And Where You Live

by Themistoklis

Summary

After the events of the movie, Audrey and Seymour just want to get back to their lives. But the appearance of more plants across the country is too hard to ignore.

Notes

Inspired by Missy's request and the song Don't Feed the Plants. It has a line about Audrey II's race of aliens attacking various cities, including "where you live."

Missy, I hope you enjoy it.

What Audrey remembered most about leaving the city for the first time is the pat-pat, pat-pat of her heart against her ribs. It thrummed in her eardrums and her wrists. When she looked down at the front of her gown she expected to see her heart's outline against the fabric.

Seymour clasped her hand as tightly as ever while they banked sharply onto the highway entrance ramp.

Then the car rumbled and they had to let go of each other so Audrey could grasp the steering wheel with all ten fingers. Seymour had taught her to drive on small town roads, not race down empty rivers of pavement. It wasn't the first time she'd sped across the wide, six-lane roads, and it definitely wouldn't be the last, but she still wasn't used to it.
Audrey watched the city fade in the rearview mirror and whispered *Good riddance.* She couldn't hear herself, but at her left Seymour smiled like he had. Even now he could smile. Even now, he understood.

Yes -- she remembered leaving the city in her wedding dress, her heart pulsing through her from head to toe.

So it was fitting that during this second escape, her heart pounded so loudly she couldn't make out the sound of her own voice or the engine rattling the car around them.

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The proposal hadn't come on bended knee, but it had come. Words Audrey had only heard on television and seen in slim dog-eared paperbacks bought from secondhand shops at fifty cents a piece. Words Seymour had given freely. To her.

She'd known just where to get the dress.

The walk to work at Mushnik's took as long as a wait for a break in traffic, but Audrey hadn't always worked at Mushnik's. In her previous … ah … occupation … she had needed quite a few clothes on a regular basis. Those weren't the kinds of socks she could pick up at the dollar store. Skirts from the thrift shops weren't enough either. So she had ended up taking the bus out deeper into town to find other places to shop.

Some of them carried mockeries of wedding gowns. Audrey shuddered to think of them when the bus passed those shops. Tiny veils to cover the hips, white pasties to stick to the skin.

No, that wasn't where she needed to go. She leaned up against the window and watched the bus's progress eagerly. She'd never gotten off at this stop before, but she knew when to hit the button to request the bus pull over. This was a place she had only seen through the cracked and dirty window since her first glimpse of it.

The window was small, but clean. There was only one dressmaker's dummy in the display. It had on a faded white dress with yellowed lace sewn around the bottom of the skirt.

That dress wasn't the one Audrey wanted. She needed something new. With the business the florist's had been doing, she had the money, too. It was packed away in her purse, done up with a rubber band to keep it all together.

Audrey told the sales girl that she needs one off the rack, as soon as possible, and after an evaluating look she was directed to a changing room in the corner of the store. Then she sat there, alone, while the girl went back to bring out a selection.

She clutched her hands together until her knuckles ached. The store smelled like baby's breath. The only decorations, though, were beautiful photographs hung on the walls -- all of brides. Brides at the altar, brides eating cake, brides dancing, brides running through showers of flower petals and rice.

City hall won't have all of that. She has no family to invite, no father to dance with. It could be worse. Audrey knows she can get a good bouquet. She'll make it herself and press the flowers afterward.

And she would have the dress.

The first to catch her eye was at the back of a stack of five the sales girl brought out on one arm. Audrey's heart sped up when she saw the skirt: wonderful, plain satin, with a full crinoline
underneath. There was no old lace and the white was so bright that the dress gleamed in the quiet light of the shop.

Even the shop girl laughed happily once Audrey had it on. It poofed out around her legs and the sleeves made her arms look long and elegant. The skirt twirled when she spun on her heel.

It was perfect.

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It was ripped and singed and stunk of smoke.

They didn't wait around for a fire engine or the police after the flower shop exploded.

They didn't even wait for a bus. Seymour clasped her hand and they ran all the way to a train station, which took them to the other end of the city. It was morning by then and they walked until they found a small lot where they could buy a car. Seymour had been keeping all his money on him, apparently. Mr. Mushnik had taught him not to place much trust in banks.

That surprised Audrey less than the fact that Seymour could drive. "Where did you learn?" she asked, folding down the visor in front of her seat. It had been so long since Audrey had been in a car that it all felt strange.

But looking into the visor wasn't to check her reflection so much as to watch the road behind them. She couldn't shake off the feeling of Two's vine snaking along the bare skin of her leg. She felt better when they pulled onto an exit and passed the city limits.

Her next breath was the easiest Audrey had ever taken. She had never been outside the city before, and now she was leaving it for good. With someone she could trust.

"I… I didn't, really," Seymour admitted, eyes glued to the road. His voice was shaky, but he kept them on a fairly straight path. "There was a broken-down sedan behind the shop for a few years. I used to sit in it and read the manual."

Audrey's eyes widened slightly and her lips parted. "This is the first time you've been in a working car?"

"No!" Seymour protested. "I borrowed one. To take the test." Now he sat up a little straighter. Audrey had seen him practicing better posture over the past few weeks. Good for him. "Mr. Mushnik talked to the grocer for me. I practiced the whole day before."

"Mr. Mushnik did that?" Audrey asked. She knew that Seymour had grown up there, with him, but she had always had the impression that Mr. Mushnik had never been the father type. Not that she would know the difference, but she read a lot, and watched television. She paid attention to families.

She had to learn about them, somehow.

"He was hoping I could make deliveries," Seymour admitted. His posture slumped back to normal. Audrey touched his shoulder for a moment, but he seemed to be fine. "But we never had the money to start it up."

The traffic started to thicken on the other side of the highway divider. Audrey watched all those people heading toward the city and wondered if they knew about the shop exploding. If anyone knew. If they'd think it was anything important or sad. She didn't hope that they would understand there was something horrible behind the smoke. After all, she had seen Two every day and never
suspected.

She rubbed her leg absently and smoothed out her skirt. The uppermost part, above her knees, was undamaged, at least. It still looked perfect if she kept her feet tucked in.

"You sure drive well, anyway," she said, smiling over at Seymour. Their side of the highway was nearly empty. They didn't have to slow to a crawl like anyone else. They were gaining distance from the city with every breath.

Seymour blinked and smiled at her, taking his eyes off the road. It was only long enough to glance at her, but that look kept Audrey warm through the rest of the ride.

They only stopped for food, bathroom breaks, and -- finally -- when the gas ran out. Seymour picked up a real estate brochure from the stands outside the gas station, and they flipped through it together, sharing a Coke.

The radio playing over the station's speakers shared a brief news bulletin that the famous Audrey II had been destroyed in an electrical fire.

It was so short, it was over before Audrey and Seymour could look up at each other.

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Audrey didn't touch the garden at the new house.

She was either in the house or at a neighbor's or shopping or at the park or, sometimes, when she could tell from Seymour's face that he was too tired to get in the car, she walked around the block, their hands clutched tight between them. But she did not spend time in their yard. Even to barbeque.

When Seymour mowed the lawn she watched him from the kitchen window over the sink. When he watered the flowers lining their front fence, she sat in the living room with her arm along the back of the couch.

The grass did not scare her. The flowers did not frighten her.

She was more afraid of what she'd do if she ever picked up another set of gardening scissors or, heaven forbid, a hedge clipper.

Audrey was afraid she would start hacking away and never stop.

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Seymour picked posies and marigolds for their yards. Nothing so exotic as a tulip to be seen on their property, let alone the bamboo or orchids he'd carefully kept cultivated in the basement of Mr. Mushnik's flower shop.

As far as he was concerned, he never wanted to buy a cutting of anything stranger than a sunflower ever again.

Grass was nice. He'd always found grass boring, before, but now it was wonderful. There was no way to sell grass out of the florist's and no one would have gone shopping for it there anyway. None of the empty lots around skid row had enough soil to give way to grass, either. The greenest shoots came from weeds sprouting up from cracks in the sidewalk.

Grass he'd seen in pictures. On TV, during the rare times he was at a store when something other
than the news was playing. Mostly he knew it from his botany books. He could name a few varieties, knew what regions they were most likely to grow in. He knew that in Las Vegas the city encouraged people to use pebbles on their lawn instead of plants, to save water, and if he'd lived there he thought he would like that.

The grass in his yard was plain and green. That suited Seymour. He scattered it with feed and set up a sprinkler once a week if it hadn't rained. Before sunset he walked the yard and pulled up any dandelions he saw.

There was a community center nearby that put up ads at the grocery store. Audrey brought one home. She wanted to learn to cook: TV dinners were nice but there were only so many flavors. Seymour had driven her to the school for her first class and gotten recognized for the first time since they arrived in town.

It'd made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

But he'd talked his way around the "strange loss" of Audrey II and, somehow, was registered to teach a introduction-to-gardening class by the time Audrey returned to the lobby with a plate of muffins.

Seymour only had to take a few photos with his students. He taught them how to de-thorn a rose and keep their lawns looking healthy enough for neighborhood associations. At week four they took home tiny crocuses planted in Styrofoam cups.

Seymour put the cash he'd hoarded as Audrey II rose to fame in his very first bank account. Audrey progressed to making soufflés.

They bought two night stands and put them between their beds and the walls. They pushed the bed frames close enough together that when they laid down to sleep, Seymour could reach across and take Audrey's hand in his.

If either of them snored, the other didn't mention it.

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Seymour was fiddling with the radio, trying to find a good station to listen to over breakfast.

"Strange and unusual, strange and unusual. Where'd you say you found…"

He turned down the volume slightly when Audrey glanced at him. Standing at the stove, she opened the omelet pan and tipped the eggs onto Seymour's plate. "Here you go, Seymour. With Kraft cheese just like you like it," she said, grinning.

"Thanks, Audrey." He smiled up at her and patted down his hair before picking up a fork.

Audrey sat down across from him. "Do you have more classes today?" she asked, pouring herself a bowl of cereal.

"Just meeting with the Dean," Seymour said. "I want to plan a composting seminar for the fall, I think teaching people how to do it over the colder months will be really beneficial for some people."

"That sounds great, Seymour." Audrey smiled. She stirred some milk into her cereal. They had a cute table in the kitchen, round and white, and she had stitched a red border onto the table cloth after picking up a sewing kit at the drug store.
She looked around their kitchen for a moment and then smiled. "Did you ever imagine being a teacher, back when you were little?"

"You know, I never did," he said. "What did you want to be when you were a kid?"

"Oh," Audrey said. A faint pink blush rose to her cheeks. She hoped it didn't show underneath her makeup. "I wanted to be something classy. You know, like a ballerina, or one of those people who plays the piano at one of those fancy restaurants," she said. She laughed a little, which made Seymour smile too. "I wanted to play the piano and wear white gloves."

Seymour nodded. "Did you ever--"

"And you say you aren't calling it an Audrey II, or Audrey III, even though that's how the plant was originally registered. Why is that?"

Audrey gasped and dropped her spoon, the metal clattering against the side of her bowl. Seymour had frozen as soon as he heard the man on the radio say Audrey II's name. Audrey expected her heart to race, but it seemed to be skipping beats instead, letting quiet fall over the breakfast table. The radio nearly echoed in the sudden silence.

"Well, I'd heard about the other plant, um…"

"Audrey II."

Audrey let out a tiny squeak and covered her mouth with her hands. Seymour's hands were stuck holding a fork and knife above his omelet.

"Right, whatever. I'd heard about it but I didn't think -- this plant's mine, you know? And I didn't find it in a big patch of 'em. This one's special. The seeds must have been blown here to Maine on the wind."

Blinking back tears, Audrey struggled to think. What had the weather been like they day they'd left the city? The explosion had been big, and destroyed the store, but not… not really… there had been plenty of rubble left behind, and certainly nothing had been turned to ash… Oh, no.

"So what are you calling it?"

"Well, I'd like to introduce you to Jordon Jr. On account of, my last name's Jordan…"

"Jordan Jr., everybody! And oh, boy, I wish you were all here to see this beauty. I'll describe it some after the commercial break. Hey, it pays for the show do you don't have to!"

The men's voices gave way to tinny jingles. Seymour seemed to snap back into himself, shuddering violently before pushing back from the table. He pinched the dial to turn the radio off, like he was afraid it might crack if he touched it too hard. Then he turned to Audrey, his eyes wide.

She had no idea what to say.

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"Seymour, I don't think this is such a good idea." Audrey's hands gripped the steering wheel so hard her fingers were beginning to ache.

They hadn't even left the driveway yet. It seemed unnatural enough to be in a car -- behind the driver's seat, nonetheless -- and even more difficult to think about driving backwards. Driving was
for going forwards. She should’ve asked Seymour to turn the car around before they started this … this …

"I don't think I can do this," she blurted, looking over at him.

She was wearing her most practical pair of shoes, a pair of slacks, and a pink blouse. The sky was clear. It was mid-morning, so the streets were empty. Kids had caught the school bus, parents had left for work, and anyone going out for lunch or errands was still at home. But she couldn't make herself turn the key in the ignition. All she could imagine was barreling headlong into a tree or forgetting which pedal was the break or not remembering to buckle her seatbelt.

Seymour reached over and rubbed his hand against hers. "I know you can do it, Audrey. Who got that rush order for corsages for an entire prom done? You!" He smiled, lopsidedly, which would normally help Audrey relax but just made her stomach flutter nervously now. "You can do anything if you put your mind to it."

Audrey inhaled slowly, trying to clam down. "But why do I have to drive? We have the one car," she pointed out. "Why--"

"I was thinking, well… maybe we should both have a car." He scratched at the back of his head. "It might come in handy."

"You think so?" Audrey asked. She forced herself to let up on the steering wheel a little. How much force was she supposed to use to turn the thing, anyway? There had to be a way this could be positive. "I guess I could save you trips to the grocery store," she admitted.

Seymour cleared his throat. "And it could be useful in, um… in emergencies."

They looked at each other for a moment.

Then Audrey turned back to the steering wheel. "Okay," she said. She squared her shoulders. "Lots of people do this. How hard can it be?"

Still, it was probably going to be a while before she could take the test for her license.

"That's the spirit!" Seymour said. "Now, check the rearview mirror."

Audrey looked up. It was clear. "Check."

"Seatbelt?"

"Seatbelt!"

They got around to putting her foot on the gas pedal, and she squeaked forward several feet in the driveway. Audrey gasped, slammed on the break, and they both were pulled against their seatbelts. She reflexively braced herself for a scream or a curse, the instinct surging before she could really think about it.

"Maybe … we should practice shifting before we turn the car on," was all Seymour suggested.

"Good idea," Audrey said, gulping.

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Even though she was still too nervous to drive over 25 miles an hour, within a couple of months Audrey did manage to start to make trips on her own.
She didn't drive with the radio on like Seymour did. The idea of fiddling with it and getting honked at for taking too long to leave a stop sign made her too anxious. It was kind of boring to drive in silence, but at least it helped her concentrate. And most of the trips she made were short, anyway.

She spent a good chunk of a day picking up supplies for a late housewarming party and didn't even have to go back to the grocery store for forgetting the milk. With Seymour teaching two classes and Audrey done with her cooking course, she had started to get a bit lonely when she was by herself. The mailman had suggested she send cards to the neighbors and have a get-together with the other housewives. Luckily she had a copy of the neighborhood directory and could actually address the invitations by name.

It was fun to prep for a party that wouldn't involve spin-the-bottle or handcuffs. Audrey put pineapple rings in the punch and wrapped tiny cuts of hot dog in canned biscuit dough. The spread was just like what she would've wanted at parties as a kid.

People showed up in a steady stream about half past noon. Near one, when she expected no more knocks at the door, someone rang the doorbell.

A short woman with broad hips wearing the cutest pair of floral slacks Audrey had ever seen was in the doorway. She smiled broadly and gestured to a tall man next to her. "Hope you don't mind that I brought a guest."

"Of course not!" Audrey said, grinning. Oh, but he was going to be the only man here. Hopefully he wouldn’t be bored without Seymour around. "I'm Mrs. Seymour Krelborn. Nice to meet you," she said, holding out her hand. "You can call me Audrey."

"I'm Charity Simon," the woman said. There wasn't a ring on her dark hands, so Audrey wasn't surprised at her next statement. "This is my brother Jeremiah. He's renting a room with me while he's in school."

"I can see the resemblance," Audrey said. She stood aside and they both came in, Jeremiah looking around the crowded parlor curiously. "You live in the house with the robin's egg shutters, right?"

"That's right," Charity said. She pushed a curl away from her face. "I was happy to see somebody paint this fence for once. The last people never did."

"Thank you!" Painting the pickets had taken an enormous amount of time. Audrey puffed up a bit hearing that anybody but her and Seymour had noticed the difference it'd made. "Would you like some punch?"

She served both of them a cup of punch and they milled about by the picture window. Audrey had gotten a chance to introduce herself to everyone already, and a couple of other women joined them when Charity showed up. Jeremiah got pulled into a discussion in the corner about buying a grill for someone's husband's birthday.

It turned out Charity worked at the local news station. Audrey perked up at hearing that. "Oh, I've started watching the news now that we have a TV," she said. "I should watch your channel instead."

Charity grinned. "I'd appreciate that. I'm behind the camera, though. But you might see me if there's a breaking news event and multiple camera people."

"That sounds like a nice job. But it must be hard to plan your days."

"Oh, yeah, events always get delayed." Charity sipped her punch and leaned her weight on one leg. "So, I know you keep house. What does Mr. Seymour Krelborn do?"
"He teaches at the city college," Audrey said. She reminded herself not to preen. It wasn't what a polite hostess did.

Charity smiled. "Then maybe Jeremiah will take a class with him sometime."

"Did I hear my name?"

Audrey looked over to see Jeremiah walking toward them, leaving behind a gap in the crowd that had cornered him for their own conversation. She smiled a bit and nodded at him.

"Audrey was just saying her husband works at the city college."

"A Mr. Krelborn, right? What's he teach?" Jeremiah asked. He was so much taller than her that when he looked down, his glasses slipped along his nose slightly and he had to push them back into place.

"Gardening-type classes," Audrey said.

Jeremiah shook his head. "I'm studying weather science. To be a meteorologist. But maybe I'll end up taking an elective with him," he said. He snapped his fingers and grinned at them. "Hey, I heard some good gossip over there."

"Oh really?" Charity asked, raising her eyebrows. Audrey shifted her weight, not entirely sure if she should hear this. Did good neighbors gossip even in the suburbs? Then again, both of the Simons looked interested.

"You know that Jordan Jr. plant?" Jeremiah asked. Audrey tightened her grip on her own cup of punch and hoped that her makeup hid the blood draining from her face. "They found another one in Los Angeles and somewhere, uh… Peahen? Peabody?"

Charity guessed, "Peoria?"

"Peoria, that's it." Jeremiah shook his head. "Only they don't want to call theirs Jordan Jr's. One's a Maribel and one's a Rutherford or something ridiculous like that."

"Oh, that's…" Audrey whispered.

Next to her, Charity snorted. "As long as they're far away from here. I still think they're cursed." She looked over at Audrey. "The first one blew up, took everybody in the shop with it."

Jeremiah laughed. "Oh, yeah, sis. They probably just took their money and ran." He snapped his fingers again. "Audrey! Wow. Must've been weird to have your name pop up on the news, huh?"

Audrey nodded vaguely and sipped her punch as her heartbeat began to pound in her ears.

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"First you fell in love with Audrey II! You've been thrilled to meet Jordan Jr., Maribel, and Rutherford! Now hold onto your seats, folks, because KW-13 has an exclusive with the young talents who've discovered more fantastic examples of this brilliant, bizarre plant!

On Friday night, we're introducing you to three! new! arrivals!

Meet Sean from Cleveland! Hear all about the mysterious appearance of Angela from Des Moines! And last but certainly not least, a tiny little bud from Boston we've been told to call Audrey III!

Hear it all on KW-13, and nowhere else! We've got the story, so make sure to tune in on Friday!"
night!, or you’ll be out of the loop when Monday rolls around!"

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Seymour came home from work one night and parked in the driveway. After getting a box from the trunk, he went around the side of the house and crept quietly into the backyard. For a minute he watched the kitchen window to see if Audrey was there, but it was dark.

Eventually he decided it was safe, and tip-toed across the yard.

In the back corner were two small structures. There was a compost bin (a tiny one, for the flower beds, and an example to show in class). There was also a tool shed. It was just big enough to hold a shovel, the lawn mower, and a few assorted other things.

Seymour opened the lock on the shed and spent a few minutes picking around in the evening dimness for a hammer and nails. It took a little longer to put a handful of level nails in the wall, but when he was done, he put the hammer up and turned to the package he'd brought in from the car.

Since Audrey generally avoided the yard, Seymour had the feeling she wouldn't find what he'd bought. Not unless he told her to go look for it. Which, hopefully… wouldn't be necessary. He shook himself and took the lid off the package.

It had taken him a while to actually make the purchase. But back in the city, the gun had been worthless. It had done him absolutely no good in that last confrontation.

When Seymour relocked the shed door, there were two new sharp, shining axes hanging from nails in the wall.

He'd be prepared to use them next time … if there was a next time.

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Audrey was alone in the house when Charity's station interrupted a game show for a breaking news segment. She looked up from a pair of pants she'd been hemming for Seymour and bit her bottom lip.

A man Audrey recognized from the evening news segments Charity normally worked on appeared on-screen. His face was drawn and he was sitting at the anchor desk instead of walking the street as he usually did. For a moment he didn't speak, and Audrey wondered if something had broken at the studio, or if they hadn't meant to be on the air.

Then he looked to the left and nodded. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make."

In the corner of the screen, a picture of a skyscraper appeared, with a shadow wrapped around it. "An appalling, shocking disaster has struck the city of Portland, Maine. We're receiving news from the Associated Press as the situation unfolds."

Audrey stared at it for the first several sentences of the newsman's speech before her brain clicked into place and she recognized what it was.

"I … I don't know how to classify this, folks. I assure you, as much as I wish it was, this is not a prank. I repeat: this is not a prank. It is all too real."

The shadow. It was one of those … one of those … \textit{plants}.

Its vines were wrapped around the building and its mouth was opened wide. The closer Audrey
looked, the more destruction she saw around the base. The sidewalk was torn up and there was smoke coming from somewhere. There were no people in the photo. Plenty of shattered glass. The skyscraper was missing a good portion of its windows. She tried to imagine why there wasn't video instead of a photo, and shuddered.

"Emergency services received a flood of calls just over two hours ago. The switchboards have now been overrun. The police commissioner has informed the Associated Press that he's placed a call to the governor, and we're currently awaiting word as to whether the national guard will be called in before the day is over…"

Jordan Jr. was as tall as a skyscraper.

The newscaster pinched the bridge of his nose and slowly folded his hands on top of the anchor desk. "The damage is contained to the immediate area surrounding the square. It's the site of the exhibition space rented out by Mr. Thomas Jordan, the owner of the plant known as 'Jordan Jr.,' a successor of the…"

Audrey's heart threatened to leap from her chest.

She got up and went to the kitchen without turning the television off. And, for the first time, she called Seymour at work.

He cancelled the rest of his classes.

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Seymour and Audrey sat in the middle of the couch, holding hands and staring blankly out the picture window.

The television was still running, but he didn't want to let go of Audrey's hand to turn it off. He thought that neither of them was really listening to it, anyway. Thankfully there was no live video. Apparently it wasn't safe for a camera crew to get any closer. Every once in a while the picture in the corner of the screen would change, like a slow-motion flipbook about the destruction of a city.

"Eventually someone will think to set it on fire," Seymour finally said. "Or electrocute it."

Before finding out there were more plants out there, Seymour had still cringed at the thought that he'd killed two people. Well. Three. Well. Two. Well. None? One? He couldn't bring himself to talk to Audrey about any of it, and imagined she wouldn't want to in the first place. It was at least partially his fault that Orin and Mr. Mushnik were dead.

He had to keep reminding himself that Audrey II had never really been his friend. And that even though the plant seemed to be able to feel things, killing it… killing it had been the right thing to do.

It felt like there were rocks piling up in his stomach.

"The national guard is trained well, aren't they?" Audrey asked, still staring out the window.

Seymour squeezed her hand. "Sure they are. They, uh…” His voice trailed off. He thought that someone from the military or national guard had tried to recruit people at school once, but he thought he remembered getting locked out of the auditorium during that assembly. Either that, or in a locker. It was hard to keep straight.

After a moment passed in silence, Audrey said, "I wonder what they'll do to the others." She glanced down at him. "I mean, the other… will they do something now or wait until…”
"Until a giant man-eating plant is rampaging down main street?" Seymour blurted. Audrey winced and he hunched his shoulders. He squeezed her hand again. "Well, at least we know there's none near us," he said, trying to put a smile on his face.

The doorbell rang and both of them nearly leapt a foot into the air.

"Who's t-that?" Seymour stammered.

Audrey opened and shut her mouth. Then her eyes got wide. "Oh no! Charity was coming for tea. I forgot." She rocked onto her feet and then faltered, staring at the television.

A knock came at the door a moment later and she rushed over to answer it. "Charity! And, oh, Jeremiah! I'm sorry -- I was … we were…"

"Watching the news?"

It was an unfamiliar voice, but female, so Seymour figured it must be Charity. He hadn't gotten a chance to meet her yet. Audrey had been inviting people over for dinner so that he'd be home to see them, but since Charity often worked evenings they hadn't run into each other yet. He saw Audrey leading them in and got up to turn the television off.

"Wait! Leave it on for a second? I haven't checked it today." A tall, skinny guy with darker brown skin than Charity edged ahead of the group to peer down at the TV. Seymour assumed he must be Jeremiah. "Is it still only Portland?"

"So far," Seymour said. He caught a glimpse from Audrey and stood up, trying to surreptitiously pat his hand on his pant leg in case it was sweaty. Then he held his hand out and shook with both of the siblings. "Hi, I'm Seymour. I … uh, a bunch of people are cancelling classes with the news, so…"

Jeremiah nodded and pushed his glasses back into place. "Yeah, I called to check and mine were cancelled today too."

"This is all just nuts," Charity proclaimed. "They should evacuate and bomb the place."

Both Seymour and Audrey looked at each other at the same moment. He couldn't read her expression, but the ache in his gut didn't get any worse at the thought of destroying a few empty city blocks if it meant there'd be no more deaths after.

"But what about the other cities?" Jeremiah asked. He looked at Audrey and she gestured for him to sit down on a chair. Charity followed Audrey to the kitchen while Seymour sat opposite of Jeremiah. "I mean, what if the people who own the other plants go into hiding? Or what if they're dead and the plants are in hiding themselves?" He frowned. "Could they do that… they seem to be able to move around, so…"

Seymour wrung his hands together. "I don't know if they could hide when they got that big," he said. Audrey II had grown fast, but how much would it have needed to eat to get as big as Jordan Jr. was now?

Audrey came back in the room with Charity, each of them holding two tall glasses of tea to pass out among them all. The women sat down on the couch and Charity frowned at the coverage currently on the screen.

"It doesn't help anybody to have a bunch of 'breaking news' that doesn't have any info. People are going to get hysterical. They should just put the regular programs back on," she said. She sipped her tea and sighed. "I'm sure that's all we'll be covering at work this evening."
"But Portland is so far away," Audrey said, looking up from her tea. "How long could the local news talk about it?"

Charity put an arm on the couch and crossed her legs at the ankle. "Well, there's the one in Boston, the, uh…"

"The Audrey III," Jeremiah said.

Seymour gulped. "Is Boston that close?"

"Oh, yeah," Jeremiah said. When he saw the looks on everyone else's faces he grinned a little sheepishly. "I mean, not close enough for us to see a giant plant trying to eat buildings downtown, but … it wouldn't take too long to get there."

They all took a moment to contemplate that. Seymour hadn't really paid attention to where the plants were. He had been hoping, almost feverishly, that their owners would be gutsier than him. That they'd kill the plants before they killed anyone else.

Seymour had to resist the urge to press a hand against his stomach. He wondered if anyone else had found bodies partly by accident, or if…

"The one in Boston is a baby compared to the others," Jeremiah added. He fidgeted, like he thought the silence had been hanging for too long. "We're going to be safe. "Don't worry about it."

Charity let out a big sigh. "It's a good thing you're not studying to be a therapist, little brother."

---

That night, Audrey triple-checked that the doors and windows were locked before settling down to sleep. She turned onto her side so she could reach out and hold Seymour's hand over the small gap between their beds.

"Are you all right?" Seymour asked.

"Oh, sure," Audrey said. Then she sighed. "Not really."

Outside, wind rushed past the house. It made a strange whistling sound against the glass. Seymour sometimes thought about planting trees in the yard, and listening to the leaves rustling. Now that seemed like such a tiny, insignificant thing to be considering.

"We're far enough away from the city," Seymour said. He didn't know if that was true, but it seemed to be a decided-upon statement. The evening news had kept repeating it. "We'll be safe."

"But, oh, Seymour. That riot in Los Angeles…" Audrey blinked rapidly and dabbed at her eyes.

"At least the plant is dead," Seymour said. He smiled a little but it ended up coming out lopsided and weak.

Audrey bit her lip. "And the owner, and those people at the front line of the mob," she said. She looked up at Seymour and reached out to cup her free hand around theirs, squeezing tightly. The thought of what would have happened if Seymour hadn't gotten out of the collapsing shop when he did… If she had been made to sit back and wait to see his face again, and then never…

"Oh, Audrey, don't cry," Seymour said. He freed his hand from hers and gently dabbed at her face with the cuff of his pajama shirt sleeve.
"I just feel awful, Seymour," Audrey said. She took a couple of breaths to calm down, and then propped herself up with one elbow. "What are we going to do? More people are going to get hurt. Nobody is moving to fix things before they get out of hand."

"I don't know if there is anything we can do, Audrey." Seymour sat up, too, and pulled his glasses off his night stand.

There obviously hadn't been pictures from Los Angeles, of the mob attacking the building where one of the plants had been kept on display. But Audrey could picture it. And she could picture people being grabbed by the vines, dragged into the monster's mouth… She shuddered. She could still feel Audrey II's vines wrapped around her legs sometimes. Sleeping next to Seymour and all, she also knew that he had some nightmares.

The news had said that the police forces in other cities were "looking into" activity around the plants, but not taking any preventative measures. Audrey could just imagine the 'charm' the plants exuded making it difficult, unless something extreme happened. In Portland and Los Angeles people had seemed to reach a breaking point.

Seymour looked up at her, his face creased with worry. "I'm afraid I started this whole mess, Audrey. If I hadn't taken Twoey in, then none of this would've happened."

Audrey felt her heart ache from the look on Seymour's face. "Well... why can't we do something, Seymour?"

"What?"

She pushed herself upright and hung her legs over the side of the bed. "We know a lot about these plants. And we're experts in gardening. I know how to de-thorn a rose and you know -- you know enough to teach classes!" She reached out and took both of Seymour's hands in hers, tugging him so he was sitting upright, too. "And this time we wouldn't be caught by surprise!"

"This time?" Seymour searched her face. "What are you thinking, Audrey?"

Audrey grimly set her jaw and took a deep breath. "Seymour, I think we should go to Boston and nip this thing in the bud."

---

Seymour made it all the way into the city limits before he broke out into a sweat. His hands started to slip on the steering wheel, and he had to wipe them off on his pant leg when they hit a red light.

By the time they got in, it'd already been dark. The city was as bright as he remembered New York being growing up. This time, though, it all seemed to have a malicious glare to it. Tail lights flashed menacingly as cars cut him off and the headlights of oncoming traffic made it hard to see ten feet ahead.

As a result, Audrey had to do most of the navigating. Though they hadn't been able to find a map. She'd called 411 to get directions to "Audrey III." They'd been warned that the exhibition was no longer open to the public, and Audrey had lied about just wanting to be able to avoid the street the plant was on. Seymour wished that part had been the truth, or that the operator had been unwilling to give them the information.

But here they were, nearly ten o'clock, with the sky pitch black overhead and wind coming in from the approaching storm. Even though it wasn't raining yet, Seymour kept expecting to see lightning hit one of the skyscrapers as they passed them.
Maybe he was being paranoid. Or maybe this was a terrible idea and it would all end in utter disaster.

He couldn't say no to Audrey, though. And he thought that maybe stopping the plant from killing anyone else would make him feel less guilty about Orin and Mr. Mushnik. At least, Seymour was nursing a hope that it would.

"Let's find a parking garage on this street. We're only a few blocks away," Audrey said. She'd put check marks next to most of the items on their directions.

"All right." Seymour started squinting so he could read the signs. This part of the city looked so upscale. For a while he was afraid that he wasn't going to be able to find anywhere to park, but eventually they found a spot. It was a garage near a bunch of restaurants.

They paid and Seymour picked a spot near the elevators. He'd have preferred the first floor, but it was all taken.

Getting out of the car, he looked around their floor nervously. He didn't see lights on in any of the other cars but that didn't mean no one was around here. Audrey got out and unlocked the trunk, looking all around before tugging out the suitcase she'd packed before they'd left the house. She tugged out the handle. "Okay, ready," she whispered.

Seymour nodded and pushed the trunk shut. It was louder than they were both expecting, and Audrey jumped a bit. Seymour winced. "Sorry, sorry."

"Let's go," Audrey said.

She started to pull the suitcase along behind her, but Seymour took the handle. "You have the directions. I'll bring this," he explained.

Audrey just nodded. They both tensed up as they walked past the parking garage attendant, but the man didn't ask about their suitcase or where they were going. Audrey had to stand under a streetlamp for a minute to get re-oriented, but after one false start they managed to head in the right direction. Audrey was sure of it because they were supposed to be getting closer to the water, not further from it. Seymour could smell the water already.

Surprisingly, there were other people out on the street too. Mostly walking their dogs. Some people were obviously just headed home from dinner or drinks. Seymour ducked his head a little every time one came near.

No one had recognized him from the press coverage surrounding Audrey II yet, but this would be a terrible time for firsts.

"You remember what we're going to do when we get there?" Seymour asked.

All these brick-faced buildings were making him nervous. As much as he loved their house, these looked nicer than anywhere he'd ever been inside before. Surely someone would call the police if they heard something bad going on. Or maybe that was part of the aura the plants exuded.

He gulped and hoped that wouldn't make them turn around and leave before they could do anything.

"Yep." Audrey's eyes were wide, and she kept glancing around, trying to take everything in. "One," she held up one finger, "we figure out what room it's in. Two," a second fingers, "we figure out how to break in. Three," and one last finger, "we chop it up."

"Hopefully before it has a chance to fight back," Seymour added.
"Of course."

They stopped at a corner and hunkered down a little. Well, that hadn't been as difficult as he'd expected. There was a banner announcing "HOME OF AUDREY III" over a house in the middle of the row. And the other homes?

The lights were all out. Both on their side of the street and the one opposite. Even if people weren't attacking this place yet, the neighbors must have gotten some kind of bad feeling.

"I hope they're all gone and not just asleep," Seymour said, looking around.

Audrey took a breath. "Let's go around back."

---

The lights were out in every room but one, on the third floor. Hopefully that meant the owner was upstairs, well away from being able to hear anything going on down at the street level.

Audrey was glad she'd had the foresight to wear flats. There were steps leading up to the back of the house, but they faced a door with no glass in it. She ended up having Seymour boost her onto a box so she could try to peer in through one of the back windows.

Audrey pressed her face to the glass and cupped her hands around her eyes. The glass back here was kind of dusty. It hadn't been cleaned recently, and her breath fogged it up, too. She had to hold her breath for a moment and let her eyes adjust to the darkness inside before she could start to make out details of the house.

"I … I see it," she whispered, her heart hammering against her ribs. She was trying not to scream.

"It doesn't see you, right?" Seymour asked.

"No, it's facing away from me," she said. Thank goodness.

Three was in a huge clay pot, and its vines were taking up most of the floor space. There was an armchair in the corner that looked like it was completely covered with vines as well. If there had ever been a couch in the room, it'd been moved to make space for Three.

"I think it's just about the size Two was when we--" Audrey started.

Then a light flared to life in the hallway, and she nearly fell backwards off the box. Seymour just managed to press his hands against the small of her back and keep her upright.

A tall man came into the darkened living room Audrey had been peering at. He was holding two black garbage bags at his sides, and they picked up the light from the hallway as he moved further into the room. He didn't turn a light on and kept his head down. Audrey couldn't see his face so well, but she could see that his hair was thinning.

He dropped both of the garbage bags on the floor and turned to the plant. Audrey could just make out his mouth moving, but she couldn't really understand the muffled sounds of what he was saying.

"What's happening?" Seymour whispered.

"Someone's in there," Audrey told him, looking down.

The color drained out of his face. "Get down before he sees you!"
The man definitely wasn't paying attention to the windows, though. Which he should have, Audrey thought a second later. He turned around without looking in her direction and opened the top of one of the garbage bags.

Out tumbled an arm.

A. human. arm.

Her mouth opened wide before she could think. She had to shove a couple of her fingers between her teeth and clamp down to keep herself from screaming, and she rushed to bend down and scramble off the box into Seymour's waiting arms.

"What's wrong, Audrey?" he asked, his voice hushed. He bumped into the suitcase and reached out to keep it from falling over.

Audrey took a breath and pried her hand from her mouth. "He's … he's feeding it," she whispered.

The look on Seymour's face was the same feeling Audrey had when she'd seen the arm. But it flickered after a moment and Seymour grit his teeth, his mouth pressing into a firm line. They both crouched down to be a little more hidden, and Audrey tried not to shudder at the thought of what was going on inside.

They both flinched when the plant let out a happy, audible sigh, though. After that, Audrey was sure she could hear crunching. She pressed her hands to her ears.

"I guess we can't just rush in there now, can we?" Seymour asked, gulping. He struggled to think. "A … Twoey was always kind of … tired after he ate," he admitted. His mouth twisted into a frown. "Maybe if we wait."

Audrey nodded a bit. Seymour hesitated, then turned around and slowly unzipped the suitcase he took out the first of two axes and held it out to her. Audrey reluctantly lowered her hands from her ears to take it. As she got used to its weight and Seymour took out his own axe, she spotted something else in the suitcase.

"What's that?"

Seymour blinked, then looked over his shoulder. "The gas can for the lawn mower," he said, softly. "I have matches in my pocket. I thought, maybe, if the axes weren't enough…"

Audrey looked up at the house, where the man was feeding some poor soul to Three.

She had an idea. "What if we pour gas around the house and light that?" she asked, trying to imagine what the front entrance of the house looked like. "If we avoid getting too close to Three, the house will still burn down… but maybe it won't see us."

"I guess Two never mentioned being able to smell," Seymour admitted, shrugging with one shoulder.

Audrey nodded, glad to hear it. She gripped her axe tight. "We could save the last of the gas and … and toss it into the room with Three, so the fire will definitely be led in there," she said, the image slowly coming together in her mind.

"What about the guy?" Seymour asked. "What if he catches us?"

Audrey looked up the building, at the light that was still on. There wasn't a fire escape from that
window. No bulky metal escapes along any of the buildings in this row, now that she took the time
to look around some. They would have to wait for the man to at least stop feeding Three before they
could break in, and if he was all the way at the top of the house when the fire started…

"I guess we can try to get him out," she whispered. She sighed and brought the axe closer. It was
starting to feel more comforting than threatening. "I guess we have to try."

They sat for a while trying to think of a plan, and eventually came up with something that they
thought would work.

First: Audrey was going to get the man downstairs. She was a little afraid of him, but to be honest,
she was more afraid of Three. And Seymour blustered some when she suggested getting near Three.
So she would go upstairs while Seymour laid the gas, and get the man's attention. Then she'd run
back downstairs -- without the man catching up with her.

When Seymour heard them coming down the steps, he'd pour the last of the gas at the door to the
living room, and throw the gas can in with Three. Then he'd toss around a couple of matches and run
outside with the rest of them.

It was a plan.

---

Every few minutes, Audrey checked to see if the man was still in the living room with Three. It took
nearly half an hour before he was gone. Seymour hoped that Audrey's feet weren't getting cold and
cramped like his were.

Then they walked slowly back around to the front door, which turned out to be made of much
sturdier wood than Seymour had been expecting. He pressed his palm to it and then looked the door
up and down. It would definitely ruin their stealth approach if he alerted everyone by chopping down
a door like this.

He was wondering if he could break the glass in the middle and quietly undo the lock by sticking his
arm through when Audrey nudged him in the side. He took a couple of steps to his left while she got
down and lifted up the doormat.

"Oh," he said, dumbly, as she lifted up a silver key.

From the look on her face, she thought keeping a key under your doormat was as stupid as he did.
That almost made him smile a bit as she quietly unlocked the door and pushed it forward very, very
slowly.

The door didn't creak. No one came running down the stairs. And no vines suddenly appeared in the
hallway, dragging Three into view. Both of them let out a breath of relief.

"So," Seymour whispered, gulping. "You ready?"

"Yeah," Audrey whispered back. "I'll tell him … that I saw the door open, and saw a burglar
running away." She blinked, and nodded. "Like a Good Samaritan."

"Good idea."

Audrey held the axe behind her back while she crept up the stairs. She kept her shoulders to the wall
and her eyes up the staircase. Seymour waited until she'd gotten up the first flight before unscrewing
the lid on the gas can.
It stunk more than he had expected. He coughed and immediately pressed his lips together, trying not to sputter. Three could hear, for sure, even if it couldn't smell. He froze, waiting to see if anything happened.

The third door along the hallway next to the stairs was probably the living room. There were no more doors after it, anyway. It felt like he was going to have a heart attack any minute, and when he did start breathing again he had to gasp quietly to get enough air, but he seemed safe for a moment. Nothing was happening.

Seymour poured a bit of gas along the wall. He dripped it onto a wooden bench in the hallway, and over a set of wicker baskets with hideously fake plants in them. The plastic would certainly catch flame at some point. The gas can slowly got lighter.

He hesitated at the second door down the hallway. Now his chest really did hurt. Every breath he took sounded like it was rattling the walls, threatening to shatter the windows. And was it just him, or had his footsteps had been echoing?

He tried to imagine keeping Two in a house. Living in the shop hadn't been the same. Seymour had never really had private space. His room was also the room where the more delicate flowers got taken care of. He cleaned up in the evenings after dinner, and ever since he turned eighteen, he'd been on his own after the shop had closed each night.

It sounded like a nightmare. At least he had been able to leave the shop sometimes. Though Two had always been weighing on his mind. Always. He couldn't stomach the thought of Two living in his and Audrey's home now.

Of course, if Two had gotten its way, Seymour and Audrey would be dead now. It had come down to "us or it."

Seymour thought of the people who'd been quietly walking their dogs on the streets. Of the groups of friends, and the couples, who'd been heading home after going out together. He gripped the gas can tighter and nodded to himself. He had to do this.

It was Three, or the city.

"I swear, I saw a burglar!" Audrey's voice suddenly rang out. Seymour jerked, and the gas sloshed in the can. "He ran away when he saw me on the street!"

"Oh, God, did he knock down the door?" another voice followed. "He must have been coming for Audrey III! What if there's a mob coming?! Oh God!"

Their footsteps were still pretty far above, but Seymour began dumping the gas in the door to the living room. When he could hear that Audrey and the man were on the last flight of stairs, he tossed the gas can into the room and started fumbling in his pockets for a match.

And a vine shot out and wrapped around his ankle.

---

Audrey heard the scream before she had reached the first floor. She had braced herself for the smell of gas, but the screech of Seymour's voice was so much worse.

She gasped, and the man -- whose embroidered bathrobe proclaimed was Donald -- rushed past her. "It's the burglar!" he yelled. "It's the mob!"
Donald barely got around the corner of the stairs before slipping on some gas and landing flat on his back. Audrey heard a dull thud come from his shoulders hitting the floor. He moaned, and clutched his ribs. "Ohhh! They're going to kill me!"

Audrey brought her axe out from her side, where she'd been clutching it out of Donald's sight. She watched the floor as she bolted back to the living room, careful to avoid the slippery gas.

Seeing Seymour's glasses shattered in the living room doorway made her gasp again. "Oh, Seymour!"

"Audrey!"

"They're going after the plant! I knew it!" Donald said, still groaning on the floor.

Audrey ignored him and raised her axe in front of her, holding it as firmly as she could with two hands. She stepped into the living room and used her elbow to flip the light switch on. She could hear Donald protesting from the hallway but didn't process his words.

He'd left the garbage bags on the floor. The black plastic was slick with blood and the floor in front of them was scattered with bits of skin and bone, like he had done a very messy job at separating all of the body parts. It almost made Audrey stumble and fall to her knees.

Instead, she felt a surge of anger wash through her and light every bit of her aflame.

Seymour was kicking at Three's mouth. It definitely was the same size Two had been, that last horrible day. Three wasn't laughing, though. It was snarling and digging its vines straight through the hardwood floors to keep Seymour's kicks from jostling it around. Seymour's sleeves had been shredded and one was held fast in thorny vines, while the other was still free.

"Seymour!" Audrey yelled, leaping forward.

She landed flat on some of the vines, squashing them underneath her feet. Three roared and smashed some vines against the windows. The glass crunched from the blow and Audrey started hacking wildly at the vines -- any of them! all of them! -- while she tried to get closer to Seymour.

"Audrey, run away!" Seymour yelled, when he saw her. He cried out as Three managed to chomp down on his leg, and brought his fist down against Three's lip as hard as he could. "Take that!"

Three shouted again and let Seymour go. His pant leg had ripped and his skin was bleeding all around the bite marks, but it was still attached to the rest of him.

"I'm not leaving!"

"But--"

Audrey screamed when a vine grabbed at her leg, and she hacked at it so many times with her axe that she ended up whacking herself with the handle. That was going to leave a bruise. "I'm not leaving, Seymour! Not this time!"

"But Audrey--"

"HOW DARE YOU?" Three suddenly slammed its vines into the wall and started to drag itself across the floor.

For a moment, Audrey wasn't being attacked, and Seymour wasn't being shoved into Three's mouth.
She took a couple of steps back, trying not to trip, as Three got closer and closer. The floor creaked ominously under its weight, and plaster fell off the walls with every tug.

Seymour stopped kicking at Three and started patting at himself instead. Audrey winced, wondering if the vines holding him up were crushing him. Then a piece of plaster was shaken off the wall and she had to jump to the side.

"I will destroy you! We will all destroy you! All you pathetic, measly wastes of space!" Three bellowed. "You killed our first but I will not let you kill me! You are all useless!"

"Audrey Three, what are -- what are you doing?" Donald squeaked.

Audrey just barely had the time to turn her head and see him panting in the doorway before Three screamed again. The vines shooting past her made her shout herself, but they weren't going for her.

Instead, they whipped around Douglas and lifted him off the floor, pulling him back towards Three so fast that when Douglas's leg knocked against her shoulder, Audrey nearly fell onto her own axe.

She had to push it against the floor to avoid getting cut, and it stuck in the wood. She started kicking the floor and pulling as hard as she could to try to get it out. Her breathing was coming in rapid bursts and she felt like her skull might burst from fear.

Three's booming voice was accented in a strange way that Two's hadn't been. "You! You let these people in! You sent them to destroy me!"

"No! No, I swear! I didn't know! I didn't know!" Donald pleaded, crying openly now.

There was a sharp thud, and Audrey glanced up to see Seymour had been dropped to the floor. She let out a shocked laugh and Seymour began to jump towards her, hopping over the vines scattering the floor.

At that moment she managed to get the axe to yank free of the hardwood. The force caught her off guard, and she stumbled backwards a couple of steps. Her shoulders hit the doorframe, and she looked up just in time to see Three dangling Donald above its mouth.

"You first!" Three hissed, dropping Donald -- kicking and screaming -- inside.

Audrey felt nausea bubble up between her fury and fear, and then something small caught her eye.

A tiny, red spark.

Seymour threw a line of lit matches down on the floor, where gas had spilled just inside the entrance. The can was lying to the side. The puddle went up in flames immediately. Audrey could feel the heat against her arms and legs, but Seymour grabbed her wrist and yanked her into the hallway before it touched her.

They had to bolt to get out of there as the flames raced down the lines of gas.

Audrey dropped her axe and both of them stumbled down the steps, gasping for air while Three started to shriek like a hundred people all screaming together. It was the worst sound Audrey had ever heard.

Seymour wrapped her up in his arms and she let out one relieved sob before the sirens started up. They both froze.
"The cops must be nearby. Or the fire department..." she whispered.

They turned the way they'd come and started running down the street, as the sirens got louder and louder and the fire behind them licked through the house. "We have to get out of here," Seymour said, wincing as he limped along.

A trio of cop cars whipped past them when they were only a block away. No one stopped for them.

---

As soon as they reached the car, Audrey realized that she'd have to drive. It didn't hit her until she felt for the keys in her pocket and suddenly remembered that they'd left the suitcase behind. And both of the axes. And Seymour's glasses, crushed on the floor.

"Are you okay?" she asked, opening the passenger door with shaking hands. She hoped that Seymour couldn't see how anxious she was. With the anger flooding out of her and leaving her so empty, she felt like she might start crying or screaming at the drop of a hat.

Seymour's leg, still bleeding, shone in the light. He winced and hopped into the car, quickly wrapping a hand towel from the glove box around the worst of the scratches. "I'll be fine. We should just -- just go as far as we can," he said.

Audrey inhaled, and shut the door for him.

The city sounded like it was going crazy around them as they drove out of it. Sirens wailed from all directions. Neither of them could make out smoke in the distance, but Seymour pointed out several helicopters flying overhead.

Audrey was just glad all of the police were distracted. Being on tiny city roads, with hard-to-read signs, was stretching her driving skills. The streets back home seemed so wide, peaceful, and wonderful in comparison. But nobody pulled her over even when she bumped against the sidewalk at one point.

She made herself start taking deep breaths. It helped keep her fingers from slipping on the steering wheel, but her heart began to thud so loudly that she could hardly hear anything else. She told herself it didn't matter.

Seymour clasped her hand as tightly as ever while they banked sharply onto the highway entrance ramp.

Then the car rumbled and they had to let go of each other so Audrey could grasp the steering wheel with all ten fingers. She may have learned to drive on better roads, but she could do this. She had helped get rid of that -- that abomination with her name. She could damn well drive the two of them home.

Audrey watched the city fade in the rearview mirror and whispered Good riddance. She couldn't hear herself, but at her left Seymour smiled like he had. Even now he could smile. Even now, he understood.

Her heart pounded so loudly she couldn't make out the sound of her own voice or the engine rattling the car around them.

But they'd be okay.

They'd get home.
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