, no matter what direction. Percy rested her cheek against his back, her eyes scanning the horizon. Something glinted in the distance and she tried to focus on it to stay awake. The psycho was wearing off…

Silver and…green. Flashes of green and—

“Pull right, Charon right! Over there!”

It was Enclave. A small camp just over the hill. Percy jumped off the bike before it came to a complete stop.

“Percy! Shit!” Charon struggled to keep the bike from skidding.

She was about to toss a grenade when she saw a tiny head of hair being stuffed into one of the—

“They’re fucking caging people!” She called back, ducking behind a boulder as one of the soldiers turned.

By the time Charon made it to her, they were all dead. Percy was holding a child as it struggled in her arms, crying for his mom.

Charon managed to unlock one of the cages after breaking three bobby pins. The woman was fine, but pretty bloodied up. He bandaged her up and gave her some food and stims.
“Thank you…” She muttered, still shell-shocked before rushing to her child. She practically had to pry him from Percy’s iron grip before thanking both of them and running north. Charon took in their surroundings. Usually she went for the power cores. More mess, but less bullets wasted on them. Charon went to a nearby terminal, reading through the most recent entry.

<<Begin Entry>>

Strange…both individuals seem normal, but readings claim their genetic structure doesn’t match up with the Enclave database’s standard of normal. Not as bad as ghouls encountered 2 weeks ago, but it’s clear serum FEV2.0 needs to be adjusted based on aforementioned readings. Will return to base with new specimens as soon as packed.

<<End Entry>>

When he turned back, Percy was injecting a stimpak into her leg; she had gotten a plasma burn, but it was fading fast. Next came the psycho. Wiping her eyes, she forced a smile. “Lay low, right? Let this…sort itself out.” She said bitterly

“Percy…” Charon said warningly “We’ve been up for days. I’m used to this but you need your rest.”

“No, I’m fine.” She insisted, tossing him the stimulant.

He caught it, jabbing it into his hip with a low grunt.

Arefu was indeed “fucking leveled.” The surrounding area was flooded slightly from the river, blocked up with cement and other debris.

“We should check Meresti,” Charon said, kicking at rubble, futilely looking for survivors.

“Right,” Percy agreed, yawning as she injected a small dose of psycho into her arm. Her eyes flew open and her muscles tensed as she waited for the initial jolt to fade. She threw the syringe to Charon and he did the same. Percy felt herself getting hooked on the stuff. But there wasn’t much they could do about it, now was there? They had to keep moving.

The subway was empty too but there was no sign of struggle. Some possessions were still there, but most were gone. Most encouraging of all, there was a message written in spray paint across the floor of Vance’s balcony.

“As dramatic as the last time I saw him. ‘A strategic retreat. Do not think we are unused to running.’” she read, scratching at the paint with her nail. “...but we will not be found unless we wish. You tried to take what we have sworn to protect; live in shame knowing you have failed.” She heard Charon sigh in relief behind her.

He held her back when she moved to leave.

“We should rest.” he pushed.

“We can rest when we have the G.E.C.K. We wasted enough time in Oasis. People are dying. Besides,” she noticed his hands shaking. “The psycho won’t wear off for another couple of hours.”

She wondered how many Vance and his people were able to save. Was Ian alright? If he was, would Lucy ever know? Percy rubbed her eyes. Little Lamplight was far, even though the travel time
would be shortened thanks to their bike.

“If some of the Arefu settlers survived, maybe some from Gidershade survived too, even if the Republic’s settlers…died. Do you want to at least check it out?” he asked.

“What’s the point?” she asked dismissively. “If anyone survived, they are in hiding, and if they died…well they died.” Her fingers began to tingle. Soon the need for another hit would be too strong. She turned to Charon, numb except for the itch. Pulling him down to her level, she kissed him with all the anger, grief, exhaustion, and need to feel that the rest of her body was unable to express. He pressed her against the railing, undoing her pants as she did the same to him. They couldn’t stay the night here, but they refused to feel nothing but the itch. Charon groaned into her mouth as she stroked his length from base to tip, bucking against her hand in pace with the strokes of his fingers against her bud. Percy panted against his ear as he bit down on her shoulder. It hurt, but right now she needed the pain as much as the pleasure. Tears pricked at the corners of her eyes as she came with a shudder. Charon’s cum spilt across the floor, and they re-dressed in silence.

“When this is all finished, I want to bury dad near vault one-oh-one. I know it probably meant as much to him as it meant to me…but it was home.”

“I’m sure he would appreciate the gesture.” Charon said.

“The radiation in that chamber probably sped up his decomposition. Even if he’s just bones…I want to bury what’s left of his body.”

‘Get the G.E.C.K., give it to the brotherhood, and let them take back the Purifier. Almost seems too simple.’ Percy grimaced at the notion. Nothing was simple, and she didn’t see herself getting unwrapped from this mess anytime soon.

Little Lamplight was…different than they expected. How had Three Dog never mentioned this place?

“No mungos allowed in Little Lamplight mungo! And that includes you, Scarface! Stay back, or I’ll blow your fucking head off!”

Charon couldn’t believe what he was seeing. This twerp, barely four feet tall, was pointing a sniper rifle right at his head.

“Shit, you’re one nasty motherfucker! I’d say your face looks like my butt, but if it did, I’d never pull down my pants—even to take a dump!” The boy exclaimed.

Charon rolled his eyes. “We need to get in.”

The boy smirked. “Oh yeah? What’s the password?”

Charon muttered something just under his breath.

“Stupid says…what?” Maccready realized what he had said a beat too late. Clutching his sides, he howled in laughter, punching the gate release, letting them in.

“How did you know that would work?” Percy asked.

“It was a game I used to play with my brothers,” Charon explained. “That and ‘jinx’ and ‘there’s
something on your shirt’—you’d flick their nose after that last one.”

Somehow, the children in little lamplight had built an entire city for themselves without anyone from the outside noticing. Percy shuddered to think of all the abandoned children that had found their way here. The little doctor, Lucy, was able to flush both their systems of psycho. “It’s a good thing you came to me when you did.” she said in a tone that didn’t quite match her age. The clipboard she wrote in barely fit in her hand. “Hooked any longer on that stuff, and one little detox wouldn’t have been very effective.”

Charon insisted they rest after they restocked on supplies.

“You really have a way with kids.” Percy said, settling on their mattress, as far away from the children as the caves would allow. “All the children in Megaton and Rivet like you, even that Hargrave brat. How did you get so good with kids? There aren’t any in Underworld, not that I’ve seen anyway.”

Charon shrugged. “I like kids. Most of them out here still have hope, despite what I’m sure they’ve seen. Even the ones here still have some small sense of innocence left. I want to protect that.”

“You’re such a softy” Percy hugged him closer for warmth in the dank caves.

She paused for a moment, not sure how to say the next thing. “You…wanted kids, didn’t you? When you were still smooth.”

“That’s a sentiment I gave up on long before I became a ghoul. Even before the war. But…yeah. I wouldn’t have minded raising a few little ones. Why?”

“I don’t know.” She rubbed his back absentely. “I never really thought of myself as having kids, even when the idea was forced upon me in the vaults. It doesn’t really matter now, though.”

Charon felt a wave of guilt. “If you ever did want children…later in life…it…wouldn’t have to be me that gave them to you.” The idea left a bitter taste in his mouth, but Charon would love whoever Percy gave life too, even if he didn’t have a hand in the process.

Percy seemed confused until what he meant dawned on her.

“Oh…that isn’t what I meant. I can’t have kids either.”

“What do you mean?” It was Charon’s turn to be confused.

“Whatever it was that made radiation heal me, also made my body a pretty inhospitable place.”

She explained her visit to Doctor Barrows so long ago. How, even if she did conceive a child, whatever radiation was in her body would try to abort the fetus before it got a chance to live.

“With that being how it is, seems pretty irresponsible—cruel even—for me to try to have kids.”

Charon couldn’t help but feel relieved. A part of him still felt the ridiculous desire to pass on his genes, whatever value they still had, but to know that the woman he loved wasn’t missing anything where he was lacking was…an awkward sort of comfort.

One of the many guard dogs of Lamplight found them and curled into Percy’s side. She smiled at the added warmth.

“Although, after all this is over, I wouldn’t mind raising something with you. Maybe a dog?” Charon
chuckled, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“Maybe a dog.”

“Well, there you go.” Joseph said, rerouting power to the computer terminal that controlled the access door to the vault. The only other entrance tunnel had been caved in years ago, according to Macready. The way he said it, smug with extra curses mixed in, implied that it had been his doing, even if he wouldn’t tell them why.

“Don’t know what good it will do you, though. I told you, that darn thing is locked up good.”

After he left, Percy took a look.

“This isn’t so bad, just encrypted. Eight letter word for pancake?”

“Flapjack.”

“Bingo.” Percy chimed in a tired singsong voice. “Okay, what’s Pandora been keeping from us all this time?”

The door slid open with a groan. Percy flipped on the pip-boy light, shining it into the darkness. The walls were more rust than metal. Usually skeletons littered the ground in these opened vaults, but this place seemed eerily empty. Something caught Charon’s ear, but he couldn’t put his finger on what it was. He held up his hand, motioning for Percy to hold back.

He peaked around the corner, and spied fishnets full of bloodied limbs and organs. His mind raced as he thought back to the corridors they had already passed through.

‘All the turn offs ended in dead ends. Everywhere behind is clear. They are safe. At least for now.’

Charon dragged her out of the vault after signaling for her to keep quiet. Once they were clear, he slammed his fist against the terminal, locking the door back up.

“Super mutants.” He said, keeping his voice low even though he knew they had escaped without being noticed.

Percy turned with her hands on her hips, thinking.

“So that’s why Macready had the other way caved in…”

Charon crossed his arms, trying to keep his panic below the surface.

“They can’t stay here.”

“Where else can they go? Three settlements are gone because of the Enclave. And we can’t take an entire camp full of children to Rivet City. Even if we got them through D.C, they don’t have the space or the resources.”

“They can’t stay here.” Charon insisted, fingers digging into the flesh of his arms.

“Nowhere is safe out here, Charon. The best we can do is seal the door from the inside, and clear out the mutants. No one knew the children were here, so that means the Enclave doesn’t either. They are the safest they can be in Little Lamplight.”
He nodded, despite himself. He itched for a hit. The detox had worked, but the habit was still there. Even if he didn’t need another dose of psycho, the routine was still there.

“Fine. Let’s take these motherfuckers out.”

As soon as the door was closed and sealed behind them, Charon felt Percy’s hand on his arm.

“All right. They’ll be fine. We can take mutants. We’ll be in and out in no time, and no harm will to come to Little Lamplight, okay?”

He took a deep breath, before returning her smile. “Thanks Perse’. For everything.”

“It’s no problem. Now let’s get this over with.”

The vault got more and more disturbing the farther they delved into its depths. Layers and layers of blood over years caked the walls. The place reeked of copper and something horrifyingly sickly sweet. Percy wrinkled her nose. The scent brought back unwanted memories, so Charon covered his nose and mouth with a bandana. After a while he put on goggles, as if to keep the particles of gore out of his eyes. Mutants were indeed everywhere, more than either expected and more than they were prepared for. Charon ducked for the corner, injecting himself with a stimpak while Percy shot suppressing fire. Slamming another clip into his gun, they tagged out and Charon took out the remaining mutants. When he turned back around, Percy was looking through the glass of one of the isolation chambers. As fucked up as her vault had been, it was nothing compared to this one.

Corridor after corridor of bodies mutated beyond recognition.

“Their overseer and doctors used them for this.” She said bitterly, looking pained as she found a chamber that had a living centaur trapped inside. “The very people they were supposed to trust.”

“The individual cannot bargain with the State. The State recognizes no coinage but power: and it issues the coins itself.”

The two jumped as they heard the quote come from down the hall…from a mutant, crackling over an intercom.

“What—who…are you?” Percy asked hesitantly. They found him trapped in the chamber at the end of the hall. Unlike the mutants they had killed on their way here, this one seemed to be wearing the shredded remains of a vault suit.

“That isn’t important, but if you need to refer to me by anything, I would prefer Fawkes. Please, I’ve been trapped for so long. Let me out.” His voice was surprisingly calm, while also being loud and rough.

Charon had heard of intelligent super mutants out west, but this was totally new.

“We’ve had enough trouble with your kind so far; what makes you any different?”

“I am no more like those rage fueled simpletons than you are like your own feral brethren. Sadly I can only give you my word…and present one bargaining chip. I have not seen anyone except my fellow meta humans for hundreds of years, which means the only reason you’re here is because you know that this particular vault houses a G.E.C.K., and I can promise you, it’s very much functioning. If you let me out, I will retrieve it for you.”

“What makes you think we can’t get it ourselves?”

“The area is flooded with radiation. Far too much, even for your ghoul companion. Meta humans are
far more resistant.”

Percy shifted on her feet. Fawkes didn’t seem like the type to betray them, but it was hard to look past his outward appearance. Charon grabbed her hand before she could push the intercom button again.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” He muttered, turning his face away from the mutant’s view. Even if Fawkes couldn’t hear them, Charon wouldn’t put it past him to be able to read lips.

“I’m just curious to see where all this goes.” Percy replied with a quirk of the eyebrow.

Charon took another calming breath before letting go of her wrist. She accessed the wall terminal next to Fawkes’ chamber. Bypassing the restricted access, she was able to open his room without the other test chambers releasing their residents.

Fawkes was slow to step out of his prison of centuries. “Thank you, kind strangers. I realize it’s probably too much to ask, but would you open the other doors? I’ve been trapped with these poor souls for a long time, and I would like to show them a small sliver of mercy.”

Charon nodded, “Take all the time you need.”

They waited for him at the edge of the radiation flooded hall. Fawkes was right, it was too much even for Charon. Percy stretched out her hand, feeling an invisible wall of tingling energy against her palm.

“So strange…” She took her hand away, feeling slightly dizzy. The radiation was slightly intoxicating in a way not entirely separate from alcohol. And yet also invigorating. She looked to Charon, smoking as they waited. Blushing, she couldn’t keep the thought of them coupling while high on radiation out of her head.

‘We will have plenty of time for that, once all this is over.’

There was a tired frustration in his eyes. They had killed all the super mutants in the vault but that didn’t stop him from worrying about the children in Little Lamplight. He was always thinking about others, even while he was risking his life to protect them. Charon would do anything if he thought it was best for someone else’s wellbeing. Even if that’s why he left in the first place, Percy couldn’t help but love that about him.

He noticed her watching him. “What’s on your mind?”

Percy gave him a half smile. “Nothing you don’t already know, big guy.”

He moved to stand next to her, passing her a fresh cigarette. Once it was in her mouth he angled her neck until the tip of hers was pressed against his. Looking into her eyes, he breathed through the filter until Percy’s cigarette was lit. This close, he could count the freckles on her cheeks, and one just above her right eyebrow. It was smaller than a pin prick, and barely darker than the rest of her skin. If it weren’t for where they were, he would have kissed her right then and there. But he could hear Fawkes coming in the distance.

“I apologize for the wait. Here, as promised.” He passed Percy the G.E.C.K. She was surprised; she had expected something more conspicuous than a metal briefcase.
“What are you going to do now?” She asked, holding the G.E.C.K close as if she was worried it would dissolve in her hands. The last key to her father’s work was finally hers.

“I’m not entirely sure. I’ve been trapped for so long, it’s unsettling to know that my fate is actually up to me, after all this time. I can’t thank you enough for freeing me. Farewell.”

They parted ways when Fawkes went to leave through the vault entrance.

“I don’t wish to scare the little ones.” He explained.

“I’d be more concerned about getting shot by the little ones.” Percy muttered to Charon, waving at Fawkes’ retreating form.

Once the door shut behind him, Percy pulled up the map on her pip-boy.

‘Instant rad death through the entrance, so I guess we are leaving through Little Lamplight again…”

She stilled, looking at the readings. Slowly, ever so slowly, she looked up. There it was…

She knew what they wanted. They were outnumbered, and outgunned. They didn’t have the stims or the ammo to get out of this alive.

“Umm…” She cursed her voice for not staying steady. Now, more than ever in her life, she needed to be convincing and calm.

“My pip-boy says there are more super mutants up ahead—we must have missed some. Will you scout ahead? I don’t want them to find out we stole the G.E.C.K.”

She smiled sheepishly, rummaging through her pack, tossing him the last of the shotgun shells and stims.

He sighed, “Damn mutants don’t know how to give up.”

She would miss that sigh. She would miss the scent of leather and stale tobacco. Percy would miss waking up to the sound of sizzling Brahmin steak downstairs. She would miss humming to the radio as they sorted through ammo and scrap.

It wasn’t fair.

Just as he cleared the door, Charon felt a sharp stab in his lower back. He was out before he hit the cold metal floor.
Chapter 43

Percy jammed the door behind him. Setting the G.E.C.K on the ground, she turned, putting her hands behind her head.

“You can come out!” She raised her voice, “I’m unarmed. I won’t fight back.”

The pulse mine, hidden among the pipes of the ceiling went off. Her entire body became rigid and she fell hard to the ground. Paralyzed, she could only wait for Colonel Autumn and his soldiers to come into view.

“Objective secured, sir. She will be out in a few moments.”

“Excellent. Grab the G.E.C.K. then secure our little guest onto the vertibird.”

Percy felt herself get hauled up by the shoulders. Autumn grabbed her roughly by the chin.

“You’ve been a very bad girl, haven’t you? Your father would be proud, if he wasn’t a pile of plasmic ooze, seeping into the charred earth—that’s right, I made sure there was nothing left to bury after what that bastard tried to pull. No matter, you can make up for it in the coming days.”

He was fading in and out of darkness, but she didn’t try very hard to maintain consciousness.

What did it matter? They lost. Maybe if she hadn’t been a coward. Maybe if she had listened to the Brotherhood and sought out the G.E.C.K. as soon as they had given her the coordinates.

But there was a bright side. Little Lamplight was still safe, and so was Charon. At least for now. Would he have the presence of mind to leave the Capital? Or would he stay and try to save the children?

When she finally came to, she felt…floaty. She winced, opening her eyes to bright fluorescent lights and hunger. Autumn was sneering at her from the other side of a force field. She was being suspended by…something.

“How long was I out?” She asked. Her throat was dry, and Percy was trying to ignore the chill.

Autumn took a moment to let his eyes climb up and down her form before answering,

“Long enough that I’m sure you need food.” He walked over to a table filled with fruits and pastries in the corner. The way he walked reminded Percy of Burke, only less casual. Every movement he made was stiff and calculated. He took a remote from the table, flipped a switch, and the force field vanished, dropping Percy against the ground. She realized why there was such a chill. She was completely naked. Getting to her feet and rubbing her sore palms, she tried not to shake from the
cold. The food smelled incredible, making her stomach rumble.

“Where’s my armor?” ‘And my pip-boy.’

Colonel Autumn chuckled. “I’ll tell you what: You can wear this,” He held up what looked like a medical smock. “And eat nothing, or you can wear this,” He set a slave collar on the table. “And eat with me.”

Percy scowled, snatching the smock from his outstretched hand. Taking a sip of steaming coffee, he began gathering various slices of fruit and bread on his plate.

“Don’t flatter yourself, sweetheart. Privacy for you is now a thing of the past. Every scar, cut, and…brand you have is well known to myself and those that escorted you here. But don’t worry; clothes and food can be earned with…obedience.”

Percy laughed bitterly. “If my dad was alive, you’d know I am impossible to keep in order. Why do you think I’m out here?”

“You’d be surprised how efficient the Enclave can be in adjusting our insubordinates. But that might not even be necessary if you only give us what we want. Tell me the access code to Project Purity.”

“Do you honestly think that if I even knew that code, I’d tell your sorry ass? James didn’t tell me shit! He had me do maintenance while he and his crew worked on the real tech. Hell, I wasn’t even with him for most of the restoration.” Percy remained standing, not wanting to show weakness.

“That can’t be true, he spoke in code to you before he killed himself.” The colonel was calm, but his thumb was rubbing repeatedly against another button in his remote. There was something off about his militaristic calm.

“Tell me the code, Miss Carter, or things will get very hard for you, very fast.”

Percy leaned over the table. “Fuck. You. There’s your code.”

In a flash she took the nearest plate, smashing it against the metal table. Grabbing the largest shard in her hand, she made a dive for his neck. Next thing she knew, Percy was on the floor, writhing in pain. The back of her neck was burning like ice and fire and acid.

“You fucking bastard!” She spat as the pain finally subsided.

“Language, miss. Like I said, the Enclave has ways of making you obey, and making you talk.”

“Percy!” Charon scrambled to his feet in a quickly subsiding daze. Finding the door jammed, his joints strained as he tried the emergency release, but it was no good.

“Damn it!!” He settled for kicking it. “Dammit dammit, DAMMIT!!” But the door still wouldn’t budge and his voice was met with silence.

Charon saw the two med-x, and stealth boy, lying drained on the ground.

‘This wasn’t how it was supposed to go!’

Why did she have to do this? Charon knew the reason…Percy was a liar by trade. She did it to get into The Pitt and Tenpenny Tower. She lied to Wally Mack and Burke because she thought it would
keep the vault and Megaton safe. Percy would lie about having two legs if she thought it would help someone she cared about.

‘I should have known, I should have sensed that she—’

He slammed against door again, screaming in rage until we was hoarse. Who knows how long he had been out? She could be anywhere she could be—

He grabbed the remains of the bridge of his nose, not that it helped. He needed to think, but he couldn’t. There was no contract, no pain—nothing to indicate that she was alive or... He needed backup.

“Where did your friend go?” Bumble caught Charon by the sleeve as he ran through Little Lamplight.

“She’s…gone.” Charon tried to stay calm around the little girl. “Where’s Maccready?”

“He’s on guard duty, like always.”

Charon felt something nudge against his leg. One of the guard dogs whimpered, tilting its head to the side as it while it looked up at him.

“Rex liked Percy the best. Maybe Rex can help you find her?”

There was very little that he was sure about, but Charon was positive the dog wouldn’t be useful in any capacity against the Enclave. But Bumble looked so hopeful. She marched up to Rex and held his head in her two tiny hands.

“You go find Percy, okay? Be a good boy, Rex!” Solemnly she touched her nose to Rex’s before blinking three times. Rex ruined the moment by licking her face.

Regardless, Charon got on his knees and pulled her into a hug. “Thank you, Bumble. I’ll take good care of Rex.”

“A…nice super mutant?” Maccready was incredulous.

“Work with me, kid; this is important.” Charon said through clenched teeth. He had wasted enough time as it was. “He was wearing the remains of a vault suit, not armor.”

Maccready scratched his hair from beneath his helmet.

“One of my scouts spotted a mutant like that north of here, at the edge of eighty-seven’s radiation zone. He was alone when they usually travel in packs. This might be your guy.”

Charon moved to leave, but Maccready piped back up.

“Where did she go, ghoul?”

He paused, clenching his fists. “I told you, she got taken away.”
“Yeah, by who? If they took Percy, then they took her from the vault. And they didn’t get in through us. Which means they have tech strong enough to withstand the radiation at the vault’s entrance. I’m not an idiot, Charon. If there’s someone new out there, I need to fucking protect my people. What is out there?”

“The Enclave is back. You’re too young to know how much of a threat they were, but they are big. And they have her, and they will stop at nothing to get what they want from her, and if they get whatever it is they want out of her, there’s no stopping them from taking over the entire Capital, and then who knows what else they’ll do, but none of that matters because Percy will be dead.”

If he had skin on his knuckles, they would be white.

“They won’t keep Percy around when she’s no longer useful.”

“Hey!” Macready shot at the cave near Charon’s head. The bullet stuck in the wall.

“God! A giant fucking ghoul like yourself—what the hell?! Are you really going to let some assholes do this?? If you care about your woman, then fight back!”

Sure enough, Fawkes was right at the border of the vault’s radiation field. He had found a boulder to sit cross legged on with his back to the vault in the morning light. He was muttering some sort of mantra under his breath. Charon caught snatches of Chinese, remembered from training long past. The guard dog, Rex, didn’t seem to mind the peaceful mutant, seeing that Charon wasn’t attacking him. Fawkes must have sensed Charon approaching because he opened one eye.

"Good morning friend. I felt your discord a mile away. Tell me, what troubles you?"

"I’m sure you can riddle it out," Charon growled. He was infuriated by everyone's supposed calm. Percy had been kidnapped, for God’s sake.

"Ah, yes. She was a compassionate woman. I’m sure she will be missed."

"She's. Not. Dead."

"I have not seen vertibirds in hundreds of years. The fact that one of the wasteland factions still possesses some in working order—and is willing to steal people for their own means—does not give me much confidence in their compassion. Do you know what they want with her?"

"She had the G.E.C.K."

"If that is all they wanted, then she cannot serve much use to them."

"Don’t you care??" he nearly screamed. He didn’t need the contract to feel this level of panic and dread. "She got you out of that vault!"

"And I am thankful for that. The sensation of sun against my skin after so long is...indescribable. But I’ve seen many friends and loved ones much dearer to me die in horrible ways in that vault. As much as it pains me, I cannot help but acknowledge reality."

"Well I won't!" Charon spit out, "I refuse to accept that until I find her. And you’re going to help me—even if it's just to...bury her." He cursed himself for the way his voice shrivelled in his throat near the end.
"I’m sorry, friend, but what do I owe you?"

"Not me; her. She saved your sorry ass—if it wasn’t for her, you’d still be locked in that damn cell!"

Fawkes looked at him for a long moment. Super Mutants couldn’t express much in the way of emotion, outside rage, but this one managed to convey annoyance, shame, and finally resignation.

“I can’t argue that I owe her a great debt. It pains me to become so quickly involved in the affairs of the outside world, but…I will help you save my savior.”

She didn’t know how long she was left alone, only that she was being watched. Using his shocker, Colonel Autumn had all but forced her back into the electromagnetic restraining field and left her there. When she was finally released, some sort of food loaf on a tray was pushed through a slot in the door.

“Eat up,” A woman called through the opening. “You have a big day today.”

Percy winced at the taste. Even by wasteland standards, this was bad. It was like everything had been blended into a mush before getting burnt in the oven. But hunger wouldn’t permit her to leave any leftovers. While she ate, her fingers brushed against the back of her neck, where all the pain seemed to spread from. She felt bumps…and numbers?

‘A bar code…’ Just like on a box of Blamco.

Someone rapped on the door, causing her to jump. Handcuffs were pushed through the slot.

“I want you to put those cuffs on, and stand exactly five feet from the door. I would not recommend further disobedience.”

It was Colonel Autumn. When Percy didn’t move, she heard a sigh from the other side and more pain shot through her in three short bursts. Before catching her breath, Percy scrambled for the restraints, snapping them on and moving to her commanded position. The door slid open, revealing Colonel Autumn and a woman in a lab coat flanked by two guards. The woman avoided eye contact with Percy as they walked down the narrow halls.

“I know you…” Percy said as she was strapped onto a medical table. The woman was busy filling a syringe with some sort of serum.

“Holt…right? Anna Holt?”

Before she could answer—although her face said it all—Autumn stepped in front of her holding a glass of clear liquid. A straw was sticking out of the top.

“I would like for you to drink this. Don’t make me punish you.”

She sputtered as the alcohol burned down her throat, but when she moved to speak, Autumn held up his remote, giving her a knowing smile. Without another word, she finished the rest of the drink. Anna gave her a dose of diluted psycho and the numbing sensation that she both hated and missed so much spread through her limbs. It became difficult to focus and Percy was sure that if she weren’t strapped in, she would have fallen to the floor from a lack of balance.

“You have one last chance, Miss Carter. What is the Purifier’s access code? Come now; the Enclave
could do so much for the wasteland. Within a month, clean water would be easily accessible to the entire Capital Wasteland. From there, we could spread to the rest of our great America.”

“Yeah, because the last government did such a good job.” Percy’s words slurred together.

Autumn slapped her hard enough to rattle her teeth, and the sound snapped through the bright white medical room. Anna jumped, nearly dropping Percy’s next drug dose.

Calming her nerves, she switched on one of the machines and a heavy base note filled the room. Staying focused became even harder for Percy, she hardly even noticed Anna stick her with a needle and dose her with the next serum.

“Tell me the access code.” Autumn’s voice echoed through her head.

“I don’t know!” Her scream went from defiant to tortured as the colonel pressed a button on his remote. Percy writhed in her restraints when he didn’t let up.

“I said, tell me the access code!” Somehow, through the noise, she could still hear him, knocking around the inside of her skull.

The bass thrummed in her ears, the alcohol swayed the room around her, and whatever else had been pumped in her veins compelled her to tell him something—anything!

“I told you…I don’t know!” she bit out through clenched teeth. “Why not ask Holt? She worked closer with my dad! She might know something!”

“She has not been difficult with me. You have. I can make you hurt more—you think this is it!?" The burning stinging pain suddenly increased, and all there was, was agony and her cries.

Percy slouched against her restraints, passed out.

“We over did it.” Anna said nervously.

“Here’s hoping she doesn’t build up a tolerance for pain.”

“I do not think I will like these people, if they are as you describe.”

They were making their way along the coast towards the Citadel. Fawkes had draped a near white sheet across his shoulders, hoping to appear more pacifist than his fellow ‘meta humans’.

“We don’t have much of a choice. If anyone has a chance to fight back against the Enclave, it’s the Brotherhood.”

“‘The duty of the individual is to accept no rule, we are not subjects of a State founded upon law,’” Fawkes recited under his breath.

As they neared the pentagon of fortified metal, he hung back. Rex stayed with him. Charon walked towards the guards as they raised their Gatling guns. His hands were above his head, but he itched to grab his own gun.

“Stay back, ghoul.” One of them snapped.
“Are you serious? I’ve been here before! I came with the Project Purity refugees. Let me in, I need to speak to Elder Lyons.” He heard the crackle of the intercom, but no one spoke. The other soldier removed her helmet to reveal Paladin Cross

“What is Percy? Is she alright?”

“She was taken by the Enclave while retrieving your G.E.C.K.”

Within a few moments, the gate opened and Sarah Lyons was striding towards him.

“How long ago did this happen??” She asked.

“A few days ago. We came as fast as we could from Lit—…from the Vault.”

She gave him an odd look, but only followed up with, “‘We”? Who else is with you?”

Charon looked behind her at the guards, the one that wasn’t Cross was clearly giving him dirty looks behind their helmets.

“He’s…hiding. He might be shot if he came within view of the Citadel.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.” She replied decidedly.

She stilled as they neared where Fawkes and Rex were hiding.

Fawkes was reading a book he had found in the ruins during their travels. Looking up, he said.

“Greetings. I am Fawkes. I apologize for my appearance, but my brethren imprisoned me for my pacifism. My desire isn’t to startle you, but sadly my appearance makes that impossible. I have travelled here with Charon to request assistance in repaying a debt to his companion, Percy.”

Astonished, Sarah looked between the two of them a few times before taking a deep breath.

“Alright. We need a plan.”

As they walked back, Sarah ordered the men to stand down, nodding for Cross to follow them into the briefing hall. Climbing out of her armor in the courtyard, Cross caught up to them before the double doors closed. The two seemed to walk especially close, despite there being plenty of room in the halls. Through the intercom, Sarah had warned the entire stronghold about their latest guests, and for everyone’s safety and peace of mind, to have the route to the briefing room cleared. Charon spied Arthur Maxson peering out from around a corner, glaring at Charon but looking terrified of Fawkes.

“The time for waiting is over.” Sarah said, booting up the war table. “They are already at an advantage by possessing the G.E.C.K. I trust Percy would never tell them the access code, but she hasn’t been trained to resist torture.”

“I wouldn’t jump to conclusions like that,” Charon said bitterly, “But she doesn’t even know the access code.”

“Which means each moment we waste only adds to her mortality,” Cross added gravely.

Charon swallowed, but nodded.

The rest of the Brotherhood higher ups filed in, watching Fawkes warily, while he himself tried to mind his own business in the crowded room.

“Do you know where they took her?” one of the knights asked, tapping the table to raise models of
army units around the citadel.

“I saw vertibirds flying northward, if that helps,” Fawkes spoke up from a corner where he was hunched.

“It does, actually.” Sarah sounded genuinely surprised, looking over a clipboard one of the scribes had just handed her.

“Our scouts report a concentration of enclave near one checkpoint known as Raven Rock.”

“Ma’am, permission to speak.” The same scribe piped up.

“Granted.”

“According to our Vault-Tec records, Raven Rock was a site commissioned by the Pre-war government as a military fallout shelter unassociated with the other vaults. This could be what we’re looking for.”

Charon felt small relief at that, despite the stress that never quite left his system. This wasn’t like the contract’s pull, but it wasn’t any better.

Sarah also looked relieved.

“Thank you, Scribe Yearling. Inform the Citadel that we will be making a frontal assault at dawn.”

“Are you sure that’s wise?” Elder Lyons asked, speaking for the first time.

“At this point, we don’t have much of a choice, sir. Even if Percy doesn’t know the code, there’s a good chance they may eventually guess the correct one. We can’t continue to rely on their ignorance.”

As the days passed, Percy knew nothing but pain and torture. What little respite she had was spent in total isolation. After she put up a particularly good fight against her escorts, her wrists and ankles were kept shackled at all times. The sore red rings grew discolored green boils as her wounds became infected. She needed radiation, but had no access to it within those sterilized walls. After four days of refusing to eat, she was eventually moved to live permanently in a room Autumn sardonically referred to as the med bay. It was more like a bleached dungeon. She took her food through a tube now.

The colonel watched her on his terminal one night. She had taken to reciting verses from the bible. Starting from the end and working backwards, it seemed.

“The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald.”

Whether it was to stave off insanity or mere boredom was no longer relevant in his eyes—she would break eventually. And yet...even in this state there was something admirable about her. Ms. Holt had sworn she had given Miss Carter the correct dosage of truth serum, but the girl was sticking to her original story. Autumn chuckled at that. Girl...despite her recently wasted figure, it was clear adolescence was long past her. By the hardness in her eyes and the gruffness of her tone, but also by the swell of her hips and...other parts. If it weren’t for her prolonged exposure to the outside, she would have been an ideal welcome to the enclave's strictly organized gene pool. Percy had gone
silent, perhaps she had finally fallen asleep.

'No, just testing her restraints again, it seems...perhaps I’ll pay our little insomniac a visit.'

Percy lifted her head slightly as she heard the door open. She couldn’t help the spike her heart-rate took as Colonel Autumn entered the bright room that reeked of antiseptic. The lights were always kept on, whether to throw off her sense of time, or just another form of torture, she wasn’t sure.

“How is our guest doing?”

“I could do with a blanket, maybe some dimmer lights.” Percy said, refusing to look him in the eye.

“Ms. Holt tells me you were a priest back in the vault you grew up in. Vault one hundred and one, correct?”

He was met with silence.

“Is that why you were reciting from the bible, or do you just have a fascination with the end of the world? Then again,” He chuckled, “Don’t we all?”

More silence.

“As fortified as vault one hundred and one is, I’m sure my men could crack it. The Enclave could always use new additions to the ranks, after all.”

“Just kill me already…”

“Pardon?” Autumn stepped closer. Too close for her comfort.

“I don’t know the access code, you know I don’t. You win, okay? Just finish me off so I don’t have to see you fuck the wastes up even more than they already are.”

“What happened to the fight? This doesn’t seem like you.” He didn’t look particularly surprised.

“You don’t know me. Holt may have heard from my dad about who I was in the vault, but that me and who I am now are two different people.”

“Very true,” He agreed, “But you seem to be confused. We were never going to kill you, even if you had given us the access code.”

She finally looked up at him. He was uncapping a marker, pressing the tip to her abdomen just above her belly button. He drew a sort of diagram along her entire body as he spoke.

“Before we set up camp here, the enclave’s home base was far to the west. During our exodus, we found extensive notes on creating super soldiers from before the war. It’s a shame such a masterpiece was never implemented before it was too late; we might have won the war. The mechanical parts were rare, but we salvaged just enough for one more soldier. And who knows, maybe after we...‘take over the wasteland’ as you say...we can afford to utilize this technology on a much grander scale.”

Percy’s blood went cold. “You don’t mean…”

“Oh I do. You’ve survived a great deal out here, young lady. You may not be Enclave by birth, but
you are tough.”

He set down the marker. He was far too close as he grabbed her breasts roughly, pinching her nipples between his finger and thumb enough to make her groan in pain. He brushed his nose intimately up her neck until he whispered in her ear, “With the skill you have, I’m sure the Enclave would be grateful for your…genetics.”

Percy struggled against her bindings more urgently now.

Autumn chuckled under his breath. “Don’t worry. I hate the feeling of a woman struggling under me; I’ll wait until they’ve done the procedure and you’re more compliant.”

He left her alone but not before pressing an unnervingly chaste kiss against her jaw.

Percy let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding as soon as the door closed behind him.

“‘Revelations twenty-one six. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.’” She muttered shakily.
“I can’t believe we’re helping a super mutant.” One of the men grumbled under his breath as Sarah’s unit lined up. “A ghoul was bad enough, but this? The Outcasts aren’t looking so bad right about now.”

“Tell me about it.” The other one said back. “I can’t believe Elder Lyons still trusts his daughter’s abilities after the thing at GNR…”

Charon gave the two withering looks, but didn’t say anything as Sarah stepped out onto the helipad. She looked to Cross, at the end of the line of Brotherhood knights. Cross gave her a warm smile and nodded. Squaring her shoulders, Sarah walked down the line with her hands behind her back, giving off an air of confidence that she did not wholly feel.

“Alright knights, this is it. We have their location, and they have our G.E.C.K. On top of that they are keeping a highly valued ally, one Percy Carter, prisoner. Now we all know the G.E.C.K. is too important to both sides, so it’s in no danger from either in this situation. We will be putting Carter’s life in priority.”

More dissidence spread through the crowd, but Lyons silenced them with a few blasts to the sky from her laser rifle.

“Enough!”

When they finally quieted down, she continued, “Since barging in guns blazing will almost certainly guarantee Carter’s death, we’re going to start out a little more subtle.”

Gesturing towards Charon, he stepped forward and took her place.

“I’ll be infiltrating and…securing Carter.” It felt strange to speak of her so formally. “Once she’s safe I’ll radio in and you all will take over.”

The ranks were outraged.

“This is ridiculous!”

“We need the G.E.C.K., not some girl!”

Charon felt a wave of rage. Percy wasn’t ‘some girl’.

“Enough!” Paladin Cross cut in. “What would it look like to the people of the Capital Wasteland if we just left her to die? Like it or not, Percy Carter and her father have done more for us then most of our own men. It would be spitting on James’ memory to not at least try to save Percy. Now get in line!”
“I don’t like flying.” Fawkes called over the whirl of the vertibird’s propeller.

“You’re not the one jumping out!” Charon shouted back as Sarah handed him a radio, several stealth-boys, a silenced pistol, and lastly, a parachute.

“It won’t do you any good sneaking around in there with a giant backpack…Good luck, Charon. I hope she’s safe.”

Charon put on the parachute stiffly. “If she isn’t, I will fucking level that rock.”

Sarah nodded, not doubting him for an instant. She had listened to the radio when the Talon Company was getting wiped out and put two and two together.

The wind whipped his short tufts of hair around wildly as Charon picked a spot to land. Finding a cliffside large enough for cover, Charon slapped his first stealth-boy on before jumping without hesitation.

“Rex, no!” Sarah screamed as Charon felt something slam into his back and teeth rip into his shoulder as Rex clung to him.

“Fuck!” Charon caught the dog before he could fall to his death. He barely pulled his chute in time, and the added weight wasn’t helping anything as the ground got closer and closer. Charon grunted, popping his shoulder back into joint. Rex whimpered, and Charon swore the dog looked sorry.

“Charon are you okay, over?” The Walkie-talkie crackled and Sarah’s voice came through.

“Yeah, I’m fine. So’s the dog, over…”

Sarah sighed in relief. “I’m so sorry, he must have gotten off of his leash. Should I send someone to retrieve him, over?”

Charon furrowed his brow, thinking about Bumble. She had commanded Rex to find Percy. He looked to the dog, before he said, “Nah…pooch is smarter than he looks. Plus he looks like a tracker, over.”

“…Fine. Radio in when Carter is secure. Over.”

Pocketing the hand radio, Charon grabbed another stealth-boy from his pocket.

“Okay boy…let’s go.”

They slipped in as the guards did a shift change. Rex was completely quiet. His nails were clipped very short such that only his pads touched the cold metal flooring.

They passed lab workers huddled in a corner, muttering quietly while looking around, afraid they might get caught.

“Are you sure you heard that right?” One asked.

“Positive. Autumn is just one disagreement away from decommissioning Eden,” the second one said.
“Oh, God…”

Rex definitely had Percy’s scent. They were down one floor when Rex made a beeline for a lone woman in a lab coat. She was pushing a cart filled with petri dishes down the hall.

Anne grew stiff as a board when she felt Charon’s silenced pistol on the back of her head.

“Listen to me.” He whispered into her ear, murder in his tone. “You are taking me to where you’re keeping Percy, or you are dying. Right here, right now. So what’s it gonna be? Tap your nail against the cart once for yes, twice for no.”

She was shaking all over, but she managed to tap her nail against the handlebar only once.

“Good. Now let’s go.” He nudged her head with the stock and they got moving.

They wound through the halls, deeper and deeper. Fewer people were passing them now. Rex was getting antsy, and Charon could feel his nervousness, even if he didn’t make a sound. A broad shouldered man turned a corner. It was Colonel Autumn. He wasn’t dressed like the others, he had a fur lined military coat with many medals decorating the front. He walked with perfect posture and assured footing before coming to a stop in front of Anne. After a brief pause, he smiled warmly down at the woman.

“Well hello, Ms. Holt. It’s a good thing I ran into you. You will be joining me later, I assume?”

“Y-yes sir. Just as soon as I put these uh, samples in cold storage.” Anne was not as cool under pressure as Charon would have liked. He lowered the gun until it was pressing into her lower back rather than her neck.

“Oh don’t worry about that, sweetheart. I’ll take those and we can catch up later.”

Anna nodded stiffly, puffing her chest out as Autumn took control of the cart.

They followed a short way after Autumn until Anne made a sharp right. Their path became more twists and turns, sometimes going upstairs, sometimes down.

“How much longer?”

“Just through these doors,” she said, sounding calmer. There was no one around now. They came to a door at the end of the hall. She swiped her card, and walked through as the door opened with a hiss.

“Over here.” The room was long, and there was yet another door just ten feet away from the one they came through on the same wall. Suddenly, Anne broke out into a sprint, slamming her palm against a red button. A force field came up, separating them as the door closest to Charon began to close for a local lockdown.

“You bitch!” He snarled, running back for the door. He caught it right before it was too late. His muscles screamed in protest as he just barely managed to force the door back open. Rex was close behind him as he ran back down the hall.

“Oh, okay, you’re up. Show me where she really is.” Charon commanded, injecting himself and the dog with more stealth-boys before the last one wore off. They completely backtracked from where Anne had lead them and the ball of tar in Charon’s stomach grew and grew, realizing what had actually happened. They finally found the med bay just as their stealth-boys ran completely out of juice. The door was unlocked and he could hear a struggle on the other side. Motioning for the
dog to find somewhere to hide, Charon punched the button on the wall to gain access.

And there was Percy, covered head to foot in bruises and diagrams in permanent marker. Autumn had her pulled against his chest, gun to her head. Charon froze in place with his gun aimed at the both of them.

“Charon!” She practically sobbed, even now struggling against Autumn’s hold, who had a maniacal look in his eye.

“So this thing is the reason for your brand, isn’t it darling? Must say, I’m a little disappointed with your choices, but that’s all over now.” He grabbed her breast and squeezed until she was screaming in pain.

Charon was visibly shaking, so ready to murder this bastard.

“Let her go…” His voice was low and raspy. It sounded like he was going feral, and part of him might have been.

“Or what? The alarm has been sounded. My men will be here any minute, and you’ll be dead, not me. Here’s an idea, why don’t you save my men some bullets, hmm?”

“Charon…please.” Percy whispered pleadingly, and he knew what she was asking of him. She looked terrible. It was clear that they hadn’t allowed her to sleep, and the marks littering her body only added to the gruesome conclusion his mind had made.

There was no way he was getting out of here alive…then she’d never get out.

“I’m…I’m so sorry Percy.” The gun shook in his hand as he pointed it towards her.

“I love you.” And yet she smiled through the fear, muscles relaxing.

She was ready.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” A voice sounded through the room from an intercom on the wall. “Colonel, let her go. I would like to have a chat with our guests. Alone.”

“Are you serious?!” Autumn said incredulously, looking back and forth from the camera in one corner and back to Charon, who still had his gun leveled at the woman he loved.

“Now, Colonel,” Eden seemed to chuckle jovially, but there was something vaguely threatening about his voice.

Autumn was fuming, and Charon almost thought he would refuse Eden’s direct order until he threw Percy into Charon’s arms. He quickly wrapped his arm around her protectively, refusing to lower his gun. Percy reached for a smock on the nearest table, hurriedly dressing and refusing to look back at Autumn.

“I wouldn’t keep the President waiting,” he seethed. “It seems he can be very impatient for results.”

Before they left the room, Percy turned and spit at him. “Fuck you,” she hissed, so upset she was unable to say more.

Autumn’s smile returned. “All in good time, Miss Carter.”

“Attention all Raven Rock personnel,” Eden called throughout the halls over the intercom. “This is your President speaking. I’ve invited our guest from vault one-oh-one to my office. Please, do not
impede her progress. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Rex followed after them, wagging his tail at what he saw as a job well done. As soon as they were far enough away, one of the eye shaped cameras swiveled towards the group.

“Miss Carter, you will find your belongings in the closet on your right. Feel free to get dressed in more comfortable attire. I would appreciate it if you kept your weapons holstered, however. Tensions are understandably high in the base.”

Charon pulled her into what looked like a maintenance closet that was mercifully empty. All her things were there just as Eden had said, but at that moment, Percy didn’t give a damn.

“Thank God you’re here!” Percy whispered, throwing her arms around him and pulling him close. He calmed down almost instantly, feeling her alive and breathing in his arms. Pressing his nose hole against her hair, he inhaled her scent until all his senses were consumed with her. Charon hugged her close until she grunted in pain. Only then did he let up, holding her back to examine her carefully.

“What did that bastard do to you, doll?” He growled, ready to run back and kill the man.

Percy opened her mouth to say something, but closed her eyes, wincing as she shook her head. “He didn’t do that…not yet. Can—can we talk about this later? Please?”

She looked over as Rex nudged her leg. “A dog, huh?” She couldn’t help but laugh shakily.

“Bumble insisted he help me find you, and he took his job very seriously,” Charon explained, scratching behind the dog’s ear.

Charon helped her get dressed in her leather armor, wincing at the finger shaped bruises littering her body. There were track marks along her arms and blisters on her wrists. He checked the pip-boy before putting it in her bag. The rad counter was at zero; no wonder she looked so rough.

They took a mere five steps out of the closet before another message flooded the halls.

“Attention! This is Colonel Autumn! You are hereby ordered to ignore the President's previous directive. The prisoner from Vault one-oh-one is to be shot on sight. I repeat, shot on sight. This is an order!”

The color drained from Percy’s face. “Of course he’s not going to let me get away, he’s insane. Charon, he tried to—” Charon grabbed her hand, slapping a stealth-boy on her arm as he pulled her through the halls.

“We can’t think about that now,” he whispered reassuringly in her ear. “Let’s go see what Eden wants. He’s probably the one person here who won’t shoot us on sight.”

Percy squeezed his hand, knowing he was right and glad that one of them was able to think clearly.

They were able to sneak past the patrolling guards. Charon’s earlier observation proved to be true: there was dissent in the Enclave. The entire place was on red alert, but it was apparent that not all the guards were following the new orders. Percy could have sworn some of the patrols had noticed them but no one shot, simply turned down the next hall, and away from them.

Charon, Percy, and Rex stood before the large door to Eden’s office on the top floor of Raven Rock. The last of the stealth-boys had been drained, and there was no other possible option than to speak with him, and see what he wanted.
“We’ll finally be able to put a face to that voice of his,” Percy said, squaring her shoulders.

Charon pulled out the radio Sarah had given him.

“Lyons, you still there, over?”

“Charon? Oh thank god…do you have Percy? Is she okay, over?”

“I’m right here. Sarah, right? Umm…over.” Percy thought back to when she helped the Paladin defend the GNR building.

“Do you know where the G.E.C.K. is being held, over?”

“From what I could tell, the Enclave is keeping it at the Jefferson Memorial but they can’t do anything without the access code, over.”

“…Listen Perse’, we’re gonna get you out of there. Just lay low and stay out of the line of fire. Over.”


Packing away the radio, they walked through the impossibly massive sliding door.

But there was no office on the other side. Where they both expected a desk, perhaps a vase with imitation flowers or carpeted floors and warm lighting, there were only more menacing steel walls and flooring. The room was completely empty, apart from a giant supercomputer in the center of the chamber. As they walked up a long winding staircase, realization slowly dawned on Percy.

“What the f—!” She hissed.

“Language please!” The computer boomed cheerfully. “As much as I appreciate your enthusiasm, I am the President and some respect is due. I’ve heard so much about you, it’s a shame we are finally meeting face to face under such inclement circumstances.”

“After all this time…after what your second put me through…you’re just a machine?”

“I prefer the term non-ambulatory A.I. The ZAX series of computers was introduced in the years preceding the war. As the years after the war waned, I realized the Wastelands needed a leader the citizens could no longer provide. My personality became an amalgam of many of America's greatest Presidents, from Washington to Richardson. I became what you see before you now,” Eden corrected. “And I apologize for Colonel Autumn. His intentions and mine are staggeringly divergent. Something I’m comprehending all too late, I’m afraid.”

“I’m not telling you the damned access code, I don’t even know it!” She exclaimed.

And that’s when Charon noticed her tell. She was lying. Her eyes were always steady when she was trying to play someone. He couldn’t help the relief swell inside him, but kept his face straight. Despite all they had surely done to her, the full potential of the Project was still out of the Enclave’s reach.

“Oh, I’m well aware of that,” the computer chuckled. “I was convinced of that after Autumn’s first session with you.”

“Then what do you want?”

“What any good politician wants: the continued trust and support of my constituents,” he said, almost
wistfully. “However, for you and your companion here, I have something far more specific in mind, if you would only hear me out.”

Percy turned to Charon questioningly. He nodded before saying, “We’re listening.”

“Our nation’s Capital is at a crossroads. The path that we choose—here and now—will affect us all.” He had clearly prepared this speech ahead of time.

“I need y’all to act on my behalf, to ensure that our country’s future is secured.”

“What country? What nation?” Percy snorted, “The entirely of what was once the United States is completely decimated. I’ve seen your eyebots spying on settlements across the capital, do you honestly think the Enclave has any authority over anything out there?”

“That’s a bit of a bleak outlook, don’t you think? The United States has fallen on hard times, yes, but it can be healed. Democracy can once again rise from the ashes of our forefathers’ mistakes, if only you would be willing to help me.”

“Then what do you want?”

“Our great nation has been ravaged by mutation. The war was so many years ago, and yet we still suffer from its effects. We cannot move forward until humanity has been washed clean of the plague of radioactive mutation. ‘Ghouls’ and ‘super mutants’ are just a few examples of the more extreme symptoms of our nation’s illness. Charon, is it? Surely, a ghoul such as yourself knows the hardships of living as an abomination. Would you not be willing to fight for a purer world? You must understand—we need to clear the way for humanity to rebuild the wastes. Miss Carter, I believe your late father’s work can do that in a way unlike any other before him.” Eden sounded desperate.

In the distance, they all could hear faint explosions. The Brotherhood was here, and it was only a matter of time before the entire place was gutted.

“By making a few small modifications to the purifier your father worked on, anything mutated that comes into contact with its water will be eliminated—removed from the gene pool. The men and women of the world will no longer share it with the horrors and monstrosities that have become so commonplace. Here, the Enclave has made a modified strain of the FEV virus. It can be added to the water supply through the purifier’s main command console, and mutations can be eradicated with little effort.”

“Genocide is not a small effort,” Percy seethed. “You’re talking about killing thousands. Not all ghouls are feral, or even dangerous! Hell, even some super mutants have found ways to survive peacefully with others. They just want to live...surely you can comprehend the importance of preserving life in a world filled with death.”

The computer paused. “I understand the importance of life yes, but surely you can’t compare yourself to the abomination that walks beside you.”

“And what are you?” Charon said. “You aren’t the president of anything. You yourself are a deviation from what your creators intended.”

“Really?” Eden chuckled darkly, “Do go on. I’m eager to hear how you believe I don’t belong here.”

“You weren’t programmed for self-awareness, you said so yourself.”

Another pause. “…The process was certainly unintended, but the result speaks for itself. I have
brought order where there was previously none. And as for deviations, I know of the synthetic man known as Harkness who you were more than willing to help in Rivet City. Life, organic or no, is important, so long as it does not impair the progress of democracy."

“But how can you know that what you’re doing is right, especially when so many people have died by the Enclave’s hands?” Percy broke in.

“Because unlike humans, my logic is infallible.”

“And how do you know you’re infallible?” She asked, a smile creeping across her lips.

“Because I’ve been programmed to be, of course!” Eden replied, losing some of his earlier patience.

“That’s circular reasoning. You know because you know? It makes no sense—‘This statement is false’—…You’ve computed yourself into a paradox.” She said triumphantly.

Eden was quiet once more, for far longer than any other break in their conversation. The sounds of laser battles and detonations were getting closer, and Charon’s hands began to sweat. They needed to get out of here, fast.

“…Processing…” The southern drawl was replaced by an even monotone. “Internal logic error detected. Resetting primary memory circuit. Prime directive breached. New course, self-destruct sequence initialized. Civilian is advised to secure hazardous FEV material to prevent explosive decompression. Civilian also advised to evacuate the complex immediately…Have a nice day, and God bless America.”
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proofread by Groovymarlin

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything went to hell in that instant. Fawkes burst through the doors at the base of Eden’s computer set-up.

“Hello friends!” he called.

“Fawkes?!” Percy looked over the railing, then immediately clung to it as the entire structure shook beneath their feet.

“Human, I am relieved to see that you are relatively unharmed. We must save catching up for later, however. It seems that both the Brotherhood and the Enclave are intent on blowing this place to the sky.”

As if on cue, another explosion shook the tower of technology that was President Eden. They swayed to and fro until the pylon lurched to one side. Before Percy realized what was happening, Charon gathered her in his arms and tossed her over the edge. Fawkes caught her before she could hit the ground, and Charon followed after her, rolling as he hit the ground to minimize impact.

“Eden set the entire rock to self-destruct; we gotta get out of here!” Charon explained, whistling for Rex, wherever the pooch was.

“The dog is safe back in a vertibird by Paladin Lyon’s orders. In a harness this time.”

“Like that will stop him,” Charon grumbled as they ran through the halls.

The robotic guards that lined the halls had completely turned against the enclave soldiers and staff, who were running for evacuation as the Brotherhood stormed the fortress. Suddenly, Nathan Vargas from Megaton burst out from one of the holding cells; his arms were bound behind him and he was running for the protection of the Brotherhood. Wide eyed and terrified, he spied Percy. Too scared to notice the ghoul and mutant flanking her.

“They’re not who they say they are! Get out while you still can!”

The next moment, they were covered in smoking ash, and Vargas was…gone.

“He…he wanted help,” Percy said, shell-shocked.

“He wanted help!” She screamed, running for the Brotherhood soldier who had shot him.

“I’m sorry ma’am, but he picked the wrong side,” the soldier said gruffly, holding onto his rifle more tightly.

“He was bound! He was wearing civilian clothes, you bastard!”
Charon had to pull her off the militant. “We have to get out of here first!” He whispered into her ear, trying to calm her down.

They ran out of the Enclave’s stronghold just as it caved in behind them.

“Are you coming back with us?” Charon asked Fawkes as he and Percy climbed into the Vertibird. Cross immediately tended to her visible wounds, but Percy refused to look at her, or answer any of her questions.

“I’m afraid not, friend. As I said before, I do not like to fly, and I trust the driver even less now,” he said, a heated lowness to his tone. “Now my debt has been repaid and this is a war I do not wish to continue to wage. After all, ‘if I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution’.”

With that, he headed southward, towards Little Lamplight. They would need a guardian more than ever in these uncertain times.

Charon held her hand through the flight. He was the only one she would respond to.

“They’re as bad as them…” She muttered, such that only he could hear her.

He squeezed her hand, trying to avoid the rings around her wrists. Rex strained in his harness to try and curl his body around her, as if to protect from her from the negative feelings that seemed to surround her.

Percy ignored Sarah when she tried to question her more about the Enclave and the state of the G.E.C.K.

“Percy…I’m sure you’ve been through a lot but we need to act fast! If they have the G.E.C.K., then it’s only a matter of time before they guess the correct access code.”

Percy rounded on her, and the fully armored paladin, who was half a head taller than Percy, actually backed up a step.

“I’m currently covered in the remains of a man who ran to me for help. Who your men killed. I’m taking a shower. Then I’m taking a nap. I’ll give you all the precious information you want tomorrow.”

Charon stopped Sarah from pursuing her further down the hall. She only flinched a little when he touched her armored shoulder.

“Their leader is dead, and their main base is gone. They will need more than a few hours to regroup. She’s done enough for your people to earn a break.”

Rex followed Percy to their new accommodations. Cross didn’t say a word as she led the three to their room, and Percy was grateful for that, even if she didn’t voice it. She scanned the room before getting into bed, checking the walls and under the bed for cameras and recording devices. The room they were given was much nicer now than last time—probably Sarah’s doing. Apparently having the same idea, Rex sniffed all across the room before he was sure it was safe, then left to wander the rest of the citadel.

In the shower Charon’s arms wrapped around her as the blood and ash was washed from their bodies. He watched in mild interest as the bruises and rashes littering her body slowly disappeared,
leaving behind old wounds, but otherwise soft and smooth skin. He didn’t ask about the barcode tattooed on the back of her neck. The Brotherhood must have had a strong reactor, because no matter how long they stayed there, the water never grew cold. Percy did as much as she could to be close to Charon even if all they did was wash up. Every so often she would grow very still then look up at him, as if to remind herself where she was and who she was with…and who she wasn’t with. It wasn’t until they were lying in bed almost completely dry that Percy finally opened up to him, face buried in his chest as he stroked her hair and along her back.

“They tortured me in there. They got me hooked on psycho and used some sort of truth serum on me for a week…at least I think it was a week. It was hard to tell time when my meals were given through a tube and the lights never went out.”

‘That explains the track marks…’

Percy stiffened but slowly relaxed as Charon’s mouth found her neck. It felt so good to have her back, he felt like he could breathe properly again, and all he wanted was her.

His lips were cracked and dry, but warm. His hot breath warmed her and she continued, “He…Colonel Autumn… He had installed some sort of chip in my neck to hurt me if I did anything he didn’t like…he didn’t like how resistant I was to his methods. When the truth serum didn’t work, he was going to make me like you.”

That caught Charon’s attention.

“Apparently there were some implants left over from the experiments done on you…from back before the war. Not enough for a complete procedure…but enough to make me compliant with the help of this.” She rubbed the bumps and numbers on her neck.

“All of that is over now.” He whispered, rolling them until she was on top of him. She sat back, fingers playing along his chest. He felt delicious between her legs, and Percy began grinding slowly against bulge that became apparent in his underwear. Her sighs were music to his ears.

“I thought…I thought I’d never get out of there. I thought I’d never see…you again.”

He tried to be strong for her. He really did. But as Charon looked up at her, safe here with him, he couldn’t stop the hand that tangled in her hair and brought her closer.

“Percy…Percy, oh Percy,” he groaned. Her mouth opened readily for him. The kiss was intense and sloppy. Desperately, Percy pulled his dick out of his briefs, pushing aside her own sheer panties to take him all in. She needed him—desperate for that wholeness that only he could give her.

There were many things in her life that she regretted, but telling Charon she loved him was not one of them. In uncertain times like these…

If she hadn’t told him how she felt…If she hadn’t come back from Raven Rock…

Percy let out a choked moan as Charon bucked up and into her, thumb rubbing circles against her clit. She watched his face, lost in the feeling of her velvety warmth enveloping him. As she bounced her hips against his, Percy’s toes began to curl. The ragged skin of his cock was rubbing all the right places.

“Ahhh mmm—Charon! Oh, Charon, hold me!”

Charon swallowed her moans and gave his as he rolled them over, pressing her into the worn mattress.
“Don’t scare me like that next time, okay, Perse’?” He grunted, as his thrusts became more urgent, fueled by his own need for release as she fluttered tightly around him. Hoisting her legs over his elbows, he spread her legs farther apart.

“No, no, no, never! Never, I love you, Charon, I…love…youuuu!”

Charon came deep inside her, face buried against her shoulder, ravenously licking her neck. The sweat from their lovemaking was enough to get him going again, if he weren’t so tired. He hadn’t slept, hardly, since she was taken. It was only now that she was back, under, and around him that Charon himself actually felt safe.

When did this happen? How did he become so dependent on this beautiful smoothskin?

How did he get so lucky?

Charon watched her cross the room, dragging their bags closer before bending down to dig through it.

Her ass was just a few inches away…so round so soft…

Just as she found the crinkled pack of cigarettes, Charon wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her back into bed, covering her back in kisses as gave her rear a good squeeze.

Percy couldn’t stop the squeal and giggle that escaped her lips, twisting around to try and kiss him back. But he was more concerned with the breasts that were suddenly thrust in his face. He wanted to show them a gentleness that they’d missed, judging by the bruises that had been there only an hour earlier.

She sighed, stroking the back of his neck as he massaged her chest with a gentleness that contradicted his morbid appearance. Leaning over to grab the pack and a lighter, Percy lit one cigarette. They shared it, enjoying the afterglow together.

“I figured out the access code. After they gave up on the truth serum,” she said, taking a drag. She blew rings, dissipating them with her finger before they got too far away. The nicotine helped take the edge off, but she needed detox from that psycho first thing tomorrow.

“After all this time… Revelations twenty-one seven. ‘I am the alpha and the omega…’…James was always one for symbolism, but this?”

“I’m sure the Brotherhood will be relieved to know,” Charon said, watching the embers burn away until ash fell against her breast. He swiped it away before she could notice; the last thing she needed right now was to be reminded of Vargas’ fate.

“I’m not sure they should know the access code either.” She passed the smoke to him, turning to trace the line of his jaw. “Who’s to say the Brotherhood is any better? What have they done for the Capital Wasteland? Hoarded resources and kept to themselves, and now they’re acting all high and mighty? What if the Purifier actually works, and they keep all the fresh water, or worse, distribute it selectively?”

She had a point…

“Sarah is next in line to be the Elder. The Brotherhood might be a bunch of bigots wrapped in tin foil, but she’s different. She, Cross and maybe a couple others.”

“So, what? Worst case scenario we just wait for the current Elder to die and Sarah take his place?”
“When you’re as old as I am, you learn to think long term, doll.”

“Two hundred years…” Percy shook her head, lighting up another cigarette. “I can’t even imagine getting old, much less living that long. I’d be lucky to make it to a hundred…”

That left a terrible taste in his mouth, which even tobacco couldn’t fix.

Eventually, Percy would grow old and die. Then he’d be alone again. Free, but alone. He’d heard of some ghouls going feral long after they’d turned, but it was insanely rare. Thinking about Percy dying…It wasn’t so hard to imagine anymore.

Charon felt the gentle press of her lips against his as her hand cupped his face.

“You looked miles away…” she said softly. “I missed you.”

Blowing smoke through his nose, he gave her a tired smile. “Thanks for bringing me back.”

“Always…” She returned his smile but it quickly turned sly as an idea popped into her head. She began kissing down his jaw to his neck, returning the hickey he had surely left on her earlier. Her breath caught as his thumbs played with her lower lips, spreading them and stroking her slit. Determined not to get distracted, she moved away, kissing lower and lower, moving the sheets away as needed. She looked up to watch his face as she slowly stroked his length, the tips of her fingers brushing teasingly along the top of his balls. Charon seemed to have a similar idea, taking his fingers in his mouth to savor her taste.

Percy licked the pre-cum from his tip, exhilarated to realize that he tasted much better now than the first time.

“Are all ghouls an acquired taste, or is it just you who requires a refined palate?” She asked, trying to put on an air of innocence as she pressed hot wet kisses up and down his hardened cock.

“You’ll have to ask Nova,” he said, leaning back. As the sweet of her faded from his tongue, Charon couldn’t help but miss it. Sitting up, he stroked her cheek until she stopped what she was doing. He watched the string of saliva stretch as her flushed lips left him.

“Did I do something wrong?” She asked, raising an eyebrow.

Charon chuckled. “Never. I just had an idea. Ever heard of sixty-nine?”

Percy paused, trying to figure out what he was talking about. Her face went red as it dawned on her.

“How would that even work? You’re a little big.”

She slapped his chest when Charon smirked. “You know what I mean! Taller. Two feet taller, I might add.”

She slapped his chest when Charon smirked. “You know what I mean! Taller. Two feet taller, I might add.”

“Let’s try it out. I’ll eat, you’ll drink.” He helped her get into the right position: on her knees with her rump facing him. He rubbed the creamy globe before him, admiring one of the few places on Percy’s body where fat hadn’t been replaced by lean, hardened muscle. “And we’ll both be merry.”

“For tomorrow we may die,” Percy said, reminding him of the last line of that particular saying.

“Wouldn’t be the first time that was a possibility,” he replied, taking her ass in one hand, and leaning forward as Percy placed her hand on his thigh for support. He felt her breath puff against his tip, and Charon couldn’t wait any longer. Strumming her clit with his thumb, he pressed his tongue into her
cunt. He could taste some of himself still inside her, but that didn’t deter him. If anything, it excited him more. The noises Charon made were as intoxicating as they were obscene, enjoying how her walls squeezed around his tongue with each swipe his thumb made against her pearl.

Percy was soon a mess, hardly able to keep herself upright, much less return his pleasure. He had tasted her plenty of times before, but this was…

She felt a jolt as Charon bit down on one of her lower lips, sucking gently while his tongue swiping quickly over the aching wound. His fingers dug into her inner thighs to keep her from squirming, but it only made her muscles tense more.

“Oh, Charon…” She massaged his balls before taking as much as him as would fit into her mouth. She had done it before, surely she could do it again, right? It was difficult to not get jostled about as Charon bucked slightly despite himself. She moaned against his dick, making swallowing motions as he used one hand to hold her steady while the fingers of the other pushed into her, curling into that one spot that made her shake all over. Charon shifted forward until he could latch onto her pulsing bud. Percy tried to sync the bobbing of her head to the movements of his fingers, growing dizzy as he pushed another finger in to stretch her clenching walls.

‘Too much…this is too…much…!’

A sharp smack across her ass make Percy squeal, nearly choking on his girth.

They fell to the side, Percy’s thighs clamping tightly around his head. Her nails dug into his buttock before her own head began to bob up and down on his cock before sucking slightly on his tip.

Charon let out an animalistic groan as her cum coated his face and her thighs rubbed silkily against his ears, lapping up as much as he could. Her orgasm sent him over the edge and Percy managed to take in all of him just as his seed shot down her throat.

Charon was putty in her hands as Percy continued to stroke his length, sucking gently on the over sensitive skin. All he could do was lick languidly along her inner thigh, drinking up whatever of her juices he could find.

Throwing one arm over his eyes, he smiled down at her as she tried weakly to support herself on both elbows.

“That was…fuck…” Percy said, gasping for air with her head on his thigh.

“The vault didn’t teach you that one?”

“The vault didn’t have much in the way of spank mags,” she laughed, rummaging through her bag for some water. “And what they did have, was more…procreation focused.”

“I’m glad you’re feeling better today; Sarah told me what happened at Raven Rock. That poor man…” Cross was taking Percy’s blood pressure. Her heart beat was a little erratic, but that was only to be expected from Psycho withdrawal. She grabbed an inhaler and tin labelled ‘Fixer’ from the counter, shaking the inhaler before handing it to Percy.

“Take a puff of this every half hour. It’s called addictol. That should help with the craving, but you should also drink as much water as you can handle to flush your system. Take one pill of the Fixer every hour. If you still feel the need to take psycho after that, just come back and I’ll get you another
“You heal…fast.”

“Very.” Percy said shortly. “When does Sarah want to discuss the purifier?”

“As soon as possible, I’m afraid. She wants the Brotherhood to secure the Purifier before they can guess the access code correctly. Our men have been preparing all morning. In fact, we have something to show you over in the Lab. She also wants me to fit the both of you out with some power armor.”

“I prefer armor that’s easier to move around in,” Percy said, taking her first puff from what looked like an oversized jet inhaler.

“You might take that back when you see what we have in store for the Enclave. Now, is there anything else I can do while I have you?”

“Actually…I need you to have a look at something.”

Percy pointed at her neck, and Cross took a closer look.

“Oh, my…” She pressed her fingers around the slight lump the implant made in Percy’s neck, trying to derive its shape and size.

“Do you mind if I numb the area? I’d like to make an incision and see what I’m dealing with here…”

Moving to lay down across the med-bay bed, Percy replied, “Sure, go ahead.”

Charon turned away as Cross grabbed a sterilized scalpel. Rex stepped forward, putting his head in Percy’s lap and whining quietly as Percy scratched behind his ear, thankful for the distraction.

“Hmm…” Cross walked over to a tool box nearby, pulling out a pair of wire clamps.

It only took a few minutes for the paladin to remove it. Charon refused to look back until Cross had resealed the cut with stitches and a stimpak. It wasn’t that he was squeamish—he’d seen far worse even before the war. But it was different with Percy. He hated to see her take any sort of damage.

“I can’t do much about this tattoo, I’m afraid. But that device is out,” she said, washing her hands.

“Can I ask how you got that? What was it for?”

“You can ask, but I’d prefer not to answer,” Percy said, putting her shirt back on.

Cross shooed Rex away as he followed her to the sink, growling at the device while she washed the blood off to get a better look. The tech was nothing like anything the Brotherhood had worked with and she had a feeling this was one piece of tech that should be lost to the ages, rather than preserved. After Percy, Charon, and Rex left, Cross crushed the implant beneath her boot, pouring the remains into an old soup can. Putting on a power fist, she bent the can until the top was completely sealed before throwing the whole mess into the garbage. With a sigh of satisfaction, she washed off and left the med-bay to go find Sarah.

Cross wasn’t sure how it happened, but a part of her was fairly certain the death of Sarah’s last partner had something to do with it. Now, more than ever, the Brotherhood was turning to Sarah, even though she felt just as lost as the rest of them. Although she couldn’t really see it in herself, she was flattered, no…honored that Sarah had turned to her for some level of stability, some level of comfort and closeness in these uncertain times. Cross had thought herself a little too old to find
herself in Sarah’s bed every morning, the two blushing like a couple of new recruits. But Sarah
didn’t wince away from the parts of Cross that were no longer flesh and blood. If anything, she clung
to the woman that sometimes felt more machine than human. Cross smiled despite herself, picking up
the pace. No, when she was with Sarah, she might not be able to forget the enhancements she
needed to survive, but she never felt anything less than complete.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make the heart grow fonder and the hands type faster.
Percy and Charon were quiet while Sarah and her father argued about how to proceed. Elder Lyons was insistent that they take time to gather their forces from around the Capital. The losses had been minimal at Raven Rock, but the Enclave was still a force to be reckoned with.

"They are weak now!" Sarah insisted. "With Raven Rock gone, their only stronghold is the Jefferson Memorial. We need to strike before they can re-group."

"This conflict may diminish our resources into the red," Rothchild reminded them. He coughed slightly, shifting his eyes to Percy and Charon before saying under his breath, "And Liberty Prime isn't ready yet. He needs to be field tested before we can be sure that he will survive an assault against their forces."

"What better test than this? If we don't act now, we may miss our chance!" Cross interjected.

Elder Lyons shook his head. "Please try to be impartial, Paladin," he said sternly, his words making Cross look taken aback, before glaring at him as Sarah's face became flushed.

"The head of the snake has been cut off, it will take more than a few days for the Enclave to gain their footing after the blow we've dealt," he continued.

"That's not entirely true." Percy spoke up and all heads turned to her and Charon, who nodded beside her.

"President Eden's second in command, Colonel Autumn, attempted to stage a coup just before your forces stormed their stronghold."

"While I was scouting the place in search of Percy, I heard some of the officers and scientists siding with one or the other. While this makes them less organized now, it won't take long for them to gather under the Colonel's new leadership," Charon added.

"If anything, their science department is likely to side with him more quickly." Percy thought back to her time there. "Anne Holt was there. She dissented from Project Purity when the Memorial was first invaded. She worked closely alongside Autumn in my…interrogation."

"Anne is alive?" Madison gasped, both relieved at this news, and ashamed that one of her people had switched sides so readily. The Elder and Rothchild exchanged another look.

"So you agree with me that we should take back the Memorial as soon as our forces are gathered?" Sarah interrupted her.

Percy's brow furrowed as she thought. 'The memorial was never yours to begin with…'
"We should fight with what we have here," she decided. "The Brotherhood members protecting GNR or the Washington Monument should stay where they are. The settlements will need all the help they can get if the Enclave attempts to gain another base."

"The memorial is crowded, with narrow halls and many corners. There's a high risk we'll get bottlenecked in one of these areas and lose more men than we would otherwise," Charon agreed, tapping at the holographic war map before them and pointing to the Memorial's floor plan.

"On top of that, the rotunda is filled with delicate equipment. Too many people means a higher risk that Purity is destroyed while we try to retake it."

"The Project utilizes radioactive energy to run and filter—allowing it to be self-sustaining. Even one stray bullet could take it, and the surrounding areas, in hell fire," Madison said, clutching her clipboard as she tried to remain calm.

Rothchild grumbled in frustration, but confirmed her words.

Elder Lyons sighed, massaging his temple with one hand. "Alright. Scribe, make a note of this: in exactly twenty-four hours' time, we will make a frontal assault. This will serve primarily as a distraction for Sarah and her team, alongside Ms. Carter and her…companion…to infiltrate the Memorial and secure the rotunda. Liberty Prime, ready or not, will assist."

The meeting was dismissed. Madison looked like she wanted to say something to Percy, but hurried out instead, muttering something about needing to warn her people.

"Percy," Sarah ran up to her before the two had a chance to disappear with the exiting crowd. "Cross told you about the power armor, right? You and Charon need to get fitted for tomorrow."

"Power armor isn't really my style," Charon said, crossing his arms. "I need to be able to move fast—get in close enough for my shotgun to do any good. Can't do that from under a ton of metal."

Rubbing the back of her head, Sarah countered, "You won't live through the battle if you try to get up close. Liberty Prime is taking the front lines, and will in all likelihood be flanked by at least five vertibirds with tesla cannons. You two and my group will stay close to Liberty Prime—but not close enough to get stepped on—and dodge whatever gets past Liberty and the vertibirds."

"Wait a minute…you mean Liberty Prime is that big fuck-off robot in the lab?" Percy said incredulously.

"That's the one," she grinned. "You can wear whatever the hell you want under the armor, but you need something to protect you from the lasers, plasma, and nuclear blasts. So what do you say?"

Percy and Charon exchanged looks before Charon let out a sigh. "If it will keep this one's head on…lead the way."

"You gotta be kidding me. There's no way I'm climbing into that death machine." Charon watched the power armor seal around the most important person in his life. They had had to make adjustments to Percy's, since her feet didn't reach all the way…or her hands for that matter. After mastering the fine art of walking, she strode over to him.

"So this is what you look like eye to eye," she teased, flexing her fingers, still trying to get a handle on the way the armor responded to her.

"I tried to warn you, doll. Not much to see. Especially up close," he said dryly.
"It did take a few drinks to kiss you, at first," she said under her breath so the Brotherhood members wouldn't hear them. "But that was more out of a need for courage, not beer-goggles."

Charon couldn't help but give her a tired smile. "You're too much for me, smoothskin, you know that?"

Percy smirked. "I could say the same to you…big guy."

Sarah walked up to them, completely covered in grime and oil. "Good to see you're getting used to the armor. Not so bad, right?"

"I can live with it, so long as I don't die without it," Percy replied.

"Good enough. Head out to the Bailey. I want you to get as familiar with a laser rifle as you can. They handle a bit differently with power armor."

Sarah turned to Charon as Percy left. "About yours…"

"Forget it. I'm not climbing into that thing. I don't do enclosed spaces."

"You won't have to. Not quite, anyway…"

She led him over to a frame of power armor, with all the plating stripped off.

"We can't make adjustments to the frame in what little time we have to prepare. But we can adjust the plating to your arms, legs, and chest. It won't be as secure as a proper set, but it's better than nothing."

Without the frame to support it, the power armor was incredibly heavy, even if most of it had been left off. Sarah tightened one of the leather straps keeping the plating on him.

"I think that's the best we can do…how does it feel?"

"Like a waste of metal," he grumbled, "but I suppose it is better than nothing."

"That's the spirit!" Sarah glanced over her shoulder. Cross was in the doorway to the armory. She shivered at the way the other Paladin was looking at her.

Times like these…uncertain times. There was so little of it left, it seemed. There was too much to do before tomorrow.

...And yet…

"Why don't you join Percy outside at the shooting range?" she suggested.

"I know how to shoot a gun."

"Yeah?" she said, not looking back at him as she made for the door. "Why don't you double check?"

Charon sighed, but couldn't blame her. He and Percy had barely made it out of their own room that morning.

Percy was used to weapons with a little more spread, but she was getting used to this. Oddly enough, the kickback was a little stronger than with ballistic rifles. But there was something so satisfying about how clean each shot was.
She landed a blast right down the middle of the target.

"Nice one," Charon nodded approvingly from behind her.

"Oh thank God you're here!" she exclaimed. "This armor is hot as hell!"

She climbed out the back of the metal chassis. "Is it really so hard to install some sort of air conditioning system in one of these?"

"Of course not," he chuckled. "That would make too much sense."

Handing him her rifle and some new ammo, she fell in behind him. "How about you give it a try. I'd prefer a pistol; the kickback is a bit much with this one."

She watched silently as he practiced. Although she couldn't really call it that, since his aim had started out better than hers.

Percy hated that she had to keep her distance from him here. She had been kidnapped and tortured, for God's sake! But she couldn't keep dragging him back to their quarters every few hours. The soldiers that passed them were giving enough dirty looks as it was. But she yearned for his touch. Even the way he handled his rifle made her jealous of the weapon. The seemingly short time they had spent together in Oasis was a distant memory in the wake of what was to come, and Percy wondered if they would ever get to explore their pleasure together so wantonly again.

Her stomach grumbled. She hadn't eaten much since getting back, and what she wouldn't give for a nice thick brahmin steak with a side of Blamco and instamash right about then...

Charon noticed, even amidst the piercing wail of rifle blasts. Flicking the safety on his weapon, he wiped his brow.

"Perse', when's the last time you ate?"

"Last night."

"And how much did you eat?"

"Some dandy boy apples and…other things," she smirked, already red from the heat.

Charon groaned, shucking off his own armor and tossing it under the counter of the shooting range. Grabbing her arm, he dragged her to Ring B.

He slammed two full trays down on the table in the mess hall for them, and the aroma was enough to get Percy's mouth watering and stomach growling all over again.

"Eat," he commanded, to which Percy saluted before diving in.

He watched her eat, lighting up a cigarette as she worked through her tray and even a bit of his.

Stretching and leaning back, Percy sighed contentedly. "You take such good care of me…can I have one of those?"

Charon handed her the pack, then got an idea as she placed the stick of tobacco between her full lips. Before she could reach for the lighter, he grabbed the back of her neck, fingers tangling in the hair there. Bringing her close, he touching the tip of his cigarette to hers, breathing in until the red-orange embers were transferred. Percy felt deliciously warm from his touch, but grew self-conscious from the many eyes that were now watching them, most with disdain. Fiddling with her medication, she
muttered under her breath, "You really shouldn't do that…we already have the Enclave after us, we
don't need two giant armies hunting us down."

"Sorry…couldn't help it." The grin on his face didn't do much to convince her of his sincerity, but
she couldn't stay mad at him, or even a little bit annoyed.

No, what she was, was agitated. Less than twenty-four hours before they would take back the
Memorial. Or at least try. And there was nothing much they could do but stand by.

In an attempt to fill the air with more than just smoke and worry, she asked, "What do you want to
do after all this? After the Enclave is out of the capital?"

His first instinct was to say wherever she wished to go, but he thought better of it. Instead he really
considered her question. What was there, after this? They could go back to Megaton. They'd
probably move to Tenpenny Tower once the dust had settled. Where there were hot baths and soft
sheets. He hadn't heard anything on the radio about the tenants turning on each other, so maybe
things had actually worked out.

"I think…I'd like to travel some more after this," Percy mused when Charon didn't answer.

"The wasteland is a pretty big place," he agreed. "But the pockets of humanity don't seem to keep in
touch with each other, these days. Could be anything out there."

"Isn't that part of the fun?" she smiled, tapping the ash from the end of her cigarette. "A girl and her
ghoul and his dog, out to find all the mysteries of the wasteland. Who knows, maybe years from now
we can come back and have our stories acted out over the radio, like Dashwood."

Charon knew of a few major factions out west, but didn't know how much they had grown or shrunk
since he'd stopped…travelling.

"We certainly have enough supplies for a long journey…and a bike to cut the travel time down."

The idea of leaving everything behind was starting to get more and more appealing to him.

"It was just an idea," Percy laughed. "I don't think I could stay away from Gob and Nova for too
long, or Greta and Carol for that matter. And…"

Percy's hands wrapped around her glass, looking at her reflection in the nuka cola.

"We have to get through this first…don't we? We both have to come out alive," she said more
quietly.

There was a thought that passed through both their minds that neither voiced.

They both had to come out of this alive, or there was a good chance neither would.

Charon noticed bruises blossoming along her arms. The power armor didn't fit right, even with the
adjustments. There were probably similar marks along her legs and waist. Percy wasn't complaining,
though. Aches and pains were normal in the wasteland, after all. He couldn't protect her from
everything.

The room was getting more crowded now as more knights and sentinels came in for dinner. The din
of chatter was overwhelming and they were inevitably crowded out. Percy led the way, knowing
they were only slightly more willing to move for her, than for Charon. Despite this, Percy's nose
smashed painfully against one of the many figures. Rubbing the bridge, she looked up, trying not to
look annoyed, and very aware of Charon's hand tightening almost painfully around hers.

"Excuse me," she said, trying to walk past the man that stayed in her way.

"Excuse yourself," he growled, refusing to budge.

"I'm trying; maybe you could help by stepping that way a bit?" There was something familiar about his voice that she couldn't quite put her finger on.

The man leaned forward and Charon's hand moved to her hip, ready to pull her back in case the situation escalated.

"You aren't fooling anyone, especially me. The fact that you walk these halls and eat our food is a disgrace, ghoulfucker," he hissed.

Percy gasped. Charon yanked her back, and was about to raise his fist when Cross materialized out of the crowd.

"Hello, sentinel. Is there a problem here?" she asked coldly.

The sentinel looked like he wanted to say there was a great deal that was wrong. But all he did say was, "No, Paladin. I was just trying to grab a good meal before tomorrow's fight." Cross stepped aside, motioning with her eyes that he had better do that. He gave Percy and Charon one more sneer before leaving, muttering under his breath, "This place is going to the dogs. Sometimes I feel like I chose the wrong side…"

Percy grew still.

"He wanted help!" She screamed, running for the Brotherhood soldier.

"I'm sorry ma'am, but he picked the wrong side."

She went deadly calm, walking quickly to the door now that the way was cleared.

The halls were also crowded, and at first he thought she was headed for their room. Then she ducked into a room, looking like she didn't want to be noticed. Charon followed after her. He blinked as the door shut behind them. The room was very dark, but he was beginning to think it was more of a closet.

"Perse'?"

"Charon?" The voice that answered him was low, whispered, and very close. He felt her fingers twine behind his neck. She pulled him into a kiss, slow and soft. He let her lead him around in the crowded space until it was her back pressing quietly against the door. Her sighs and gasps puffed warmly against his head as his lips pressed hungrily against her jaw and neck, her fingers combing softly through his hair as his arms wrapped around her waist.

"I'll rip his tongue out, if you ask me to," he growled, nibbling at her ear in a way that made Percy's legs quake. Her lips found Charon's again, dragging his lower lip between hers. Her mouth served to stifle the groan as her fingers wrapped around his cock, giving him a few slow pumps.

"Shh…" Percy pressed kisses against his neck and chest, and he could feel the heat of her through his clothes. She dropped to her knees and lovingly took his cock in her mouth.

His arm rested against the door, cradling his forehead as he tried to support himself. The occasional
grunt escaped his lips, despite his attempts to keep quiet. He couldn't watch for too long; that beautiful hot mouth swallowing his cock over and over again like that...there was no way someone wouldn't notice the noises he would make if he watched for too long.

She was perfect. Everything about her. And she loved him. After everything thing that had happened between them, what he'd done, and hadn't done, here she was.

'Let them hear you.' A small voice in the back of his head urged.

'Let those bigots know who's sucking you off right under their noses.'

His bit down on his knuckle hard enough to draw blood as he felt her mouth move to his balls, tongue tracing circles on them as she sucked lightly.

'And once your jizz is coating her throat, return the favor until her screams can be heard out in the bailey. Make them all wish they were as lucky as you.'

He grabbed her hair, pushing himself farther into that delicious warmth. She moaned around him, hollowing her cheeks and making swallowing motions until he could feel the back of her throat. Percy's nails dug into his backside, her head bobbing faster as she sensed him reach the end of his rope.

That's when he lost control. Thrusting his hips wildly, his hand on her hair was no longer gentle as Percy forced her mouth to stay slack, letting him use her.

"Fuck…fuck, fuck, I love you, Percy," he hissed, a last ditch effort to stay quiet.

"You're everything to me and damn, you feel so good, doll."

He shuddered, taking huge gulps of air as he collapsed against the shelves of miscellaneous scrap and junk opposite the door. Percy followed after him, tears pricking the corners of her eyes, as she rested against his inner thigh, shaking slightly.

"You okay?" he wiped the tears from her eyes and she leaned into his touch.

"I'm okay…just so…angry. How dare they judge me for loving you? With the bigots out there? Of course I'm a—a ghoul fucker. No one out there comes close to the man you are, Charon."

"The world is full of assholes like that, you get used to it after a few decades," Charon said, tucking himself back into his pants and pulling Percy close.

"I hate that idea. They should be getting used to you, not the other way around. You have every right to be here, and I have every right to love you."

Charon pulled her to her feet, straightening her clothes and his before putting his hand on the door knob. It was still pretty loud outside—a mercy for all the noise they ended up making inside.

"I'll grab our armor from the bailey, and get it ready for tomorrow. Will you get those rifles in order?" Percy asked, eyes straight ahead, despite the hateful stares.

"As you wish," Charon replied, too sated to notice any of them.

The armor took far too long to clean and maintain, and by the time she got to their room, Percy was too tired to clean off, and could only fall into bed. She curled around Charon, who seemed to have had the same idea.
She needed sleep, but couldn't help but be anxious about tomorrow; couldn't shake the feeling that things were…ending. Everything had changed so much since she left the vault. And nothing could ever be the same after this, for good or ill. Maybe the settlements could rebuild. Maybe Vance and his gang of vampires would come out from hiding and help. But that wouldn't bring the dead back.

All this for clean water. It was ridiculous to fight over something that James had meant for everyone to benefit from.

She knew why, as much as she hated it, Percy understood. Control the water, and you control the lives of everyone that needed it. And everyone needs water.

As her body began to feel heavy from sleep, Percy heard the sound of nails scratching against metal. Stumbling to the door, she opened it to find Rex, whining faintly and wagging his tail hopefully.

"Hungry, boy? Come on in." She cracked open a can of cram, setting it on the ground for him, but Rex jumped into bed with them instead, laying against the curve of her legs.

Charon rolled over, hand resting against her hip. She pressed closer. Neither of them smelled very good right about now, but Percy wished morning would never come.

Chapter End Notes

Even writers need to eat, and even if a comment won't feed me, I'd still love one ;)


Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

This chapter was proofread by Groovymarlin

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The room was totally dark when Percy’s pip-boy alarm went off. She could hear the sound of Brotherhood members running back and forth behind the door. Sighing, she untangled herself from Charon, edging to the side of the bed to reach for her medicine. A huff and a pill, and plenty of water. Percy felt dizzy after a full bottle, and the subsequent box of Dandy Boys did nothing for the turmoil in the pit of her stomach. Charon’s arm wrapped around her waist and she felt his warm dry lips on her lower back. She answered his unspoken request, leaning back as his other arm joined the first.

All their stuff was ready. The Brotherhood wasn’t marching out until noon. They could stay in bed a little longer.

His fingers ghosted across her belly as he sighed into her hair. Percy turned until she was facing him. Charon’s face was near unreadable as Percy pressed her forehead against his, leaning farther into his touch.

“I…sleep well?” she asked, her voice cutting through the oppressive silence.

“No,” he said.

“No?” she replied.

“Me neither,” she replied.

Her stomach was feeling better now but nervous energy was still coursing through her system. To distract herself, she traced the scarred and missing flesh on his chest, the red exposed muscle rippling where she touched. Percy could feel him watching her. Looking up, his eyes seemed to be searching her face for…something. What would he find there?

“What was it like? The first time you were on the battlefield?” she asked, sounding shy. This was his past, after all; something he didn’t like thinking about.

Charon’s eyes softened. Sighing, he said, “Neither side gave its soldiers much time to think. Foot soldiers fought in the trenches—climbing out meant getting blasted to ash. Every night, rumors would pass through the troops that the Chinese trenches were better, drier, less rats. I had a feeling their general was telling them the same thing about ours. We learned to live on only a few hours of sleep, split into short naps over the course of the day. While missiles and nukes flew over our heads and screamed in our ears.”

His eyes glazed over as the memories became clearer.

“We would use the bodies of our fallen comrades to build up the sides of the trenches; to protect us from oncoming blasts… The night raids were the worst, you knew the other side was getting desperate when they tried to attack us at night. When we finally broke through to their main camp, we saw how desperate they really were. There were barely enough rations to feed half of them. I
kind of wondered whether their higher ups were withholding food as another incentivizer.”

Charon saw her brow furrow.

“This won’t be like pre-war battles. I have a feeling…neither side will back down till the other is destroyed. The battle will be over by the end of the day, I expect.”

Percy flashed a nervous smile. “That’s a relief I guess…who knows, maybe this will all be done before dinner.”

Charon chuckled. “If it is, I’m taking you to Carol’s place, and we’re eating the freshest brahmin steak she has, on me.”

“Are…are you asking me on a date, Charon?” She raised her eyebrow.

He shrugged. “Something to look forward to.”

Percy licked her lips, the earlier anxiety returning.

“Charon…if something happens, I—”

His lips covered hers, kissing her urgently. She gasped in surprise, giving him the opportunity to entwine his tongue with hers. Her eyes drifted closed as he brought her impossibly close. Rolling until he was mostly covering her, Charon cupped her cheek with one hand.

There was a knock at the door.

“Percy?…Charon?”

It was Cross.

“Sarah wants to give a speech. Warm up the troops. It would be best if you two were there with her to remind the soldiers why they’re fighting.”

“Since when have we been an inspiration?” Charon muttered, pulling back and sitting up.

Percy pursed her lips, silently agreeing with him.

“We’ll be right out,” she called, climbing out of the bed and into her leather. She noticed Rex watching them prepare, his tail hanging limply. Kneeling down, she scratched behind his ear.

“Thanks for helping Charon find me. You’re a really good dog, Rex.”

Rex licked her face, seeming to know this was goodbye.

“You have to stay here, okay, boy? You can’t come with us on this one.”

Rex huffed, but looked like he understood.

The air was especially windy outside, the skies overcast. Everyone, including Percy and Charon, was dressed in full power armor. Sarah stepped up to the intercom, the feedback squealing slightly. Charon looked down at the troops. They barely made up twenty, even with Lyons’ Pride standing at the forefront. They looked tired and worn, and some, even scared. Others looked defiant, as if Sarah
was not their first choice of who they would want to lead them into battle. Not one looked ready for the battle ahead of them, but here they were anyway; just following orders.

“Sentinels, Knights, and Paladins of the Brotherhood,” she began.

“Your loyalty to our cause has been put to the test, near ceaselessly since we arrived in the capital wasteland. We have brought safety and strength to this corner of the world where there was none before. But there is a new threat to the Capital. One that would withhold much needed clean water from the people that need it most. One that takes the residents of the wasteland— kidnapping them for experiments and torture. All in the name of a long dead, and failed government. I say no!”

There was cheering throughout the crowd; some were standing a little taller now, but there were still some who doubted her words.

“I say we take back the Memorial, and show those Enclave bastards what we’re made of! I say we show them what the Brotherhood can do when challenged this way! I say, we send a message.”

The soldiers cleared out of the way as the ground opened beneath them, and Liberty Prime rose into their midst, powering on.

“The message is this: You are not welcome. You are no longer needed. Leave, or be destroyed.”

Sarah beat her fist against her chest, and her men followed in salute, screaming battle cries before running for vertibirds as Liberty Prime was carried by a giant crane and moved outside the walls of the Citadel. Percy and Charon followed close after Sarah as she ran to follow the giant robot, dust kicking up around them as vertibirds rose into the air.

“Good talk,” Percy quipped, catching up to Sarah. The Paladin beamed, eyes filled with determination, before putting on her helmet.

All hell broke loose as Liberty Prime broke down the first barrier. The ground shook and the skies were filled with wild blasts of energy from both sides. The Enclave had better guns and more men, but the Brotherhood had Liberty Prime, and that was making all the difference now. Percy and Charon did what they could to avoid the mini nukes that rained from the sky, stumbling when they got too close to the giant robot’s feet. There was little they could do but survive the hellfire that rained upon them until they got to the entrance of the Memorial. Liberty Prime shot the Enclave vertibirds right out of the skies, stepping on the fallen heaps of metal like they were nothing but crumpled tin foil.

“COMMUNISM IS A TEMPORARY SETBACK TO FREEDOM,” it roared, chucking a giant nuke towards a band of soldiers in a way not totally unlike a football throw, in Charon’s mind.

They finally made it to the rotunda, and the real work for their smaller group began. Percy climbed out of her power armor.

“It’s too clunky—I’ll be more effective if I can move!” she insisted.

The entire place shook from the fire fight happening outside. Percy felt a strong sense of deja-vu as they took out the soldiers inside. But there was something different this time, they seemed to be pulling back, but not for the rotunda, just…away.

“They know they’ve lost,” Charon noted over the in-helmet radio.

“Or maybe they are pulling back because they know Project Purity is their bargaining chip…” Percy put in.
“Either way, stay sharp,” Sarah commanded.

All the enemy soldiers were either dead or gone. The building was unnervingly quiet aside from the clanking of power armor parts rubbing together.

Sarah signaled to the four other Brotherhood soldiers who had followed them in. “Stay here while we clear the rotunda. Odds are, there will only be scientists who we can bring in peacefully.” They nodded and began to set up mines around the perimeter, before moving to guard the door for them. Sarah, Percy, and Charon stepped through.

“So good of you to join us, I was wondering when you might come,” the southern drawl was like a smack in the face as it filled Percy’s ears. She felt light headed, and something burned at the back of her throat as Colonel Autumn stood before her, flanked by two guards.

“Pardon me for not having coffee or perhaps some refreshments ready for you.”

“Give up Colonel! We have you out numbered—” Sarah was cut off by Autumn, raising his hand.

“My apologies Miss, I’m sure you have many pretty words to say on the subject of honor, glory, the good of the wastes, et cetera, et cetera.” His fingers waved with the last two words, as if he was trying to entertain himself with something extremely boring.

“No, I’m afraid the only one I’ll be talking to is Miss Carter.”

Sarah was taken aback, and more than a little offended, considering the situation. Blasts and explosions could still be heard outside. Sighing in resignation, she turned to Percy, allowing her to step forward.

Charon could only watch in fury as she moved closer to the man he wished to destroy. His weapon creaked under the force of his fist clenching around it.

“I won’t speak to you until your men are gone. I doubt any of us want this to end in a fire fight,” she said, voice only shaking a little, and more out of hate than fear.

He sighed with false resignation. “Fine, but your… people,” he enunciated, glancing towards Charon, spying the ragged flesh of his unprotected upper arms, “should at the very least drop their weapons as well.”

His guards left for the exit that Percy, Charon, and Sarah had just come through. Sarah sent a message to her men to let them go through peacefully before taking off her helmet. Charon did the same. Slowly, they begrudgingly set down their weapons and stepped back.

“What do you want, Autumn?” Percy asked, sounding exhausted. “You’ve lost. The Enclave is finished.”

“I beg to differ,” he chuckled, although his mouth was tight at the edges. “The enclave is bigger than you know. Did you honestly think this was all we had?”

“Then why aren’t they here? Why aren’t they fighting alongside their leader?”

“Surely you aren’t fighting with the total of your forces,” he countered. “I’ll admit the robot is a bit impressive, but it’s clear you aren’t giving it your all. The answer is tactics, ma’am. I’ve never been one to put all my eggs in one basket. As for what I want…” He looked her up and down in a way that made Charon see red. “I want the future of the Enclave secured. With us holding the only source of clean water in the capital wasteland, people will flock to us in droves. From there, we can
rebuild.”

“Your president didn’t seem to have the same idea…”

Autumn scoffed. “It was foolish to trust that machine—I’ll admit that faster than anyone. But that’s in the past. I’m thinking about the future. The Brotherhood already has their fingers spread across the capital, do you really think it would be best to give them more power over the people of the wastes?”

“Better them than you!” Percy grew tired of talk, attempting to rush for Autumn, pulling a knife from her belt. But he pulled a small remote out of his coat. The same one he had used to control her back at Raven Rock.

“Nuh, uh, uh…” he purred as she stopped dead in her tracks. He looked back to Charon and Sarah.

“If you want this…paragon of the wastes to live, I suggest you stand down.” He turned back to Percy.

“I may have lost the war, but I will not lose this battle. If you insist that the Brotherhood take the Memorial, than you’re coming with me,” he hissed.

Percy paused, before taking another step forward, then another. Colonel Autumn pressed a button on his remote.

But nothing happened.

She kept getting closer. The way she was looking at him must have been unnerving, because he pulled out a forty-four millimeter. In a flash, her knife was digging into the flesh of his neck, with Autumn’s gun pressed into her belly.

“Give me one reason not to,” she demanded.

“If I die, you die,” he whispered.

“Not good enough,” she smirked at his shocked face, and sliced his throat open.

His shot rang in her ears, and the warmth of his blood splashed against her face.

Charon could hear Madison Li over the intercom, and Sarah rushed to talk to her, but all he could do was catch Percy as she and Autumn fell the ground. He used the power armored heel of his boot to smash the Colonel’s face in, feeling only a small bit of satisfaction, before pulling out a stim for Percy.

“I don’t think the bullet hit anything, and it looks like it went all the way through…” she said, clinging to him while she stared off into space.

“Sarah Lyons? Sarah Lyons! God, someone pick up!” Li screeched over the intercom.

“What is it—what’s wrong?” Sarah asked, trying to make sense of the readings on the terminal. Charon joined her, supporting Percy with one arm, her wound mostly healed.

“I was able to break through their firewalls and get the readings on Project Purity! But…dammit, something’s gone wrong. Whether through damage from the fighting or sabotage, I’m not sure…but there’s pressure building up in the holding tanks. Someone needs to get in there and release it or else the whole facility could explode! I’m sorry…but the purifier needs to be turned on. Now.”

“So…what’s the problem? We can do that, the rotunda is secured—we won!” Sarah couldn’t keep
the joy from her voice, but as Percy looked at the terminal, she knew this was hardly a victory.

“The inner sanctum is flooded with radiation…if we go in there, we die,” she said.

“…Percy’s right. I wish there was some other way but there’s just no time,” Li said, sounding truly remorseful.

“But—but we don’t even know the access code.”

“That’s not true…” Percy said. “The code is two one six…I figured it out while I was at Raven Rock.”

“And you didn’t think to tell anyone until now?! Never mind, it doesn’t change anything now.” They could hear Li sigh before continuing, “I know this isn’t easy to ask, but one of you needs to do this, and it has to be done fast.”

The intercom buzzed off, and Sarah turned to them. “Those damned bastards…of course they couldn’t just let us win.” Her fists clenched, but she stayed determined. “I…I should go. My men are out there dying for our cause. I shouldn’t be afraid to do the same.”

“No!” Percy insisted, separating herself from Charon. “Your people need you…This was my father’s project—his legacy.”

Sarah looked like she was about to say something, but looked over Percy’s shoulder. After a moment, she looked back and nodded.

“Alright…fine, you’re right. Um…” She held out her hand. “It’s been a pleasure, alright?” Percy took her hand, giving it two shakes before being pulled into a tight embrace.

“Charon, now!”

“Wait, what? What?! No!” Percy struggled against her hold, watching in panic as the glass doors closed behind Charon, but she was no match as Sarah’s limbs locked around her. She could only watch in horror as he punched in the key. His hand hovered over the button, turning to her.

“Get out while you still can, Percy,” he pleaded, knowing he needed to start the purifier soon.

“Nonononono, Charon, please don’t do this! You promised! You promised you wouldn’t leave again! You—you can’t do this!”

A blast of energy threw them back. Percy’s fall was broken by Sarah, who was knocked out cold. The rotunda was flooded with blinding light as the Purifier was activated.

Charon fell back, leaned against the glass before his legs gave out and he slid to the floor. The radiation was making his head fuzzy…he didn’t know how long he would be able to stay conscious, but none of that mattered now. He noticed out of the corner of his eye, Percy was crawling towards him…how was she still awake? What was she doing? She need to get out of here...

The thoughts drifted into mind his as fast as they left. He couldn’t think straight but he tried to keep his eyes steady on her. She leaned against the glass opposite him, the thick glass separating them.

“Why…why’d you do it?” she asked.

He could barely hear her through the glass, and he struggled to focus on her words.

“I…I knew I had a better chance of surviving the radiation…And I love you.” His brow furrowed as
if that was obvious.

“I couldn’t let you throw your life away. I’ve been alive for over two hundred years, Perse’, enough is enough. I’ve done a lot of things I’m not proud of, but being with you while I could…that’s something I’ll treasure for what little time I have left.”

She smiled softly, eyes drifting closed. “I love you too, Charon. More than anything.”

The radiation buzzed against her skin, and Charon noticed it was beginning to glow as she slumped over. He wished the radiation would take away the pain in his chest…God this hurt…

His eyes widened slightly as he noticed the scars on her arms that Burke had cut into her so long ago. They were fading away, healing over until nothing was left but soft skin. Her freckles disappeared too, and the ink was seeping out of her neck from where the barcode had been tattooed into her skin. Charon’s eyes felt very heavy.

And he was gone.

A few hours later, Elder Lyons and Scribe Rothchild stepped into the rotunda followed by Lyons’ Pride. The radiation had dissipated.
“Sarah…” Owyn Lyons leaned over her body, checking her pulse. It was faint. She was far away from the inner sanctum, but he was still concerned for her. Ordering her men to take her back to the Citadel for immediate care, he went to join Rothchild, who was stepping over Percy and Charon to look over the readings of the purifier.

“It’s…working.” He almost couldn’t believe it. “The Potomac should be completely clean within a week…They did it…”

Lyons looked back, it was just them in the rotunda now. “No…I think it was actually Sarah who turned it on,” he said, giving Rothchild a look.

After a beat, the head scribe replied, “Of course, foolish of me.” He nodded towards the two. “What should we do with them?”

“We should take their bodies back, at least. Cross would throw a fit if we didn’t.”

They called for more soldiers to take the two away. Rothchild looked through Percy’s pack. Past the stims and ammo, he found a vacuum sealed vial filled with something glowing and green.

“Well, well, well…what is this now?” he muttered, tucking it in his robes before following the elder out.

Chapter End Notes

The art for this chapter was done by zeichenkohle. You can find more of her fantastic work on Tumblr!
Chapter 48

Three Dog stumbled out of bed to a knock at his door. It had been two weeks since the Brotherhood had taken back Project Purity, but he had received no reports on what actually happened. The Brotherhood had been silent on the whole issue, and had even kept him away from his radio equipment, ordering his assistant Margaret to play reruns until *they* received more orders. Well, it looked like they had. Two scribes stood at his door, handing him what looked like a script.

“Seriously?” he asked incredulously. “You know I’m more a riff-man, right?”
But he took the paper, reading over it. It was better than nothing, and there wasn’t much he could do, considering they and their guns protected his little outpost.

His radio chair was stiff from a lack of use; he wiggled his ass until he got comfortable.

“Gooood morning, wasteland! Three Dog is back from hiatus to give you the best damn news this side of the irradiated Atlantic! Two weeks...it's been two weeks since our boys in power armor kicked those Enclave bastards out of Project Purity...and started that baby chuggin'. Now, y'all remember James, right? Father of 101? Well Three Dog has learned that back in the day, James' wife had a dream. See, she was a scientist, see? Worked on that project. You know what she wanted? The waters of life! Free, clean—for any, and all! God, ain't that beautiful? But even better, it's finally happened, the water is clean and hell yeah, it's free, OWWWWW!...Just a little patience, children. As I speak...our heroes, the Brotherhood is working with Rivet City Security and Canterbury Commons to get that fresh water to the wasteland. The caravans are comin'! So get your glasses ready, children. This round's on me.”

He turned the page.

“‘But how did it happen?’ you ask? Well, Three Dog has some firsthand news, straight from some of the brave men who fought for the water in the first place! You remember the hero from one-oh-one? And her ghoulish companion? Well, they and Sarah Lyons faced off against the last standing leader of the Enclave. That’s right, President Eden and Colonel Autumn are both down for the count! And when all that was left but the crying, the purifier had to be started. But thanks to some scientific mumbo jumbo, the poor sucker who started it would be stuck in a room filled with radiation. That’s right, kiddies, one of them had to take one for the team...and that one, was Sarah Lyons. After seeing her people fight, she knew it was her turn—to give to the Capital the only way she knew how. The only way that really matters, ya’ dig? Since then, she’s been in a coma with no signs of waking up. Percy and her companion were taken out during the fight...no word on their condition, but I mean...It’s been two weeks. If I were you, the Jefferson Memorial is accepting notes of condolence, and handing out a bottle of fresh water to each well-wisher who drops by.”

Percy threw her Nuka-Cola bottle at the radio and it cut out.

“That asshole just made my list…” she growled, pacing her cell.

“At least your aim’s still good. Maybe next time it will be his head,” Charon replied, flicking the butt of his cigarette at the bars of his cell. Arthur Maxson had come by to talk to them every day. He seemed to blame them for Sarah being how she was.

“Here he is, three o’clock, right on the dot,” Percy said, falling back onto her cot as the boy was ushered in by two Brotherhood guards. There was a red line spray-painted across the floor that Maxson refused to even get near.

The Brotherhood soldiers had informed Percy when she woke up that she was throwing off radiation like a goddamn nuke when they brought her in. Since then, they hadn’t let anyone closer than three feet to her cell, even though her Pip-Boy wasn’t ticking. Cross was nowhere to be found, but Charon had a feeling she was being turned away at the door. With Sarah in a coma, she must be a wreck, but any authority she had as a Paladin didn’t seem to matter anymore.

“Hey, sport, what do you have for us this time?” Percy asked, covering her eyes with her forearm.
“I thought you’d have turned into a ghoul by now. I wonder how long it’s supposed to take,” Arthur said, putting his nose up.

“Surely Cross taught you better than that. Where is she, anyway?” Charon asked, glancing towards the guards.

“Elder Lyons is having Head Scribe Rothchild teach me now. He said Cross was becoming a bad influence. I think it’s because she’s getting old.”

“Rothchild is older!” Percy threw up her hands.

“Maybe, but at least he doesn’t like ghouls!”

“Hey, this ghoul saved your life! He’s the reason the purifier is on!”

Maxson stomped his foot. “That’s not true! Sarah turned on the Purifier! She sacrificed herself for you and that filthy ghoul!”

Percy ignored the rest of what Arthur had to say. She turned over and tried to sleep. She was tired of hearing propaganda, especially from some poor brainwashed child.

A few days later, Madison Li finally showed up. She looked sheepish and exhausted like she hadn’t slept in days. Not surprising; everyone had been busy since the Purifier started working. The radio told them caravans were constantly in and out, trying to meet the new demands of a wasteland that needed fresh water.

Madison looked over to the guards. “Can I get a little privacy?”

“The Elder ordered us to keep watch on the prisoners,” they said, not even bothering to look at her.

“Well you can tell Owyn to shove it! They can’t do much behind bars.”

The two sighed, but left. They weren’t given enough down time to deal with Madison on a good day.

As soon as the doors closed behind them, Madison rushed to Percy’s bars.

“They only just let me speak to you! Everything’s been so hectic since the purifier started, and Owyn’s treating his own daughter like a damned martyr!”

“You’ve known him longer, does this surprise you?” Percy didn’t look up, she was carving trees into the wall of her cell with a shard of broken glass. Anything to stave off the boredom.

Madison looked down. “…No…no, I should have seen that coming, but I never expected him to do this!” She waved her hand at the two cells Charon and Percy had been kept in.

“He knows if we walk free, we’ll ruin his daughter’s reputation,” Charon said, arms crossed and leaning against the bars that separated him from Percy.

“So what does he plan to do with you?” Madison asked. “He can’t keep you in here forever!”

“You got me…is there anything else you wanted to say?” Percy asked.
Madison twined her fingers together. “Yes…I’m…sorry for how I’ve treated you. James was a good man, and everything he ever did, he did because he cared…He was proud of you. And he would be, especially, now.”

Percy finally looked up, walking to the bars and reaching out her hand.

“Thanks, Madison…that means a lot.”

“Is there anything I can bring you? To make this…easier?” she asked, taking Percy’s hand in both of hers.

Percy laughed. “Yeah, actually. I miss Rex, could you see about letting him stay with us? I wouldn’t say no to a buzz saw for these bars, either…”

Smiling weakly Madison pulled away, nodding to Charon. “I’ll see about Rex, but the best I could probably slip past the guards is a scalpel.”

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Rex was allowed to stay with them, but he had to stay on the other side of the bars. Charon had the genius idea of crumpling up an empty food box. They would play fetch like that for hours while Percy hummed to the songs on the radio. When she got really bored, she’d cuss out the Brotherhood to the tune of whatever happened to be on.

She got bored often.

Through the radio that the guards refused to turn off, the two learned that in an attempt to find the last remnants of the Enclave hiding throughout the capital, Liberty Prime had been nuked by a satellite the Enclave still had control over.

“Christ…” Charon growled, “how long will it take before they decide to aim that at us?”

Charon and Percy were sitting back to back—or rather, as much as they could with a row of bars between them—as Charon read out loud from one of the books Madison had brought them. The posted guards would often listen in. It got to the point where they would only read certain books with certain shifts so no one would miss the story they were listening in on. The guards had long since given up trying to act intimidating. They had nothing against the two—not even Charon—but orders were orders. This meant they also had to take away the piece of glass Percy had used from a broken Nuka-Coka bottle to carve scenery into the cell.

“Nice work though,” one of them said nervously. “I really like what you did with the branches.”

“Thanks.” She replied awkwardly, tousling the uneven edges of her hair. It had grown a good foot from the radiation from Project Purity, and without a mirror or scissors, there was little she could do but hack it away and try to make it even.

At least the two had privacy at night, now. Percy dragged her mattress to the bars separating them, and Charon did the same. They held hands between the bars, the glow of Percy’s Pip-Boy illuminating their faces.

“How long are they going to keep us here…” she asked, not really expecting an answer.

“As long as they think we are useful,” Charon answered, surety in his face. He had seen situations like this before, hell, been in situations like this before.
“And then what?”

“Past experience tells me we should get out of here before that becomes a concern.”

Percy’s hand tightened in his. “After all we’ve done for the Brotherhood… I should have known helping them was a mistake…I’m sorry you got dragged into this, Charon.”

He was taken aback. “Percy, even without the contract, I’ll follow you wherever you choose to go. Not because I’m obligated to anymore, but because you’re… everything.”

Percy blushed. “Those are some pretty high standards.”

Charon rubbed her fingers between his, staring at the flawlessness of her arms. The nickname of ‘doll’ fit now, more than ever with her unmarred skin. “I… apologize for breaking my promise… before.”

There was a tightening in her chest as she remembered the Purity incident. It had been weeks, but Percy still remembered the fear so strong it actually hurt.

“You were right… you did have a better chance of surviving the radiation than me… but I didn’t know for sure at the time. Even if I did, I still probably would have tried to stop you.”

Their tangled fingers were an inferior copy of what she really wanted.

“Did it hurt?” she asked after a time.

“No… it was more like getting very drunk and tired. What about you? You passed out right next to the glass.”

“It was the same. For a while I felt really energized by the radiation, but as I got closer, I felt really heavy.”

Trying to distract her from their situation, Charon asked, “If we do get out of here—”

“Don’t,” she cut him off, eyes stinging with tears that threatened to leak out. “Please… no more planning for what might not happen. Let’s just… focus on what we have.”

The next time Madison Li came to visit, there was a stiffness in her movements, her eyes shifted back and forth, not even trusting the guards. It was Percy’s turn to read. It was an old spy novel. The pages were old and yellowed, the ink flaking off in some places. After a few minutes of just leaning nervously against the wall, Li moved to sit on the floor near Charon’s cell. It was an odd position for someone who always appeared so dignified. Rex came up to her, sensing her distress and laying his head in her lap. With one hand, she began rubbing up and down his back. The other hand, resting on the ground, tapped restlessly against the concrete floor. A pattern caught Charon’s attention.

He looked over to Percy, She must have noticed too, but kept her eyes on the book. She covered her pause by coughing and taking a sip of water before reading a little louder.
Li only repeated her message once, trying to cover it up by tapping out a bunch of nonsense between the repetitions and at the end. After Percy finished the chapter, she stood up, dusting off her lab coat before nodding to the guards. Madison turned first to Charon, then to Percy, nodding to each of them. Neither were shocked, but Percy looked a little sad.

“Goodbye, you two,” she said.

“I’ll be counting the hours till the next time you come to visit, Madison,” Percy replied glumly.

There was no next time.

They both winced as light suddenly flooded their cell at two in the morning. Elder Lyons stepped through the door. He was alone. He looked to the camera in the corner, not speaking until the red light dimmed out to nothing.

“I’m sure you know the trouble the Brotherhood has faced recently? Between Liberty Prime being destroyed, caravans not meeting demands…and my daughter…”

“Tears stain the pages of every book I own,” Percy said dryly, yawning and trying to hide her concern for Sarah. The Brotherhood was too good for someone like her.

Owyn’s fists clenched. But he spat out, “I have not come here to trade insults with you. I have come…to ask for help. And to offer a deal. One that may lead to your freedom,” he added.

“Pardon me, but the radio broadcasts have made me doubt your honesty,” she snapped back. “I seem to remember someone else starting the purifier. Don’t you, Charon?”

He nodded staring silently at the man who had the nerve to come to them for help. Lyons was shaken from his gaze, but pushed on.

“The Brotherhood needs a leader. I had hoped that if my daughter wouldn’t wake up, then the idea of her would at least be enough to keep the men fighting. But with Liberty Prime gone and the wastelanders growing resentful of how long it takes us to distribute water...ungrateful bastards…”

“Cut the shit, Lyons, what do you want with us?” Charon growled. “Last I heard, Perse’ and I were MIA since the battle at Project Purity.”

He dropped a file into each of their cells. “We haven’t been able to shut Three Dog up since the incident with Liberty Prime, now everyone is scared of getting nuked.”

“Imagine that. Not being able to silence the press about petty things like warheads raining from space,” Percy muttered, as she looked through her papers.

“We need a small group to infiltrate the Enclave’s last apparent base at Adams Air Force base. If we can hack into their computer, and have their satellite target their own base—”

“You can destroy the Enclave once and for all,” Charon finished with a nod, having heard all this before.

“That’s what you said about Raven Rock, and the Purifier, and now this. I’ve heard it all before. And what happens when the Enclave is destroyed huh? And all that’s left is you guys. With control over the biggest damn supply of water and the power to nuke anyone who speaks against you or
offers any sort of threat. I’ve seen this shit rationalized before. Maybe not about water, but the idea is still there.”

“You don’t understand! Everything I’m doing is—”

“For the greater good. To protect our great nation from those who would take it. To protect our families—the American way. Excuse me Elder, but I’ve heard it all.”

Charon threw the file in the man’s face. Percy slid hers under the bars as well. No more needed to be said.

After that, none of the security guards that watched them were the same, and their books were taken away. The lights stayed on all night, with the only way to tell the passing of time by the clock on Percy’s Pip-Boy, which seemed to be the only thing aside from their clothes that they were allowed to keep. Rex was taken away as well, but Percy wasn’t too worried. If anything happened, Rex would probably run away and make his way back to Little Lamplight. Their meals also got simpler, and the radio was finally shut off. That was a bit of a mercy, but Percy missed the songs.

It wasn’t until a week later that they received another visitor, and Percy was actually a little happy to see Arthur Maxson walk through the door. He looked smug, and he was carrying an oddly small power armor helmet under his arm.

“You’ll never guess what Elder Lyons told me today,” he said with a shit-eating grin.

“That he will be adding ketchup to our Yum Yum Devilled eggs?” Percy asked, snapping her fingers as if she’d been tricked. “The man’s really gone too far this time, he must be stopped.”

Arthur scoffed and Charon swore the child might literally have a stick up his ass.

“No, although I imagine that’s all you two are concerned about, since you refuse to help the Brotherhood. Elder Lyons told me that Sarah finally woke up! She can’t see me yet, but she wants me to be her second in command at the assault on Adams Air Force base! I’ll finally get to prove myself to her.” The boy seemed to have actual stars in his eyes as he said this.

Charon grew very still.

“The Elder told you…what exactly?” he asked.

Arthur’s face screwed up. “I knew it; ears falling off really does affect ghoul hearing. Don’t worry, ghoul; when I get promoted to sentinel, I’ll see what I can do about giving you a merciful death. Who knows, we may be able to spare some med-x for you when the time finally comes to put you down.”

But Charon didn’t seem to hear that. He slammed against the bars of his cell so fast, everyone jumped, even Percy.

“LYONS, YOU SON OF A BITCH!” He screamed at the camera, which was clearly focused on him. “FINE, YOU WIN—YOU FUCKING WIN! BUT YOU BETTER PRAY THE ENCLAVE MANAGES TO KILL ME BECAUSE WHEN THIS IS OVER I’M FUCKING COMING FOR YOU!!”

The guards raised their weapons at him, but even then he wouldn’t back down, cursing and
screaming while Maxson ran away, hollering about how the giant ghoul finally went feral. Charon began punching at the bars while the guards yelled at him to step back. He actually managed to dent the bars before the guards threw a pulse grenade into his cell. It took two before Charon finally collapsed. Percy could only watch in horror as they chained his unconscious body to the bars that separated them.

“Don’t worry ma’am,” they said, not even bothering to look her in the eye. “He’ll come to in a few hours.”

“Do you really believe in what you’re fighting for?” she asked quietly, moving to sit as close to him as she could.

They didn’t answer.

‘He’s insane…’ Percy thought running her hands through Charon’s hair as she prayed that he woke up soon. ‘Elder Lyons has finally lost it…’
The sunlight was blinding. Percy shielded her eyes as she and Charon were led to the fortified exit of the Citadel by Paladin Cross. She was haggard, with hard shadows under her eyes. It made her look older than the last time the two had seen her. Rex ran in circles around them, happy to see his new friends again. Charon was in reinforced handcuffs that went all the way up to his elbows. There was also a bag over his head so at least if he tried anything, he would be too disoriented to put up much of a fight…right? Percy doubted that, but didn’t say anything. Cross shouldered the Tesla cannon that they had been given as their only defense should things go south. They could hear Maxson throwing a fit in the distance, furious that his chance to prove himself to Sarah had been taken away, and that she still refused to see him. None of the small party had the heart to disillusion him about Sarah’s true condition. She was still stable, but with minimal brain function. It had been jarring when they were allowed to see her one last time before they left. She had lain pale and helpless in her bed, tubes riddling her body, pumping nutrients in and refuse out.

“I shouldn’t have left her…” Cross sighed, knowing that her opinions and desires had never once been considered when she was ordered to escort and assist Percy and Charon on their mission. If anything, it was more likely that the exact opposite of what she wanted had been ordered out of sheer spite. Cross had been at her lover’s side day and night, tirelessly looking after her, and the Elder hated that. Hated that his only daughter—his only chance at a continued lineage—had no plans of choosing a mate for the sake of procreation.

Putting her hand on the worried paladin’s shoulder, Percy tried to comfort her.

“She’ll be in good hands until you come back. And you are coming back,” she insisted.

Cross nodded, but didn’t say more until the Citadel was out of sight. Once they were a far enough distance, Cross handed the key to Percy so she could unshackle Charon. As soon as his hands were free, he pulled her into a tight embrace, breathing in her scent and trying to quell his racing heart. He turned to Cross, who had looked away to give them privacy.

“Give us a reason why we shouldn’t escape, now that we have a chance?” he asked darkly, holding Percy close.

“Because they would find you. Or report you as an enemy of the Brotherhood for another chapter to eliminate you,” she replied. Her eyes were sympathetic, but it was clear she either couldn’t or wouldn’t oppose her people.

Charon set Percy down, and took his pack from her to carry.

“Our folder said there was a subway tunnel that takes us directly to Adams, but the only way to that is through the White House…wasn’t that the first thing to get bombed?”

“Yes, but the underground subway systems were reinforced with several feet of solid steel. The tunnel should still be standing. I wish I could also say the cars are completely operational after
centuries of neglect, but I’d be lying.”

Cross spied the back of Percy’s neck. Or rather, spied what was missing.

“So the rumors were true…”

Charon shot her a look and Cross strategically chose to leave the rest of her train of thought unspoken.

‘She really is part ghoul... but with none of the apparent disadvantages.’

Percy mapped out their route in her Pip-Boy. On foot it was going to take a few days to creep through the subways and avoid the mutants, who only seemed to get more violent with the Brotherhood and Enclave distracted by each other. Mercifully, Cross was dressed in recon stealth armor, rather than her typical set of power armor. She felt overly exposed without it, but Cross knew this mission needed stealth above all. Her eyes ached as she watched Charon lean protectively over Percy, his body stiff as if he was trying to shield her from some unknown force. His fingers dug into her hip and while Percy winced, she didn’t tell him to let up. If anything, she leaned into him, desperate for the closeness she hadn’t felt during months of captivity.

“It will take a little over a day and a half if we don’t stop to eat or sleep, and I wouldn’t recommend holing up in a random building with all the mutants crawling around…”

Cross held her chin in thought. “The Washington Monument is still being guarded. We could grab some extra supplies, whatever they can spare, anyway,” Cross added bitterly.

Aside from the Tesla cannon strapped to her back, they had been sent out with little more than the clothes on their backs. The Elder claimed they were low on supplies since the latest battle, but Cross knew this was a blatant lie.

“There is a town in that vicinity,” Charon said, scowling at the paladin’s blank look before he added, “Underworld.”

“If you want us to keep up this charade that we died at the Memorial, we can trust Underworld to keep that secret. Three Dog never sends any of his reporters there, anyway,” Percy said.

Cross looked slightly nervous, but had to agree. “Good idea. We should head out then if we want to make it by nightfall.”

They pulled on their hoods and set out.

Charon was especially aggressive towards any mutants they found. Shooting their bodies more than a few times, even after they died. Percy was close behind him, deadly efficient, but didn’t wear her emotions on her shoulder like Charon, who seemed to take a fierce sort of pleasure in each body that fell at his hands. For once, the paladin didn’t need to lead, and that was nice, but it left her alone with her thoughts, which were… less so.

Between the lack of supplies and the minimal armor, Cross couldn’t lie to herself about the Brotherhood’s intentions towards their small party, and if her companions wanted one last day of freedom, she couldn’t deny them that.

Percy was glad for her hood’s visor when they neared the entrance of Underworld. Even if ghouls
didn’t exactly need purified water, she shouldn’t have been surprised to see someone trying to sell it. But a ghoul with a full head of hair—who wasn’t Snowflake—that was an odd sight. As they drew closer, Charon was reminded of snake oil salesmen as the ghoul danced on a makeshift stage, singing about the miracle drink ‘Aqua-Cura’ that he was selling for the low, low price of ten caps for two bottles.

“That’s right folks! Thanks to the miracle of Aqua-Cura, you too can get back those beautiful locks. Combs will be in high demand in Underworld in no time! Why, you’ll need at least three new barbers to keep up with demand!”

The crowd that had gathered seemed skeptical, but there was still a good chunk of them who bought several bottles. Not wanting to draw attention to themselves, the four gave the crowd a wide berth before slipping through the double doors of the ghoul city.

Percy looked over to Charon as they walked down the halls. He seemed…distant, fists clenched. He didn’t look angry, just…tense.

“Hey…” she touched his shoulder, bringing him back to the present. His eyes softened when he noticed her, but his faint smile was clearly forced. “Would you grab some ammo and food for the trip? Also some gun oil if they have it.”

“Of course,” he said, seeming to zone out again once he turned away. Percy sighed, but let him go without another word. Cross seemed on edge, as citizens of Underworld gave her less than friendly looks. Charon was completely covered, and Percy wore a bandana over her face, but Cross was clearly Brotherhood.

“I hope you’re proud of yourselves…”

“Good luck getting a room at Carol’s, bitch.”

Percy pulled Cross upstairs, whispering, “Ignore them.”

Having nothing against ghouls personally was one thing, but the results of her people's prejudice was difficult to ignore. Cross followed closely after Percy.

Carol was restocking the shelves, tears blurring her vision as she listened to the young man in the corner reminisce about his life in the vaults. Sydney was there to comfort her friend while Clover could only glumly lean against her lover. She may not have known Percy very well, but Butch cared about her, and as much as that would have spiked jealousy in the former concubine, she hated to see her man so upset.

“The vault was crap, ya’ know? Like…a real shit storm.” Butch slurred over his drink while Sydney nodded as if she knew what it was like to live in a sealed vault, packed in with a few hundred others like a can of sardines.

“But Percy…she knew what was up…I always felt like she had plans on leaving that place, I just wish she had brought me along the first time…” wishful thinking was replaced by new waves of guilt. He should never have left her side. He had owed her that much, and failed. If he had stayed, maybe James would still be around…and Percy too…

He jumped as Carol set down a box of snack cakes.
“Eat up, sweetie,” her maternal instincts overcoming her own grief. “It’s not good to drink so much on an empty stomach.”

She shifted back to the counter as two figures stepped in, the bell on the door tingling in a way that gave of the illusion of pleasant cheer in the somber hotel. Carol glared at the one who was clearly a Brotherhood member.

“Pardon me, but don’t you have the Memorial? Haven’t you taken enough from us without taking up my beds?” she asked coldly.

The smaller, shrouded one stepped forward, pulling caps out of her bag. “I’m sorry ma’am, but they wouldn’t have taken my other companion in if we tried…will this do?”

Percy actually shrunk under the withering look Carol gave her, she had never seen her so angry.

“I don’t negotiate with people I can’t look in the face.”

Percy turned to look around the small establishment. It was mostly empty except for Patchwork in one corner and—

She walked over to the small table. “Butch…?”

He dragged his eyes up the wanderer until they connected with hers, wary but twinkling. He recognized her instantly. How could he not?

“Perc—!”

She rushed to cover his mouth, giggling shakily as she said, “Don’t make a big scene, huh, Butch-man?”

He pulled her hand away, sober in a flash as he exclaimed, “But—but how?”

Percy loosed her face wrap. All her freckles were gone, and despite the shadows under her eyes, she looked unnaturally healthy.

Before she could say another word, she was tackled by Carol, sobbing hysterically and clinging to her.

“I—I’m so sorry…how are you—Oh, Percy!” Carol exclaimed, holding her at arm’s length to get a better look at her. She was very thin and her hair hung dull and uneven about her face, but more than anything she looked both nervous and anxious.

“Please don’t make a scene…” she pleaded, glancing toward Cross.

Charon stepped in with his bag full of supplies, he looked towards the small crowd, and then to Percy.

“Tulip knows, but I don’t think she’ll make a fuss,” he said simply.

Carol sat them all down at the table, bringing more chairs, even one for Cross, although everyone eyed her with suspicion. Rex curled protectively around Percy’s legs, forcing everyone to shift to the side to accommodate him.

“Alright, what’s going on?” Carol asked with authority.

Percy explained what she could. But she knew she couldn’t say everything she wanted, not with
Cross there.

“We…did survive the battle, but…Charon and I were very sick after. The Brotherhood doctors didn’t think we would make it. By the time we woke up, word had spread we were dead.”

“But you aren’t! People need to know, don’t they?” Butch asked.

Percy looked to Cross again. “No, because…we are leaving the Capital Wasteland,” she said with a sigh. “After today, we are going to Megaton to pick up our things and disappear for good.”

The lies came harder now, harder than they ever had before. Percy wasn’t blinded to the truth. They weren’t sent on this mission with the intent of success. They were undesirables—all three of them. Sure, they might succeed in their objective, but the odds of them getting out before the Brotherhood turned the Enclave’s own nukes against them was…slim.

“After everything that’s happened, I’d rather just stay a memory. I’m tired of people expecting me to fix everything when I—I can’t!”

Maybe they weren’t all lies…

The room was heavy with silence, before Butch raised his glass.

“…To Percy and James Carter. Too good for the wastes, and not soon forgotten.”

The others awkwardly raised their glasses. “To Percy,” they muttered.

After that Butch began catching them up on what he had been up to since he left the Memorial.

“After we heard about the Enclave attacking Arefu …we knew we couldn’t even try to fight back, but we managed to lay low until they left. When they came our way, all they saw was a bunch of ruins. The Republic of Dave wasn’t so lucky.”

“We did what we could, and no one we knew died,” Clover exclaimed, and to her, what she said was reassuring. You couldn’t afford to waste concern on someone who wasn’t part of your group. If you did, you’d wind up dead.

Charon quietly drank while Percy and Butch reminisced about life in the vaults, and about her father.

“He was always trying to be everywhere at once, even after Jonas became his assistant.” Percy chuckled, despite herself, warming her belly with the squirrel stew that Carol kept refilling for her. “I remember once, I was late to school because he tried to pack me a lunch while also labelling some lab cultures—my lunch box was full of petri dishes and the med lab’s fridge had my Cram and apple slices. Luckily, he was only testing blood samples and nothing was actually contagious. Brotch was pissed, though.”

She glanced over to Charon, who still looked withdrawn and stiff. Cross had long since gone to bed with Carol’s promise that no one would bother her, despite the flimsy dividers separating each ‘room.’ By the time Greta had closed the 9th Circle and come to join them, Clover was nodding off against Butch’s shoulder.

“As much as I’d like to stay, we should really go to bed. We have a long day tomorrow,” Percy said, standing up and stretching. Butch pulled her into a hug, and Percy leaned into him, letting the nostalgic scent of hair gel, cigarettes, and worn leather surround her.

“I’m glad you’re alive, Perse’. I owe you so much…it was nice knowing you.”
“You too, Butch. You too.”

After they separated, Butch turned to look at the ghoul who was still seated and finishing off his drink. So this was the one who had run away…and who Percy dragged right back. That was just like her. With exception to her current situation, she was always in control. Whether it was the son of the security chief or a seven foot ghoul, she was the one who really called the shots.

“Charon, right? Look after this one, okay? Don’t let some wasteland asshole make the mistake of thinking they can mess with her and live.”

Charon looked up, and there was an understanding between the two. Percy didn’t need protection from the world, the world needed protection from Percy. He nodded.

As Percy filled a bucket of water at the sink, Charon sat at the end of the bed and began dismantling their weapons. Methodically he cleaned and oiled each piece, checking for dents or misalignments. Occasionally he looked her way while she cleaned up, goose bumps ghosting across her skin as she rubbed the grime away with a harsh rag. After dumping the cloudy water over her head one last time, Percy shook out her short hair and refilled the bucket, setting it before Charon. He glanced up from his task as he clicked the last piece of his shotgun into place. She was shivering slightly from the cold moisture, but handed him the rag without a word. Charon washed himself with the same sort of methodic efficiency that he cleaned their guns, but he seemed more at ease now that they were alone and away from the Citadel. Percy stretched out on the bed behind him, watching the muscles tense and relax on his back as he got clean. She didn’t tease herself with ideas of what they would do after this, or where they would go if they actually survived their mission.

Her fingers traced his spine, just visible beneath the exposed flesh and muscle, and warmed at him visibly shudder in the wake of her slowly climbing digits. She noticed him still completely, and wrapping her arms around his broad back, she whispered into his ear,

“Let me get your back for you.”

He complied, pressing the newly wet rag into her waiting hand. Percy leaned over and kissed his jaw in thanks, only a little disappointed when he didn’t turn to meet her lips. She was more careful than Charon, gently coaxing the dirt and dust from the ridges and wrinkles of skin and muscle on his back. She knew he wouldn’t fall apart, but that didn’t make her want to test his durability. Charon was old, but strong. A warrior who had seen too many wars, traveling with a wanderer who couldn’t seem to stop.

“Well, I might have to stop soon…not how I planned, though.’

She shook her head. As if she had planned anything since leaving the vaults.

Charon was melting into her touch despite himself, but there was still some stiffness to his movements as Percy silently urged him to lay on his belly. Kneading his exhausted and worn muscles, her mind returned to what lay ahead, rather than what was already behind. As much as she wished it, she knew there would be no way to convince Charon to stay behind—to leave the Capital for good, and walk the earth as a free man for the first time in two hundred years. But that was a ridiculous sentiment, and she knew that if he asked, begged, or even demanded the same of her, to let him go complete this without her and give her a head start from the surely pursuing Brotherhood, she would definitely follow him and Cross, anyway.
The warmth returned as she shifted, her inner thighs rubbing against the rough skin of his sides. Leaning forward, Percy rubbed his shoulders as she kissed up and down his neck. Charon made no response. He wasn’t asleep—his eyes were clearly open and focused on the far wall. But he showed no reaction to her ministrations. That truly hurt. For months they had been separated by bars, and under near-constant surveillance.

“What did pre-war soldiers do in these situations?” she asked, referring to nights before a big battle or an impossible mission.

Visions of dimly lit tents, with soldiers pairing off with either the medical staff or each other, or ‘entertainers’ being flown in to ‘wish them luck’ drifted into Charon’s mind before he rolled over, slowly so Percy could adjust.

His eyes traced her form, no longer marred by the wastes or its inhabitants. All her scars, and even her freckles were gone. This woman was the spitting image of the green vaultie he had met so long ago. Only the eyes were different, only they could tell the stories her body could not. But they were troubled, and he could do more than guess why. And his desire was no longer hidden by the sheets and bedding.

“Go on,” she prompted, not wishing her question to hang unanswered.

“Please...don’t make me…”

Percy’s blood ran cold as her cheeks grew red. She attempted to ease off his legs, as she turned her face away.

“I’m sorry—I thought…”

‘Months...months apart yet so close, and now...?’

The warmth of his hand met her cheek, and even now she couldn’t help but lean into it.

“I don’t wish to hurt you,” he clarified.

Her brow furrowed, even more confused now. But she thought back to the last few days. Since they had left the Citadel, Charon having been quiet and reserved, but shaken.

“I don’t doubt it...big guy,” she hedged, going back to straddle his legs. Looking up, Percy watched him carefully while she slowly ground her center against his cock. He didn’t protest, but didn’t move either.

“Talk to me. It’s just us here, away from the Brotherhood, and as safe as we can be in this world…”

She bit back a whimper, feeling him pulse beneath her and push up into her movements.

“I-I missed you, Charon…” she panted, “and I trust you—mnh!”

Charon groaned into her mouth as he came crashing forward, rolling them over; only pulling back when he ran out of breath.

“Don’t think I haven’t missed you, either. If I had known those bars were so weak I would have broken into your cell weeks ago.”

“Then why hold back now?” Percy brushed her thigh along his side before crooking it and jerking him closer.
He buried his face in her collarbone and Percy, sensitive from their lack of contact, felt a wave of something painful shoot out from her chest.

“That…Lyons bastard…using a kid—just to get to us!”

His hands squeezed hers tightly before remembering himself and trying to rub the pain away.

“I wouldn’t put it past him to force that kid into battle if we had still refused.”

Percy sighed, nuzzling her cheek against his head. “You can’t save everyone, Charon. Believe me. Someone will stop you, or make it worse, despite your efforts…And some people just don’t want to be saved. But…that’s not all…is it?”

Charon leaned back, but Percy followed after him, climbing onto his lap, desperate for closeness.

“Autumn…he was going to make you like me—or at least how I was. It is clear he had more than just a soldier’s life in mind for you.”

Percy looked away. “He didn’t know about my mutation...The Enclave had issues with stagnant gene pools, like the vault,” she said, trying to focus on the warmth of his body rather than the pain of the past.

“When they took you…I never thought I’d see you again, Percy. I couldn’t sleep—I nearly got hooked on psycho again just to keep going. And when I got there, and he was…holding you like that…” He couldn’t look at her anymore, his hands were shaking again. “All I could think about was ripping his hands off ‘my woman’…”

Charon tried to avoid looking at her until she grabbed his face in her hands. She searched his eyes before kissing him once, twice, three times.

“That’s not so bad. And you got me out of there. Autumn’s dead now.”

“I have no claim to you, or your body,” he insisted.

She bit her lip, flushing slightly at a new idea. “What about for tonight?”

“What?”

Percy fell back against the pillows at the head of the bed, slowly spreading her legs and smiling when his eyes travelled south.

She was wet…had been for a while.

“For tonight, you can do whatever you want with me,” she said, barely above a whisper.

Charon shook his head but didn’t look away this time. “I told you Perse’…I’m too worked up right now, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“And what if I like it?” she asked with a smirk, before looking up at the ceiling and running one hand through her hair. The sight made Charon’s skin burn.

“You know I love you, Charon…And you beat me to that confession, so I’m pretty sure you feel the same. It’s not a bad thing that you hated seeing me touched by someone else…Hell, who knows what I would have done in the reverse situation…so, until we have to go…let’s just let loose. Just this one night, don’t worry so much about holding back.”
After a moment’s hesitation, he had her pinned again. There was a flash of anticipation, and Percy bit her lip, smiling in victory.

“Just in case,” he growled, thumb giving her a few rough swipes before pushing two ragged fingers into her, making Percy gasp in surprise. “What’s. Your. Safe word?”

“Oooh! Uh—Aqua Cura!” she wailed, hands balling into the pillow beneath her as she writhed against his touch.

Charon harshly pumped his fingers, watching her face contort in a mix of pain and pleasure. Pressing his lips against the shell of her ear, he asked,

“Do you like that, doll? Do you like how this ghoul makes you feel?”

“Fuck, Charon…” she moaned, “so good, so good! I want you inside me, I need to feel you!”

Every time she got close, he would ease up and Percy would cry out in frustration.

“But I am inside you, Persephone…” He bit down on her earlobe, tongue swiping out to ease the pain. “Come on, doll; use your words. Be specific,” he commanded.

“I—I want to feel your cock, Charon. I want to feel you take me, use me, take what you want from me until I can’t walk!”

He dragged her to her knees on the bed fisting his dick in one hand and her hair in the other.

“So you want this rotting cock inside you? Prove it. Show me how much you want me…”

Charon watched his dick disappear and reappear from her full pink lips, blood burning in his veins. She watched him behind thick lashes. She was good, so fucking good…

“Nuh uh uh…” He stopped Percy’s hand from reaching between her legs. She whimpered in protest.

“I want you starving for me when you finally get it,” he growled, making her squeal around him with a harsh buck of his hips. Gritting his teeth, Charon threw his head back as he eased Percy off of his swollen cock with a loud pop. A frustrated groan left her as she was thrown against the bed again.

“So how was that? You sure you want more?”

“Yes, please, Charon, anything!” She tried to get up again but his hand on her chest held her in place.

“On your knees.”

The power was almost as intoxicating as she was. He kneaded her ass, thumbs tracing up to her lower back…where there was nothing.

No scars…no words…nothing but soft silky skin.

Percy leaned against his tip.

“Come on, Charon…take me.”

And he did, fingers digging into her hips. The bed slammed against the wall, Percy screamed and bits of drywall rained down on them, but neither cared. If they didn’t die on this mission, they would likely just be forced into taking more dangerous jobs for the Brotherhood until they did. But while
they were here, while they were away and could pretend to be free, just for a night, they would make it worth every moment.

“Scream for me...my Persephone...make all of Underworld know...who you belong to...” he grunted between harsh thrusts, stretching her pussy with a pain she had fantasized about for weeks. The coarse skin of his cock brushed against her clit, sending shockwaves through her body.

And she did. She screamed his name, holding the headboard for support as he rammed into her again and again. Waves of pleasure crashed over her, and yet he would only pull out and finger her to completion anytime he felt himself get close. When Percy couldn’t hold herself up, he flipped her over and took her with her legs over his shoulders.

“Charon!”

“Persephone...”

He swallowed her moans, licked the sweat from her breasts, and was consumed by the scent of their sex. Percy enveloped him and there was no world outside their little room.

She ran her hands through his hair as he lay panting against her chest, arms still wrapped tightly around her, despite being thoroughly exhausted.

“You’re so beautiful...” she sighed.

Charon looked up as she traced the lines and ridges of his face.

“When you look completely relaxed, you almost look like a different person, you know?”

He answered her with a kiss. She shivered against him as he circled her nipple between two fingers. Her body was too sensitive, the sheets were completely ruined, but neither gave a damn. After all, nothing existed outside their small world.

Not even the Pip-Boy alarm was enough to wake her, and Charon was sure to turn it off before she could even stir. He chugged a bottle of water before settling back into bed, a smile ghosting across his face as Percy curled into him in her sleep. The night before had been perfect...

She shivered in the cold and Charon moved the thin blankets to cover her shoulders before settling his hand on her hip, rubbing slow circles there, comforted to only feel smooth skin.

She had been given a fresh start, a clean slate with only her memories to weigh her down. And yet even without her brand, she still chose him. The world was a shitty place but he shared it with Percy, and that made it not only bearable, but enjoyable.

His fingers dipped lower, feeling wetness between her legs. He frowned; they had at least cleaned up partially before passing out, what was this?

Bringing the slick digits to his lips, Charon’s eyelids fell in ecstasy as he tasted her arousal. It was sweet and mellow, lingering on the tongue like a dissolving candy

‘So, until we have to go...let’s just let loose. Just this one night, don’t worry so much about holding back...’

The memory and temptation returned with a vengeance, and he felt himself grow hard against her
thighs.

Percy made a noise, flushing slightly in her sleep and curling into his chest. Her wet core was pressed against him. He couldn’t stop his fingers from brushing against her clit again, just to see what would happen. A whimper ghosted from her lips, her breaths grew steadily more erratic, and her walls shuddered against his probing fingers.

Then she said something; barely a whisper, but it caught his attention.

‘Is she awake?’

But her eyes were still closed. He continued to stroke her, the moisture soaking his fingers as her face and shoulders grew red.

“Oh, Charon…” There was no mistaking it now.
‘Even in her sleep?’ A surprised smirk spread across his face, and an idea formed in Charon’s mind.

It would be ridiculous to think that after all this time, she might be dreaming about some pretty boy smoothskin—maybe that Butch kid—but even asleep, her arousal…her pleasure…her love was directed at him…

Before he could think, he found himself between her legs, rubbing his ragged exposed cheek against her inner thigh. So soft…so smooth…no more damage, no more pain.

She was just as delicious as he remembered, if not more. Her scent enraptured him, her taste intoxicated him—that sweet ambrosia. Her thighs began to shudder and squeeze against his head, and his only senses were taste, scent, and the velvet of her walls against his tongue.

Warm…everywhere was so warm…no…hot. Deep in her belly and shooting lower. She was being pulled deep underwater and yet that’s where she wanted to go more than anything. To sink to the very depths and be suffocated by this pleasure was all she could think about. Then all of a sudden she was rising, faster and faster until she was crashing through the surface.

The room was filled with moaning as Percy tried to catch her breath, then she realized it was her.

“Oh oh, what? Charon! What are you—?”

But he couldn’t hear her through the muffle of her legs around his ears, and the last thing Percy wanted was for his mouth to do anything else.

“Oh, fuck…!” Her heels dug into his shoulder blades, and Charon groaned, sucking on her lips and clit even harder until she was sure they would bruise. He sounded like was a starving man eating his last meal.

Only after she came again, sweating and writhing, did he pull back, finally opening his eyes to look at her.

“What a way to wake up…” She said laughing shakily, pulling him up for a proper kiss.

“You did say I would do whatever I wanted with you until we leave…I hope you don’t mind?”

“Mind?” She asked incredulously with a smile, “No—hell no!...Maybe I’ll get the chance to return
the favor sometime…if you wouldn’t mind?”

Charon was already beginning to occupy himself with her breasts, his stiff member rubbing heavily against her knee.

“Never. Although that might actually be the thing that finally turns me feral.”
Chapter Notes

This chapter was proofread by Groovymarlin, I can't thank her enough for making my story but cleaner and grammatically correct ^_^

They helped each other get dressed in silence, both covering their faces before gathering their things. Rex was waiting for them on the other side of the door, wagging his tail.

“He can’t come with us…”

“Just try leaving him. It won’t happen,” Charon scoffed, patting the dog’s head.

Carol, Tulip, and Butch were waiting at the entrance for them.

Giving them each one last hug, Carol passed Charon several lunchboxes, “For the trip.”

“I’m sorry…for thinking so poorly of you for all these years, Charon.”

Tulip nodded, passing Percy all the spare ammo, bobby pins, and duct tape she had.

Butch passed her a straight razor and a pair of freshly sharpened scissors. “Fix that mop next chance you get, Springtime.” He laughed nervously. The statement hung in the air before he held out his hand.

Percy smiled, giving it a strong shake. “Only if you promise to go easy on the hair gel; how do you even wear a helmet over that?”

Cross was waiting for them outside, looking calm despite the turmoil shaking her entire being.

“Shouldn’t you leave the dog here?”

Shrugging, Percy set a strong pace for the north east. “Apparently that’s impossible. Are you coming?”

“Of course…”

“Are you sure this is the spot?” Cross asked doubtfully.

The White House plaza was completely empty aside from the usual rusted car or barricade, hinting at an impromptu battleground of two hundred years prior.

“Well, the White House was bombed to hell, and the sewer system here leads to the private subway. Seems to be hidden in plain sight, but we should still look out for some security,” Percy replied, showing a scan of the nearby area to the paladin.
Charon caught Rex as he jumped down to follow them. To call it a sewer would have been incredibly misleading as they soon found out. It maintained the illusion for all of about twenty feet before they found a door leading through several concrete walls lined with wires and tubes. All they could do in the eerily quiet halls was follow the tiny glowing tick mark on Percy’s map. Tightening the grip on his shotgun Charon kept his eyes peeled for the glow of an Enclave helmet.

It was too quiet…

They came to an unmarked door, not even at the end of a hall, but simply there, off to the side.

“I’ll scout ahead; if there’s Enclave on the other side, we should take them out quietly, or find a way to sneak past.”

“Be careful,” Cross warned, but was met with a raised eyebrow. Choosing not to say anything to that, Percy activated a stealth-boy, wincing as she jammed it into her hip.

The rooms behind that door were far fancier than any subway checkpoint Percy had seen before, with bronze statues of forefathers and polished wood floors.

‘Nearly completely untouched…’ Percy hugged the walls, peaking around the corner. Robots stomped about, chattering about a breach in security, but she was sure they weren’t referring to her.

‘Too many to deactivate...maybe there’s a terminal.’

After many close calls with the sentry bots patrolling the tunnels, Percy came to a small room lined with computers. She rubbed the dust off the center console. A gold plaque read, ‘M.A.R.Go.T’ in black bolded letters. The exit on the other side of the room was locked. Shutting the door she had come through, Percy felt the stealth-boy fade out and all the cameras immediately turned to her.

“Hello.”

A female voice came through the foam and mesh speaker at the top of the center console.

Hesitantly, Percy stepped up to the intercom looking microphone sticking out of the counter of the console. Pressing the talk button, she said, “Um…hello? May I ask who this is?”

“I’m sorry,” the voice took on a tired tone, but it was clearly A.I and not a person on the other end, “but due to a major breach in security, unauthorized personnel are not allowed past this point. Prepare for a security check.”

Percy felt something vibrate across her skin while the computer made a low humming noise.

“Identification of local access user failed. Please identify yourself.”

The console didn’t look familiar, but she recognized a few keys on the interface that matched ones on the vault overseer’s personal terminal. Tapping two and holding three others down in rapid succession before speaking again into the intercom, Percy leaned closer to the microphone.

“Override security parameters,” she stated clearly. “Assign current user highest clearance.”

“Stand by…Override accepted. Clearance assigned. How may I assist you?”

Percy sighed in relief. “What’s this about a security breach? Are there Enclave soldiers on the other side of that door?”

“Term: ‘Enclave’ not found in my memory array associated with any Commonwealth or world
power faction.”

“Then what is causing the security breach?”

“Numerous unidentified persons in the southeast tunnels area have destroyed metro equipment and have refused dialogue with security. Anti-riot statute A567-slash-B has authorized the use of deadly force to neutralize.”

“I need more information on these persons,” Percy said, growing tired. She hated robots, and A.I. made her uneasy.

“Apologies, my equipment must be defective. My sensors indicate high levels of radiation and inordinate amounts of body heat. Would you like to fill out a work order?”

“Negative. Is the line to Adams Air Force base still clear? Does the subway still work?”

“One of the unidentified persons has ripped out a main fuse line, and the tunnel has been sealed for safety until power can be restored. Until the security breach is resolved, I strongly advise against repairing or turning the breaker box back on.”

“Thank you for the information. I can resolve the issue, but I need your security units to not turn hostile against me and my party. They include another woman, a dog, and one man similar to the unidentified persons. He is very tall and has lower levels of radiation. Can you do that?”

“Affirmative. You have been marked as friendly and any persons travelling with you shall not be met with hostility. Please bring them here so I can confirm them in my systems.”

Charon let out a sigh of relief when Percy finally stepped through the door. Images of her being taken away by the Enclave again had intruded into his thoughts ever since she had gone ahead to scout.

“Good news, no Enclave, and the security systems will let us through. The bad news is that the Subway system is down, thanks to some ferals. We need to clear them out before I can take a look at the damage, but I might be able to get the car up and running and save us a lot of time.”

Cross felt more than a little uneasy that she would have to fight ghouls without her power armor. She didn’t buy into the idea that ghouls could turn people with a bite like many other Brotherhood members did, but there was always that fear itching at the back of her head of ‘what if?’

A pack of ferals was an understatement; there were three reavers and two glowing ones, and no amount of Rad-X could take away the nausea as Cross collapsed against the wall, watching Percy work on the subway’s breaker box as she felt the Radaway burn in her veins. Charon and Rex had gone off to pick off the last of the ghouls and blast closed the openings they had come through.

Her thoughts were drawn to Sarah as she tried to keep from vomiting. “I hope she’s okay…”

“Even if she is, do you really think she’s safe in the Brotherhood if she wakes up? From what I’ve heard, they aren’t too keen on couples who can’t procreate,” Percy said bitterly. “You should be thankful that you can actually go home—if we even survive this. Charon, Rex and I can never go home. We didn’t even get to say goodbye to most of our friends. We can’t even return to Megaton for keepsakes or extra clothes.”
Her muscles tensed and her jaw grew tight as she continued, the words poured out of her mouth and Percy couldn’t stop them.

“I have no idea if the Enclave attacked my vault. I can’t even visit the place where my father died—I haven’t seen the Purifier since Charon started it! I’ve lost every home I’ve ever known, and it’s your fault!”

A flash of pain squeezed at her heart, and Cross’s face grew flushed with anger.

“How can you possibly blame me for the Elder’s decision? I was sent on this suicide mission too!”

“I finished my father’s work, I owe you nothing! You could have just let us leave. You could have gone back saying we died, then maybe they would have sent you with proper backup. I thought I lost everything because of the Enclave, then your people took what little else I had.”

“At least you have Charon, do you think I’ll ever get to see Sarah after this? After all these years my paladin-ship means nothing.” She sighed, trying to calm herself. “Elder Lyons will do everything in his power to keep us apart. If this mission doesn’t kill me, another one will.”

“Then why stay?” they both jumped as Charon spoke up. Aside from being covered in blood and dust, he and Rex were unharmed.

“I told you the Brotherhood would hunt you down if you tried to run from this mission; the same goes for me. And…I can’t leave Sarah—I won’t. Even if they try to keep me away from her,” she said with determination.

“Then here’s a proposition.” Charon’s voice grew dangerously low. “If we survive the mission, you will let us go.”

“I told you, I can’t.”

Charon kneeled before her. “You can, if you ever want to see Sarah again. Make no mistake: if it comes down to your life, or our freedom…I will never be a slave again. Nor will I allow that to happen to Percy.”

Her blood ran cold. He wasn’t lying. He was completely serious. She looked to Percy, but he had turned away, focusing on the breaker which had just sparked to life, lighting up the tunnel and powering the subway car.

They said nothing on the ride, despite how exhilarating it was for all of them. Neither Cross nor Percy had ever experienced something so fast in their lives, and Charon hadn’t in centuries.

If the subway station in Washington was clean, then the one in Adams was pristine.

Charon put his ear against the door at the far end of the hall. Two soldiers and an officer by the sound of it. He motioned for the others to activate their stealth-boys. Rex stiffened as Percy pressed one into his side, rubbing him reassuringly.

“Who’s a good boy? Yeah…good boy…” she whispered.

Cross and Charon snuck up behind the two soldiers, waiting for Percy’s signal.

Fluidly, she wrapped her arm around the officer’s neck, holding her gun up to the woman’s head.
“Now!”

The three flicked back into the visual plane, Charon and Cross wrenching the cores out of the power armor, immobilizing the people inside.

“What the hell?!?” the officer exclaimed before being thrown against the wall.

“Take off your clothes—now!” Percy commanded, cocking her hammer when they hesitated.

As she did this, the other two pulled the soldiers’ helmets off, slitting their throats before pulling them out of the power armor.

“Hurry the fuck up!” Percy screamed at the blubbering officer, who was shivering in her underwear. She kicked the clothes Percy’s way, turning white when she looked over to her dead guards.

“Now, if you want to get out of here alive, tell me what’s ahead of us.”

“Why should I tell you?” she screamed incredulously.

Percy smirked, flourishing her gun as she struck a pose.

“Don’t you recognize me? Paragon of the wastes, Persephone Carter, at your service. Surely you saw me at Raven Rock?”

The woman grew nervous. “…So? What’s your point?”

Percy strode closer, the others climbing into the now emptied armor. These sets were far more advanced than the Brotherhood issue. The limbs and torso were adjustable so Charon was able to fit in his without a problem.

“My point is, that I was tortured by Colonel Autumn for a long time. In many and creative ways, I might add. And I took some notes. Want me to show you what I learned? Or would you like to get out of here the way we came? All you have to do is betray your people; not so hard, right?”

“The Enclave base is covered in soldiers, and vertibirds scout the sky,” she said hurriedly. “The Mobile Base Crawler is where we keep the deathclaw labs, and above that is the control hub of all the Enclave’s operations.”

“Surely it wouldn’t be so easy to access such an important place. Come on, don’t lie.”

“I—I’m not lying.”

“What’s your name?” Percy asked, moving even closer.


Percy struck her across the face with the butt of her gun, and the officer fell to the ground with a shriek. Cross looked away, not having the stomach for torture.

“Come on, Jennifer, don’t lie to me…” Her voice didn’t even waver as Percy looked down at her with contempt. “Tell me the truth.”

“The Convo tower!” she screamed, as Percy raised her gun again for another blow. “You need to get up there to lower the ramp!”

“And what about the satellite uplink terminal; is it in the Base Crawler?”
Realization dawned on Jennifer’s face. “You…you don’t mean?”

“That shouldn’t matter to an ex-pat like you, huh?”

She gulped. “Yes…it’s there at the very top.”

Percy’s face relaxed but her eyes didn’t. “Thanks, Jenn’. One more thing: could you move over to that wall over there?” She motioned with her gun.

“Why?” she asked, but obeyed.

“So your blood doesn’t get on my new uniform.” And she pulled the trigger.

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Cross was on red alert as they walked through the base in plain, if not well disguised, sight. She was thoroughly shaken by Percy’s actions, and doubted now more than ever that Percy might even try to stop Charon from fulfilling his promise against her mortality. The Enclave members surrounding and passing them gave barely a look to the three, not seeing the dog who crept quietly behind them, cloaked in stealth. What looks they were given were mostly due to the choppy hair stuffed into Percy’s hat.

“Make sure to flank me, don’t get too close,” she muttered under her breath, mostly to Charon.

As they neared the Convo tower, someone shouted at Percy, “Officer! What the hell are you doing?”

Percy stiffened, turning to the man striding toward her. He looked at her nametag, then down at his clipboard.

“Officer…Johnson. Your shift isn’t due to end for another hour, what are you doing away from your post?”

“I’ve been feeling under the weather, sir,” she said, thinking fast and coughing into her arm. She saw out of the corner of her eye, the glimmer of Rex creeping behind him. “I was able to get the next guy to cover the last bit of my shift.”

“Oh? And what was this kind hearted officer’s name? And why were your guards allowed to end their shifts with you?”

Percy began to panic, until she felt Rex’s nose tap against the back of her thigh…in a very distinct pattern.

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“Ummm…I don’t know him personally, but I think his name was Jacobs? And I was feeling faint, sir. My guards here offered to walk me to my room. Surely the turrets can handle things while they are gone?”

The higher-up seemed content with her answer, but looked to Charon and Cross for confirmation.

“That’s correct, sir,” Cross said, keeping her voice steady. Charon nodded.

“…Everything seems to be in order. Get some rest, soldier.” And he walked away.
It took all of ten minutes to hack the tower’s computer. Charon huffed in quiet relief as he saw the ramp lower, just as Jennifer had said. “We should hurry before someone detains us again,” he said.

“Rushing will make us look even more suspicious,” Percy reminded him.

When they got in, Cross noticed force field barriers, but luckily none of them were up.

‘They weren’t even expecting us…’

She took a good look at the scientists and workers they passed. They were all haggard, with deep circles under their eyes. Hair unkempt, uniforms wrinkled from over use with stains in the armpits. These people were beaten and broken, and yet continued to fight.

‘Fighting to their death.’

She suppressed a shiver, and her fingertips grew cold.

Percy was more focused on the insignia on each uniform. The control tower would likely be reserved only for high clearance members. She spied an older woman with five stripes on her arm—the highest number Percy had seen in this place. She motioned Charon, Rex, and Cross to hold back.

Walking up to the general, Percy gave a weak smile, hunching her shoulders and looking sheepish.

“Ma’am? I need your help with a terminal? It’s denying me clearance and I think the keyboard is broken or something.”

She looked Percy up and down, and Percy felt something in the woman’s eyes and formed a new idea.

“Shouldn’t you be asking maintenance for that?”

Percy forced herself to blush, looking at the floor as she stepped closer, her voice taking on a sultry tone. “Actually…I was hoping you could help me…” She threaded her fingers in an act of nervousness. “I know you probably don’t know me…but I’ve always admired you…”

The general’s breath caught but Percy felt her hand wander along her inner thigh, creeping up slowly to where her legs met.

“Storage closet. Now.”

Percy gasped as she was pushed roughly against shelves by the older woman. She wasn’t much shorter than the general, but she was urgent and excited for the pretty little officer who had so boldly propositioned her. She crushed her lips against Percy’s, tongue invading her mouth as a knee forced her legs open. Percy moaned despite herself—this one knew how to get a woman going! But her hands fumbled against the shelves, searching for a clean and quiet way to dispose of her. Percy smiled against the kiss as her hand closed around a familiar syringe. Getting louder with her gasps and groans, the woman’s fingers rubbed fervently against her clit through her underwear.

“Oh Mara!…” she keened, having read her nametag earlier. Shrieking in one last bit of distraction, Percy jabbed the Med-X into her neck, and the general collapsed. Percy pulled five more from the shelf, injecting them into the woman’s heart, and for the first time during this mission, wincing at what had to be done. She would have died soon, anyway.
“I’m sorry…” she choked out before clearing her throat and fixing her hair. Finding the pass card in the general’s pocket was quick work, and Percy exited the closet to immediately run into a soldier in full power armor on the other side.

“Did you get what you wanted?” Charon asked in a clipped tone, his voice muffled and metallic but still ghoulishly rough.

She held up the card. “You done? Because if you are, we have a nation to murder.”

Cross shushed them, “Enough, we need to finish this already.” But she was beginning to feel more like their hostage than their back-up.

“She’s right,” Charon said through gritted teeth, trying to remind himself that Percy was an extremely convincing actress, and that’s all there was to it.

After climbing up several flights of stairs, they arrived at the door at the very top of the satellite control tower. Percy readied two pulse grenades. They had activated more stealth-boys for this one. Even with their disguises, this was too conspicuous.

“Time to give them a taste of their own medicine. I need y’all to slam this door shut as soon as the grenades are through.”

Charon and Cross nodded, getting to position on either side of the door. Percy knocked on it, hoping that whoever was inside might move closer into range. The door slid open and she threw the grenades into a room of five surprised officers.

“Close it close it!” she hissed, backing away despite herself. The door slammed closed and they could hear the pulse grenades go off with a muffled flash. Cross looked around, but there had been no one nearby to notice. Reopening the door and stepping through, Charon went to check for cameras while Cross looked over the bodies and moved them to a corner. Percy cursed; the grenades had reset the entire system; they were locked out and the encryption was complicated.

“Charon, barricade the doors!” Sirens went off in the distance as Percy tried to hack the terminal.

‘Civilization? No…extemporized?’

Charon got to work on the door with a laser rifle, Cross went to check on Percy’s progress just as she managed to break through. Her fingers hovered over the ENTER key.

Turning to Cross, she asked, “This is genocide. Are you sure you want me to do this?”

Cross could hear Enclave soldiers in the distance. “We can’t hesitate, Percy! War is hell, but the wasteland can only heal after the Enclave is destroyed! Besides…orders are orders.”

At this, Percy backed away. “Fine…you do it then. If the Brotherhood wants to destroy thousands of people in an instant, than a Brotherhood member should be the one to do it. Besides, I’m done doing your dirty work.”

Cross grew still. The blinking lights of the computer taunting her, daring her. But she shook her head. This was no time for hesitation.

*Adams AFB Platform targeted. Fire payload.*

She knew this was right…that this needed to happen, but that didn’t stop the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.
“We have one minute to clear out of here. Let’s go!”

The only other door led out to the Vertibird landing pad, but it’s not like they had any options.

Instinct took over as Charon heard explosions on the other side of the door. Grabbing Rex and Percy around the waist, he made for the only exit they had. Cross followed after them, her entire body vibrating as the fight or flight instincts warred inside her.

They were met with Enclave soldiers surrounding the door, weapons raised. Rex whimpered, struggling free of Charon’s hold. Clattering to the ground, he bared his teeth, snarling viciously at those who would endanger his family.

They were out gunned and outmatched. They couldn’t fight their way out and escape the barrage of nukes headed towards them in time. Percy wiggled in Charon’s arms until she could wrap her arms around his neck.

She might not have chosen how she would die, but who could? She might not go home, or see Gob or Nova or Carol or Greta or Butch or anyone else again, but…She could control one last thing before she died. She didn’t want some stranger to be the last person she kissed.

Her lips crashed against Charon’s, and he pulled her close, brow furrowed in concentration on this last sensation.

He loved her, oh God, he loved her. She was the reason he breathed and fought and survived. To hell with the Brotherhood and the Enclave, the Great War, and the woman who made him this way. It was the woman there in his arms who had remade and reformed him—who made him fight to be worth her affection. If he had to die, he could think of worse ways.

One being that he could die without her.

He closed his eyes, and waited for the Bombs to take them.

“Stand back! I’m warning you!” Wielding the Tesla cannon that had been useless up to this point, Paladin Cross stood her ground. She refused to give up, not after all this.

The shriek of a laser streaked through the air, and Percy braced for it…but nothing happened. She opened her eyes to find herself and Charon covered in ash. Only their mouths and some cheek was left clean.

Her head whipped around to find ash three inches thick around them and whipping up with the wind. On her knees, Cross stared in shock and relief at a vertibird with the Brotherhood insignia land before them.

“What are you waiting for? Come on!” Sarah Lyons, awake and anxiously waving, called to them. “Hurry, before those nukes get us, too!”

“Sorry I’m late…It was a full day after I woke up that my father even told me you left.” Sarah said over the rumble of the Vertibirds blades. “I was told you were sent on a stealth mission, but I knew you would need a way out so…here I am.” She turned to Cross by her side.

“And…I was worried…I wish you were there when I woke up.”
Cross warmed, tension leaving her body as the blond pressed a kiss into her neck.

“I wanted to stay, believe me I did…”

“But orders are orders.” Sarah finished for her, understanding.

Looking to Charon, Percy, and Rex, who was stretching to curl around both their legs, Sarah smiled wearily but wasn’t sure what to say to them; they didn’t look at her, both staring out at the base as nukes rained from space.

“It’s a shame…Cross tells me that those were the last nukes available on the satellite. Unless we find a way to fly into space, it looks like the Brotherhood can’t utilize the craft as a weapon against future enemies.” Percy stiffened, gripping Charon’s arm tightly as she tried to ignore Sarah.

“But at least it’s technically still under Brotherhood control, even if we can’t use it. I would hate for it to be in the wrong hands.” Sarah continued.

“Put us down here.”

“What? We barely cleared the base.”

“Put us down now!” Percy screamed angrily.

Sarah pulled a cord by her head, signaling to the pilot.

Percy jumped out of the Vertibird as soon as it landed, Sarah hot on her tail.

“What the hell is going on? My Father wants us back by morning—there is so much more to be done, the Brotherhood needs you!”

Cross tried to hold her back, but Sarah was still in power armor, and didn’t even feel the resistance. Charon wordlessly grabbed their packs and what little provisions available in the vertibird while the rest were distracted.

“Why?! Why does the Brotherhood need me? I’ve fought and killed for you! My father died for you —I died for you!” Percy threw up her hands in rage, stalking back towards Sarah.

“What are you talking about?” she asked, angry but confused.

Percy looked down, clenching her fists in frustration. “Ask your dad. We are leaving.”

When she turned, Sarah couldn’t help but make one last comment.

“I can’t believe you’re abandoning the Brotherhood when we need you the most—”

Without a helmet, there was nothing to stop her face from being forced to the side by Percy’s slap, the sound ringing in the air.

“I owe you nothing. Goodbye, Sarah.”

Cross kept Sarah from pursuing them further, and after a few minutes, Charon heard them fly back to the Capital.

After an hour of travelling in fuming silence, Percy stopped at the top of a hill, waiting for Charon and Rex to join her as she squinting into the sunset. It didn’t seem quite real; everything had happened so fast…
The sky was no different, the plains of charred earth and dead trees were the same. The sun was unconcerned with the struggles of the people of the wasteland, neither was the moon or the stars. Everything was the same out there.

Charon noticed the tears streaming down her otherwise composed face. He pointed in the distance to a house covered in raider graffiti.

"I imagine they cleared out long ago when the Enclave came. They won't need whatever they left behind."

He headed in that direction without another word, knowing Percy would follow him eventually.

A nation. They had destroyed a nation with barely a thought.

Percy shook her head in disbelief, and for the first time since she left the vault, the excommunicated chaplain crossed herself.

The redeemed exile sighed as the wind cooled the sweat on her brow.

The dead paragon followed after her pre-war warrior, and her post-war dog.

And Percy left the Capital Wasteland. Forever.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end!
I have many other stories in the works for the "Pre-War Tobacco" series, hopefully I haven't turned y'all off my writing with this less than fairy tale ending ^_^;

End Notes

You can also find this work at: https://www.fanfiction.net/u/6747265/Victorygin, And I have a Tumblr page devoted to posting updates and information, http://victoryygin.tumblr.com/

Please comment and tell me what you think of the story so far; I'd really love to hear from all of you!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!