

COPYRIGHT MATERIAL BY STIPE LOZINA

The following is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living, dead, or undead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright by Stipe Lozina.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author.

The cover of this book is made with the use of Canva (consisting of a combination of the font League Gothic and an original background picture).

STORY INTRODUCTION

Dear reader, here lie the instructions for the following fictional work, inside of which you are meant to recognize the narrative type you may begin to read.

The present book you are reading is named “Echoes of the Past”, and it is a book that is considered to be the first main chapter of the “Our Story” apocalyptic series.

“Our Story” presents a series of novels set within a plot occurring in an apocalyptic setting, where the story is deeply influenced, as well as shaped, by the choices you make as a reader.

Without further ado, begin your journey, and let its end speak of your choices.

YOUR PATH

Throughout the story of “Echoes of the Past”, you will be met with several differentiating choices you will need to make as a reader. From the perspective of the main character named Peter Folley, the choices you make will eventually lead you to varying paths that will guide you to the ending of this novel. In the following books of this apocalyptic series, the choice-driven paths you take will influence the overall direction of this story, which is planned to span across three major novels, as well as short books released in between. Below lies the example of the choice-driven element present throughout “Echoes of the Past”.

These are the beginning choices present within the first chapter of “Echoes of the Past”.

1: I THINK WE SHOULD TURN BACK... **PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 2 - PREMONITION**

If you believe the main character should turn back, you will press the first choice, and after that action, you will be taken to the second chapter named “Premonition”.

2: OKAY, YOU KNOW BEST... **PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 2 - FAITH**

However, if you believe the main character should make a different choice like the one offered above, you will press the second choice, and after that action, you will be taken to the second chapter, named “Faith”.

Once you have finished reading one of the choice-driven chapters, an example of the text below will await you, guiding you to continue the overall story of “Echoes of the Past”.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 3 **PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 3**

As you finish reading the choice-driven chapter influenced by the path you wish the main character to take, you will be guided to continue reading your story by turning to the following chapter as instructed above (in this example, Chapter 3).

Now, I welcome you at the beginning of your journey in the “Our Story” apocalyptic book series, and may the outcome speak of your choices.

Stipe Lozina

PROLOGUE

Curious, yet questions spoken with a frightened tone were heard...

“Dad, where are we going? Dad!”

“Quiet, son. Daddy’s going to make everything alright again... Don’t you worry now, okay?”

Peter turned around to look at his boy one more time as they were passing down the road of southeastern Colorado, heading towards the local police station.

Peter spoke bitterly as he looked at his son. “Look, Jacob, my boy... Daddy loves you, okay?” Tears were dripping from his eyes. He bit his teeth. “Remember that, alright?”

His 10-year-old son expressed his confusion toward his father. He looked around the seats of the car. “Dad, why are you telling me this? Where’s mom? Dad?”

Amid a second, the driving vehicle had halted. Peter, a 30-year-old military veteran, opened the door and walked outside. His brown hands were risen in the air, as several police officers surrounded the man and his son, Beretta Model 92s, pointed upwards.

“Sir, turn around and crouch on your knees with your hands behind your head!”

The cold, winter wind flew beside him, and the subtle drops of rain started falling on his shoulders as he inhaled deeply, his eyes closed, remembering.

“Peter, what are you doing? Put it down, Peter!”

Tears ran across his eyes, tears of guilt, tears of sorrow... Words of his brother found their way back...

“Pete, do not let it overtake you. Jealousy can be a horrible thing. Believe me, I know...”

Multiple officers ran up to him in the flash of a moment, putting cold steel cuffs on his hands. Peter looked at his son, who was staring at him through the window of the car, his eyes wide with fear. He smiled as he stared at his innocent eyes.

“I will be okay son, don’t you forget your paps, don’t you ever!” He yelled as he was being taken away into the patrol car, red and blue lights flashing by his side...

CHAPTER 1

Jackson: “Huh, I guess it is time, my friend...”

Jackson, an entry police officer of the Colorado State Penitentiary, spoke to his friend, with whom he developed a protective relationship during the last ten years. “You know, I’ll actually miss you, Pete. Huh, however crazy that sounds...” He laughed as he was walking with Peter through the endless corridors of the prison. Bleak colors of grey surrounded them as they walked, echoes of violence and sorrow being heard farther away with each step they took.

Peter wiped his right cheek as he was slightly smiling. “Oh Jack, you fucker... Who says it’s over? We’ll still be friends, won’t we?” Jackson stopped, motioning for Peter to follow. “I hope you mean regular pals, mate. I think you and I have both had enough of these steel bars, wouldn’t you say?” Peter chuckled. “Yeah, sure we did... Remember when I arrived here? Hell, you’ve been thinking about how I was alive, for God’s sake!” Jackson smirked upon hearing his words. “Well, I’d be damned. I thought death row was your drop-off, I must admit.” The echo of their steps slowly flew by as they found themselves standing at the exit gate of the large, unscalable construction.

Martha: “Name?”

Peter: “Uh, Pe-”

Jackson, who began speaking with his colleague, cut him off. “Folley, Peter Folley, Martha.”

“Here are your things, Folley.” The tall woman spoke bitterly as their eyes crossed. And indeed, Peter’s possessions were there, the ones he had arrived with. A brown leather wallet, empty inside. A beaten-up diary, whose papers had slowly faded. And a silver keychain, with a small picture, taped to it, the picture of his son... As seconds passed by, he was abruptly patted on the shoulder. “Ready Pete? We should better get going soon.”

As Peter and Jackson had entered the car, the officer quickly turned on the radio as the vehicle ignited to life. “Some peace, my friend. Hell, how long’s it passed since you heard one of these? I can’t fucking imagine...” He spoke as the smoke of the lit-up cigarette surrounded him. “Want one?”

Although he thought about it for a moment, Peter declined the officer. “No, but thank you. Can you please unlock these?” The grey-haired officer looked at him one more time. “You sure? Okay, but I tell you, we all need to have our reliefs in some way, something to blow the steam out, you get me? Ah, you know I would gladly do that, my friend. But we’ve got to obey the rules for just an hour or so, and then you’ll be free to live life once more! Oh, and since you’re not accepting these babies, that makes me wonder, you have a new pretty lady waiting for you?” As he realized what he had just spoken, Jackson quickly tried to apologize. “Oh, for fuck’s sake... I’m sorry, I completely-”

“You don’t have to be, my friend. I have someone, my boy...” Peter said with a soft smile running across him, remembering. In the blink of a second, the car had suddenly stopped moving, coming to a swift halt. Jackson yelled in panic. “Oh, for Christ’s sake! What is going

on?” He pointed his words to the uniformed man standing outside. A soldier of the United States Army.

???: “Sir, we need you to turn around. Drive back to the location you came from, wait for further instructions.”

Jackson: “What, are you kidding me? I have a prisoner. Well, a released man. I need to drive him to the city courtroom. I can’t just barge him and myself back to the penitentiary.”

The soldier slowly walked back to one of his colleagues, who was standing on the road, blocking the entrance to the city of Colorado, its penitentiary being on the outskirts outside. The two soldiers walked back towards them once more, one being a white man, approximately in his 30s, while the other being an Afro-American woman in her 40s, who had leaned inside through the window.

“The city of Colorado is currently off-limits. I need you to drive back to the penitentiary this moment, officer!” She spoke aggressively, her fingers on the edge of her gun.

Jackson: “Okay, okay, fine...”

The car had slowly turned around as Jackson and Peter were driving in the penitentiary's direction. Unexpectedly, Jackson hard turned in a left direction of the main road, away from the prison, and the car had found itself traversing through a back road leading through the forest, a shortcut to the underneath tunnels. Peter looked through the window. “Jackson, where are we going?” To his question, the officer amusingly replied. “What, you don’t think I would drive you back there, do you? Nah, mate, we are getting to that courtroom, one way or the other.”

1: I THINK WE SHOULD TURN BACK...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 2 - PREMONITION

2: OKAY, YOU KNOW BEST...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 2 - FAITH

CHAPTER 2 – PREMONITION

Jackson slightly shifted his eyes to face the rearview mirror. “What, you can’t be serious... Just a few more miles and we’ll be free to-”

Peter interrupted him mid-sentence. “No, we turn back and we drive towards the penitentiary, Jackson, please...” Jackson noted his words and replied hastily. “You have got to be kidding me, Peter! You’ve just spent the last ten goddamn years of your life in there! Are you serious with me right now?!?”

Peter spoke calmly. “I know what you are telling me better than anyone, my friend. I truly thank you for everything you’ve been doing for me in that hellhole... I think I can manage a few more days in there.” He chuckled. “Maybe I’ll finally get to meet your colleagues.”

Officer Jackson sighed after hearing his words. “Alright, as you say, my friend.”

The vehicle had turned around, and Jackson began driving back to the Colorado State Penitentiary. As they drove by the dark green bristle cone pines, Jackson noticed something in the distance, and stopped the car at a crossroads, connecting them with the main road. He pointed his finger at a man walking in their direction. “My, my God!” He spoke in horror upon noticing the man’s bottom jaw was ripped out, and a large amount of blood had been dripping onto the grey cement below him...

“Look, stay there, I’ll go check what the hell’s going on!” He spoke as he was opening the door.

“Like there’s anything else I can do...”

The thought passed through Peter’s mind as he felt his right hand, which was handcuffed to the inner handle of the door. He could see Jackson running up to the injured-looking man in a panic, his yelling being heard miles around them. “Sir, are you okay?!? Sir, let me-”

Suddenly, the man had pushed himself onto Jackson, making them both fall onto the road. Shock ran through Peter, who saw the man trying to push his upper remaining teeth deep into Jackson’s throat. Bright lights blazed on him from the left as he saw a large truck quickly approaching, whose driver was smashing the horn from inside his cabin. A loud, creaking sound was heard, as the driver pressed the brakes and tried to avoid the police car by turning the wheel in the other direction. Unfortunately, time was not on his side. The last thing Peter saw before his vision turned black was the truck smashing into the car...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 3
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 2 - FAITH

Jackson laughed as he heard Peter's words. "Hah, of course I do, mate! Look, don't you worry, we'll get you out of those cuffs in no time..." He spoke bitterly as they found themselves passing through the darkness of the large tunnel above them. The sound of the engine had pushed itself louder as thick concrete surrounded them. Suddenly, Jackson smashed his foot onto the brake, a look of horror present in his eyes. "Oh, God... I'll be damned!" He exclaimed as he was holding his phone and making a call. "He-, hello?!? Yes, you have to be getting out here as soon as possible. What, what do you-, I'm under the Porcupine tunnel, hurry!"

And indeed, Peter had understood the reason for the officer's sudden shock, as he himself was seeing the wreck present in front of them. An enormous crash of four vehicles, bodies of three men and one woman laying on the ground outside. Jackson had opened the door as he stepped out, running towards their remains. Peter noted his behavior. After finding no pulse to be present, Jackson used all of his might, punching his fists at the torsos of the people, one by one. But unfortunately, his actions provided no hope of saving the previously deceased. During those passing seconds of despair, Peter noticed Jackson's behavior had shifted, as the officer had slowly checked the sides of the bodies one by one, which resulted in him getting up from his crouching position, slowly shifting his gaze to Peter, who was still in the vehicle, a look of sorrow pointed at him.

Suddenly, a group of people had surrounded the officer who was standing outside, wooden rifles and steel pistols in their hands...

"Get the other one out, now!"

One of them yelled, pushing the officer to walk toward Peter's door, the others keeping their aim... As Jackson had crouched next to Peter; he unlocked his cuffs, using a key from his left pocket, all the while motioning for Peter to take an item out of his right. As the cuffs were let loose, Peter pushed his hand into Jackson's right pocket, pulling out a state-issued stun gun and placing it into his own.

"Both of you! Approach slowly!"

As the two of them followed, they found themselves in a kneeling position, their hands behind their heads. Peter could notice Jackson's imminent preparation, as he had placed one of his knees farther from the other, preparing himself to jump at the two men in front of him, his eyes motioning for Peter to prepare the stun gun. As the other people in the surrounding group had gone to inspect the car, Peter had slowly reached one of his hands into his right pocket, when suddenly, his vision went black from an impact of a hit from behind...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 3
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3

His eyes slowly opened, a flash of light circling around him. Upon reaching conscience, Peter found himself lying on a bed, wooden walls colored in red surrounding him. A sheet of blue cotton was placed on his body, his phone was plugged into a charger he did not recognize, placed on a dark wooden stool next to the bed he found himself on. As he was preparing to get up and explore his surroundings, he felt a pain in his head as he suddenly sat up. A whistling of a woman's voice was heard as the door to his left, the supposed entrance to his new room, was opened. A larger woman with red short hair entered and smiled as soon as she saw him in an awakened state.

“Oh, goodness gracious, you are up! Would you look at that? The Lord works in mysterious ways, indeed!” She exclaimed while holding a steel plate with food placed on it, two squarely cut pieces of bread, one cut boiled egg, and a glass of apple juice.

The cheerful-looking woman placed the food-filled plate on his legs and quickly walked outside while yelling. “Jonathan, our guest is awake!”

Peter, who still found himself immensely confused, took the plate and placed it on the wooden stool next to his phone. His legs stood on the wooden creaking floor, and as he began to walk, his vision slowly blurred, which resulted in the man placing his left hand onto the wooden wall, providing him support.

As Peter walked outside the room, he slowly made his way down, carefully placing each step onto the green carpet-covered stairs. When he reached his way down, he found himself standing in what seemed to be a living room. Unlike before, yellow wooden walls were the decorative part of this area. Two younger-looking men sat on a grey fur sofa, both of them dressed in white shirts and brown trousers. The woman who was standing next to him before, now stood behind a wooden counter that was colored in white, Peter's eyes slowly locked on another man present in the room, an older man with white hair and a grey beard on his chin, who was dressed in dark blue work clothes and wore black, mud-stained boots.

“Well, glad to have you feeling better, stranger.” He spoke in a deep raspy voice, his eyes closely placed on him. Upon seeing the man's motion, Peter sat down next to him and placed his right hand on the table.

“Give it a couple of hours, and the spinning will go away. The name's Jonathan, by the way.” The man spoke, noticing the hand was serving as a balancing point for Peter. Peter nodded in agreement upon hearing his words and muttered. “What, what happened to me?”

Jonathan looked at him closely as he was hearing Peter's words. He asked him a question. “What is the last thing you remember?”

As he heard Jonathan's question, Peter's memory slowly started fading back, and as he realized the events that took place before he woke up amongst these people, his speech started stuttering from the slight shock. “Oh God, all of it happened so suddenly. I was right there next to... God, where's Jackson?!? He was with me as all of it happened...”

Jonathan slowly placed his back against the chair, studying Peter's behavior. "Stranger, you were the only one we found. Your surroundings were void of anyone else's presence. Who is that man you mentioned? Jackson was his name?"

Upon hearing the man's words, Peter asked. "Why, why do you say that? I, I have to find him, I-" He was interrupted by the man who was sitting on the sofa. "God damn, stranger. You don't know what's happening out there? The whole world's gone to hell..."

Suddenly, Jonathan stood up and raised his voice at the younger man. "Tobias, what have I said?!? We do not mention the Lord's name in vain!"

The younger man, who Peter now knew as Tobias, had slightly chuckled upon seeing Jonathan's reaction. "For Christ's sake, pops, I'm sure the Lord has nothing to do with all this, so best to try and call him in some way!"

As Tobias spoke those words, Jonathan walked up to him and grabbed him by his shirt, pulling him up off the sofa and yelling. "I will not be having you blaspheme His name in my presence. March up to your room, young man!"

As Peter saw the younger man walking up the stairs, he could notice that he was sitting amongst a family. Jonathan sat back in his chair, still fuming with anger. Upon gaining his senses, he spoke. "Mind telling me your name, son?"

"Peter, Peter Folley." He spoke. "Well, Peter, I am glad to have you as my guest. There is one thing I want to be made clear, is that okay?" Feeling slightly surprised by Jonathan's question, Peter nodded. "Back when we found you there a month ago... You were lying down next to a police vehicle, and correct me if I am wrong, but this friend of yours, you said Jackson, if I'm recalling right... Was he a police officer?"

Peter answered. "Yes, he is. Look, why are you saying was? I, I don't understand..." As he closely listened to Jonathan's previously spoken words, Peter stood up, his eyes open wide from the sudden realization. "Wait, you are telling me I passed out for an entire month?!?" He placed both of his hands on his head. "Oh no, my boy's all confused, I, I have to go!" He spoke as he rushed up to the door on the left side beneath the stairs he had walked on before, which led him to the outside environment.

In his maddening motion, Peter suddenly stopped in his tracks, soaking in the view around him. He stood in a large, green-filled countryside, fields of wheat spanning ahead, chickens placed in metal cages to the left side of the house, a red-colored tractor parked next to them, the night sky above him...

He felt a hand being placed on his right shoulder. The older man spoke. "Look, my son, there is much you have to know. Best you come back inside before deciding to continue your way, would you not say so?" Peter felt his head spinning from the sudden physical motion, his vision darkened once more.

CHAPTER 4

Once again, Peter found himself lying down on the bed he had slept on before. This time, however, he was accompanied by Jonathan, who sat on the wooden stool beside him. The old man smiled as he saw Peter waking up.

He patted him on the shoulder as he was lying down and spoke. “Look, my son... You are still under the impact of the events that took place before all of us found ourselves in this new world.”

Peter slightly opened his eyes upon hearing Jonathan’s words. He asked him. “What do you mean... when you say this new world?”

The man slightly chuckled, he placed his right fist on his knee. “Peter... Is it okay if I call you by your name?” Peter nodded, waiting for him to continue. “The world you remember, now, I am uncertain where you are from... But all the cities you had been aware of, at the very least, are no longer habitable... Now, what do I mean when I say this?”

The old man spoke out loud, his eyes forming an expression of thought. “Peter... the world you and I knew before, the world which we inhabited along with the rest of the modern folk... It was struck by a virus... One... We had never seen before, simply told. And this tiny combination of infected cells, as they called them on the news, infected parts of the population, not by the dozens, but by the millions, my son... And, it was brought to everyone’s attention, that the men and women who had gotten infected with this new strain, well... They perished soon after. The World Health Organization had reported worldwide that a search for the cure would be issued soon, but by then... It was already too late, as the men and women who had passed away from this virus, rose once more... And my Lord...”

A tear had formed in one of his eyes, and it slid down his right cheek. “They had resembled something much, much more horrible...”

He shut his eyes as he continued. “Remember the fictional stories where you read about the living dead? Well, this fictional imagined reality had become one... One we would find ourselves in today... Millions of the infected had risen, taking more and more as mere seconds had passed... Big populated cities were the first ones to perish, as these... The risen had an unquenching thirst for human blood, they... They acted like animals, running toward any man or woman, towards any child they could see... And they would strike their teeth into the people who were healthy... Our government had issued out the military and allowed it to begin the so-called operation, Black Hawk was its name... Well, that was the last news we would hear from them since... Apparently, what little news we could get from the outside... Europe, Asia, Africa, and all the other civilizations of the world followed similar military plans of their own, but so far, we know little of their success.”

Jonathan leaned his back on the chair. “The risen, as we heard them being named by what little radio channels we could find, had very different physical abilities compared to the ones they had before, and to the ones you and I have now. Folks over in Texas mentioned their thirst for blood could circle around for miles... Hell, if you stood even slightly wounded on the far end of my farm, they would have supposedly sensed your presence all the way from here...”

Jonathan's look echoed with sadness. "Those were the news I and my family had needed to prepare for this ongoing period all of us are going through now. The two of my boys are miracle workers, Peter. Can you believe that just the two of them had managed to circle our entire fields with a steel fence, and mind you, a fence that had electrical switches attached to it? And God bless them... They had connected all the needed wirings to the generator beneath this very house, no one else to help them besides me with my little knowledge of those electrical mambo jumbos..." The old man chuckled.

Upon hearing the news Jonathan had told him, Peter found himself in a state of shock. His eyes widened. "Oh God, my boy..." He spoke once more as he quickly got out of bed and ran downstairs, Jonathan yelling after him. As his steps loudly echoed throughout the lowering corridor of the house, Peter could see the two younger men standing beneath the stairs in anticipation. As he ran downwards on the wooden stairs, Peter suddenly slipped, causing himself to fall. Luckily, the two brothers caught him in the passing momentum, saving him from the impact.

"Peter! Oh, thank God you are not hurt... Jeremiah, Tobias, place him on the sofa, come on!" Jonathan spoke in a panic as they dragged Peter and placed him in a lying position. Although being conscious, Peter's vision was blurred, thus making it hard for him to see his surroundings.

As a few minutes had passed, he spoke. "Where... where am I?" Jonathan grabbed a wooden chair from the table and placed it next to Peter. As he sat down, the old man spoke: "My son, you are in Merrill Creek, close to the Reservoir Center, around 5 miles from it." As he heard Jonathan's words, Peter's eyes widened in shock. However, Jonathan's continued talking interrupted his present thoughts. "You mentioned a boy before you ran down..."

Peter noticed the man before him was waiting for a reply. "Yes, my son..."

"Where was he present the last time you were awake? Was it where we found you?" Jonathan asked him. Peter slowly answered. "No, he was with his uncle in Minneapolis. I was going to prepare for my travel when-"

He suddenly paused, thinking about his next words. "When I would be freed by the state." The old man focused his gaze, waiting for him to continue. "I was in prison for... for killing my wife Jess... Jessica. Ten long years had passed as I served my sentence, and as I was driving to the city with Jackson, everything went black... And now, you are telling me the world is in this situation."

Jonathan crouched on the floor and gazed deeply into Peter's eyes, forming an expression of doubt. "Do you repent for your sin, Peter? The sin of taking a life?" Peter smiled. "Have been every day of my life..."

Jonathan got up and spread out his hand towards him. "Come on, let us get you upstairs. We'll talk more in the morning."

CHAPTER 5

Rays of the morning sun shined on Peter's closed eyes as its light had passed through the curtain-covered window next to the wooden stool on the right side of his bed. He slowly opened them and was much more relaxed than he had been the night before. Slowly, he got up on his feet, put on a blue shirt and a black pair of pants placed next to his phone, cleanly prepared for him.

As he opened the bedroom door, Peter could feel the smell of eggs coming from the living room beneath. As he walked downstairs, he could see that the two younger men, along with Jonathan, already sat at the table, waiting for the morning meal to be served.

Upon seeing him, Jonathan spoke loudly, a smile formed across his lips. "You're finally up! Come and sit down already!"

Peter complied, finding himself sitting on one of the wooden chairs opposite Jonathan. The woman that had first greeted him had placed the large steel plate in the middle of the table, filled with eggs and bacon, and had sat down next to her husband. Peter waited for them to place breakfast on their plates, and as they all did, he placed a small portion on the plate.

Upon seeing his plate, Jonathan slightly got up and placed more of the meal on the Peter's plate. "I will not be having you acting shy in my home." Peter nodded, and all of them proceeded to eat.

As everyone had finished, Peter saw the woman picking up their plates, prompting him to ask. "I am sorry... I forgot to ask. What is your name?" Jonathan answered instead. "Margaret, Peter. And she is an angel, ain't she?" As Peter nodded, one of the younger men, Tobias, got up from the table and began to walk towards the door, calling for him to follow.

Peter stood outside, next to the parked tractor, which Tobias was turning on. "Hop on." He spoke as the engine blasted into life. Peter gazed at the far-reaching fields of wheat they were passing through, feeling amazement overcome him as they went forward. "God, you did all this? Just the four of you?"

The young man laughed out loud as he heard his question. "Nah, it was actually three. Mom sure is all sweet and nice, but she ain't got what it takes to keep this running, if you understand me..."

Peter focused his view and noticed a large fence placed in the distance, the one Jonathan had told him about. Tobias noticed his gaze, which prompted him to speak. "Yeah, all nice and dandy, stranger. Whatever touches that... Well, it'll be nice and crispy, that's for sure." As the moments passed, the young man had parked the tractor in front of a medium-sized wooden construction. A stable.

Peter followed Tobias inside, finding himself between three closed spaces on both sides. The wooden floor beneath them was filled with straw, and the upper part above them had comprised an angled wooden roof.

As Tobias opened them one by one, Peter saw that the three spaces on the left were filled with six pigs in total, each space having a wide wooden fence that was filled with cabbage

and the same enclosed fence filled with water, which Tobias had refilled by opening the sink placed above it.

The three spaces on his right held three large cows, each in their own, the spaces having been made in the same pattern as the ones on the left. However, the fences made for food were filled with grain mixed with hay instead.

After finishing their check-up, Tobias called for Peter to follow him back to the vehicle. “So, what’ ya think, stranger?” He asked him as he slightly chuckled. Peter still looked back at the wooden building behind them, his view expressing an emotion of gratitude. “Folks like you keep the country going, my friend...”

Upon hearing his reply, Tobias looked at him in a confused manner. “Huh, you could say that, sure... Anyway, hop on, I’ll show you somethin’ nice!” As the engine came to life, the two men drove toward the East, slowly driving back to the house they came from.

While they were in the close vicinity of the family home, Tobias twisted off the engine of the red vehicle, and as he jumped off, the younger man motioned for Peter to follow him, signaling him to crouch as they went. They found themselves standing in front of a wooden door that had been placed on the ground, surrounded by dirt. Tobias took a key from his pocket, twisting it into the small lock made of steel. “Jump down!” He spoke amusingly.

At first, all Peter could see was darkness, but as he heard a switch being flipped, electric lights turned on above him. A large grey-colored generator stood in the middle of the dirt-surrounded area, large wires sticking from it on all sides except for the one they jumped from, red, yellow, and blue wires passing through the ground. “God, how did you-”

He was stopped mid-sentence. “First, to stop you right there, cuz I think I know what your question might be, stranger. All this had been done before I and my brother ever stepped our feet in this room about a month ago.” That is when Peter noticed a label on the right side of the generator.

BARTON INDUSTRIES

SECRET OPERATIONS

“All we did was simply use what we found here...” Tobias took out a map from a small wooden crate placed on the ground. As Peter had looked at its contents, he found out that the large piece of paper contained schematics and instructions for a large perimeter intended to be placed around the area.

Tobias continued. “Those fences you see outside, well, we found them buried around our crops, exactly where these Xs are on this thing... Welding them together was no big deal, and as we were finished with that part of the job, paps called for us, saying he’d found a map right beneath our home which contained instructions that led us to where the ends of these wires were placed! I and Jeremiah rushed to em’, both of us findin’ yellow switches placed beneath the patches of dirt we dug out with our shovels! And as you might’ve guessed, after flipping em’, they somehow connected to these fences, making em’ all-electric and shit!”

As they slowly climbed up to the surface, Tobias's phone rang, the call coming from his father, Jonathan.

“Tobias, you and Peter need to return now. We are waiting for you. Hurry.”

CHAPTER 6

Jonathan stood in the living room from where Peter and Tobias had walked out moments before. The old man walked out, watching his son and a newfound friend leave with the tractor, driving between the yellow fields of wheat. He breathed in the fresh air, closing his eyes, remembering.

Mary ran to her father, who was standing in front of her flat in Longmont. The young, brown-haired girl quickly placed her hands on his shoulder, pushing him slowly.

“Daddy, we have to go!”

“Tobias, Jeremiah, find Mom. We don’t have a lot of time left!”

She yelled at them as she placed Jonathan in her car. She turned her head to see her two brothers walking with their mother and placing her down on the passenger seat. As their parents sat, waiting for them, Mary ushered Jeremiah and Tobias, telling each of them to sit beside their father. The scared family drove with her through the chaotic streets. With their own eyes, they saw the horror taking place around them. People killing each other for simple things, a man hitting an older woman with a bat just to grab a can of beans from her frail hands, a woman being strangled by a man at least ten years younger than her, all for a pack of cigarettes.

As seconds passed, and as they drove farther outward the city of Colorado, they began to see the dead people raising from the grounds they stood on, alive moments ago...

Suddenly, the vehicle had come to a swift halt, as Mary stared at a group of people, their guns pointed upward. Slowly, the young girl walked out, asking them. “What do you need? We don’t have anything of use...” One of the grumpy men laughed. “Oh, sure you do... What’s that thing between your legs, gorgeous? No law is gonna forbid that now, won’t it?”

In the blink of a second, she jumped on one of them and was trying to grab his rifle, yelling at her family. “Jeremiah, drive now!” Her brother suddenly jumped to the front seat from the back, and as Jonathan and Tobias were about to walk out of the car and help their family member, it was already too late, as the sound of a bullet being fired passed through their ears...

The old man heard the voice of his second-born son, Jeremiah, coming from the living room of their house. “Father, I need you, quickly!” As his son saw him walking towards him, he picked up his laptop and stood next to him, opening the remotely controlled views of the cameras placed on various spots of the fence which surrounded their farm. “Look here.” The young man spoke, pointing his finger at a square window in the upper left corner of the screen, the view of the camera placed next to the steel fence double doors on the northwest side of the farm.

The video showed three people standing in line. Two of them were women, while the one between them was a yellow-haired man who wore a blue sweater, glasses placed in front of his eyes. All of them stared directly at the camera, the man waving towards it, a smile formed across his face. Jonathan suddenly picked up the phone from his right pocket and made a call for Tobias. As he heard the voice of his son, the old man spoke.

“Tobias, you and Peter need to return now. We are waiting for you. Hurry.”

CHAPTER 7

Walking in front of the family home, the three men met, looking at each other...
“What’s goin’ on?” Tobias directed the question to his father, as the old man pointed his left hand at Jeremiah through the open door, who was placing the laptop onto the dining table, waiting for them to come.

Standing next to him, the older brother placed his head closer to the screen, looking at the feed which presented itself. Peter, who did not yet know what had occurred, was more surprised to notice that the family’s farm had been equipped with filming equipment.

Turning around, Tobias and his father exchanged a look of worry, until one of them would speak...

Jonathan: “Son, what are we to do? What do you say?”

Listening to him, Tobias stared at the open door, wiping his mouth with his right hand as he was thinking. Suddenly, he spoke out to Peter. “Stranger, why don’t you go with us for a ride? It’ll do you good.”

The four men somehow sat on the loud tractor, and as Tobias had issued it to drive, Peter asked Jonathan what was happening, looking curiously at the unnerved family.

Jonathan stared at the outer fields while they drove, answering back without exchanging sights, his shoulders tense. “My son, there are people outside our gates...”

At first, Peter could see no harm in the man’s words, answering. “Maybe they’re looking for help?”

To his surprise, the quiet younger brother he knew as Jeremiah, sharply answered. “Stranger, nice people are hard to find, now more than ever...”

“Quit blabbering, Jey!” Tobias yelled from the front, waving his hands in the air. “Who knows? Maybe good ol’ Pete here’s right!”

Twelve minutes would pass before they would find themselves standing in front of the inner side of the gates. Motioning for him, Tobias directed Jeremiah to press the opening switch on the left side. Now, they would face the people outside in direct contact...

“Folks, nice to see you first.” Jonathan addressed the two women and the man who stood on the other side of the now-open gates. Placing both of his hands on his hips, the old man continued to speak firmly. “Second, we would be grateful if you told us why you are here...”

At first, the blonde-haired man who wore a pair of glasses looked at him in surprise, seemingly not expecting to hear such a cautious response. With a slight stutter in his voice, he answered back, the two women behind him exchanging their careful sights with the brothers...

“We, well... We...”

Noticing his stance, Jonathan interrupted him. “Best you speak on out, son. I am no man of trickery...”

Hearing him, the younger man closed his mouth, the woman to his left beginning to speak, in whose tone, a sense of preparation could be felt. “Nice to meet you, friends. We are a small family that truly needs help, and seeing your walls, we would be thankful if you could provide it.”

Instead of Jonathan, Tobias would loudly answer. “And what kind of help do you need?” To his question, Jeremiah would pursue. “And... And tell us about yourselves!”

The woman slightly smiled. “My name’s Rosemary, Rosemary Arkenshaw. This here’s my brother Billy, and my younger sister Veronica. When this all began, we got separated from our father and mother in New York, and ever since, we have tried to survive by any means we could.”

Jonathan, who waited for her introduction, replied. “And what is it you might need, Rosemary?”

Rosemary: “Honestly, sir... We were looking for some food and drinks. Something to keep us going for the next couple of days.”

Carefully listening to her words, the old man noticed the timeframe she used. “And tell me, child... Where are you going?”

Rosemary: “We are heading to the borough of Lewisburg, heard rumors a community had been formed...”

Jeremiah walked up closer to his father, whispering in his ear. “Dad, I... I don’t believe them. Somethin’ ain’t right...”

Jonathan: “Hold on for a couple of moments, strangers...”

Turning around, the old man met with his two sons. He motioned for Peter to walk up to them as well. They spoke in whispers.

Jeremiah: “We... We need to make them leave...”

Tobias: “What? Why?”

Jeremiah: “How do we know they’re alone? It don’t make any sense... No walls... No borders...”

Tobias: “You’re making no sense. Listen to yourself!”

Jonathan: “Toby, your brother speaks reasonably. You know, as much as I do... That a group of three, to survive this long with no shelter... It is not far to say that they have help...”

Tobias: “And what if they do? We should not help them? We’re people, all of us!”

Peter noticed the untrustworthy expressions the members of the family had exchanged amongst each other, not knowing himself what to think.

Jeremiah: “Well, I’m not in!”

The younger brother whispered before he would separate from them, leaning on the right side of the gate.

Tobias: “This ain’t right...”

The older brother calmly spoke as he walked to the left side of the gates, expressing his opinion. Jonathan looked at Peter closely, speaking to him in a quiet tone. “Peter, what do you say?”

1: WE NEED TO HELP THEM...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 8 - EMPATHY

2: SAY NOTHING...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 8 - CAUTION

3: WE STICK TO OUR OWN...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 8 - SAFETY

CHAPTER 8 – EMPATHY

Listening to Peter's words, the old man called for the three people to enter. As they did, he instructed Tobias to bring two bags of supplies, one with food, the other with beverages, while Jeremiah, who did not approve of his decision, pressed the switch so the door would close.

The woman who spoke with him shook hands, showing appreciation for the old man's hospitality. As they stood there, Jonathan would begin a deeper conversation, discovering more about them.

Jonathan: "I would be thankful if you'd tell me more about yourselves. You said you got separated from your parents. Your father... What did he do before all this?"

Rosemary looked at him, a sign of discomfort appearing as she touched her shoulders.

Rosemary: "Our father, he... He was a carpenter... Worked like a dog for a business that treated him like dust..."

Exchanging a sight with Peter, Jonathan continued.

Jonathan: "What was the name of the company?"

Rosemary: "Well, to be honest..."

She slightly chuckled...

Rosemary: "I can't remember..."

To the woman's surprise, the younger man standing next to her spoke.

Billy: "We... Welshare Industries..."

Hearing him, Jonathan's expression grew grim. The old man remembered the events of the past...

Jonathan: "The past is the past, my boy... There is no changing it."

Rosemary: "Agreed."

She looked around herself, examining the distance of the owned property...

Rosemary: "You seem to be well fortified here. How many of yours?"

With a slight wave of his hand, Jonathan answered.

Jonathan: "Missy, best we don't share that information. We'll help you, but after we do... I suggest you go on your way..."

As he spoke, Tobias could be seen approaching with the tractor, two bags on his shoulders, ones he would hand to the younger sister and brother of the woman known as Rosemary. Once more, she shook hands with the old man.

Rosemary: "I thank you for this. There aren't a lot of good people around anymore."

Jonathan smiled. “May the Lord be with you.”

Jeremiah opened the gates, through which they appeared to walk away...

CHAPTER 9 – EMPATHY

Peter spent the remainder of the day together with Tobias, learning how their family farm had operated. As the evening slowly set in, he found himself sitting on the wooden stairs in front of the house's door, staring at the distant setting sun.

Jonathan walked up from behind, sitting next to him.

Jonathan: "It sure is a beauty, ain't it?"

Peter smiled, listening to the old man's words, deep down, knowing what he had to do.

Peter: "I... I thank you for the hospitality provided, Jonathan. I really do... But..."

Without letting him finish, Jonathan patted him on the back.

Jonathan: "Your boy... You need to find him, I know... Tell me, do you know where he may be? Last I remember, you spoke about Minneapolis, said he's with an uncle..."

Peter thought about it, convincing himself of one thing.

Peter: "My... My brother... He's with him, he took him as his own after..."

Looking him directly in the eyes, Jonathan warmly spoke.

Jonathan: "Don't think about it, son... The past has come and gone... There ain't nothing to be done about it. But for the future, there is no telling what you can do..."

A tear slipped down Peter's eye...

Peter: "Th... Thank you..."

Noticing his saddened expression, the old man tried to shift his attention.

Jonathan: "So, this brother of yours... Where's he situated?"

Peter: "... Pittsburgh, he lives in the downtown area, near Whitehall, if you know about it..."

Jonathan: "Oh, my boy... I sure do."

Looking behind them, Jonathan touched him by the shoulder, motioning for him to get up.

Jonathan: "Come on, Peter. Don't want to be late for dinner. Margaret sure ain't a fan of that!"

They sat next to each other, warm smiles passing from one to the other, as Peter would spend the rest of the evening under the family's warm hospitality.

CHAPTER 10 – EMPATHY

The morning sun slowly rose, as Peter stood in front of the family home, carrying a full backpack of supplies... Jonathan and Margaret stood in front of the door, smiles present on their faces, while their two sons walked up to him.

Tobias offered him a hug, to which Peter would gladly answer. The other brother, Jeremiah, with whom Peter had not agreed before, only shook his hand, offering a respectful nod, which his older brother would notice.

Their father spoke from behind, waving at Peter. “May God be with you, my son.”

Peter smiled back, slowly beginning to walk away.

.
. .
. . .

“H... Hang on!”

He heard a yell from one of the brothers... Tobias suddenly turned to face his parents, speaking dearly.

Tobias: “Mom, paps, I... I want to go with him... Th... There’s nothing for me here, I... I...”

Swift tears formed.

Tobias: “I want to prove that I can be strong... That I can face what awaits me out there... I want to prove it to myself... that... I can be as strong as her...”

Without a word, Jonathan hugged him with a force only a father could give, a couple of tears leaving the old man as well... His older turned to look at his younger...

Tobias: “Je... Jeremiah is here with you... He knows what to do... He knows how to keep you safe... I know it...”

Jonathan: “Go...”

His father would whisper in his ears, loudly addressing Peter.

Jonathan: “Peter, if it’s alright with you... Tobias here would help you find your way...”

Peter walked back to them, looking at the two brothers who hugged each other in tears... Standing in front of the old man, Jonathan spoke to him closely, slightly visible tears still finding their way...

Jonathan: “He knows how they act... He’ll help you, immensely...”

Peter could do nothing but stare at him, listening to his words of farewell.

Jonathan: “Watch each other’s back... Keep him safe, Peter... As much as you can...”

Tobias stood next to him, smiling in happiness.

Tobias: “Come on, stranger. Shall we?”

Although he did not expect this to happen, deep down, Peter felt safer having company on his way out. With a hug, he said farewell to Jonathan and the rest of the family, walking with Tobias into the farm fields beyond...

CHAPTER 11 – EMPATHY

Passing through the gates, Peter and Tobias stepped into the thickness of the autumn woods. The two men walked beneath the shadows of the long pines, carefully looking at their steps as they traversed through the leaf-filled forest grounds.

While they walked, Peter noticed Tobias constantly shifting sights. Wondering what he was doing, Peter asked him, to which the man would respond.

Tobias: “Listening, observing. You... You can sense when they’re close... You can hear their gurgling...”

With nothing but a nod, Peter continued to look in front, not knowing what exactly Tobias had meant, but feeling he would eventually find out, sooner or later. Minutes would pass as they walked. Those same minutes turned into two long hours before they would find themselves standing in the vicinity of Decker Road.

Noticing the small wooden houses, Peter spoke to Tobias, asking him if they should maybe look for someone, to which the village man would harshly refuse, staring at him...

Tobias: “You... You don’t understand... There is no one... Every single one of them... They’re either gone or... they turned... And we won’t be takin’ no risks...”

Spotting an abandoned gas station in the southwest direction, Tobias quickly motioned for Peter to follow, as the two of them would quietly enter the small building. Finding a small corner, each to his own, they would rest throughout the afternoon...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 12
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 8 - CAUTION

Observing Peter's lack of words, the old man would listen to his own instincts, calling for the three people to enter. As they did, he instructed Tobias to bring two bags of supplies, one with food, the other with beverages, while Jeremiah, who did not approve of his decision, pressed the switch so the door would close...

The woman who spoke with him shook hands, showing appreciation for the old man's hospitality. As they stood there, Jonathan would begin a deeper conversation, discovering more about them.

Jonathan: "I would be thankful if you'd tell me more about yourselves. You said you got separated from your parents. Your father... What did he do before all this?"

Rosemary looked at him, a sign of discomfort appearing as she touched her shoulders.

Rosemary: "Our father, he... He was a carpenter... Worked like a dog for a business that treated him like dust..."

Exchanging a sight with Peter, Jonathan continued.

Jonathan: "What was the name of the company?"

Rosemary: "Well, to be honest..."

She slightly chuckled.

Rosemary: "I can't remember..."

To the woman's surprise, the younger man standing next to her spoke.

Billy: "We... Welshare Industries..."

Hearing him, Jonathan's expression grew grim. The old man remembered the events of the past...

Jonathan: "The past is the past, my boy... There is no changing it."

Rosemary: "Agreed."

She looked around herself, examining the distance of the owned property...

Rosemary: "You seem to be well fortified here. How many of yours?"

With a slight wave of his hand, Jonathan answered.

Jonathan: "Missy, best we don't share that information. We'll help you, but after we do... I suggest you go on your way..."

As he spoke, Tobias could be seen approaching with the tractor, two bags on his shoulders, ones he would hand to the younger sister and brother of the woman known as Rosemary. Once more, she shook hands with the old man.

Rosemary: "I thank you for this. There aren't a lot of good people around anymore."

Jonathan smiled. “May the Lord be with you.”

Jeremiah opened the gates, through which they appeared to walk away...

CHAPTER 9 - CAUTION

Peter spent the remainder of the day together with the two brothers, learning how their family farm had operated. As the evening slowly set in, he found himself sitting on the wooden stairs in front of the house's door, staring at the distant setting sun.

Jonathan walked up from behind, sitting next to him.

Jonathan: "It sure is a beauty, ain't it?"

Peter smiled, listening to the old man's words, deep down, knowing what he had to do.

Peter: "I... I thank you for the hospitality provided, Jonathan. I really do... But..."

Without letting him finish, Jonathan patted him on the back.

Jonathan: "Your boy... You need to find him, I know... Tell me, do you know where he may be? Last I remember, you spoke about Minneapolis, said he's with an uncle..."

Peter thought about it, convincing himself of one thing.

Peter: "My... My brother... He's with him, he took him as his own after..."

Looking him directly in the eyes, Jonathan warmly spoke.

Jonathan: "Don't think about it, son... The past has come and gone... There ain't nothing to be done about it. But for the future, there is no telling what you can do..."

A tear slipped down Peter's eye.

Peter: "Th... Thank you..."

Noticing his saddened expression, the old man tried to shift his attention.

Jonathan: "So, this brother of yours... Where's he situated?"

Peter: "... Pittsburgh, he lives in the downtown area, near Whitehall, if you know about it..."

Jonathan: "Oh, my boy... I sure do."

Looking behind them, Jonathan touched him by the shoulder, motioning for him to get up.

Jonathan: "Come on, Peter. Don't want to be late for dinner. Margaret sure ain't a fan of that!"

They sat next to each other, warm smiles passing from one to the other, as Peter would spend the rest of the evening under the family's warm hospitality.

CHAPTER 10 – CAUTION

The morning sun slowly rose, as Peter stood in front of the family home, carrying a full backpack of supplies. Jonathan and Margaret stood in front of the door, smiles present on their faces, while their two sons walked up to him.

Tobias offered him a hug, to which Peter would gladly answer. The other brother, Jeremiah, with whom Peter did not make disagreements before, would only shake his hand, offering a respectful nod, which his older brother would notice.

Their father spoke from behind, waving at Peter. “May God be with you, my son.”

Peter smiled back, slowly beginning to walk away.

.
. .
. . .

“H... Hang on!”

He heard a yell from one of the brothers... Tobias suddenly turned to face his parents, speaking dearly.

Tobias: “Mom, paps, I... I want to go with him... Th... There’s nothing for me here, I... I...”

Swift tears formed.

Tobias: “I want to prove that I can be strong... That I can face what awaits me out there... I want to prove it to myself... that... I can be as strong as her...”

Without a word, Jonathan hugged him with a force only a father could give, a couple of tears leaving the old man as well... His older turned to look at his younger...

Tobias: “Je... Jeremiah is here with you... He knows what to do... He knows how to keep you safe... I know it...”

Jonathan: “Go...”

His father would whisper in his ears, loudly addressing Peter.

Jonathan: “Peter, if it’s alright with you... Tobias here would help you find your way...”

Peter walked back to them, looking at the two brothers who hugged each other in tears... Standing in front of the old man, Jonathan spoke to him closely, slightly visible tears still finding their way...

Jonathan: “He knows how they act... He’ll help you, immensely...”

Peter could do nothing but stare at him, listening to his words of farewell...

Jonathan: "Watch each other's back... Keep him safe, Peter... As much as you can..."

Tobias stood next to him, smiling in happiness.

Tobias: "Come on, stranger. Shall we?"

Although he did not expect this to happen, deep down, Peter felt safer having company on his way out. With a hug, he said farewell to Jonathan and the rest of the family, walking with Tobias into the farm fields beyond...

CHAPTER 11 - CAUTION

Passing through the gates, Peter and Tobias stepped into the thickness of the autumn woods. The two men walked beneath the shadows of the long pines, carefully looking at their steps as they traversed through the leaf-filled forest grounds.

While they walked, Peter noticed Tobias constantly shifting sights. Wondering what he was doing, Peter asked him, to which the man would respond.

Tobias: “Listening, observing. You... You can sense when they’re close... You can hear their gurgling...”

With nothing but a nod, Peter continued to look in front, not knowing what exactly Tobias had meant, but feeling he would eventually find out, sooner or later. Minutes would pass as they walked. Those same minutes turned into two long hours before they would find themselves standing in the vicinity of Decker Road.

Noticing the small wooden houses, Peter spoke to Tobias, asking him if they should maybe look for someone, to which the village man would harshly refuse, looking at him...

Tobias: “You... You don’t understand... There is no one... Every single one of them... They’re either gone or... they turned... And we won’t be takin’ no risks...”

Spotting an abandoned gas station in the southwest direction, Tobias quickly motioned for Peter to follow, as the two of them would quietly enter the small building. Finding a small corner, each to his own, they would rest throughout the afternoon...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 12
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 8 - SAFETY

Listening to Peter's words, the old man called for the three people to stand still. As they did, he instructed Jeremiah to stand close to the switch of the door.

The woman who spoke with him earlier looked at him with wide eyes, showing a sign of worry for the old man's reaction. As they stood there, Jonathan would begin a deeper conversation, discovering more about them.

Jonathan: "I would be thankful if you'd tell me more about yourselves. You said you got separated from your parents. Your father... What did he do before all this?"

Rosemary looked at him, a sign of discomfort appearing as she touched her shoulders.

Rosemary: "Our father, he... He was a carpenter... Worked like a dog for a business that treated him like dust..."

Exchanging a sight with Peter, Jonathan continued.

Jonathan: "What was the name of the company?"

Rosemary: "Well, to be honest..."

She slightly chuckled...

Rosemary: "I can't remember..."

To the woman's surprise, the younger man standing next to her spoke.

Billy: "We... Welshare Industries..."

Hearing him, Jonathan's expression grew grim. The old man remembered the events of the past...

Jonathan: "The past is the past, my boy... There is no changing it."

Rosemary: "Agreed."

Still standing on the other side of the door, she tried to look farther in front, examining the distance of the owned property.

Rosemary: "You seem to be well fortified there. How many of yours?"

With a slight wave of his hand, Jonathan answered.

Jonathan: "Missy, best we don't share that information. And I am sad to tell you this, but we are not in a situation to help strangers. I suggest you go on your way."

Hearing Jonathan's words, Peter could see Tobias looking at both him and his father resentfully.

Rosemary: "But... We only ask for little... Have you no heart? We'll die out here!"

Jonathan's expression grew bitter. "May the Lord be with you."

With his command, Jeremiah began to close the gates, and before they would be fully closed, the small group appeared to walk away...

CHAPTER 9 - SAFETY

Peter spent the remainder of the day together with Jeremiah, learning how their family farm had operated. As the evening slowly set in, he found himself sitting on the wooden stairs in front of the house's door, staring at the distant setting sun.

Jonathan walked up from behind, sitting next to him.

Jonathan: "It sure is a beauty, ain't it?"

Peter smiled, listening to the old man's words, deep down, knowing what he had to do.

Peter: "I... I thank you for the hospitality provided, Jonathan. I really do... But..."

Without letting him finish, Jonathan patted him on the back.

Jonathan: "Your boy... You need to find him, I know... Tell me, do you know where he may be? Last I remember, you spoke about Minneapolis, said he's with an uncle..."

Peter thought about it, convincing himself of one thing.

Peter: "My... my brother... He's with him, he took him as his own after..."

Looking him directly in the eyes, Jonathan warmly spoke.

Jonathan: "Don't think about it, son... The past has come and gone... There ain't nothing to be done about it. But for the future, there is no telling what you can do..."

A tear slipped down Peter's eye...

Peter: "Th... Thank you..."

Noticing his saddened expression, the old man tried to shift his attention.

Jonathan: "So, this brother of yours... Where's he situated?"

Peter: "... Pittsburgh, he lives in the downtown area, near Whitehall, if you know about it..."

Jonathan: "Oh, my boy... I sure do."

Looking behind them, Jonathan touched him by the shoulder, motioning for him to get up.

Jonathan: "Come on, Peter. Don't want to be late for dinner. Margaret sure ain't a fan of that!"

Noticing Tobias's absence, Peter spoke before getting up.

Peter: "Is... Is he alright?"

The old man's eyes closed, as Jonathan quickly thought about what to say.

Jonathan: “Peter, he... He does not understand what is happening... He wants things to remain as they have before... But I’m sure that... As time passes, he’ll understand the decisions we have to make, no matter how harsh they may seem...”

In the passing moments, they sat next to each other, Tobias walking inside, warm smiles passing from one to the other, as Peter would spend the rest of the evening under the family’s warm hospitality...

CHAPTER 10 - SAFETY

The morning sun slowly rose, as Peter stood in front of the family home, carrying a full backpack of supplies. Jonathan and Margaret stood in front of the door, smiles present on their faces, while their two sons walked up to him.

Tobias only offered him a handshake, to which Peter would gladly answer. The other brother, Jeremiah, with whom Peter had agreed before, offered him a hug, an action his older brother would notice.

Their father spoke from behind, waving at Peter. "May God be with you, my son."

Peter smiled back, slowly beginning to walk away.

.
. .
.

"H... Hang on!"

He heard a yell from one of the brothers... Tobias suddenly turned to face his parents, speaking dearly...

Tobias: "Mom, paps, I... I want to go with him... Th... There's nothing for me here, I... I..."

Swift tears formed.

Tobias: "I want to prove that I can be strong... That I can face what awaits me out there... I want to prove it to myself... that... I can be as strong as her..."

Without a word, Jonathan widely hugged him, a couple of tears leaving the old man as well... His older turned to look at his younger.

Tobias: "Je... Jeremiah is here with you... He knows what to do... He knows how to keep you safe... I know it... I... I'll change... I will learn, father... I will learn what has to be done..."

Jonathan: "Go..."

His father would whisper in his ears, loudly addressing Peter.

Jonathan: "Peter, if it's alright with you... Tobias here would help you find your way..."

Peter walked back to them, looking at the two brothers who hugged each other in tears... Standing in front of the old man, Jonathan spoke to him closely, slightly visible tears still finding their way.

Jonathan: “He knows how they act... He’ll help you, immensely...”

Peter could do nothing but stare at him, listening to his words of farewell.

Jonathan: “Watch each other’s back... Keep him safe, Peter... As much as you can...”

Tobias stood next to him, smiling in happiness.

Tobias: “Come on, stranger. Shall we?”

Although he did not expect this to happen, deep down, Peter felt safer having company on his way out. With a hug, he said farewell to Jonathan and the rest of the family, walking with Tobias into the farm fields beyond...

CHAPTER 11 – SAFETY

Passing through the gates, Peter and Tobias stepped into the thickness of the autumn woods. The two men walked beneath the shadows of the long pines, carefully looking at their steps as they traversed through the leaf-filled forest grounds.

While they walked, Peter noticed Tobias constantly shifting sights. Wondering what he was doing, Peter asked him, to which the man would respond.

Tobias: “Listening, observing. You... You can sense when they’re close... You can hear their gurgling...”

With nothing but a nod, Peter continued to look in front, not knowing what exactly Tobias had meant, but feeling he would eventually find out, sooner or later. Minutes would pass as they walked. Those same minutes turned into two long hours before they would find themselves standing in the vicinity of Decker Road.

Noticing the small wooden houses, Peter spoke to Tobias, asking him if they should maybe look for someone, to which the village man would harshly refuse, looking at him...

Tobias: “You... You don’t understand... There is no one... Every single one of them... They’re either gone or... they turned... And we won’t be takin’ no risks... Just like you and paps did not...”

Spotting an abandoned gas station in the southwest direction, Tobias quickly motioned for Peter to follow, as the two of them would quietly enter the small building. Finding a small corner, each to his own, they would rest throughout the afternoon...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 12
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 12

Waking up, Peter looked around himself, noticing that Tobias was not to be seen. Quickly standing up, he walked around the interior of the station, looking for him, and as he did not find him, Peter went back to take his backpack.

Walking outside, he called out for his name.

Peter: "Tobias? Tobias!"

Suddenly, he saw the man running up to him from his right. Tobias nervously spoke.

Tobias: "D... Don't do that ever again! They... They can hear you."

Looking at his fearful eyes, Peter nodded, and the two of them would continue to walk forward, passing through the rural streets. Time would go by as they walked on Fox Farm Road, looking at the surrounding trees... In the coming hours, they began to hear the sound of flowing water, noticing a creek, Lopatcong Creek.

Without a second thought, Tobias ran towards it, quickly placing his head on the small waves of water, drinking. Peter looked at him, confused.

Peter: "Why... Why don't you drink this?"

He took out one of the plastic bottles of water Jonathan had prepared for him, pointing it in Tobias's direction, who harshly answered.

Tobias: "Hell, stranger. That... That needs to be the very last thing on your mind if we are to make it. You need to understand... There's not a lot of supplies left, you've seen it in the station. And by the way, nothing can compare to this, mother's sweet nature..."

Suddenly, Peter looked around, hearing what appeared to be footsteps coming in their direction. Hearing them as well, Tobias immediately rushed upwards, taking what appeared to be a combat knife out of the back pocket of his pants, one which Peter did not notice before...

Placing his pointy finger in front of his mouth, he motioned for Peter to stay quiet, slowly walking forward, nearing the noise.

"Not quite enough."

The two men had become surprised as they heard a female voice coming from the thickness of the trees, and upon seeing what the African-American woman was holding, Tobias slowly stepped back, now standing beside Peter, mistrust placed within his eyes.

Wearing a bandana over her mouth, the seemingly young woman called for him to drop the knife on the ground, to which Tobias obeyed.

"Come on, place those legs back, just a bit more."

She addressed the two men, who followed. As they did so, the woman, who wore a long green coat all over her body, crouched, her long strands of hair not yet visible because of the hood above, taking the knife to herself.

Stepping back, she placed the rifle she held behind her back, attaching it to the leather belt around her waist.

“You from around here?”

Angrily looking at her, Tobias replied.

Tobias: “What’s it to ya’?”

Slowly taking the hood off, and revealing her long brown hair, she smiled, mockingly answering back.

“Well, I like to know who I am speaking with. And seeing your behavior before, amateurism is the first thing that came to mind...”

Tobias: “Amateurism? Oh, you don’t talk to me like that. I know these parts better than-”

“Oh, so you are from here. Good, and you, quiet man?”

Peter continued to look at her, not expecting to come in contact with an armed female, slowly remembering his time in prison...

“Hello? I’m speaking to you.”

Pulling him out of his trance, Peter spoke back.

Peter: “Peter... Peter Folley.”

To their surprise, the woman laughed.

“Best you tell me your address, home number, and everything...”

Slightly scratching her right fist, she continued to speak.

“Name’s Shawne. Yours, village boy?”

Tobias: “... Tobias...”

Shawne: “Well, Tobias, there’s no need to be all worked up. There are no bad people around here. Not yet, that is...”

She threw the knife back on the ground, which Tobias would quickly pick up. With the passing of seconds, the woman would walk in her own direction, who Peter curiously looked at...

Peter: “Wh... Hey! Where are you going?”

Shawne: “Best you people continue on your way. It’s slowly becoming dark...”

Realizing the meaning of her words, Tobias quickly looked around them, noticing that the sun was slowly beginning to set. Without a second to wait, he quickly pulled Peter after him, yelling for him to run...

With no knowledge as to why, and seeing time had not presented itself for further questions, Peter followed.

CHAPTER 13

They ran as fast as they could, time not being on their side. Already feeling he was slowly reaching his limits, the still-wounded Peter stopped, catching his breath... Tobias ran back, pulling him, screaming...

Tobias: "God damn it! We have to go, now!"

And just as he had spoken, he widened his eyes, realizing what he said. With no other words, but a single nod, Tobias called for him to continue, Peter himself realizing the emotional state the man in front of him felt, learning of his catholic childhood.

With the minutes passing by, they found themselves in the town of Lopatcong. Running throughout its streets, Peter would suddenly be stopped by Tobias's hand, as they looked at a person... standing on the concrete road... whose eyes were white... looking at them.

Feeling a stinging sensation on his left hand, Peter looked at his palm, which had a slight cut, one he received as they ran through the forest, small drops of blood coming out. Tobias, who did not yet look at him, still stared at the figure, the small boy... turning his attention to him. His eyes widened upon seeing the small trace of blood...

The figure appeared to slowly raise its head upwards, looking as if it was smelling for something. And as it had found the trace, the dead boy... the first risen Peter would see, let out a blood-curdling scream, fiercely beginning to run in their direction...

Tobias, who found a sense of orientation, quickly pulled out his knife, jumping at the risen, who was inches away from reaching Peter, stabbing it directly into the left side of its skull.

Slowly raising himself off the concrete road, he looked around them, shock running through him, as Tobias saw more, and more of the risen...

Feeling the slight force of the wind behind him, Peter began to turn around, but before he could, they would both feel a tap on their backs, as the woman they had seen before, ran in front of them, circling to their left, yelling...

Shawne: "Come on!"

Following Tobias, who immediately ran after her, Peter noticed the movement of the risen, seeing that, upon seeing the boy lying on the ground, almost in unison, their gazes centered on him, and they would begin to inhumanly run, letting out terrorizing screams...

Shawne placed her hand on the steel handle of a house she coordinately ran towards, and upon managing to unlock the door with a key she held in her hand, the woman opened it, calling for them, as they would practically throw themselves inside the small corridor. Closing and locking the door, Shawne suddenly yelled for them to stop any movement.

The three of them remained quiet for what felt like minutes, hearing the scratching on the wooden surface of the door, feeling the will of the risen, who would stop at nothing to get inside...

CHAPTER 14

Both Peter and Tobias looked at the young woman, who seemed to closely listen to the sounds which came from the outside. Over the brief span of time, she got up on her legs, whispering to them.

Shawne: “Go.”

The two men followed her into what looked to be an organized living room, whose windows had been boarded up by dozens of wooden planks. Motioning for them to sit on the red leather sofa that had been in the south-eastern spot of the room, she walked in front of a black cupboard, from which she would pull out a bottle of alcohol, taking three glasses with it.

Placing it in front of them on the carpet-covered floor, she poured the drink into the glasses. Tobias asked.

Tobias: “What’s that?”

Smiling and glancing at him, Shawne answered.

Shawne: “Whiskey, village boy. Good ol’ whiskey...”

Peter slowly waved with his right hand.

Peter: “I... I can’t... I don’t do that anymore...”

Noticing his motion of slight distress, she answered back, handing him the glass anyway.

Shawne: “As for him, I saw confidence in how he acted out there. But for you, I did not, so this will help you ease up, stranger...”

Listening to her words, Peter held the glass with his right hand.

Tobias: “So, you from around here?”

With a sigh, she answered.

Shawne: “Uh, no... I don’t... stick to places...”

Tobias: “Why not?”

Shawne: “I feel more safe knowing my road...”

Peter asked her a question, noticing her previous familiarity with the house.

Peter: “For how long have you been here?”

Their eyes meeting, she cautiously answered.

Shawne: “For... three weeks...”

Suddenly, Tobias quietly chuckled.

Tobias: “Well, that don’t sound to me like you’re a moving type of person!”

Shawne: "You... you don't understand... I-"

Before she could answer, however, the two men shivered upon hearing a sound of steps coming from behind them, followed by an innocent voice.

Skye: "I'm scared..."

Turning around, both Peter and Tobias could see a small girl standing behind them, a soft blanket around her. Shawne quickly got up, crouching and hugging her.

Shawne: "Don't be, angel. Everything is going to be okay."

Pointing her finger at them, Shawne continued.

Shawne: "Look, I brought you some friends!"

Skye: "Fri... Friends?"

Tobias just continued to stare, not knowing how he should react. Peter, on the other hand, walked up to her, crouching to face her, shaking her small hand.

Peter: "Hello, sweetie. My name is Peter, and what might yours be?"

With a small look of doubt, the girl answered.

Skye: "... Skye..."

Hearing her answer, Peter widely smiled, placing his hand on her curled blonde hair.

Peter: "Well, I am happy to meet you, Skye."

Tobias, who saw that the young girl looked at him, quietly answered before turning his head to look away.

Tobias: "Name's Tobias..."

Shawne spoke to her with care in her voice.

Shawne: "What happened, angel?"

First, the girl looked at the floor, small tears appearing in her innocent eyes...

Skye: "I... I saw them... I saw mommy and daddy..."

Without waiting, Shawne hugged her.

Shawne: "Oh, don't worry... We'll find them. Remember what I said?"

Slowly, Shawne took the girl in her hands as she walked upstairs, placing her back inside her bed, covering her with warm blankets. Walking down, she sat once more in front of the two men, drinking the glass of whiskey in a single shot.

Tobias, who still seemed to be in a state of shock, whispered.

Tobias: "She... She's yours?"

Fiercely looking back at him, Shawne abruptly answered.

Shawne: “Oh for fuck’s sake, jackass... You haven’t heard what she said? Her... Her parents are gone, God knows where...”

Peter softly addressed her, taking notice of her distress.

Peter: “When did you find her?”

Shawne: “Fucking three weeks ago... You two catch anything now?”

Tobias: “Wh... What?”

Shawne: “Jackass, I stepped inside this town three weeks ago. Twenty-two days, to be exact. Not knowing where to look first, I scavenged house by house, and as I stepped inside this one, I found her. And now I’m stuck here. I can’t just leave the poor girl behind...”

Curiosity running through him, Peter asked.

Peter: “You just found her?”

Shawne: “Huh... She was inside her room, crying in a corner. She said her mom and dad left a note, that they should have come back some days ago. So what am I supposed to do? Finding a six-year-old girl that has no one to care for her, I stay here...”

She poured one more glass, and after drinking it, continued to speak, now looking at them closely.

Shawne: “So, enough about my fucked up situation. Where the hell are you two going?”

Pointing a finger in his direction, Tobias answered with a smile.

Tobias: “Helpin’ him.”

Peter: “I... I am going to get my son...”

Slightly changing her position on the wooden chair, Shawne investigated.

Shawne: “And where is he?”

Looking at the small glass, Peter took several seconds to give an answer.

Peter: “He should be in Pittsburgh...”

Hearing his answer, Shawne widened her eyes, slightly laughing in shock.

Shawne: “Pittsburgh? You’ve gotta be kidding me, man. That place’s been overrun by these freaks. The possibility of finding someone alive in there is best to...”

Realizing what she had intended to say, the woman suddenly stopped, changing her answer...

Shawne: “I... I’m sorry, I didn’t think... Look, you can sleep here for the night. In the morning, I’ll show you the best way onward, okay?”

As she was getting up to walk upstairs and bring them a pair of blankets, Peter interrupted, asking her.

Peter: “What happened to everything, Shawne?”

With bitterness in her voice, the woman answered, looking away.

Shawne: “The world has gone to hell. That’s what happened, Folley...”

CHAPTER 15

The morning soon came to rise, as Peter stood up on his legs, looking at the rays of the shining sun, rays that passed between the vacant houses around them, he thought to himself how he should proceed, ever so slightly looking back at the still-sleeping Tobias.

At his core, Peter had not known why the young man would decide to accompany him on his path, but every time he would think about that, he found a sense of safety in being together with someone who could guide him through this new world.

Looking at his reflection in the glass, Peter thought about his boy. The lone father hoped as much as he could that his child was safe and unharmed.

He heard Tobias slowly rising from the sofa he slept on, and upon looking at the villager who placed both of his hands on his hair, Peter saw Tobias sigh, speaking calmly.

Tobias: "Huh, mornin' already."

Peter smiled. "You sure bet."

Several minutes would pass before the two men would pack their things, during which Shawne would come down, looking at them with her hands placed on her hips, leaned against the wall, smiling.

Shawne: "You two know where you're going?"

Peter wanted to answer. He was about to tell her they will follow the signs on their path, but before he could, Tobias replied instead.

Tobias: "Headin' out to Easton. From there, we'll see our best way forward."

The woman looked at him in confusion. "You'll see your best way forward?"

Tobias: "And head on where the Lord finds us best."

Peter could see Shawne's slight motion of disapproval, as the woman would continue to speak, trying to figure out Tobias's way of thought.

Shawne: "That does not sound safe, my man. With these freaks out there, well, there can be no more counting on luck."

Straightening his back, Tobias glanced at her.

Tobias: "Luck got nothin' to do with it. The Lord keeps us safe. I suggest you learn that."

Shawne chuckled, and to her reaction, the villager would respond, a feeling of tension present within his voice.

Tobias: "There's nothin' funny about that. Mockin' will do ya' no good."

Shawne: "Oh, honey, mocking's got nothing to do with it. The safest route you should take is--"

Hearing the innocent words coming behind her, Shawne would stop talking.

Skye: "C... Can we go with you? Please?"

Looking at her, Tobias would spin around, pretending to check his backpack as he crouched. Both Peter and Shawne kept their sights pointed at each other. Folley waited for her to continue, not knowing what the six-year-old girl had meant.

Skye: "I... I want to find them... I want to see mommy and daddy again... Please!"

Suddenly, she began to cry. Shawne quickly ran up to her, whispering.

Shawne: "Angel, remember what we said about noise? We need to be quiet..."

Without a moment's notice, Peter asked her curiously.

Peter: "Where are your mom and dad, sweetie?"

Looking up at him, the girl quietly answered, still wiping off her tears.

Skye: "They... They said they will be with aunt Jessica..."

The man walked up to her, crouching and placing his right hand on her left shoulder, giving her a wide smile.

Peter: "And where is your aunt?"

After she heard his question, Peter saw the little girl thinking, trying to remember. The moment her eyes grew wide, she spoke to him with a sense of excitement.

Skye: "Greensburg!"

Shawne: "Shhh!"

Shawne immediately placed a hand on the girl's mouth, as the child had unintentionally yelled. Peter knew of the place she spoke and was now thinking to himself. He knew its location was in the close vicinity of where he was going.

Looking back at him, Peter saw Tobias had issued him a look of annoyance, hoping he would not hear what he thought he would.

Peter: "That is on our way. If you want, you can come with us..."

Shawne looked at him with her eyes wide, not knowing what she should say in front of the girl, who hugged her in joy, begging her to agree. Deep down, she knew this was a chance for her to move on...

Peter: "We are safer together."

He offered her his hand, motioning for a handshake, to which Shawne would agree, and when a little more than an hour had passed, the woman and the girl joined them, Shawne carrying two long bags of supplies on her back.

CHAPTER 16

The small, newly formed group stepped onto the concrete road of the streets. Tobias, together with Shawne, seemed to have knowledge of the surrounding threats. The two of them stood in front of Peter, who held the young girl's left hand, smiling at her in order to keep her calm.

Shawne whispered to Tobias, pointing her hand in the southwest direction, indicating their attention towards a white four-door car.

Shawne: "Go."

She whispered as she began to walk towards it. Tobias, together with Peter and Skye behind him, followed. Shawne, now standing next to the door, took out what appeared to be a key underneath the vehicle as she was laying down on the concrete road.

Unlocking it, Tobias immediately entered the passenger's seat, while Peter sat behind with Skye by his side, Shawne in front of them.

Tobias: "Alright, when'd you think of tellin' us about this?"

Tobias spoke in annoyance, and Shawne equally replied.

Shawne: "Don't go there, man. You did not seriously think I was going to lend it to someone I've never met?"

Tobias: "Ah... never mind. Come on, this will shorten our trip. How much gas does it have?"

Shawne: "Well, now we'll know."

Tobias chuckled while opening the window.

Tobias: "Geez, woman... You have the key, but have no clue of the contents? Well, hope it turns-"

Looking at the alleyway to his right, he saw several risen... slowly approaching, looking at them, before they began to run. Hastily closing the window and placing his arm back inside, the villager yelled in panic.

Tobias: "Alright, turn it on, now! Go!"

Twisting the key, the engine's sound was heard, but the needed strength did not yet come, as the risen smashed themselves onto the doors, surrounding the vehicle, clawing at the windows...

Tobias: "God damn it, turn it harder!"

In her second attempt, the car gave life as the engine roared. Without a second to waste, Shawne stepped onto the pedal, beginning to traverse the town road, as the risen ran after them, screaming...

CHAPTER 17

Breathing heavily and wiping the sweat from his hair, Tobias calmed himself down, softly looking in Shawne's direction, whose sight remained fixed forward.

Tobias: "I... I'm sorry for earlier..."

Shawne looked at him fiercely, silently answering back. "Tell that to her."

Turning around, the confused Tobias looked at the little girl Skye, his cheeks becoming red from being uncomfortable. "Uh, little missy... I am sorry for my bad words..."

With a sad shine from her eyes, she replied. "Daddy always said that bad words are no good."

Slightly placing his right hand on his hair, Tobias replied, looking at the window behind. "I... I know, missy. Mister Tobias will get better, okay?"

Hearing his apology, Skye softly smiled, revealing a sight to be gazed upon, as the small girl laughed in joy...

Peter, who looked after her carefully, patted the young girl on the head. With a smile, he spoke.

Peter: "Skye, you are safe with us. I know we don't look like it, but we are casual when we relax, it's just... We all are getting used to our new environment, that is..."

With a shine from her eyes, the girl looked at Peter, returning him a smile.

Skye: "Peter, yes?"

With his nod, she continued.

Skye: "Can I call you Pete? I like that name."

Peter softly chuckled. "Of course you can, sweetie..."

Skye: "Great!"

As she spoke, Skye placed her small head against the window of the car's left-back door, closing her eyes as she began to rest, soon falling into a quiet sleep.

As Shawne drove through the streets of the connecting towns, Peter gazed upon the surrounding environment. The man saw the storefronts whose glass doors and windows were broken, countless bricks fallen from the damaged buildings on the walkways, streets devoid of people...

Shawne, who looked in the rearview mirror, noticed his saddened expression, soon realizing that he was not long-informed of the world events.

Shawne: "Hey, don't think about it, Folley... It's best when you don't..."

Several minutes passed before they would park in front of what appeared to be a large mall. Motioning for them to do so, they all got out of the vehicle, except for Skye, who Shawne had left in the car, locking the doors in order to keep her safe.

Shawne: “We go inside, and we look for any supplies we can find, alright?”

She spoke while walking in front of the two men who followed her. Tobias spoke back.

Tobias: “We already got supplies.”

Shawne: “If you have any intent at all to reach the destination you’re after, then that will not last.”

Without a reply, they would walk through the broken doors of the extensive building, whose inner sections of products were crashed, showing the signs of panic that had not so long ago occurred.

Seeing a pack of large woolen bags, Shawne quickly opened it, tossing two pairs each to Peter and Tobias, who went around the mall, each to a section he meant to gather from. Bottles of water, packs of vacuumed bread, several types of edible grain, and many more supplies were gathered. Before they would meet back in the mall’s middle section, Peter stood next to a shelf that contained a pack of fruit lollipops, wondering...

1- TAKE THEM...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 18 - TAKE

2- LEAVE THEM BE...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 18 - LEAVE

CHAPTER 18 – TAKE

Taking them, Peter placed them inside his left pocket, walking over to Shawne and Tobias. Pleased with what they had gathered, Shawne spoke.

Shawne: “We head back, place these in the trunk, and drive on to the nearest gas station, good?”

With their nod, they walked outside. As they stood behind the car, Shawne opened the trunk, where they would place the bags. Closing it, they stepped inside, the engine once again coming to life.

Awakening from her short sleep, Skye wiped her eyes, softly yawning.

Skye: “... Where were you?”

Shawne: “We were taking supplies, angel. We need to make sure we have food and water, remember?”

Skye answered before looking at Peter. “Um, yes...”

Looking back at her shiny blue eyes, Peter spoke. “Yes, sweetie?”

Skye: “You’re tall!”

To the men’s collective surprise, Shawne laughed upon hearing her words. Smiling back, Peter replied.

Peter: “Um, I believe I am, sweetie.”

Skye: “Are you strong?”

Scratching the back of his head, Peter spoke. “Well, it depends on the situation, Skye. Can I call you by your name?”

Skye: “Yes, I am not candy!”

Peter chuckled, remembering how he constantly addressed her.

Skye: “You’re quiet!”

The girl spoke to Tobias, whose eyes widened. Shawne winked at him.

Tobias: “Uh, well, missy... I ain’t much of a brilliant talker...”

Skye: “Daddy always told me we can be whatever we want. We just have to put in the work!”

Peter looked at her. “Your father spoke wisely, Skye.”

Skye: “Of course he did. He is the smartest in the world!”

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 19
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 19

CHAPTER 18 – LEAVE

Leaving them, Peter walked over to Shawne and Tobias. Pleased with what they had gathered, Shawne spoke.

Shawne: “We head back, place these in the trunk, and drive on to the nearest gas station, good?”

With their nod, they walked outside. As they stood behind the car, Shawne opened the trunk, where they would place the bags. Closing it, they stepped inside, the engine once again coming to life.

Awakening from her short sleep, Skye wiped her eyes, softly yawning.

Skye: “... Where were you?”

Shawne: “We were taking supplies, angel. We need to make sure we have food and water, remember?”

Skye answered before looking at Peter. “Um, yes...”

Looking back at her shiny blue eyes, Peter spoke. “Yes, sweetie?”

Skye: “You’re tall!”

To the men’s collective surprise, Shawne laughed upon hearing her words. Smiling back, Peter replied.

Peter: “Um, I believe I am, sweetie.”

Skye: “Are you strong?”

Scratching the back of his head, Peter spoke. “Well, it depends on the situation, Skye. Can I call you by your name?”

Skye: “Yes, I am not candy!”

Peter chuckled, remembering how he constantly addressed her.

Skye: “You’re quiet!”

The girl spoke to Tobias, whose eyes widened. Shawne winked at him.

Tobias: “Uh, well, missy... I ain’t much of a brilliant talker...”

Skye: “Daddy always told me we can be whatever we want. We just have to put in the work!”

Peter looked at her. “Your father spoke wisely, Skye.”

Skye: “Of course he did. He is the smartest in the world!”

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 19
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 19

CHAPTER 19

Parking next to the Stone Post Gas Station, Shawne and Peter would step outside the car, leaning against the trunk while Tobias poured the needed fuel inside the vehicle.

While he was looking at the distance, Peter spoke to her.

Peter: "I thank you for helping..."

Shawne sighed. "Don't mention it."

Peter: "If... you don't mind me asking... Why did you decide to join us? To you and that sweet little angel back there, the two of us present nothing but strangers..."

Slightly smiling, the woman answered. "Hell, Folley... You are correct, I know nothing about you or that village boy behind, but to tell you... The truth is, I did not know that girl, never seen her before in my life, and probably never would if it were not for my decision to explore those houses three weeks ago. And practically in a week, I've become a nanny to her, you could say. The same goes for you, too. I know nothing about you or your past. But seeing how the world went to hell in a fucking month... I just go with the feeling I get when I see you..."

Her look shifted to the sky.

Shawne: "When I saw you back there, in the creek, and later on, in the town... What I saw were two lost men. One who thinks he knows his way around, despite actually knowing jack shit... And the other, who looked lost, followed this rabbit like a sheep. I helped you get out of that situation because you were scared. You looked like you were going to jump out of your skin. And by seeing that, by seeing that innocent fear in your eyes, I knew you were not a bad person."

Placing her hand on the back window, Shawne looked at Skye, who herself had kept her view fixed upon the confused Tobias.

Shawne: "As to why I blindly accompanied you... You can blame her for that... Hearing her say what she did, calling out for help in order to find her parents, and you answering that is where you essentially headed, I knew that if I had refused, well... That girl would hate me like a motherfucker. And honestly, I couldn't afford that. So, here we are, and there is a lot you need to learn if you want to survive in this new world of ours, Folley..."

As he yelled at them, they heard Tobias.

Tobias: "It's full!"

Shawne: "Come on, Peter. Let's go."

CHAPTER 20

More than twenty minutes would pass before they would find themselves standing at a new destination. Stepping outside in order to stretch his legs, Tobias sighed in relief as he walked over to a nearby bush in order to perform his hygienic needs.

Walking back, he spoke cheerfully.

Tobias: “Boy, oh boy! Emptied up, and ready to go!”

Peter: “I’ve heard about this place many times...”

Shawne: “Well, it was nice at its peak...”

Hearing in on their conversation, Tobias interrupted.

Tobias: “Uh, what’ you two talkin’ about? This place’s a dump!”

Peter stared at him with a smile on his face, speaking back with a warm voice.

Peter: “I think your father would like it here, don’t you?”

Tobias: “... Don’t know. Anyway, shall we continue? It’s three o’clock already. We need to find a place to stay during the night.”

Looking back at Shawne, Peter noticed she was staring at the distance, looking at the risen who walked throughout the small community streets.

Peter: “I think Tobias is right, Shawne... We don’t want them to see us...”

Tobias: “It sure feels safe standin’ here in the woods, but the moment we walk in, hell will come...”

Shawne turned around, slowly breathing in.

Shawne: “Let’s-”

But before she could tell them to walk back into the car, several gunshots were heard, coming from the center of the town before them...

Without a moment’s thought, Tobias began to run in the direction of Laurys Station, taking the knife from the back pocket of his trousers, gripping it in his arms, yelling after them...

Tobias: “We’ve got to help!”

Suddenly, Shawne and Peter looked at each other.

Shawne: “Go, I’ll take the rifle from the trunk!”

As Peter was running after Tobias throughout the rural streets, the risen began to notice both of their movements... Cries for help were heard, cries coming from what appeared to be a semi-elderly male voice, and the voices of a woman and a boy.

Now, being able to see the small family that several of the risen had surrounded, Tobias yelled for them to run back, to which the grey-haired man would yell back...

“Nowhere to!”

Once again, he shot one of the risen straight into the head with an old rifle he held in his hands, the others coming closer to his wife and son...

Without thinking, Tobias rushed at them, stabbing at least two of them in the back of their heads before they could turn around, but as the others did, they shifted their attention in his direction, slowly approaching...

Peter ran to him, hitting the weaker-appearing risen, throwing one of them to the ground. Tobias stood by his side, and as they were slowly being surrounded, they heard gunshots coming from the direction they came from, shots taking out several of the risen as bullets passed through their heads...

Looking at the woman that fired, the older man raised up his rifle as he placed a round of bullets back inside, helping her to clear the small gathered herd. As a visible passage had appeared, Shawne yelled for them to run through, calling for them to follow, which they did.

Running back to the car, Shawne motioned for Peter and Tobias to enter. Seeing that space behind was little, Peter would hold Skye on his lap, who waited for them to come back, while the older man and his wife, who held their young son in her arms, would tightly sit next to him, both exhaling harshly from the physical experience.

With the passing of seconds, and the movement of the risen coming their way, Shawne would drive off into the road ahead...

CHAPTER 21

With the evening's arrival, they would stop in the town of Slatington, quickly entering one of the abandoned apartment complexes, whose points of entry, Tobias, and Peter would close.

Walking up the concrete stairs of the complex, together with Shawne, they would lead Skye into the room to their left, in which four single-person beds were placed. Leaving her to wait for them, they walked to the three people they had saved before, intending to meet them in person.

The older man, who had crouched in front of his wife and son, who both were sitting on a bed in the room next to theirs, turned around upon being called by Shawne, who eyed him carefully.

With a smile on his face, he would straighten his hand out, offering to shake each of their hands. Speaking calmly, Peter could not help but notice the grey mustache above his lips, which looked as if it had not been shaved a long time ago.

"Name's Kenlee. Thank you for helping us."

He spoke to Shawne, who replied back, ever so slightly looking at his wife and son, who sat by each other closely.

Shawne: "Nice to meet you, Kenlee. They are your family?"

She addressed them, to which Kenlee would joyfully answer.

Kenlee: "They are my everything... They mean the world to me..."

Shawne: "Well, why don't we meet them? Lady?"

Knowing Shawne had asked for her to walk over, the larger woman stood up, shaking their hands, holding her son with the other.

"Name's Veronica, I deeply thank you for savin' my boy..."

Upon hearing her accent, Tobias chuckled, commenting.

Tobias: "Well, nice to meet one of ours!"

Shawne glanced back at him.

Tobias: "Well, you know..."

Without waiting, Peter spoke to the couple.

Peter: "Sorry if it may sound rude, sir. But how old are you? You seem to have some experience in you..."

Kenlee: "Ah, my son... Sixty-four, and still counting... Veronica here is forty-seven, and my beautiful boy Mark's nine."

Shawne crouched in order to meet the boy eye-to-eye, shaking his small hand with a wide smile.

Shawne: "Well, it is nice to meet you, Mark."

Mark: "N... Ni... Nic..."

Suddenly, Veronica took him by the arm, guiding him back to the bed without a word spoken, as Shawne, along with Peter and Tobias, noticed the trouble he had with speech.

Peter: "Is he..."

Sighing, Kenlee answered while looking at the floor.

Kenlee: "It's just... He has trouble speaking... But my boy's got the heart of gold, I'll tell you that..."

Shawne: "Sorry for... It wasn't intentional. I hope you understand..."

Kenlee: "Oh, don't say nothing, gorgeous. We farmers know a lot of things, but there are no words with which I could express to you my gratitude. Back there, you saved us... Honest to the Lord, even if we'd made it out of that pile, there was not a lot of hope left, as we knew not where to go... Our farm, Dairy's Little Sunshine... It got... raided..."

Tobias curiously spoke, recognizing the name.

Tobias: "My God, I know it. It's yours? My father always spoke of it... He... You must know him!"

The man looked at him.

Kenlee: "Your father... Tell me his name, son."

Tobias: "Jonathan... Jonathan Shard."

Immediately, the man patted him on the shoulder, warmly speaking.

Kenlee: "Old John... And you are his... My boy, we had a lot of respect for each other. I hope he told you..."

Tobias: "Well, yes. Of course, he did... He said you two grew up together, but that you moved into the city, and... And that you two would always hear from each other, no matter the circumstances of your stay..."

Kenlee: "And we sure have, my son. Tell me, where is he? I do not see him here, so I must ask."

Tobias: "Well, he's back at our old farm... I... I wanted to explore, to move into my own path..."

Hearing his words, Kenlee smiled.

Kenlee: "Fate is what brought us together, my son. Fate brought all of us together."

Slightly interrupting their conversation, Shawne chipped in, saying her regards.

Shawne: “I see you two have a lot to talk about, but I have someone I need to attend to. We’ll see each other in the morning. Have a good night.”

Peter: “I need to get some sleep as well. Stay safe until tomorrow...”

Together with Shawne, Peter walked inside the room, the two of them sitting around Skye, who patiently waited. Shawne patted her on the head, whispering to her ear with a smile before she would not walk to one of the other beds, but instead exit the room, her steps heard as she descended the stairs, stepping outside.

Shawne: “Sleep tight, Angel.”

Confused by her action, Peter placed his hand around Skye, rubbing her shoulder.

Peter: “Sweetie, dream as much as you want.”

But as he got up and was about to walk after Shawne, the girl called out to him, visible tears forming on her face.

Skye: “Pete, can you sleep with me? I... I’m scared...”

Forming a smile, he replied.

Peter: “Don’t worry, darling. I’ll be back, I promise...”

Skye: “Back in the car... I dreamt of her... I saw mommy...”

With a heavy emotional weight on his shoulders, Peter closed back the door he was about to walk out of, and in the coming seconds, had pulled one of the metal beds closer to Skye’s. A small space dividing them. Peter was lying on his bed, speaking to the little girl.

Peter: “There is nothing to be afraid of, sweetie. I’m right here, you are not alone...”

.
. .
. . .

As the echoes of the night would slowly come to pass, Peter, recognizing that Skye had fallen asleep, got up out of the bed. He neared the door, which he would carefully open. He thought about who he should check on, as both Tobias and Shawne did not return in the last two hours...

1- CHECK ON SHAWNE...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 22 - SHAWNE

2: CHECK ON TOBIAS...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 22 - TOBIAS

CHAPTER 22 – SHAWNE

Walking downstairs and stepping outside, Peter observed each step he made, making sure no loud noise would be made, avoiding that which he feared.

Realizing Shawne was not to be seen in his close vicinity, he walked around the building, checking the left and right alleyways. Still not finding her, he turned around to walk back inside, and as he did so, he saw her.

Looking upwards, Peter saw Shawne sitting on a metal balcony of the building in front of theirs. Quietly stepping inside of the construction, once again carefully finding his way, Peter stepped onto the balcony, looking at Shawne, who, in a lying position, fell asleep.

He crouched next to her, bumping her on the shoulder, from which she would awake, half dazed.

Peter: “Why don’t we go inside?”

Still slowly opening her eyes, Peter saw Shawne was holding a picture in her left hand, a picture of a baby. Realizing he had seen it, Shawne suddenly got up on her feet and began to walk inside the building’s interior, intending to walk downstairs and into the street, but before she could, she felt Peter grab her right hand.

Peter: “Wait...”

Knowing what he was about to ask, Shawne bitterly turned around, as the two of them would lean onto the balcony’s fence, looking at the night sky above.

Peter: “Is... Is she-”

Shawne: “She... She was mine...”

Upon hearing her answer, shock ran through Peter.

Peter: “I am sorry...”

Realizing she could not hold it in, a single tear slipped down Shawne’s cheek, which Peter would sadly observe.

Shawne: “She did not suffer... She passed the... the moment she took her first breath... But...”

Other tears would follow...

Shawne: “I was young and stupid. Three fucking years had passed... But to this very moment... There is nothing I wouldn’t give... To... To hold her in my arms for at least a second...”

Without a second thought, Peter placed his left hand around the young woman’s shoulders, whispering...

Peter: “She... She watches over you, she knows...”

Shawne, who was feeling so fragile at the moment, would bitterly answer...

Shawne: “Don’t give me that crap... I don’t buy it, not for a damn second...”

Slightly closing his eyes, Peter did not answer, but would instead sit with her on that same balcony, on which the two of them would fall asleep as he held her in his arms. In the early hours of the morning, they would return to the room where the little girl, Skye, had slept.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 23
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 23

CHAPTER 22 - TOBIAS

Walking inside the other room, Peter carefully observed each step he made, making sure he would make no loud noise, trying to avoid any possibility of waking up the sleeping people they saved.

Looking for Tobias, he saw he had slept on the floor, only covered with a spare blanket. Crouching next to him, Peter patted him on the shoulder, waking him up.

Peter: "Hey... Come on, let's get you into bed..."

Slowly opening his eyes, Peter would help Tobias get up on his feet, as the two men, the two past strangers who met on Jonathan's farm not long ago, stepped into the corridor that separated the two rooms.

As Peter prepared to open the door, Tobias, who placed his head against the wall, making a slight noise, would stop him.

Peter: "Hey, what's the matter? Just a couple of steps left-"

Tobias: "Uh... Fuck this, man..."

Peter: "What... What do you mean?"

Stopping him in his movement, Tobias would sit on the floor, placing his hands over his head, blankly looking at the wall in front of him. Peter, who noticed something had been bothering him, crouched next to Tobias, waiting.

Tobias: "You know, Peter... I don't know what my old man told you back there, back on our farm... But I can guess... I can guess he tried to introduce you to whatever the hell had happened to this world in the best way he could... But his way ain't workin' shit..."

Peter: "What are you saying, Tobias? Jonathan-"

Tobias: "Jonathan doesn't know anything... He doesn't know that there ain't no coming back from this, Peter... For hell's sake... The world was ruined in a fucking month... Our government, the same government that had always assured us they have our backs... All those Washington dogs ran away like the biggest cowards ever... The fucking President, he... He went on a supposed security meeting in Alaska... Like we are fucking stupid..."

Peter: "You... You don't know, Tobias... Jonathan said there was research, maybe it's still going on..."

Tobias: "You talkin' about Black Hawk? Huh, for what I know, that shitty operation was only a false sign of hope... A ploy to trick us common folk into believing we are going to be safe. God damn it, Peter... If that were the case, where's our military? Where are they? Fucking abandoned us, that's what I'll tell you..."

Sensing his inner pain, Peter slowly motioned for Tobias to get up, whispering...

Peter: "Come on, as long as we have each other... As long as there are people like us, who help one another... We'll find a way to get through this, together..."

Getting up on his feet, Tobias smiled at him.

Tobias: “We will, won’t we?”

Peter: “Of course, my friend.”

Walking through the door, Peter helped him lay on one of the beds, and only a couple of seconds later, as he was laying down on his own, Peter noticed Tobias fell asleep once more...

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 23
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 23

CHAPTER 23

The signs of the morning would come, as the rays of the shining sun found their way inside, slowly waking them up, one by one.

The first thing that found itself inside Peter's mind was Skye, who still deeply slept. Seeing that both Shawne and Tobias were slowly getting up, Peter crouched next to the girl, whispering.

Slowly opening her eyes, the girl placed her sight on him, softly mumbling.

Skye: "We... We are going?"

Smiling back, Peter answered...

Peter: "No, sweetie. We'll see where we head on from here, but we're counting on you to be ready when we do, okay?"

Yawning, Skye answered.

Skye: "Uhhh... Okay..."

Together, Shawne, Peter, and Tobias walked to the other room, inside which Kenlee, along with his wife and son, was already awake, waiting for them.

On the floor, four packs of biscuits were placed, along with two bottles of water. Kenlee motioned for them to sit down.

Kenlee: "Where's the little missy?"

Shawne: "She'll get up, soon."

Without waiting, Tobias took one of the biscuits, drinking a sip out of the bottle as well. Kenlee, who looked at him warmly, shifted his gaze to Peter, addressing him.

Kenlee: "Come on, son. Energy is the most important element of our days."

His eyes meeting with Shawne's, the old man continued.

Kenlee: "You too, miss. I won't be takin' no for an answer."

Slowly but surely, they began to eat their breakfast, a portion of which Peter would take and bring to Skye, who was still in her bed. Placing the biscuits next to her, he whispered once more.

Peter: "Come on, sunshine. Stand up on your pretty feet."

As she slowly got up, Peter was about to walk back to the other room, and to his surprise, as he was opening the door, the little boy he knew as Mark stood in front, asking him if he could enter.

Peter heard Kenlee's voice.

Kenlee: "Best we let the kids have some fun while we talk, Peter!"

Letting the boy inside, Peter sat back next to the surrounding people, continuing to eat his breakfast, during which they would converse.

Kenlee: "Tobias here told me you're all goin' to Pittsburgh?"

Peter: "Yes, we are."

Kenlee's wife would speak.

Veronica: "That is a long way ahead, folks... Around 270 miles at the least..."

Shawne: "We know. But that's where we're headed."

Kenlee: "There's a lot we're goin' to need to watch out for on our way there. Wouldn't you all agree?"

Noticing the old man's words, Peter curiously answered.

Peter: "We?"

The old man smiled as he ate.

Kenlee: "You didn't think we were gonna walk away from you? If it were not for you folks, God..."

He looked at his wife.

Kenlee: "There's no telling what would've happened..."

Shawne regarded them.

Shawne: "We thank you, people. We truly do. But as you have said it yourselves, there are many dangers ahead. And, sorry if this may be interpreted wrongly, but you are not in your best days, Kenlee. And we do not want any harm coming your way."

Kenlee's eyes met with hers, a feeling of slight tension forming.

Kenlee: "Don't worry about my bones, missy. They're up to whatever you throw at em'."

And that tension, Kenlee's smile would break.

Kenlee: "Besides, we've got nowhere else to go. We're stickin' with ya' all, whether you like it or not."

Veronica spoke to Peter.

Veronica: "Honey, you are looking for your son, are you not?"

Peter: "Um..."

He exchanged eye contact with Tobias.

Peter: "Yes."

Veronica: "If you don't mind me askin', how old is..."

Peter: "Jacob, his name is Jacob."

Veronica: “Yes... How old is he, hon’?”

With a heavy burden on his heart, Peter answered. “Eleven days ago, he turned twenty...”

Kenlee spoke in between their words.

Kenlee: “Well, I’m sure we’ll find him, Peter.”

CHAPTER 24

In the passing moments, the now seemingly bigger group found itself standing in front of the vehicle once more. Waiting for Shawne to unlock the door, Peter could notice that Kenlee's son Mark, as well as Skye, had formed a relationship, as the children quietly giggled while they whispered to each other.

Shawne: "Alright, get inside."

She spoke as she sat in the driver's seat, patiently waiting for all of them to enter, Peter now being the one who would sit on the passenger seat next to her. Twisting the key and turning on the engine, they drove off into the distance, as Shawne pinpointed their next destination.

A long hour would pass, as they drove through rural areas, nothing but the thickness of the forest surrounding them, ever so slightly, distant shadows of fallen buildings visible every few minutes.

The old man spoke to her.

Kenlee: "Which route are we taking?"

Shawne gazed at him through the rearview mirror.

Shawne: "We pass through Elysburg, move on through Rushtown, and we stay in Sunbury. In the morning, we head to Loganton."

Kenlee: "Honey, you sure there ain't no better way? We can drive through the south, cutting off our way in a decent bit."

Shawne would silently breathe in, remembering...

Shawne: "I see you know not of what you speak... Best we hope to God that we do not pass through that route..."

Kenlee: "Well, why not?"

Although he did not know, Peter could feel that something had happened to Shawne in the southern areas.

Shawne: "There are people there... People we do not want to come in contact with, enough?"

Through the remainder of their drive, Kenlee, who heard her answer, understood, and would continue to look after his wife and son, who sat beside him.

Passing through the rural areas of Rushtown, from the news she managed to hear, Shawne knew that the safest place they could enter had been Sunbury, whose walls of cement provided a small haven of safety against the risen.

But as the vehicle had turned the road's corner in the western direction, its wheels would stop turning, to which Shawne, as well as the others, looked with uncertainty. Their movement had slowly ceased.

Quickly stepping outside the car while the long pine trees swung around from the surrounding wind, Tobias opened the car's hood, trying to find the cause from what little experience he had, Peter and Kenlee standing by his side.

Tobias: "Fuckin' hell..."

He furiously spoke as he saw the state of the engine, whose in-taking pipes had been damaged. Peter looked more closely, finding that the fuel they had poured in before was dripping.

Veronica: "What... What do we do now?"

CHAPTER 25

Kenlee sighed. “We continue to walk...”

In the passing minutes, they would gather their things, each taking their own shared weight of the supplies. The group began to walk through the rural roads, Peter and Shawne leading their way.

CHOOSE YOUR MEMORY

1: YOU CHECKED ON SHAWNE...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 25 - SHAWNE

2: YOU CHECKED ON TOBIAS...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 25 - TOBIAS

CHAPTER 25 – SHAWNE

Peter: “Are you feeling okay?”

He asked her, carefully observing Shawne’s behavior, who looked back at him, a soft redness appearing on her cheeks.

Shawne: “I am... Look...”

Peter: “Speak freely...”

Shawne: “Can I ask you to at least try to forget what happened yesterday? I... That’s not me... I am not weak...”

Peter smiled while they continued to walk, looking at the road.

Peter: “There is no need for that, Shawne. That feeling you had, we all do... It finds us when... when we remember. And our past is not a weakness. Our past strengthens us. It makes us who we are today.”

Shawne: “... I know...”

Slightly waving her head back, she addressed the people behind them.

Shawne: “Hey, looks like he found friends. Not so weird anymore.”

Shawne spoke of Tobias, who Peter had looked at upon taking notice of her words.

Peter: “They have a common language.”

Shawne: “You can say that again! Do you trust them?”

Slightly widening his eyes, Peter momentarily turned around, looking at Kenlee, his wife, and his son.

Peter: “They seem like good people.”

Shawne: “Good, I wanted to hear what you thought. Except for that old man back there, you are the second... or the third oldest among us, I can tell. How many years?”

Peter: “Forty in August.”

Shawne: “Alright, we can still have some use out of you, then...”

She chuckled upon saying, Peter following.

Suddenly, a loud sound was heard from their front direction, slowly approaching. As they moved to the left side of the road, the group noticed a small semi-trailer truck driving their way.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 26
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 26

CHAPTER 25 - TOBIAS

Looking back at him, Peter called for Tobias to walk over to him and Shawne, as the three of them would now be side by side.

Peter: "So, did you get enough sleep?"

Tobias: "Well, wouldn't complain if there was more, that's for sure!"

Shawne smiled, looking at them.

Shawne: "Best you two have your talk. I am going to check on Skye."

As she walked back, Peter and Tobias could hear Shawne conversing with the people behind, checking on Skye as she did so.

Peter: "It's a sunny day."

Tobias: "It sure is. Look, can I ask you somethin'?"

Peter: "Sure, shoot."

Tobias: "When we get to Pittsburgh... When we find your son... What do you intend to do, then?"

Realizing the meaning of his words, Peter looked at the road.

Peter: "To be honest, I do not know... I just have to find him, keep him safe..."

Tobias: "That's good, because I was going to ask you somethin', if you don't mind."

Peter: "Yes?"

Tobias looked at him, thinking to himself whether he should smile.

Tobias: "Once we're done with all this, would you go back?"

Peter: "Where?"

Scratching his head, Tobias continued, "Well, to the farm. My father, I know we don't get along very well... But I know it when I see it. He cares for you, just as much as he does for us... And we would be happy to have you with us, as well as your son... It... It would make us feel whole..."

Peter: "Whole?"

Tobias: "We had a sister. And after losing her... Nothin' feels the same, you know? Over the small period of your stay, you seemed to fill that missin' gap. But don't think now that is why I ask you. I just, I want the family to be happy... And you do not seem like a bad stranger..."

Peter smiled back, thankful for the words he received, but before he could answer, suddenly, a loud sound was heard from their front direction, slowly approaching. As they moved to the left side of the road, the group noticed a small semi-trailer truck driving their way.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 26
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 26

CHAPTER 26

Parking by their side, two drivers walked out of the truck, greeting them with respect. First, there was the man who introduced himself as Bofur, a large middle-aged man who wore a blue shirt, along with a white hat on his black hair, smoking a cigar while he looked at them, smiling. After him, a skinny man, who was presumed to be around 30 years of age, wearing a white full-body coat, introduced himself as Louie.

Bofur: “So, what are you folks doing around these parts? It ain’t safe out here.”

Louie: “It... It ain’t safe anywhere, really...”

Bofur: “Quiet, Louie. These friendly folks understand what I’m saying. Don’t bother with him. He is a little whacked in the head, but being my little brother, I love him with all my heart and soul.”

The large man spoke while laughing out loud as he patted his younger brother on the shoulder. Peter shook his hand, introducing himself, as well as the others behind him, members of his group, who quietly stared at the strangers before them, observing their behavior.

Peter: “Name’s Peter. These nice people behind me, we’re together, passing by.”

Briefly looking at them as he continued smoking, Bofur answered, closely eyeing Peter. “Nice to see a group of people out here, you know? Right around forty minutes or so, we picked up three men, makes me think...”

Bofur walked to the back doors of the trailer, and upon opening them, the man had called for the people inside to exit. And it was among those three people that Peter crossed eyes with one, shock running throughout his body.

Jackson: “P... Peter?”

The ex-officer spoke in mutual shock, spreading his eyes, still not believing who it was he was looking at. Without a moment’s thought, he rushed up to Peter, hugging him.

Peter: “Jackson?”

Jackson: “My God, Peter... You’re alright...”

He continued, tears finding their way out.

Jackson: “You do not know how happy I am to see you again, friend...”

Noticing their close contact, Bofur spoke, addressing the group.

Bofur: “Look, folks. It’s not safe out here to walk on foot. Why don’t you all get in the back? As I said to these three people before, we’re driving back to our home. We’d be happy to have you all as our guests.”

Shifting his attention to Bofur, Peter answered, not finding the strength to overthink, still realizing who he had found.

Peter: “Sure, thank you...”

CHAPTER 27

They stepped inside the trailer. Shawne, however, being the one amongst them who asked to accompany the two brothers in front, had not found trust to share just yet. Without hesitation, the brothers agreed to her request, while Peter and the others sat back, the young girl Skye close by his side.

Jackson, who could not hold his emotions before, sat close to him, looking at him as if he were his own brother, glancing at the small girl, introducing himself.

Jackson: “Nice to meet you, little girl. You can call me uncle Jackie.”

Looking at him with her innocent eyes, Skye smiled back. “Nice to meet you, Jackie.”

Tobias sat together with Kenlee and his family, while the two men who were with Jackson before sat one next to the other, closely whispering.

Peter: “Who are they?”

Peter addressed them while speaking to him, as Jackson would warmly answer.

Jackson: “Oh, Bill, and Merlie. I met them not long ago, Pete. Brothers, two brothers who... saved me...”

CHOOSE YOUR MEMORY

1: YOU TURNED BACK TO THE PRISON...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 28 - PRISON

2: YOU DROVE THROUGH THE TUNNEL...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 28 - TUNNEL

CHAPTER 28 – PRISON

Together, while Skye slowly drifted to her sleep, Jackson and Peter remembered the last time they have seen one another. Observing her state, Jackson quietly spoke, looking directly at him.

Jackson: “My God, has it been so long, Pete?”

Peter: “Jack... It... It all happened so quickly. I... I was in a coma...”

Jackson: “Oh, no... Are you alright, now, friend?”

Slightly touching his head, Peter answered. “Yes, of course. But I still feel it, the pain. No matter how small, it comes...”

Clenching his right fist, Jackson mumbled. “God damn it... If it wasn’t for my foolish reaction...”

Remembering the event, Peter replied. “When... When I saw you fall... That man on top of you... I... it scared me... But before I could even try to help, that damn truck...”

Jackson immediately responded. “Hell, I did not know what the hell was even going on... And when I saw that crash, right before my eyes... I lost all consciousness...”

Peter: “What... What did you see... when you woke up?”

Closing his eyes, Jackson hesitated to answer. “Hell... The worst part about it was... I wasn’t even there... I woke up back at the prison, looking at the guards who found me... And... That’s when it all went down...”

Peter: “... What happened?”

Jackson: “These... these freaks, Peter... They marched onto the gates, breaking inside... I ran... I ran for my dear life, not long after I awoke. That’s when I heard them, the screams... The screams of the men and women I’ve worked with for so many years... I heard the panicked yells of the prisoners, who called for me to unlock the doors to their cells, but... But I wasn’t strong enough, I... I could do nothing... but... run for my own... damn life...”

Peter placed his right hand around Jackson. “It’s okay, Jack... You did the right thing, there’s nothing you could have...”

Jackson: “Yes, there was, Peter... If I had not run like a cowardly dog, there were lives I could have saved... I could have helped someone, anyone... but instead... I walked around for this past fucking month... Not like a man, but as a fucking shell of a person. I... I still hear them, every night... I still hear their screams...”

Deep down, knowing there were no words with which he could help, Peter sat close to Jackson for the remainder of the drive, supporting him like a true friend.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 28
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 28

CHAPTER 28 - TUNNEL

Together, while Skye slowly drifted to her sleep, Jackson and Peter remembered the last time they have seen one another. Observing her state, Jackson quietly spoke, looking directly at him.

Jackson: "My God, has it been so long, Pete?"

Peter: "Jack... It... It all happened so quickly, I... I was in a coma..."

Jackson: "Oh, no... Are you alright, now, friend?"

Placing his hand on the back of his head, Peter answered. "Yes, of course... But I still feel it, the pain, no matter how small, it comes."

Squeezing his right fist, Jackson mumbled. "God damn it... If it wasn't for my foolish reaction..."

Remembering the event, Peter replied. "When... When I saw them surround us... Their weapons raised up... I... I was scared for not only me, but for you as much as I was for myself. But before I could try to help, try to follow your intent, that damn hit on my head, it all blacked out..."

Jackson immediately responded. "Hell, I did not know what the hell was even going on. And when I saw that bastard continuing to stomp on you with his fucking feet, right before my eyes... I rushed at him without a thought to bear, and that's when... when I was shot... I lost all consciousness..."

Peter: "Oh no... How... how did you recover? What... What did you see... when you woke up?"

Closing his eyes, Jackson hesitated to answer. "Hell... The worst part about it was... I wasn't even there... I woke up back at the prison, looking at the guards who found me... And... That's when it all went down..."

Peter: "... What happened?"

Jackson: "These... these freaks, Peter... They marched onto the gates, breaking inside... I ran... I ran for my dear life, not long after I awoke. That's when I heard them, the screams... The screams of the men and women I've worked with for so many years... I heard the panicked yells of the prisoners, who called for me to unlock the doors to their cells, but... But I wasn't strong enough, I... I could do nothing... but... run for my own... damn life..."

Peter placed his right hand around Jackson. "It's okay, Jack... You did the right thing, there's nothing you could have..."

Jackson: "Yes, there was, Peter... If I had not run like a cowardly dog, there were lives I could have saved... I could have helped someone, anyone... but instead... I walked around for this past fucking month... Not like a man, but as a fucking shell of a person. I... I still hear them, every night... I still hear their screams..."

Deep down, knowing there were no words with which he could help, Peter sat close to Jackson for the remainder of the drive, supporting him like a true friend.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 29
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 29

CHAPTER 29

They felt their movement stop as the truck had reached its destination. The two brothers in front, along with Shawne, stepped outside, looking at a wooden house whose inner lights were turned on. A young teenage girl stood in front of the door, eyeing them closely.

Opening the back doors of the truck, the connected groups stepped outside, breathing in the fresh evening air. Peter, who noticed Skye had still been asleep, picked her up in his arms, carefully walking out, Jackson by his side.

Tobias, who accompanied Kenlee and his family, stood close to them, observing the two men, between who, Shawne had stood, her arms crossed.

And as the remaining two brothers who were with Jackson before, Bill and Merlie, stepped out of the container, its door would be closed by the man known as Louie, whose brother Bofur would speak soon after.

Bofur: “Folks, I see you’re all a little tired.”

He pointed at the girl standing in front of the lone house’s door, which had been surrounded by long fields of crops extending on all sides except the one which they came from, as a clearly visible dirt path was formed, leading to the outer main road.

Bofur: “This here’s our little friend Patrice. She’s a beauty. Anyway, why don’t you all come inside? I’m sure she’s prepared a nice big dinner for us to eat!”

Listening to his words, Tobias spoke back. “How... How did she know we’d be here?”

Bofur laughed. “Oh, she did not, silly man... She always cooks big, I mean, look at my belly!”

Skye, who Peter held in his arms, was slowly beginning to wake up, yawning with her sweet little voice, opening her eyes...

Skye: “Um... Wh... Where are we, Pete?”

Peter: “Oh, we are visiting friends who’ve picked us up, sweetie. Will you stand?”

Skye: “... Yep...”

As she replied, Peter carefully placed her back on the ground, and as she stood on her little feet, Shawne walked by, patting her on the head, smiling.

Shawne: “Come on, let’s get inside.”

She spoke to them both while they stepped onto the front porch of the wooden house, passing through the door. Walking inside, they would be led by the younger brother Louie, who directed them to enter a wide living room in the middle of which a long wooden table was decorated, filled with several plates full of meat and mashed potatoes.

“You folks sure do eat a lot.” The old man Kenlee spoke to the brothers, who chuckled in response.

While the teenage girl they now knew as Patrice was placing the needed empty plates on the table, each of them sat on the benches. Next to Kenlee, his wife and son would sit, looking at him with joy. Veronica whispered to her husband.

Veronica: "Honey, this is gorgeous..."

He smiled. "Oh, it sure is, Ver."

Tobias, however, sat next to the two brothers who were with Jackson before, and he, personally, would now sit with Peter, where Skye and Shawne were sitting to his left.

And before the large dinner would begin, the two brothers would each sit on the dividing ends of the table, the teenage girl walking outside the room, an action Jackson would quickly notice...

Jackson: "Where's she going?"

Bofur: "Oh, she eats while she prepares. You know how women act, all in their own minds and such..."

Over the brief span of time, the dinner would pass, as each of them would eat the food with joy, while casually conversing with each other as they did so.

"Well, I'd be damned if this were not one of the best dishes I ate in a long time..." Jackson spoke to Bofur, who nodded with a smile... holding something... with his left hand... beneath the table... an action that not only Jackson, but Peter and Shawne as well, would notice...

He wanted to ask what the man was holding, but had rather found himself being unable to do so, as Peter would slowly begin to feel dizzy. Feeling the same effects on himself, Jackson quickly got up, walking over to Bofur, who would quickly do the same, shocking him with a taser...

Peter: "... No..."

He looked to Shawne, who herself had fallen asleep, as did Skye... Placing his sight in Tobias's direction, Peter saw that, as well as the two brothers next to him, the three of them followed the mutual reactions... The only one who would try to get up before his vision would go dark, was Kenlee, who like Jackson, was shocked by Bofur, falling to the floor...

The last words Peter heard had been the conversation of the two brothers in whose house they stood.

Louie: "Oh boy, oh boy, Boffy! Are we takin' em? They sure look pretty. I bet they're adorable!"

Bofur: "Come on, Louie... Let's take the men..."

CHAPTER 30

The chilly wind touched their skin. Upon opening his eyes, Peter found himself tied to a wooden pole. Tobias, Kenlee, his son Mark, Jackson, and the two brothers, Bill and Merlie, were also tied to the surrounding poles... all of them located in the thickness of the fields of crops.

Standing in front of them, while some still slowly began to wake up, were Bofur and Louie, looking at them with sickening smiles on their faces.

Peter, who was finding the strength to speak, did so.

Peter: “Wh... What are you... doing?”

Bofur laughed. “Oh, stranger! We’re waiting for your friends.”

Louie: “Wakey, wakey, darlings!”

Jackson, who saw them now, screamed.

Jackson: “You fuckers! What the fuck are you doing?!?”

Bofur walked closer to Kenlee, tapping him on his cheeks, while Louie hit Tobias right in the chest. Stepping back, the older brother spoke, noticing the brothers Bill and Merlie had come to their senses.

Bofur: “Alright folks, it was nice meeting ya’ all. And like the nice people we are, we gave you a pretty nice sendoff...”

Louie: “Hahaha, pretty nice!”

Peter: “What are you... talking about?”

Once again, Bofur had laughed, eyeing Jackson instead. “Well, upon finding strangers on the road, like the good people we are, we took you to our lovely home! We fed you pretty well, I must say! But... like with those who came before you, we need to take something in return.”

Louie: “Oh, and we did!”

Bofur: “Yep, Louie, we sure did. Patrice was a pretty nice catch. Guys, if you just knew how well she pleases... Well, it’s an experience to not forget. But like all men, seeing more fish in the tank, we have to take em’...”

Louie: “And we surely will!”

The brothers smiled at each other once more.

Bofur: “Sure, your girls will need some time to grieve over you all. But like her, they’ll forget. And if not quickly, we’ll make em’...”

Slowly looking down on the muddy dirt beneath them, Tobias screamed in terror, spotting what appeared to be a skull, half-buried...

Bofur crouched down, placing his finger on the switch of the first device of five.

Bofur: “And, being the good people we are... our other guests... need to have dinner as well...”

Flipping the switch of the first radio, a loud sound would come, the sound of music... the sound which would only become more amplified by the joined music of the radios next to it...

Bofur: “Be sure to play nice, folks. The women would not like to hear you scream...”

Louie: “Oh, oh! Play nice!”

As he had spoken his last words, Bofur began to walk back in the house's direction, his younger brother following him.

CHAPTER 31

Jackson: “God damn it!”

He yelled while trying to free his hands off the rope that kept him bound to the pole.

Tobias, who looked at Peter in terror, tried to follow what Jackson was doing, but as he did, the young man would fail. Kenlee would only keep his eyes pointed towards his son, whispering to him in order to try calming him.

Kenlee: “Look at me, boy... Everything’s gonna be okay...”

“Like hell, it will! Stop talking and do something!” Jackson yelled back at the old man, who menacingly looked at him in response.

The two brothers behind them tried to push themselves off the poles as hard as they could, but they found no success in their actions.

Seeing the situation they found themselves in, Peter tried to feel the tightness of the rope around his fists behind him. He tried to squeeze them through, finding an immense feeling of pain.

Suddenly, through the distorted sound of music, echoes were heard... echoes that were slowly coming closer...

... Echoes of the risen...

The brother known as Merlie scratched at the fabric of the ropes, blood beneath his nails slowly beginning to drip... and as the dark red liquid left its host... a screech was heard in the far thickness of the fields... a screech followed by many more, as sounds of maniacal running would soon be heard.

Feeling the instinct that took over them, they would all begin to furiously try to move from their positions, and seeing there was no other way... Peter would pull and pull... no longer caring for the pain... biting his teeth as hard as he could.

Jackson followed, but would as well continuously push himself off the pole, trying to loosen its position in the earth. And in the passing of those crucial seconds, Peter managed to free himself, after which he quickly rushed to help the others around him... as the running steps came closer and closer.

Untying Kenlee, he ran up to Jackson, with whom he did not have to struggle, as the ropes themselves were half-loosened. Freeing him, the two of them would now turn to Tobias, who, along with the boy Mark, was freed by Kenlee.

Through the crops, they could now be seen... screeching... gnarling at their sight... spreading their clawed hands... to tear down their flesh...

... Terror overcame them... as the old man and his son instantly began to run in the direction of the house. Tobias directly followed while Peter, who ran up to the two brothers in order to free them, was pulled by Jackson, who called for him to run.

Screams, screams of Bill and Merlie were heard... screams of pain... screams of agony... as their flesh was ripped apart... their bones and muscles chewed upon...

CHAPTER 32

In their horrifying rush, they saw the house, finding their way out of the crops. Still, without a sign of stopping, Kenlee placed his hand on the handle of the door, trying to open it, but even with Tobias's help, he did not manage to do so.

Jackson, who rushed at them with Peter, upon seeing their futile attempts, began to slam himself at the wooden door, screaming at whoever had been inside.

Jackson: "God damn you! Open it! Open it!"

Turning around, Tobias screamed... as he saw dozens of the risen... running after them.

Jackson: "Don't just look around! Help me, you fuckers!"

He screamed at them, and after his panicked words, Peter and Kenlee slammed themselves at the door, accompanying him. Tobias placed his arms on Mark's shoulders, keeping the eyes of the boy pointed in the direction opposite of the horrifying horde that was coming for them.

.
. .
.

The handle would loosen up...

.
. .
.

The wood began to splinter...

.
. .
.

The screams neared...

.
. .
.

The steps of the risen, coming so close, preparing to consume their flesh...

.
. .
.

But stopped as the men smashed through the door, which fell onto the wooden floor of the house. All of them were now running upstairs.

In their rush, they ran inside a large bedroom to their left, and as Tobias and Mark entered, Peter locked the door behind them, whose weak wood would begin to experience the animalistic rage of the risen, who clawed at it from the other side... desperate to enter.

Both Kenlee and Tobias pushed themselves against the wooden surface, using the weight of their bodies to stop the imminent breach.

In the right-side corner of the room, next to the open curtained window... the women that had been with them... Shawne, Veronica, and the young girl... Skye... stood, looking at the two brothers... who held a rifle pointed in their direction, motioning for them to take their clothes off... while the girl known as Patrice, was found dead on the floor.

Upon placing their eyes on them, Bofur immediately turned to point the weapon in Peter's and Jackson's direction, yelling.

Bofur: "You... You better not move!"

Louie: "Big bro... What's goin'..."

As the younger brother looked at them, he froze in shock, leading his sight away from the women, among who, Shawne, along with Veronica, prepared.

Jackson slowly took one step closer, to which the older brother fired at the ceiling.

Bofur: "I said, don't fuckin' move, alright?!?"

With the second's passing, Veronica would jump onto the younger brother's back, throwing him on the wooden floor, and as Bofur was to turn around to Shawne's direction, who was prepared to place her arms around his neck... in the shortness of his dividing attention... Jackson struck him in the knee... causing him to fall in pain.

He took the rifle away from him, handing it to Peter, who himself had not known what he was to do.

Jackson: “Kill the motherfucker.”

Tobias, who heard Jackson’s words, yelled back, while the pressure on the door became stronger.

Tobias: “What?!? No!”

1. KILL BOEUR...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 33 - WRATH

2. LET HIM LIVE...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 33 - MERCY

CHAPTER 33 - WRATH

Standing in the midst of the rising panic, Peter pulled the trigger. The bullet passed through the older brother's head, blood beginning to pour from his body.

Looking at the sight next to him, Louie screamed in terror, now placing both of his hands on the lying body of his brother, sobbing.

Louie: "Bofye... Bofye, get up... get up! Get up!"

The door would loosen itself. Tobias, as well as Kenlee, realized they could hold it no longer. Shawne and Jackson exchanged eye contact. They knew what had to be done.

Jackson: "Jump!"

As he was running towards the open window, Jackson quickly crouched next to the dead brother, taking a pair of keys from the upper pocket of his shirt. Without thinking, Shawne grabbed Skye, holding her in her arms. Kenlee yelled for Veronica to take their son.

One by one, they would jump outside, falling on the thick grass beneath.

Before his turn came, Tobias pointed a deadly expression at Peter, who... right after him... would find himself outside... running after the remainder of their group, all of whom, in unison, ran towards Jackson, who was unlocking the door of the truck... yelling for them to get in as he began to drive, separating the container.

Screams of the younger brother were heard as the risen tore him apart, consuming his flesh.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 34
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 34

CHAPTER 33 - MERCY

Standing in the midst of the rising panic, Peter decided to not pull the trigger, letting the older brother look at him with anticipation, his fists squeezing themselves from the experienced uncertainty.

Looking at him, Louie screamed in terror, now placing both of his hands on the back of his brother.

Louie: “Don’t, don’t, don’t! Please let him be! He’s my big bro!”

The door would loosen itself. Tobias, as well as Kenlee, realized they could hold it no longer. Shawne and Jackson exchanged eye contact. They knew what had to be done.

Jackson: “Jump!”

As he was running towards the open window, Jackson quickly pushed Bofur onto the bed, taking a pair of keys from the upper pocket of his shirt as he fell, punching the younger brother in the face, breaking his nose. Without thinking, Shawne grabbed Skye, holding her in her arms. Kenlee yelled for Veronica to take their son.

One by one, they would jump outside, falling on the thick grass beneath.

Before his turn came, Tobias pointed a grateful expression in Peter’s direction, who... right after him... would find himself outside... running after the remainder of their group, all of whom, in unison, ran towards Jackson, who was unlocking the door of the truck... yelling for them to get in as he began to drive, separating the container.

Screams of the two brothers were heard as the risen tore them apart before they could regain their senses, consuming their flesh.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 34
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 34

CHAPTER 34

Keeping his foot pressed on the pedal, Jackson yelled for them to sit close to each other, so that he could be free to look clearly. As they managed to follow his instructions, he spoke once more, breathing in heavily.

Jackson: "... Alright... Is everyone... good?"

"What... What the fuck do you mean?!?" Tobias yelled. "No, I am not okay! If you haven't fuckin' noticed, we almost got ourselves eaten up!"

Jackson: "I know, alright?!? But we are here! And... and those fuckers got what they deserved!"

CHOOSE YOUR MEMORY

1: YOU SHOT BOEUR...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 35 - WRATH

2: YOU LET HIM LIVE...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 35 - MERCY

CHAPTER 35 - WRATH

Tobias: “You called for him to commit an act of taking away a life! You called on him to commit a deadly sin!”

Enraged, Tobias looked at Peter.

Tobias: “And you followed his words! How could you?!?”

Jackson screamed back at him.

Jackson: “Of course he did! You fucking hillbilly! Those psychos tried to rape the women around you! Are you fucking insane?!? If we had the time, a bullet would not be what would end that son of a bitch’s life, but me! I would crush his skull to pieces with my bare hands!”

Hearing what he said, Tobias looked at Shawne and Veronica, ever so slightly glancing at Skye, a sense of shame taking a hold of him. Kenlee, who held his wife in his hands, asked.

Kenlee: “Honey... is it true? Did they-”

But before the old man could say his words, the still enraged Jackson continued to yell while barely managing to not turn to look at them, holding his sight on the dirt road ahead.

Jackson: “Of course they did! What do you think they were doing in there?!?”

Kenlee: “...”

Veronica silently answered, while Shawne looked through the window, holding a tight grip on Skye.

Veronica: “They... they wanted to... But you... you saved us...”

The moment he heard her words, Kenlee kissed his wife’s forehead, small tears forming themselves.

Peter spoke to Shawne, not knowing how he should act.

Peter: “... Are you...”

Shawne: “I’m fine. They would not have gotten the chance. I would be dead before I would ever let them...”

Skye: “What... what are you talking about? What did those two uncles want?”

Surprising every single one of them, the young girl asked, in her core thought, truly not knowing what was possibly going to happen to them.

Peter immediately placed his hand on her head, patting her.

Peter: “Nothing sweetie... It’s just... We grown-ups...”

He looked at Jackson, who slowly became silent.

Peter: “We... We were just afraid of...”

Mark: “Of the monsters?”

The young boy, Mark, who was hugged by his parents, asked.

Peter: “Yes, the monsters... They can be scary for everyone...”

Kenlee: “And we must always do what, my son?”

Mark: “Stay away?”

Kenlee: “Yes, we must keep our distance. They are not good when we come close to them.”

The older father spoke, crossing eye contact with Peter, both nodding to each other in respect.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 36
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 36

CHAPTER 35 - MERCY

Tobias: “You called for him to commit an act of taking away a life! You called on him to commit a deadly sin!”

Thankful, Tobias looked at Peter.

Tobias: “And you did not follow his words. Thank the Lord you did not.”

Jackson screamed back at him.

Jackson: “Thank the Lord?!? Thank the fucking Lord?!? I thank fucking God that even though he did not, they got what was coming to them, either way! You fucking hillbilly! Those psychos tried to rape the women around you! Are you fucking insane?!? If we had the time, a bullet would not be what would end that son of a bitch’s life, but me! I would crush his skull to pieces with my bare hands!”

Hearing what he said, Tobias looked at Shawne and Veronica, ever so slightly glancing at Skye, a sense of shame taking a hold of him. Kenlee, who held his wife in his hands, asked.

Kenlee: “Honey... is it true? Did they-”

But before the old man could say his words, the still enraged Jackson continued to yell while barely managing to not turn to look at them, holding his sight on the dirt road ahead.

Jackson: “Of course they did! What do you think they were doing in there?!?”

Kenlee: “...”

Veronica silently answered, while Shawne looked through the window, holding a tight grip on Skye.

Veronica: “They... they wanted to... But you... you saved us...”

The moment he heard her words, Kenlee kissed his wife’s forehead, small tears forming themselves.

Peter spoke to Shawne, not knowing how he should act.

Peter: “... Are you...”

Shawne: “I’m fine. They would not have gotten the chance. I would be dead before I would ever let them...”

Skye: “What... what are you talking about? What did those two uncles want?”

Surprising every single one of them, the young girl asked, in her core thought, truly not knowing what was possibly going to happen to them.

Peter immediately placed his hand on her head, patting her.

Peter: “Nothing sweetie... It’s just... We grown-ups...”

He looked at Jackson, who slowly became silent.

Peter: “We... We were just afraid of...”

Mark: “Of the monsters?”

The young boy, Mark, who was hugged by his parents, asked.

Peter: “Yes, the monsters... They can be scary for everyone...”

Kenlee: “And we must always do what, my son?”

Mark: “Stay away?”

Kenlee: “Yes, we must keep our distance. They are not good when we come close to them.”

The older father spoke, crossing eye contact with Peter, both nodding to each other in respect.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 36
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 36

CHAPTER 36

When they found sight of the main road, Jackson parked the truck upon seeing that they had lost sight of the risen. Stepping outside, he leaned onto the outer front of the large vehicle, breathing in slowly, calming himself down.

Shawne and Peter would be the ones who would follow, both of them stepping outside, leaving Skye to sit next to Kenlee and his family, while Tobias was left together with them, thinking about his words.

Jackson: "... Where... Where are you thinking of going?"

Jackson spoke to Peter, who had yet to wait to answer, noticing his stress.

Shawne: "We-"

Jackson: "I was talking to him, if you don't fucking mind. Best for you to go back inside."

Shawne: "Hey, you will not be talking to me like that, I-"

Jackson: "What? Fuck off, for Christ's sake. Leave us to talk in peace."

Seeing how Jackson spoke to Shawne, Peter argued with him.

Peter: "Hey, Jack. Don't talk to her like that. Shawne is as much to be responsible for making decisions as we are."

Slightly raising his grey eyebrows in surprise, Jackson stayed quiet, looking at the far road ahead.

Peter: "I... I'm sorry for them..."

Hearing his words, Shawne could notice that the two brothers who were with them before were now missing. Without a word, she guessed their fate.

Peter: "I... I wanted to help them, truly, I-"

Stopping him mid-sentence, Jackson responded, staring down at his brown leather shoes, his arms crossed.

Jackson: "I know you did. But in that moment... it was either them or you. And I could not have taken that risk."

Peter: "..."

Jackson: "They... they saved me. Did I tell you that?"

Tears formed.

Jackson: "They saved me when I needed help the most. And... and I abandoned them without even taking a fucking look back."

Shawne: "Look, I'm sure they understand."

Jackson: “Oh don’t give me that bullshit, lady... I don’t give a damn about that mambo jumbo... Never have...”

His eyes met with theirs.

Jackson: “And I certainly will not become a believer now.”

Shawne: “...”

Wiping the tears away from his eyes, Jackson continued, returning to their main topic.

Jackson: “Enough of that for now. I don’t care which one of you tells me. Where are we going?”

Shawne did not answer, but would let Peter do so.

Peter: “Jack, we’re... we’re going to Pittsburgh.”

Jackson: “Pittsburgh? What do you want there?”

Peter: “M... My son... H... He lived there together with... with my brother.”

Not waiting for a second to answer, Jackson immediately began to walk back to the door, calling for them to enter, remembering.

“No, but thank you. Can you please unlock these?”

“You sure? Okay, but I tell you, we all need to have our reliefs in some way, something to blow the steam out, you get me? Ah, you know I would gladly do that, my friend. But we’ve got to obey the rules for just an hour or so, and then you’ll be free to live life once more! Oh, and since you’re not accepting these babies, that makes me wonder, you have a new pretty lady waiting for you?”

“Oh, for fuck's sake... I’m sorry, I completely-”

“You don’t have to be, my friend. I have someone, my boy...”

CHAPTER 37

With the night taking its hold of the sky, they would slowly become more tired as time passed on, and upon entering what he'd assumed to be the best place to stop, Jackson parked the truck in the small town, calling for the others.

Jackson: "Come on, we're staying here!"

Slowly waking up from their short sleep, the rest of them would step outside, looking at the wooden houses around them.

Peter: "Where are we?"

Jackson: "Winfield, the best place to be."

They stood in the small Pennsylvania town, whose population of little more than eight hundred, prior to the outbreak, had consisted of mostly conservative residents, many of whom had been retirees. Tobias curiously looked at the houses that were placed around them, whose wooden walls in the rural-feeling streets were single-handedly owned by the local people.

They entered a house Jackson concluded to be secure, and upon their entry, both he and Peter, standing side by side, stepped inside, checking its interior for inhabitants.

Upon finding there were none, the others would enter, Tobias being the one who would close the door, locking it for safety, remembering the chase.

Inside the large living room, the floor had been made of brown tiles where a wide woolen carpet had been placed, on which Skye and Mark would immediately jump in excitement.

Knowing there was no upstairs to be walked to, Jackson inspected the remaining rooms, two of which were bedrooms with king-sized beds, and the last one had been the bathroom, inside of which a shower could be found.

Seeing the bottles of soap, and checking the flow of the water, a sense of relief surrounded Jackson, who called for Peter to come, where, in turns, each one of them would take a shower, Jackson and Peter the last ones who would wait for their turn.

Finding Jackson to be finished, Peter entered, and upon feeling the water slip down his skin, he breathed in deeply, being thankful for being surrounded by the people he thought to be of a good heart.

Walking outside, a smile found itself on his lips, as he would see Skye being placed in the bed inside the bedroom to his left, hushed by Shawne. Peter walked over to her, crouching down before speaking.

Peter: "Sleep well, sweetie."

Skye: "I'm not candy! Do you remember?"

He chuckled. "Of course, you're not, Skye. All good now?"

The little girl would slowly close her eyes, saying back. "... Yes..."

Peter stood up, shaking Shawne's hand, agreeing she should sleep with the little girl.

Walking back to the living room, he could see Kenlee, along with his wife and son, hugging Tobias, telling him to sleep well on the couch, slightly waving to Jackson, and upon seeing Peter, shaking his hand before they entered the other bedroom of the small house.

Inside the living room, the three of them would remain, looking at each other.

Jackson: "So? Sleep tight, I guess?"

Tobias: "..."

Seeing the tension had still been present between the two men, Peter spoke.

Peter: "Maybe it would be good if you were to settle the differences from before."

Lying down on the floor and covering himself with one of the cotton blankets they found in the drawers, Jackson sharply replied.

Jackson: "The only thing we need to think about now is what are we going to do tomorrow. Remember our supplies?"

Peter: "..."

Jackson: "They're left at... You know where... And I don't think any of us are willing to go back there."

Tobias calmly spoke, placing a hand on his stomach.

Tobias: "Now that you mention it..."

Jackson: "Hunger finding its way? Bite your teeth, village boy. When the morning comes, we hunt for whatever we can find... whatever may not be spoiled from the elements."

Listening to his words, Peter began to lay down on the hard floor as well, covering himself with one of the blankets, while Tobias curiously looked at them, asking.

Tobias: "Won't one of you..."

Jackson: "We've both got experience in this, buddy. Your young bones still have some time to get used to... hard surfaces. Sleep on."

Looking at them, Tobias still waited for Peter, who nodded with a smile before the darkness of the night would find its way inside.

CHAPTER 38

However, in the following morning, upon getting up on his legs and looking at the still-sleeping people, Peter could feel a certain tension in the air. No sounds of the walking risen. No steps to be heard from the outside. Nothing... but quietness in the air surrounding them.

A certain fear found its way inside his mind, as Peter could not but notice... that upon carefully looking through the clear window on the left side of the entry door... several shadows could be seen. He walked back to Jackson as quietly as he could, slowly waking him up while holding a finger in front of his mouth, calling for him to remain still with his voice. As he did before, Jackson would show his stubbornness, answering loudly.

Jackson: "What are you talking about, Pete? Let me-"

To Peter's newfound fear, before Jackson would finish, the door would suddenly be forcefully opened, several people walking inside, armed with black armored suits, assault rifles in their hands.

One of them yelled, while the remaining three walked into the remaining rooms of the house.

"Place your hands in the air!"

Jackson: "Hang the fuck on. What do you think you're-"

Stopping his reply, the armed man who wore a military helmet approached him more closely, pointing the barrel of the weapon straight at his forehead.

"Turn around, all of you."

Jackson, who Peter could see had not expected this action, turned around, crouching on the floor, while, together with Tobias, Peter followed. Soon, both Skye and Shawne walked and crouched down next to him, while Kenlee, together with his family, began to walk outside the house, following the orders coming from one of the armed men.

"Now, you. Step up and walk forward. No sudden movements..."

CHAPTER 39

Walking out of the house, Peter saw that dozens of armed men waited for them outside, many of them whispering. They were all placed next to each other, still following the orders to keep their hands in the air.

Jackson was the first one to speak, while Shawne was eyeing him. “Alright, folks, what the hell is going on here? We were just passing through, no harm intended to anyone!”

Suddenly, one of the men walked up to him, hitting him directly in the face with the back of the gun, which caused Jackson to fall onto the concrete road. Slowly, he got back up, helped by Peter, taking his hand.

“You are to speak only when you are asked to.”

The man who hit him spoke as he walked back and stood beside the others, who all seemed to wait for something to happen. To the group’s shared surprise, what seemed to resemble a military vehicle appeared to approach them from the far side of the road, and as it came closer, a black-haired woman wearing a long black coat would step outside, her gloved hands inside of its pockets.

“This many?”

She spoke to one of the men, who could be seen nodding in agreement. Soon after, she spoke to the group, slightly spreading her hands as she addressed them.

“Men, women, and children. Do not be afraid of these soldiers standing before you.”

Jackson: “Don’t be afraid? Are you fucking kidding me? He-”

Jackson quickly stopped to speak as he saw the man who had hit him before begin to approach once more, but this time, however, the woman would raise her black-gloved hand, motioning for him to walk back to his position.

“I am sorry for the response our soldiers tend to give, but rules are made to be respected by all.”

Tobias, who looked at her with a confused expression on his face, asked her a question, while Kenlee, together with his wife and son, stayed quiet, looking downward.

Tobias: “Are... are you with the military?”

Shawne, who closely observed the woman, saw her smile upon hearing the man’s question.

“We intend to not associate ourselves with past forces.”

She began to slowly walk from left to right.

“Surrounding you, is The Union Regime. My name is Karla Richards, I am the Leading Commander of the Pennsylvania Station. Men, women, and children, who are found, like yourselves, are inspected for... irregularities.”

Peter: “Wh... What irregularities?”

Karla: “Possession of weapons, signs of infection.”

Now, upon hearing her request, Shawne spoke back. “We have no weapons with us, and there are none who are infected yet. Are we free to go on our way?” Their eyes crossed as the two women stared at each other.

Karla: “Check them.”

Jackson: “Wh... What are you...”

Before he could finish, several soldiers walked to each one of them, forcefully laying them on the ground, touching the skin of their arms and legs, checking their pockets. Peter kept his sight fixed on Skye, whispering to the little girl while trying to hold a forced smile on his face.

Peter: “Everything’s gonna be okay, sweetie.”

Skye would say nothing back, but would hopefully look at him. Stepping away from them, enabling them to raise the upper parts of their bodies, one of the soldiers informed Karla.

“Clear.”

Karla: “Report back to Sergeant Harris.”

With her command, the armed men would disperse, and in the passing minutes, while the woman had still stood in front of them, two of her guards by her side, sounds of car engines were heard. Military vehicles appeared from the corners of the streets, driving away from the direction they came from.

Karla: “Stay safe.”

These were the last words the woman would speak to them before she headed back to her vehicle, sitting behind while the two officers sat in front, driving away while the group still remained in their position.

CHAPTER 40

Shawne was the first who would get up, Jackson quickly following after.

Jackson: “Screw those fuckers! Best we move on.”

Kenlee: “My boy, he’s hungry.”

Jackson: “I was getting to that... We need to look around, search for food and drinks.”

Shawne gestured with her hands. “We split into teams, each looks for houses of their choice, clear?”

Jackson: “Sure, Peter’s with me.”

He would say before Peter could speak his mind, who himself had deeply known that Jackson was going with him either way.

Shawne: “Good, Skye and I will head-”

“C... Can I go with?” The girl pointed her small finger at Peter, an action Shawne did not expect, but would answer with a slightly forced smile. “Of course, angel. If it’s okay with you, that is...” She addressed the two of them, amongst which Peter would happily nod.

Shawne: “Okay... Tobias, you and I will go. Kenlee?”

She questionably asked the old man, looking if together with his family, they would explore alone. “We march on there.” He pointed his finger toward the eastern streets.

Shawne: “Good, we meet back in twenty minutes. Understood?”

She spoke to the people around her, who all agreed the formed teams should go their separate ways.

CHAPTER 41

Passing through the first house on their schedule, nothing was found by Peter and Jackson, who Skye closely followed, holding Peter's hand.

Jackson: "Fucking hell."

Peter gave him a look of disapproval, as Jackson noticed the small girl heard his words.

Jackson: "Uh, sorry. Skye, was it?"

Skye: "Uhm..."

Jackson: "Well, Skye. It won't happen again."

Skye: "You are not the first one to say that."

She answered back, reminding Peter of Tobias's words. They passed from house to house, finding several packs of spoiled bread. However, upon finding bags that could be used for storing, Peter and Jackson would place several empty plastic bottles inside them, knowing for what they could use them later, as for now, finding edible goods was their key priority. Passing by the road, Jackson caught sight of what appeared to be a small store, and he hurried towards it. Entering, he immediately began to check the shelves on his right, while Peter would search the ones on the left.

Jackson: "Gotcha!"

He exclaimed, holding a small can of beans and quickly placing it in one of the empty bags. Peter, who closely checked his shelves, would, however, not be lucky enough to find something useful.

Skye: "My mom uses this!"

He heard the girl's voice, seeing that she held a bottle of detergent. Jackson chuckled.

Jackson: "Oh, little girlie. There ain't no use for that no more!"

And just as he had spoken those words, a saddened expression would form on him, as Jackson realized their meaning. Skye walked up to Peter.

Skye: "I... I am hungry..."

CHOOSE YOUR MEMORY

1: YOU TOOK THE LOLLIPOPS...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 42 - OLD WORLD

2- YOU LEFT THEM BEHIND...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 42 - NEW WORLD

CHAPTER 42 - OLD WORLD

Remembering his action, Peter checked the back pocket of his blue trousers, finding what he was looking for.

Peter: "Here, sweetie."

Skye would cheerfully take the lollipops, immediately opening one. Jackson called for them.

Jackson: "Come on, we have no time to lose."

They walked back to the meeting area they had agreed on before, meeting back with Shawne, Tobias, Kenlee, Veronica, and Mark.

Shawne: "What did you find?"

Jackson placed the bags of empty bottles to his side, taking the can from the one he opened. "Beans." Kenlee placed two packs of vacuumed biscuits, and Shawne, seeing the scarcity of their finds, would not provide much more, as Tobias had placed three packs of dried berries.

Mark: "Hey!"

The young boy called out to Skye, looking at the lollipop. Walking up to him, the girl would give him the other one that had been placed in the double pack.

"Thank Pete." She whispered to him while continuing to lick the one in her left hand.

Mark: "Thanks, uncle Pete!"

The boy cheerfully said, while the two children would unitedly giggle. Shawne looked at them, happy that they had something to look forward to. She asked Peter where the candies were found and was met with the answer. Nodding, she now addressed the others.

Shawne: "There is not much we have. We need to spend these supplies appropriately."

Jackson: "We can use them, place the beans in a pot, fill it with water, combine them with berries."

Shawne: "That would mean we'd only have it for today."

Jackson annoyingly answered. "I don't see for how much longer we could use them. Do you?"

Shawne: "Uh, okay. But we keep the biscuits for another time."

Coming to a mutual agreement, the group would enter one of the houses that had a gas-powered stove, on top of which they would prepare their afternoon lunch with what little resources they had. Tobias, together with Kenlee's wife, Veronica, would place the plates on a dining table, where they each ate an equally distributed small portion of the food, and as they were all finished, Shawne called for them to follow. As the group walked back to the truck which Jackson had unlocked, they would continue on their journey.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 43
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 43

CHAPTER 42 - NEW WORLD

Remembering his action, Peter checked the back pocket of his blue trousers, not finding what he was hoping for.

Peter: "I'm sorry, sweetie."

Skye sadly looked back at him. They heard Jackson's voice, who called for them.

Jackson: "Come on, we have no time to lose."

They walked back to the meeting area they had agreed on before, meeting back with Shawne, Tobias, Kenlee, Veronica, and Mark.

Shawne: "What did you find?"

Jackson placed the bags of empty bottles to his side, taking the can from the one he opened. "Beans." Kenlee placed two packs of vacuumed biscuits, and Shawne, seeing the scarcity of their finds, would not provide much more, as Tobias had placed three packs of dried berries.

Mark: "Hey!"

The young boy called out to Skye, asking her for sweets. Walking up to him, the girl sadly whispered back. The boy lowered his head, as he and Skye would stand next to each other, sharing their lack of joy. Shawne took a look at them, sad that they did not have something to look forward to. She spoke to the others.

Shawne: "There is not much we have. We need to spend these supplies appropriately."

Jackson: "We can use them, place the beans in a pot, fill it with water, combine them with berries."

Shawne: "That would mean we'd only have it for today."

Jackson annoyingly answered. "I don't see for how much longer we could use them. Do you?"

Shawne: "Uh, okay. But we keep the biscuits for another time."

Coming to a mutual agreement, the group would enter one of the houses that had a gas-powered stove, on top of which they would prepare their afternoon lunch with what little resources they had. Tobias, together with Kenlee's wife, Veronica, would place the plates on a dining table, where they each ate an equally distributed small portion of the food, and as they were all finished, Shawne called for them to follow. As the group walked back to the truck which Jackson had unlocked, they would continue on their journey.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 43
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 43

CHAPTER 43

A long two hours would pass before they found themselves driving through the main road which led to the city known as Altoona, a city forming itself through the use of railroads, whose hard-working population served to recover from the industrial decline experienced in recent decades. Keeping his eye close on the fuel counter of the truck, Jackson quietly cursed underneath his breath, an action Shawne had noticed, while Tobias and Kenlee both fell into an afternoon sleep.

Shawne: “How much do we have?”

Jackson: “Not much longer, and for that to happen here out of all places...”

Peter listened closely to their conversation, sitting beside the two children who slept, having their heads leaned on Veronica.

Peter: “Why do you say that?”

Jackson: “For Christ’s sake, Pete. Look where we are. Practically in front of a fucking city. And we all know what waits for us there.”

Shawne: “The risen.”

Jackson: “Not hundreds... but thousands of those fuckers. God damn...”

He would suddenly stop their movement, finding that either way, dozens of crashed vehicles blocked their path forward through the main road. Soon, they saw them as they walked, their rotting skin slowly burning away under the sun’s rays throughout each day that passed.

Jackson: “Rise up!”

He yelled at those who slept, quickly waking them up. Tobias, who slowly began to look around them, asked while scratching his head.

Tobias: “Where are we?”

Jackson: “Buckle up, village boy. You’re living the modern life!”

Tobias: “Wh... What?”

Jackson: “A city, dumbass. We in front of a God damn city...”

The older man, who heard every one of his words, asked.

Kenlee: “Why are we not moving?”

Shawne: “We have no way forward.”

Jackson eyed her. “No way in this state.”

Understanding his words, Peter asked.

Peter: “We walk?”

Tobias, who began to see the dozens of risen in front of them, spoke in shock.

Tobias: “Are you insane? Look at them! We’ll get torn apart!”

With a smug, Jackson would suddenly walk outside, picking up an item found on the road, one he had seen moments ago. With the equipped knife, he walked to seven divided risen, who he knocked down, one by one. After finishing, he walked back, sitting inside.

Jackson: “Well, drama queen? There’s no other way forward. We check the cars around us, each of us finding a weapon he or she can use, and we walk through this hellhole...”

Tobias: “What?”

Jackson: “Once we find ourselves inside, we quickly enter one of the malls we will surely find. Inside, we take as many supplies as we can, after which we walk to the outskirts in the south, from where we take a smaller vehicle, a car that still has a decent amount of fuel. With that, we’ll be able to move through smaller, more rural roads. You all understand?”

Tobias: “You can’t be serious, we’ll-”

Without a second to waste, Jackson suddenly yelled back at him, not caring for the children’s presence. “What else do you suggest, you idiot?!? Look around! With this big shit, we cannot move forward or backward! Look at the fuel counter! Even if we try, there’s no telling when we’ll stop! For all I care, we could stop in the middle of the rural areas, where we are bound to find no things to eat, so we continue starving ourselves to death!”

Shawne: “There is no need to-”

Jackson: “To yell, is that what you were going to tell me? Well, what the fuck should I do when this young champ just keeps on giving?!?”

Tension building up inside her, Shawne suddenly yelled back. “Alright, I’ve had it enough with your over-hyped sense of bullshit!”

Jackson: “Bullshit?!?”

Shawne: “You can keep on spewing facts most of us already know, but for the others that don’t, you don’t have to act like a jerk!”

Skye: “Please, stop fighting!”

To everyone’s surprise, the little girl would yell, turning down the conflicting air. Meeting Peter’s unapproving gaze, Jackson would step outside, standing in front of the truck with his arms crossed, looking at the tall city buildings in the distance. As all of them slowly exited the vehicle, Shawne stood next to him, speaking as calmly as she could.

Shawne: “Just... lead the way...”

CHAPTER 44

Having each find an item they could use, be it a hockey stick, a bat, or a pair of scissors, the adults would soon find themselves nearing the city's streets, downing several of the divided risen on their way. Meeting their eyes with the larger crowds that had managed to fill even the approaching inner roads of the city, Shawne would point for them to enter one of the small storefronts while they tried to produce as little noise as had been possible.

Jackson: "Well, open fucking sesame."

Jackson quietly whispered, raising his right arm to point at the shelves that had been filled with dried packs of meat. And that meat, they would soon mostly take, placing it inside of the bags they carried. Minutes passed as they walked through the inner passageways of the connected row of buildings, taking many kinds of edible products whose dates of expiry did not yet pass.

Having their bags filled to a decent amount, Jackson would whisper for them to follow as he looked through one of the glass windows, pointing to the southern streets. Soon, he would spot what appeared to be a crossroads that had remained empty enough for them to pass, where on its left corner, a passage could be seen. Without a word, he would point out the way for the people behind him.

Shawne: "Look to the right."

She would speak to him, as Jackson could see the gathered horde of the risen, who seemed to relish in the slow setting of the sun. "This is our best shot." He whispered back.

Kenlee: "He... He is right. If we move back, night will come before we reach the outskirts..."

His son curiously asked.

Mark: "Is that... when they get angry?"

Jackson momentarily looked back at the nine-year-old. "That is when they get fast, kid..."

Slowly opening the door, he stepped outside, trying so desperately to not make noise, as the horde to their right kept its attention fixed upon the sun. Unfortunately, it would be Tobias, who, out of an honest mistake, would slowly lean back, not paying attention to his bag, which had not been closed properly, as a metal can of mushrooms would fall out, hitting the concrete. From the produced noise, one of the risen would turn its head, seeing them, beginning to scream, others turning back...

Jackson immediately yelled...

Jackson: "Run!"

CHAPTER 45

They rushed through the streets like flies escaping their slaughter, not paying attention to any of the risen who would face them in the coming streets, risen that joined the horde that ran after them...

A second turned to two, two turned to five, five turned to ten, as through their animalistic run, they would find sight of an opening providing a way out of the thickened streets. Without a second left to spare, Jackson yelled for them to keep moving, ever so slightly noticing the rising tiredness in Veronica's eyes. Now running through the roads of the outskirts, Jackson did not know in what possible way they could lose the horde.

Shawne: "They aren't stopping!"

She yelled in a fury, Peter looking back at the unrelenting force of the risen. Continuing to pass between the rows of crashed cars that filled the exiting road, Kenlee's wife would suddenly stop, trying to catch her breath, while the risen were nearing...

Kenlee: "Honey, go!"

He yelled at her in despair as he held their son in his arms. The division between her and the first of the risen would disappear, as Tobias stood behind her, pushing her forward, screaming in agony... as the flesh of his neck... would be torn apart. Seeing him while running after Jackson, a memory found its way inside Peter's mind...

Jonathan: "Watch each other's back... Keep him safe, Peter... As much as you can..."

.
. .
. . .

Kenlee: "Nooo!"

The old man screamed in shock, as seconds after, Veronica, who could not continue to run for much longer, would be caught... falling down... as the risen began to feast.

.
. .
. . .

Seeing a point of interest, Shawne, who held Skye, yelled for them to follow, as they would soon pass through a tight alleyway, jumping over a metal fence, which would soon be

crushed by the horde. But enough time would be given, as they would enter and pass through several suburban houses, eventually finding one whose model she would recognize, a car which they would succeed in turning on, using the time they had gained, as Shawne connected the wires under the steering wheel. With the last second they had, before the horde would place their claws on them, she would step on the gas pedal, driving through the less populated road...

CHAPTER 46

Jackson sat next to her, deep inside, still not believing what happened. Kenlee, who sat next to Peter in the back, held his son in his arms, who looked at Skye with uncertainty, who herself was now held by Peter. He could not look at the people in the car, but would continuously look through the glass, saying no words, holding his mouth closed by the placement of his left hand on his lips, his eyes drowning in tears... tears the old man tried to hide from his son... with all the force he could gather.

Peter looked away through the glass on his right, his eyes wide in shock, his mind... looping the memory of Tobias's eyes... before...

Jackson remained quiet in the passing minutes, as Shawne, who was filled with tears deep inside her, continued to drive, providing them a way out.

.
. .
. . .

An hour would pass.

.
. .
. . .

Passing through an urban road, surrounded by the autumn trees around them, Shawne stopped the vehicle and had walked outside, crouching on the concrete road. Peter opened the door, leaving Skye to sit inside, while he stood by the back of the car, gazing at the distance, breathing in deeply, not being able to hold the tears any longer... letting them form... as the cold drops touched the warm road.

Kenlee would remain to sit inside, holding his son, who found his mother to not be by his side, while Jackson would step outside, hitting his head against one of the trees, blood appearing on his forehead as he continued to strike. Seeing him, the little girl ran up to him, screaming at him.

Skye: "Stop! Stop!"

His eyes meeting with hers, Jackson sat on the earth, his back leaned against the tree, his eyes bloodshot red. Only the children would find sleep when the night soon arrived, as they remained in place, grieving.

CHAPTER 47

Eventually closing his eyes, finding no strength to continue, Peter would surround himself in sleep, a dream taking his soul...

.
. .
.

“Wh... Where am I?”

He sat on a wooden bench in a street filled with people... people who breathed... people who lived.

Sitting by his side, he would feel someone’s touch.

Looking at her... looking at his wife... Peter would cry, placing his head on her shoulder... hugging her.

“Sarah...”

She would smile, asking him.

.
. .
.

“Peter...”

Widening his view, he continued, now looking at the people who walked around them... now standing still... looking at him.

.
. .
.

“Peter...”

He looked again at his wife.

.
. .
.

“You need to continue. You need to find him, our boy.”

.
. .
.

“For us.”

CHAPTER 48

He felt the touch of an arm, hearing her voice.
Shawne: “Come on.”

She spoke to him solemnly, taking his hand as she helped pull him up, while Jackson and Kenlee, together with the children, sat inside. Looking at Skye as he stepped in, closing the door behind him, Peter would hear the sweet girl’s voice, who somehow smiled, taking him out of his trance.

Skye: “Buckle up!”

The wheels would turn, as their movement began, silent talks heard as the vehicle drove forward.

Shawne: “We drive to Greensburg, soon after which, we-”

Skye: “Are we going to... mommy and daddy?”

With her anticipation rising, the girl asked. Peter placed his left hand around her small body.

Shawne: “Yes, angel.”

Skye: “Yey!”

She squeaked in joy, Kenlee slightly looking at her.

Shawne: “After we do what we need to, we move on to Pittsburgh. Okay, Peter?”

She addressed him while looking at him through the rearview mirror, her hands tightly pressed against the wheel. Returning her gaze, he would say nothing but nod. Finding the strength to do so, Shawne spoke to Kenlee.

Shawne: “Ken... Don’t... You know... We are with you... We are together... All of us...”

Kenlee: “Do not... speak in his name...”

The old man answered back, regarding Jackson, who kept his eyes closed.

1: DEFEND HIM...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 49 - ECHOES OF THE PAST

2: JOIN KENLEE...

PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 49 - REALITY OF THE PRESENT

CHAPTER 49 - ECHOES OF THE PAST

Eyeing his reaction, Peter would find the strength to speak, defending his old friend.
Peter: “He... He could not have known...”

Suddenly, Kenlee shifted his eyes at him, trying not to yell.

Kenlee: “If we would not have followed his plan... My wife... Your friend... They... They would still be here...”

Tears found their way once more.

Kenlee: “They would still be here...”

Jackson: “...”

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 50
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 50

CHAPTER 49 - REALITY OF THE PRESENT

Eyeing his reaction, Peter would find the strength to speak, joining the mourning father.
Peter: “Speak when you’re spoken to.”

Suddenly, Kenlee looked at him, calming himself down.

Kenlee: “If we would not have followed his plan... My wife... Your friend... They...
They would still be here...”

Tears found their way once more.

Kenlee: “They would still be here...”

Jackson: “...”

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 50
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 50

CHAPTER 50

An hour and a half would pass, as they would park the car in a wooded area, walking on foot towards the city.

“Angel, in which street does your aunt live?” Shawne spoke to the girl, who she held by her hand.

Skye: “Um... Yellowpine.”

Shawne: “Good. Does anyone know their way through?”

.

.

.

Peter: “...”

.

.

.

Kenlee: “...”

.

.

.

Jackson: “I do.”

Shawne turned around to face him, as they stood near the entry streets of the city.

Shawne: “Okay, then. We follow your lead.”

Hearing her, Jackson stepped in front of them, continuing to walk, keeping his sight away from theirs. As they would begin to pass through one of the entry points of the city, the mourning group would find a sense of surprise, as the streets appeared to be deserted, no risen finding their way.

Minutes passed as they continued to walk, finding nothing but emptiness throughout the entirety of Greensburg. Looking at the sign, Jackson turned the corner to his left, walking through the street they were looking for.

Jackson: "Skye, which number does your aunt live in?"

Skye: "4th! Yellowpine 4th!"

Despite not seeing them, out of instinct, Shawne placed her hand on Skye's mouth, whispering. "Angel, remember what I said? We need to be quiet. We never know who might hear..."

The moment she spoke those words, Shawne would hear several quiet breaths behind her. She slowly looked at Jackson and Peter, who stood next to her, as both of them were now holding their hands placed behind their heads.

CHAPTER 51

A nervously spoken sentence was directed to them.
“D... Don’t move!”

She heard the youthful voice of a man who was accompanied by two others, who remained silent. Hearing the distant steps, he would speak again.

“Turn around!”

Looking at him, Peter’s eyes would be met by a young man who he presumed to be in his early thirties, short yellow hair on top of his eyes, in front of which a pair of glasses were placed.

At first, the blonde-haired man looked at him in surprise, not expecting to see him. With a slight stutter in his voice, he continued, the two women behind him exchanging their careful sights with the group.

Billy: “Y... you?”

Rosemary Arkenshaw: “Well, I’d be damned! Ver, you seeing this?”

Veronica Arkenshaw: “...”

Memories found their way back.

“Folks, nice to see you first.” Jonathan addressed the two women and the man who stood on the other side of the now-open gates. Placing both of his hands on his hips, the old man continued to speak firmly. “Second, we would be grateful if you told us why you are here...”

CHOOSE YOUR MEMORY

1: YOU ADVISED TO HELP THEM...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 52 - EMPATHY

2: YOU SAID NOTHING...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 52 - CAUTION

2: YOU SPOKE AGAINST THEM...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 52 - SAFETY

CHAPTER 52 – EMPATHY

Jackson: “Folks, we are going our separate-”
Billy: “S... Shut up!”

The man yelled back, pointing his rifle straight at Jackson, who stood silent in return.

Rosemary: “Well, stranger... What brings you around here?”

Peter: “...”

Shawne looked at him, whispering.

Shawne: “You know them?”

Rosemary: “Alright, honey. Best you keep your pretty eyes on us.”

In the passing moment, the older sister smiled.

Rosemary: “Stranger, what happened? Cat ate your tongue?”

Peter: “... No...”

Rosemary: “Well, come on, then. Talk to us! Oh, I see...”

She lowered her rifle down, motioning for her young brother and sister to do the same. With a wide smile, she continued.

Rosemary: “Alright, then! All good now?”

Billy: “Rose...”

Rosemary: “Hush your tongue, Billy. We’re talking.”

Billy: “Rose...”

Noticing his persistence, she looked at him.

Rosemary: “What?”

“Good enough for now. Boys...”

A man wearing a black leather coat spoke in between their words. The older sister, who looked at him in shock, immediately stepped aside as several armed men walked through, knocking Peter and the rest of their group unconscious.

CHAPTER 53 – EMPATHY

Soon enough, Peter would slowly wake up, finding himself laying behind bars of steel that passed through the tunnel's opening, a passage of the sewers.

Looking around himself, he would find Jackson, Shawne, Kenlee, and the two children, still lying down. He quickly rushed up to her, waking her up, as Shawne would slowly realize where they had been taken. Upon awakening, Jackson immediately rose to his feet, slamming his hands on the bars of steel, while the lone father, together with the two children, would be woken up by Peter.

“That will do you no good.”

They would hear another voice, and as Jackson had turned around, he could see a man sitting in the corner, leaning against the sewer bricks.

Shawne addressed him. “Where are we?”

“Oh, where are we all? Drifting around like flies! Waiting to be zapped.”

The long-haired skinny man answered, slightly holding his hands in the air as he spoke. Walking up to him, Jackson would pull him up, the strands of his orange hair touching his shoulders, as the ex-officer held him close, harshly speaking back.

Jackson: “You better start talking. And I mean now!”

Seeing his sudden reaction, Peter pulled Jackson away, apologizing to the unknown individual.

Peter: “We... We're sorry... It's just... We're lost...”

“Huh, a funny way of saying so! Name's Len.”

Being offered a handshake, Peter complied. “Well, nice to meet you, Len. Now, would you mind telling us where we are?”

Len: “When you put it that way, not at all! See? That's how you meet your friends!”

The man sarcastically spoke to Jackson, who stared through the open gaps between the steel bars, not turning around.

Len spread his arms. “Well, you can consider yourselves as guests to his... astonishing grace!”

Shawne: “Who... who do you speak of?”

Len: “Oh, you haven't met him? Well, nothing to be worried about, you surely will!”

However, his sarcastic smile would instantly fade away, as the young man's eyes met with the person he spoke of, who was now standing behind the other side of the bars.

“You better be sure they have, Lennie...”

Walking next to him, one of the armed men would place a key inside the small lock on the right side, unlocking the hardly visible metal door, which appeared to complete the shape of the bars, having no handle.

“Name’s Henry.”

CHAPTER 54 – EMPATHY

Standing outside on the streets, Peter, together with those close to him, would look at the man who stood before them, surrounded by his followers, while the two sisters and their brother stood between the large group.

He slowly began to take his steps, whistling while speaking.

Henry: “To begin our little chit-chat in the best way we can, I want to introduce you to my girls here, and their less competent brother, of course. You see... they had some pleasant words to tell about one of you. Peter, yes?”

Their eyes meeting, the muscled man continued with a wide smile.

Henry: “Well Peter, to be honest... I don’t really care about our outer encounters. You see, the ones I care about... Well, they involve those working for us, as well as those working against us. And it is with those that work against us I have a problem with.”

With the wave of his hand, the two sisters and their brother would step back, as Henry looked at each one of them, tapping with his dark brown boots on the road.

Henry: “Currently, the one that takes the first spot on that naughty... naughty list... Well, I don’t know if you’ve heard of them, but they would be a nicely organized group. A group of assholes who like to call themselves The Union Regime.”

Hearing his words, Peter would slightly raise his eyes, an action Henry quickly noticed.

Henry: “Oh boy, oh boy! Have I found the spot, or what? Hah... So you’ve heard of them? That’s good. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

As he neared him, inches would separate Peter and Henry.

Henry: “What I now want to know is... Are you working for them, by any chance?”

Jackson: “Those fuckers threatened us, they-”

His words would come to their end as the man standing in front of them would yell.

Henry: “Alright, don’t any of you try to do that again! When I speak to someone, I am conversing with them alone! Now, Peter, my good pal...”

Peter: “... We met them... on the road...”

“And what would you say? Are they nice, or what?” He sarcastically smiled back.

Peter: “They searched us for weapons, and...”

“And?” He asked while putting his right hand on his ear, pretending to not hear.

Peter: “And for signs of... infection...”

Henry: “Were there ones they found? What would you say, Peter?”

Peter: “No... After... after finding none, they left...”

The man would slowly step back, turning around to look at his men, then turning around to look back at them.

Henry: “Hm... That’s all? There... weren’t any little chit-chats that occurred, Peter? You... aren’t hiding anything from me? Are you?”

Peter: “No.”

In his mocking appearance, the man pretended to kneel.

Henry: “Oh, most honored guests! I thank you for your honesty. Now, before we cut this to an end... Would you mind telling me what are you doing in this nice... little city, Peter?”

Peter: “...”

Henry remembered the conversation he had with the girl named Rosemary Arkenshaw, and now, as he noticed Peter was not answering his question, he teased him.

Henry: “Peter, you gave me honest answers just seconds ago! Come on. I can’t seem to hear you.”

Peter: “We... we are looking for people...”

Henry: “Oh, and who might they be?”

Skye: “Mommy... and daddy...”

Without a second left to pass, Henry immediately approached the little girl, crouching down to look her directly in the eyes, revealing his white teeth as he smiled at her.

Henry: “Oh, sweet little angel. And where do they live?”

Skye: “Yellowpine! Yellowpine 4th!”

However, after hearing her answer, Henry walked back to Peter, motioning for him to follow, as together, they walked through the empty streets, approaching the door of a small flat, one they would enter.

CHAPTER 55 – EMPATHY

Facing them, placed on a sofa, were three corpses. Two women, and a man, openings in their heads... made by the shots of three bullets... all of which came... from the pistol placed on the floor.

Placing his hand on Peter's shoulder, Henry spoke calmly.

Henry: "Look, Peter... I will not be the one to harm you, yet. But there is a piece of advice I would like to give you."

Shock still running through him, Peter looked at him, his lip twitching.

Henry: "Tell that sweet little child back there that mommy and daddy... went on a trip. Okay? At least, that's what I would do."

Together, the two of them stepped outside, and in the next couple of minutes, Peter and the members of his group were granted a safe way out of the city.

As they stood on the road of its outer borders, Henry yelled at them in amusement.

Henry: "I have a good feeling about you, people! That's why..."

The car with which they came was driven in front of them as one of Henry's men walked away from the driver's seat.

Henry: "I'm giving you your ride back! And a safe reminder, just in case. Don't think about Lenny boy back here. Sure, he might not look to be in a suitable spot right now. But when he comes to his senses, he'll be surrounded by friends. Friends who are there for him, when he shows loyalty, that is..."

As he waved his hand, a large metal door would be slid in between them.

Henry: "Nice to meet you, people! Hope we do not... see each other again..."

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 56
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 56

CHAPTER 52 – CAUTION

Jackson: “Folks, we are going our separate-”
Billy: “S... Shut up!”

The man yelled back, pointing his rifle straight at Jackson, who stood silent in return.

Rosemary: “Well, stranger... What brings you around here?”

Peter: “...”

Shawne looked at him, whispering.

Shawne: “You know them?”

Rosemary: “Alright, honey. Best you keep your pretty eyes on us.”

In the passing moment, the older sister smiled.

Rosemary: “Stranger, what happened? Cat ate your tongue, like before?”

Peter: “... No...”

Rosemary: “Well, come on, then. Talk to us! Oh, I see...”

She lowered her rifle down, motioning for her young brother and sister to do the same. With a wide smile, she continued.

Rosemary: “Alright, then! All good now?”

Billy: “Rose...”

Rosemary: “Hush your tongue, Billy. We’re talking.”

Billy: “Rose...”

Noticing his persistence, she looked at him.

Rosemary: “What?”

“Good enough for now. Boys...”

A man wearing a black leather coat spoke in between their words. The older sister, who looked at him in shock, immediately stepped aside as several armed men walked through, knocking Peter and the rest of their group unconscious.

CHAPTER 53 – CAUTION

Soon enough, Peter would slowly wake up, finding himself laying behind bars of steel that passed through the tunnel's opening, a passage of the sewers.

Looking around himself, he would find Jackson, Shawne, Kenlee, and the two children, still lying down. He quickly rushed up to her, waking her up, as Shawne would slowly realize where they had been taken. Upon awakening, Jackson immediately rose to his feet, slamming his hands on the bars of steel, while the lone father, together with the two children, would be woken up by Peter.

“That will do you no good.”

They would hear another voice, and as Jackson had turned around, he could see a man sitting in the corner, leaning against the sewer bricks.

Shawne addressed him. “Where are we?”

“Oh, where are we all? Drifting around like flies! Waiting to be zapped.”

The long-haired skinny man answered, slightly holding his hands in the air as he spoke. Walking up to him, Jackson would pull him up, the strands of his orange hair touching his shoulders, as the ex-officer held him close, harshly speaking back.

Jackson: “You better start talking. And I mean now!”

Seeing his sudden reaction, Peter pulled Jackson away, apologizing to the unknown individual.

Peter: “We... We're sorry... It's just... We're lost...”

“Huh, a funny way of saying so! Name's Len.”

Being offered a handshake, Peter complied. “Well, nice to meet you, Len. Now, would you mind telling us where we are?”

Len: “When you put it that way, not at all! See? That's how you meet your friends!”

The man sarcastically spoke to Jackson, who stared through the open gaps between the steel bars, not turning around.

Len spread his arms. “Well, you can consider yourselves as guests to his... astonishing grace!”

Shawne: “Who... who do you speak of?”

Len: “Oh, you haven't met him? Well, nothing to be worried about, you surely will!”

However, his sarcastic smile would instantly fade away, as the young man's eyes met with the person he spoke of, who was now standing behind the other side of the bars.

“You better be sure they have, Lennie...”

Walking next to him, one of the armed men would place a key inside the small lock on the right side, unlocking the hardly visible metal door, which appeared to complete the shape of the bars, having no handle.

“Name’s Henry.”

CHAPTER 54 - CAUTION

Standing outside on the streets, Peter, together with those close to him, would look at the man who stood before them, surrounded by his followers, while the two sisters and their brother stood between the large group.

He slowly began to take his steps, whistling while speaking.

Henry: "To begin our little chit-chat in the best way we can, I want to introduce you to my girls here, and their less competent brother, of course. You see... they really had very few words to tell about one of you. Peter, yes?"

Their eyes meeting, the muscled man continued with a wide smile.

Henry: "Well Peter, to be honest... I don't really care about our outer encounters. You see, the ones I care about... Well, they involve those working for us, as well as those working against us. And it is with those that work against us I have a problem with."

With the wave of his hand, the two sisters and their brother would step back, as Henry looked at each one of them, tapping with his dark brown boots on the road.

Henry: "Currently, the one that takes the first spot on that naughty... naughty list... Well, I don't know if you've heard of them, but they would be a nicely organized group. A group of assholes who like to call themselves The Union Regime."

Hearing his words, Peter would slightly raise his eyes, an action Henry quickly noticed.

Henry: "Oh boy, oh boy! Have I found the spot, or what? Hah... So you've heard of them? That's good. There's nothing wrong with that."

As he neared him, inches would separate Peter and Henry.

Henry: "What I now want to know is... Are you working for them, by any chance?"

Jackson: "Those fuckers threatened us, they-"

His words would come to their end as the man standing in front of them would yell.

Henry: "Alright, don't any of you try to do that again! When I speak to someone, I am conversing with them alone! Now, Peter, my good pal..."

Peter: "... We met them... on the road..."

"And what would you say? Are they nice, or what?" He sarcastically smiled back.

Peter: "They searched us for weapons, and..."

"And?" He asked while putting his right hand on his ear, pretending to not hear.

Peter: "And for signs of... infection..."

Henry: "Were there ones they found? What would you say, Peter?"

Peter: "No... After... after finding none, they left..."

The man would slowly step back, turning around to look at his men, then turning around to look back at them.

Henry: "Hm... That's all? There... weren't any little chit-chats that occurred, Peter? You... aren't hiding anything from me? Are you?"

Peter: "No."

In his mocking appearance, the man pretended to kneel.

Henry: "Oh, most honored guests! I thank you for your honesty. Now, before we cut this to an end... Would you mind telling me what are you doing in this nice... little city, Peter?"

Peter: "..."

Henry remembered the conversation he had with the girl named Rosemary Arkenshaw, and now, as he noticed Peter was not answering his question, he teased him.

Henry: "Huh, you are a quiet one. Aren't you? Come on. I can't seem to hear you."

Peter: "We... we are looking for people..."

Henry: "Oh, and who might they be?"

Skye: "Mommy... and daddy..."

Without a second left to pass, Henry immediately approached the little girl, crouching down to look her directly in the eyes, revealing his white teeth as he smiled at her.

Henry: "Oh, sweet little angel. And where do they live?"

Skye: "Yellowpine! Yellowpine 4th!"

However, after hearing her answer, Henry walked back to Peter, motioning for him to follow, as together, they walked through the empty streets, approaching the door of a small flat, one they would enter.

CHAPTER 55 - CAUTION

Facing them, placed on a sofa, were three corpses. Two women, and a man, openings in their heads... made by the shots of three bullets... all of which came... from the pistol placed on the floor.

Placing his hand on Peter's shoulder, Henry spoke calmly.

Henry: "Look, Peter... I will not be the one to harm you, yet. But there is a piece of advice I would like to give you."

Shock still running through him, Peter looked at him, his lip twitching.

Henry: "Tell that sweet little child back there that mommy and daddy... went on a trip. Okay? At least, that's what I would do."

Together, the two of them stepped outside, and in the next couple of minutes, Peter and the members of his group were granted a safe way out of the city.

As they stood on the road of its outer borders, Henry yelled at them in amusement.

Henry: "I have a good feeling about you, people! That's why..."

The car with which they came was driven in front of them as one of Henry's men walked away from the driver's seat.

Henry: "I'm giving you your ride back! And a safe reminder, just in case. Don't think about Lenny boy back here. Sure, he might not look to be in a suitable spot right now. But when he comes to his senses, he'll be surrounded by friends. Friends who are there for him, when he shows loyalty, that is..."

As he waved his hand, a large metal door would be slid in between them.

Henry: "Nice to meet you, people! Hope we do not... see each other again..."

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 56
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 56

CHAPTER 52 - SAFETY

Jackson: “Folks, we are going our separate-”
Billy: “S... Shut up!”

The man yelled back, pointing his rifle straight at Jackson, who stood silent in return.

Rosemary: “Well, stranger... What brings you around here?”

Peter: “...”

Shawne looked at him, whispering.

Shawne: “You know them?”

Rosemary: “Alright, honey. Best you keep your pretty eyes on us.”

In the passing moment, the older sister smiled.

Rosemary: “Stranger, what happened? Cat ate your tongue?”

Peter: “... No...”

Rosemary: “Well, come on, then. Talk to us! Oh, I see...”

She walked closer to him, placing the barrel of her rifle directly against his forehead, motioning for her young brother and sister to do the same for Shawne and Jackson. With a wide smile, she continued.

Rosemary: “Alright, then! All good now?”

Billy: “Rose...”

Rosemary: “Hush your tongue, Billy. We’re talking.”

Billy: “Rose...”

Noticing his persistence, she looked at him.

Rosemary: “What?”

“Good enough for now. Boys...”

A man wearing a black leather coat spoke in between their words. The older sister, who looked at him in shock, immediately stepped aside as several armed men walked through, knocking Peter and the rest of their group unconscious.

CHAPTER 53 - SAFETY

Soon enough, Peter would slowly wake up, finding himself laying behind bars of steel that passed through the tunnel's opening, a passage of the sewers.

Looking around himself, he would find Jackson, Shawne, Kenlee, and the two children, still lying down. He quickly rushed up to her, waking her up, as Shawne would slowly realize where they had been taken. Upon awakening, Jackson immediately rose to his feet, slamming his hands on the bars of steel, while the lone father, together with the two children, would be woken up by Peter.

“That will do you no good.”

They would hear another voice, and as Jackson had turned around, he could see a man sitting in the corner, leaning against the sewer bricks.

Shawne addressed him. “Where are we?”

“Oh, where are we all? Drifting around like flies! Waiting to be zapped.”

The long-haired skinny man answered, slightly holding his hands in the air as he spoke. Walking up to him, Jackson would pull him up, the strands of his orange hair touching his shoulders, as the ex-officer held him close, harshly speaking back.

Jackson: “You better start talking. And I mean now!”

Seeing his sudden reaction, Peter pulled Jackson away, apologizing to the unknown individual.

Peter: “We... We're sorry... It's just... We're lost...”

“Huh, a funny way of saying so! Name's Len.”

Being offered a handshake, Peter complied. “Well, nice to meet you, Len. Now, would you mind telling us where we are?”

Len: “When you put it that way, not at all! See? That's how you meet your friends!”

The man sarcastically spoke to Jackson, who stared through the open gaps between the steel bars, not turning around.

Len spread his arms. “Well, you can consider yourselves as guests to his... astonishing grace!”

Shawne: “Who... who do you speak of?”

Len: “Oh, you haven't met him? Well, nothing to be worried about, you surely will!”

However, his sarcastic smile would instantly fade away, as the young man's eyes met with the person he spoke of, who was now standing behind the other side of the bars.

“You better be sure they have, Lennie...”

Walking next to him, one of the armed men would place a key inside the small lock on the right side, unlocking the hardly visible metal door, which appeared to complete the shape of the bars, having no handle.

“Name’s Henry.”

CHAPTER 54 - SAFETY

Standing outside on the streets, Peter, together with those close to him, would look at the man who stood before them, surrounded by his followers, while the two sisters and their brother stood between the large group.

He slowly began to take his steps, whistling while speaking.

Henry: "To begin our little chit-chat in the best way we can, I want to introduce you to my girls here, and their less competent brother, of course. You see... they had some nasty, and I mean, really nasty words to tell about one of you. Peter, yes?"

Their eyes meeting, the muscled man continued with a wide smile.

Henry: "Well Peter, to be honest... I don't really care about our outer encounters. You see, the ones I care about... Well, they involve those working for us, as well as those working against us. And it is with those that work against us I have a problem with."

With the wave of his hand, the two sisters and their brother would step back, as Henry looked at each one of them, tapping with his dark brown boots on the road.

Henry: "Currently, the one that takes the first spot on that naughty... naughty list... Well, I don't know if you've heard of them, but they would be a nicely organized group. A group of assholes who like to call themselves The Union Regime."

Hearing his words, Peter would slightly raise his eyes, an action Henry quickly noticed.

Henry: "Oh boy, oh boy! Have I found the spot, or what? Hah... So you've heard of them? That's good. There's nothing wrong with that."

As he neared him, inches would separate Peter and Henry.

Henry: "What I now want to know is... Are you working for them, by any chance?"

Jackson: "Those fuckers threatened us, they-"

His words would come to their end as the man standing in front of them would yell.

Henry: "Alright, don't any of you try to do that again! When I speak to someone, I am conversing with them alone! Now, Peter, my good pal..."

Peter: "... We met them... on the road..."

"And what would you say? Are they nice, or what?" He sarcastically smiled back.

Peter: "They searched us for weapons, and..."

"And?" He asked while putting his right hand on his ear, pretending to not hear.

Peter: "And for signs of... infection..."

Henry: "Were there ones they found? What would you say, Peter?"

Peter: "No... After... after finding none, they left..."

The man would slowly step back, turning around to look at his men, then turning around to look back at them.

Henry: "Hm... That's all? There... weren't any little chit-chats that occurred, Peter? You... aren't hiding anything from me? Are you?"

Peter: "No."

In his mocking appearance, the man pretended to kneel.

Henry: "Oh, most honored guests! I thank you for your honesty. Now, before we cut this to an end... Would you mind telling me what are you doing in this nice... little city, Peter?"

Peter: "..."

Henry remembered the conversation he had with the girl named Rosemary Arkenshaw, and now, as he noticed Peter was not answering his question, he teased him.

Henry: "Well, you sure have some nasty tricks up your sleeves, or am I wrong? Come on. I can't seem to hear you."

Peter: "We... we are looking for people..."

Henry: "Oh, and who might they be?"

Skye: "Mommy... and daddy..."

Without a second left to pass, Henry immediately approached the little girl, crouching down to look her directly in the eyes, revealing his white teeth as he smiled at her.

Henry: "Oh, sweet little angel. And where do they live?"

Skye: "Yellowpine! Yellowpine 4th!"

However, after hearing her answer, Henry walked back to Peter, motioning for him to follow, as together, they walked through the empty streets, approaching the door of a small flat, one they would enter.

CHAPTER 55 - SAFETY

Facing them, placed on a sofa, were three corpses. Two women, and a man, openings in their heads... made by the shots of three bullets... all of which came... from the pistol placed on the floor.

Placing his hand on Peter's shoulder, Henry spoke calmly.

Henry: "Look, Peter... I will not be the one to harm you, yet. But there is a piece of advice I would like to give you."

Shock still running through him, Peter looked at him, his lip twitching.

Henry: "Tell that sweet little child back there that mommy and daddy... went on a trip. Okay? At least, that's what I would do."

Together, the two of them stepped outside, and in the next couple of minutes, Peter and the members of his group were granted a safe way out of the city.

As they stood on the road of its outer borders, Henry yelled at them in amusement.

Henry: "I have a good feeling about you, people! That's why..."

The car with which they came was driven in front of them as one of Henry's men walked away from the driver's seat.

Henry: "I'm giving you your ride back! And a safe reminder, just in case. Don't think about Lenny boy back here. Sure, he might not look to be in a suitable spot right now. But when he comes to his senses, he'll be surrounded by friends. Friends who are there for him, when he shows loyalty, that is..."

As he waved his hand, a large metal door would be slid in between them.

Henry: "Nice to meet you, people! Hope we do not... see each other again..."

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 56
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 56

CHAPTER 56

After driving off for a distance he thought to have been enough, Peter told Shawne to stop the car in the middle of the road. Standing outside, noticing the trees around them were affected by the coming wind, he called for Skye to exit the vehicle, and as she stood in front of him, Peter crouched to look at the little girl.

Skye: “Did... Did you find them? Mommy and daddy?”

Before he would know what to tell, Peter remembered a close memory.

Henry: “Look, Peter... I will not be the one to harm you, yet. But there is a piece of advice I would like to give you.”

.
. .
.

Henry: “Tell that sweet little child back there that mommy and daddy... went on a trip. Okay? At least, that’s what I would do.”

Peter: “Sweetie...”

He warmly spoke, expecting her to give him a response.

Skye: “I’m not candy. How many times do I have to tell you, both of you?”

She spoke in her childish sense of annoyance while quickly pointing her hand back at Shawne, who stood on the other side of the car, her hands leaning on top of the door, looking at them.

Skye: “What did the big man tell you? Did he find them?”

1: TELL HER THE TRUTH...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 57 - PAST

2: FOLLOW HIS ADVICE...
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 57 - PRESENT

CHAPTER 57 – PAST

With tears escaping his eyes, Peter answered.

Peter: “Skye... Mommy and daddy... They are in... They are in a better place...”

The girl looked at him in confusion, slowly backing away.

Peter: “They... Mommy and daddy watch over you...”

In the blink of a second, the small girl began to cry, screaming in terror... Without waiting, Peter immediately hugged her as hard as he could, patting her on her back.

Jackson, who feared the sudden noise, stepped outside the vehicle, yelling at him.

Jackson: “Peter! Calm her down, now!”

Shawne ran up to them and hugged Skye from behind.

Shawne: “Shh... angel... We need to be quiet. Remember, please...”

Slowly, Skye would close her eyes, stopping herself from continuing to cry, and without a word, they took her back to the car and placed her against the back seat. Soon, their drive would continue.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 58
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 58

CHAPTER 57 - PRESENT

Withholding tears which tried to engulf his eyes, Peter answered.

Peter: “Skye... Mommy and daddy... They are in... They are in a better place...”

The girl looked at him in confusion, slowly backing away.

Peter: “They... Mommy and daddy moved on. They went on a long trip...”

Skye: “They... abandoned me?”

In the blink of a second, the small girl began to cry. Without waiting, Peter immediately hugged her as hard as he could, patting her on her back.

Jackson, who feared the sudden noise, stepped outside the vehicle, yelling at him.

Jackson: “Peter! Calm her down, now!”

Shawne ran up to them and hugged Skye from behind.

Shawne: “Shh... angel... We need to be quiet. Remember, please...”

Slowly, Skye would close her eyes, stopping herself from continuing to cry, and without a word, they took her back to the car and placed her against the back seat. Soon, their drive would continue.

CONTINUE YOUR STORY AT CHAPTER 58
PRESS TO TURN TO CHAPTER 58

CHAPTER 58

Driving forward, Shawne tossed a look back in Peter's direction, knowing what he had wanted to tell, almost certainly guessing the truth. Soon, they would cross the borders of Pittsburgh, nearing the end of their path.

Jackson looked at him through the rearview mirror, nodding, letting him know that whatever was to come, he would be by his side.

As they did before, they would leave the car parked outside, but now, however, the three of them had made the decision to leave the kids together with Kenlee, and Shawne had cautiously instructed them to wait for them during the span of a single hour. She told the old man that if they do not return, he will need to drive away, and take Skye and Mark with him.

Struggling to find a smile to return, the old man answered back. "Make it two."

With the utmost precaution, the three companions began their walk, exchanging words before they would enter the streets of Pittsburgh.

Peter: "You... you do not need to go with me. I can find him. I know I can."

Shawne: "I'm sure you can, Folley. But don't mind. There needs to be somebody watching over your back."

Peter glanced at Jackson, who continued to look at the road.

Peter: "I... I don't blame you for... for what happened... I hope you know that..."

His old friend smiled. "Never stopped, and never will."

They would soon step onto the cemented pathways of Pittsburgh, finding themselves on the eastern entry streets. Peter, who knew his way well around the city, pointed as to where they should go, trying to avoid the hundreds of risen... who could be seen... walking through the streets.

Quickly running through four buildings, they would end up standing in front of a park that had been located across the road, whose grassy lands were inhabited by those they feared.

CHAPTER 59

Peter remembered the words of his brother.

“Day or night, you will know where I am. The Moon’s Light shows the way.”

Jackson could be seen looking at the central point of the square, wondering to himself which way forward they could possibly take.

“Peter?” Shawne addressed him, waiting for his reply.

Peter: “We... we go around. Through The Moon’s Light!”

Jackson: “... The Moon’s what?”

Peter: “The Moon’s Light tunnel. It’s an underground...”

“I’m pretty sure we know what a tunnel is.” Shawne stopped him in the middle of his words.

Jackson, however, asked him. “Where to?”

Pointing in the northwest direction, they would walk through, successfully managing to avoid contact with the risen. Soon, they would stand in front of the underground entry, which led to the railing tunnel. Jackson was the first one to step inside, knocking down several of the risen who stood in his path, piercing their skulls with the knife he held in his right hand.

Reaching its bottom, Shawne would point to the ascending steps visible on their left, through which they would pass, each of them being thankful that their path remained clear of the hordes. They hoped luck would follow.

A hope that would, however, soon be closed, as upon reaching the top, now standing on the sunlit walkways once more, hundreds of the risen would meet their sights, looking at them, closely recognizing that the three which stood among them... were not their own.

Without waiting for a second to waste, Jackson yelled for them to follow, spotting an alleyway in the middle of which a metal door was visible. Hoping no lock would be placed on the other side, Jackson had known this was the only viable path they could take. Running towards it, they would open it, continuing to run forward, quickly passing through the risen, who recognized them seconds after.

CHAPTER 60

Chirps of birds were heard, birds flying above, as Peter would slowly, but surely, through the panicked running, recognize the locations he passed by.

And it would be a black wooden door, on whose front a two-digit number was placed, that he would recognize.

17

With a fatherly yell, Peter motioned for Jackson and Shawne to follow him, as they marched on, nearing the door. Placing his hand on the golden handle, Peter would open it, quickly running inside after. Shawne closed the door behind them, remembering to turn the lock that had not been turned before.

Peter: “Jake? Jacob? Jacob?”

The father called for his son with a swiftly raised voice, not seeming to find him. Without a second thought to bear, he would enter his brother’s workroom, finding him sitting on the chair placed in front of his drawing desk, turned around, a rope tied around his upper body...

A rope Peter would not see upon placing his hands around his brother's body, hugging him...

Jackson: “... Peter!”

Time would not be on his side, as Peter would not understand Jackson’s words before a bite would be made on his left hand, a bite which came from the teeth... of his risen brother...

CHAPTER 61

He would continue to look at his brother, slowly beginning to feel the stinging sensation. Peter would see his brother's eyes had been turned upside down, a cold, blank whiteness filling them.

Tears formed, as he would uncontrollably begin to cry whilst sitting on the floor next to the chair his brother was tied to, whose risen body tried to reach him in whatever way it could.

Jackson stared at him, horror covering his way of thought. Shawne quickly ran up to him, hearing his yell, looking at Peter's brother, spotting the bite mark on his hand...

Peter: "Is this... the infection?"

Jackson: "..."

Shawne: "..."

Knowing the mistake he had made, a mistake he could not take back in whatever way he would try, Peter stood up, opening the right-side drawer of his brother's desk, knowing what he would find inside.

Pulling out the pistol, Jackson would yell after him in terror, fearing what he might do, but soon, both he and Shawne saw the younger brother place the pistol's barrel on his older brother's head, firing the shot.

Peter: "He's not here."

Jackson: "Pete..."

Seeing the look on his face, Peter would wait no more, but had instead walked through the remaining rooms, passing by them like a shadow in the dark, looking for its light.

The lone father would search through the flat's interior, soon finding no points of his son's whereabouts were to be found. He began to smash the furniture, throwing it around in a rage that would soon turn into sadness.

Jackson, who blankly stared at him, hugged him in return, speaking to him loudly.

Jackson: "It's... It's going to be okay, Peter..."

Peter, whose eyes met with Shawne's, pointed a question as Jackson stepped back.

Peter: "... How long... until I become... like them?"

Jackson: "Oh, that don't matter, Peter... What we need to do now is get you back, safe and-"

He would stop his friend, who tried to find a way of comfort, and had repeated his question once more.

Peter: "How long?"

Shawne, who looked him directly in the eyes, answered while giving him a bitter expression.

Shawne: “It could be hours. It could be minutes. There... There is no way to tell. The people I saw go through it... each one had his or her own pace.”

Jackson silently stared at her. The feelings he was experiencing became stronger. He yelled at Peter.

“Peter, God damn it! God damn it!” He yelled, pushing the drawer on his left onto the carpeted floor.

Jackson: “How could you be so foolish?!? How could you do this?!? How...”

Jackson sat on the floor, leaning his back against the dark green wall, crying in terror.

Jackson: “Not you, Peter... Not you...”

CHAPTER 62

Opening the door, they would step outside as subtle drops of rain found their way down. Slowly, they found their way to pass through the risen. Walking back to the city's borders, they looked in the car's direction where Kenlee, together with Mark and Skye, had waited for them.

However, Jackson would turn away from Shawne and Peter, gazing at the woods beyond. With his fists clenched, he would give his regards.

Jackson: "Say to Ken that... I am sorry..."

Shawne: "What the hell are you doing?"

Jackson: "..."

Not being able to control her emotional state, Shawne screamed at him, not believing what she was seeing.

Shawne: "Your friend is dying, you fucker! And you're just going to leave him in this state?!? Are you fucking insane?!?"

Seeing he would not turn around to look at them, Shawne walked closer to him, and as she placed her hand on his shoulder, she would suddenly be pushed down. Jackson looked at both her and Peter, visible streams of tears forming beneath his eyes.

Jackson: "I... Pete..."

However, he could find no strength to talk, and would once again turn around. He dropped the pistol he carried onto the ground and walked into the autumn woods. Shawne continued yelling after him.

Shawne: "Yeah! Walk away, you coward! Walk the fuck away, you scummy piece of shit!"

The last words that would be exchanged between the two of them, Jackson would quietly whisper, stopping for a short passing of seconds...

Jackson: "Go to hell, young girl."

CHAPTER 63

Together, side by side, Peter and Shawne walked up to them, both looking at the curious children, Kenlee asking in return, pointing in the direction where Jackson had walked away.

“Where’s he goin’?” The old man asked them, confusion running through his words as he eyed them carefully. Slowly, but surely, he noticed the posture of their shoulders, and he knew something was not alright.

“Did... did you find him? Your boy?” He spoke the question to Peter, who softly answered, slowly beginning to feel the arrival of the effects.

Peter: “N... No... He... He is not here...”

Kenlee: “Oh... I see... Well, where else do you think he might be? We should head on over there before dark.”

“Ken...” Shawne spoke to him, giving him a look he could not fully recognize, but would know there was information to be told.

Turning around to look at the kids, the old man smiled at them, telling them he, uncle Peter, and aunt Shawne needed to talk privately for a minute, to which the children would cheerfully respond, running back to sit on the back seats within the car.

Scratching his hands, he would speak back to them.

Kenlee: “What... What’s going on?”

He glanced at Shawne, who stared at the earth beneath them. Slowly, his eyes would shift to Peter, who would point to the inner part of his left hand, as Kenlee would see that which he feared.

Kenlee: “Oh...”

A sense of uncertainty surrounded him, as the old man did not know what he would say, knowing that the man before him... had so many years left to live...

Kenlee: “Look, maybe there’s a way we can stop it... We’ll look for it, together... What do you say?”

Shawne: “Ken... He knows...”

Kenlee: “What... What do you mean he knows? No, listen to me, Pete... There is a way, surely there must be one, one we will find, alright? Peter, look at me!”

He furiously yelled, an action the children behind them would notice.

Placing his hands on both of his shoulders, Kenlee continued. “Don’t... don’t listen to her, my son... We’ll find a way out of this... We will...”

Peter: “Ken... It’s okay...”

Kenlee: “No, what are you saying? Can you hear yourself? Can you hear yourself, my boy?!?”

Shawne: “Okay, Ken, that would be enough...”

The woman would slightly push him away, trying to keep the situation calm.

Kenlee: “Oh God... Yes... Him... The Lord will find a way... With his help... we’ll find a way...”

Peter: “My friend... don’t, please...”

Dread ran through him. The same feeling of dread Ken had experienced recently... when the old man listened to the screams of Tobias... when he saw his wife become surrounded... by the dead...

Placing both of his hands on his head, he shivered from left to right.

Kenlee: “No... This is not happening... Your son... You are his father, for God’s sake...”

Seeing his state of shock, Peter hugged him, smiling as he closed his eyes.

Peter: “That... That’s where you come in, friend. Both of you.”

Slowly, they walked back to the car. Peter sat on the passenger seat, while Shawne would sit to his left, turning on the engine. Ken placed his arms around the children behind, keeping his eyes closed, praying.

CHAPTER 64

Skye: “Where is uncle Jack?”

The small girl asked, noticing the officer’s absence.

Peter, who eyed her through the rearview mirror, smiled, answering back.

Peter: “Uncle Jack went on a trip. He said that he will come back, sweetie.”

Skye: “What kind of trip? W... Wait... Where is he? Where is your son?”

As the seconds passed, Peter would slightly cough.

Peter: “He... he’s not where we thought he will be, sweetie... Uncle Jack went to look for him...”

Skye annoyingly replied, making Peter laugh.

Skye: “There you go with the candy again!”

The strong, icy wind would pass around them while they drove to the nearest haven of safety they could find. The evening sun slowly began showing its descent.

CHAPTER 65

Parking in what appeared to be a small town, they would step outside the vehicle while Shawne ran to one of the wooden houses, checking it for safety. Peter and the one who stood by his side, Kenlee, kept the children behind them, all of them waiting for her to return.

Upon seeing her step outside, Shawne informed them that entry was clear, and they would slowly enter, taking the remaining bags of supplies with them. The woman, as well as the old man, had placed them inside the cupboards present in the living room. Not long after, Shawne placed her hand on Peter's back and walked with him to the single bedroom, placing him on the blanket-covered bed.

Lying down, he would ask her to bring him something, an item that, now, during his passing moment, Peter would find to present the most value he would know of.

Peter: "Shawne... Could you... Can you give me a piece of paper... Along with a pencil... Please..."

Looking at him with her eyes widened, Shawne turned around to walk around the house, looking for what he had asked for, trying as hard as she could to hold her tears hidden.

Kenlee: "What... What's he asked?"

She turned to look at the old man, quietly answering back.

Shawne: "He needs something to write on..."

Kenlee: "Oh... Let me help you..."

The two of them would walk around the interior of the house, trying to find what Peter wanted to have.

With a loud laugh of joy, Ken ran up to her, handing her a notebook on whose red cover, a blue pen had been attached...

CHAPTER 66

Shawne ran to Peter, handing it to him.

Peter: “Th... Thank you... I... I’ll call you when I’m done, okay?”

Walking outside, several minutes would pass as Shawne and Ken waited in anticipation, letting the time move on while pretending there was nothing to worry about in front of the two children around them.

.
. .
. . .

Those same minutes would slowly pass into an hour.

.
. .
. . .

Shawne, who could not wait any longer, would enter, her eyes meeting with Peter, as the closed notebook was placed on the bedsheets next to his head.

.
. .
. . .

Peter, who lied peacefully, his last breath, appearing to pass before...

.
. .
. . .

Looking at him, Shawne screamed. To her, Ken would run, the two kids behind him... all of them... seeing him...

Suddenly raising up from the floor she fell on, Shawne ran up to them, trying to close the door, but before doing so, hearing a voice... Peter's voice...

Peter: "Stop... Please..."

Turning around, Shawne and Ken approached him, sitting on both sides of the bed, while Skye looked at them, the little girl slowly realizing... what was happening...

Skye: "No..."

She jumped on the bed, crawling toward him, who would continue to smile, his eyes closed.

Peter: "Sweetie... Don't... Don't cry, please..."

Skye: "But... but you're..."

Peter: "Oh, no, sweetie... Uncle... Uncle Pete is passing on... I am going to see many, many members of my family... And of course, I will never stop watching over you... keeping you safe..."

Knowing his end was near, Peter kissed Skye on her cheek, calling for Ken to walk the kids outside, only him and Shawne remaining inside.

Peter: "I... I am going to ask you something... something I know... will be a hard thing for you to do, friend..."

Shawne: "..."

Peter: "In... in this book... I left my... I left my words... The words for all of you... As well... as the words for... for my son... if you ever come to meet him..."

Shawne: "... Peter..."

Peter: "Shawne... I... I need you to... not let me turn... into one of them..."

Once again, the young woman would begin to sob.

Peter: "Please, friend... Do that for me..."

.

.

.

Raising the pistol, she spoke.

.

.

.

“Peter...”

.

.

.

“Goodbye, friend...”

CHAPTER 67

Hearing the pistol's shot, Ken would lean himself onto the wall, both Skye and Mark, cried around him. Soon, Shawne would walk outside, holding the book, which she placed inside one of the bags.

Without a spoken word, she walked outside, looking at the night sky, as stars appeared. The morning would soon come, as the rays of the sun shined down upon her, a companion of a fallen man... who could not find peace before his death...

Entering the car, they would drive in a direction now known, but a way Shawne felt would be the safest, no matter where it led.

She looked at Skye, whose sunken eyes showed tired signs. The young girl remembered...

"Hello, sweetie. My name is Peter, and what might yours be?"

"... Skye..."

"Well, I am happy to meet you, Skye."

.
. .
.

"Sweetie, dream as much as you want."

"Pete, can you sleep with me? I... I'm scared..."

"Don't worry, darling. I'll be back, I promise..."

"Back in the car... I dreamt of her... I saw mommy..."

"There is nothing to be afraid of, sweetie. I'm right here, you are not alone..."

Shawne kept her leg pressed against the pedal, as Ken would call for her from behind, trying to calm her down.

Kenlee: "Shawne... It's okay..."

Hearing his words, she would yell back, halting the car's movement...

Shawne: "Do you remember your words? Do you?!? No, Ken... Nothing is okay... Nothing feels right with... with the world we are in..."

Kenlee: "Shawne, the kids are here..."

Shawne: “Yes, they are. And they must learn... They must learn that no matter how hard we try to pretend... No matter how much we try to forget... The world we lived in before, the world that was filled with countless people, members of families, our closest loved ones... That world will never come back...”

Skye, together with Mark, would closely listen.

Shawne: “They must know that sooner, rather than later, they will meet the harsh reality of this new world... A world in which us... we... the ones remaining from our past lives... will do whatever it takes to keep us and the people around us going... But in reality... not knowing, ourselves... whether the very goal we fight for... is a goal worth looking up to...”

Trying to refute her claims, Ken spoke back.

Kenlee: “No, Shawne. That way of thought is not what these innocent children need to hear. That is not what they need to believe in, as a life like that is not a life worth living for.”

They would shift their attention to him, both of them, who were still very young, not truly grasping the meaning of the words they heard.

Kenlee: “Life... no matter how hard it may become as we pass through it... Well, that life... That life is worth fighting for, because with every moment of sadness... with every moment of death... a moment of joy will come. Those moments will find their way into our lives... be it one way, or the other... But they will, and those small moments of joy, no matter how short they may be... are worth every tear we drop in order to achieve them...”

Not being able to continue listening, Shawne stepped out of the vehicle, looking at the road ahead, Ken quickly following.

CHAPTER 68

No matter how much it bothered her, the old man continued to speak.

Kenlee: “Peter. Look at him. Look at what that man had to go through. Look at what he did on his way... of trying to find his son...”

Shawne: “...”

Kenlee: “He... He met people. People of all kinds. He met you, me, our kids. He met my... my wife... Tobias... and even Jackson. People that were there for him, some longer, others shorter. Sure, you can say that there were bad people, unpleasant individuals who made their own decisions which would negatively influence us. Those... Those two brothers. There were people whose motives we still do not know, people who we know not if they are on the side of good or evil. That... That woman, who searched us over with her soldiers. Or... Or that man, who, although not knowing us, had let us go forward either way. It... Those are the passages of time we experienced. Those moments of our near past are the coincidences that led us to where we are now.”

Shawne: “And where the fuck are we, old man? Huh? Standing in the middle of fucking nowhere, carrying two kids with us who we do not know will see the light of day!”

Kenlee: “Stop...”

Shawne: “No, fuck you! Hell, maybe Jackson was fucking right! Hell, maybe it is the best choice to just walk the fuck away! Perhaps it is the right call to be alone with yourself so that you should not see the pain or suffering of those around you!”

Kenlee: “Shut up!”

Shawne: “You know what, Ken? Fuck off... I... I am not doing this shit no more...”

In her fury, Shawne would open the back door, taking one bag of supplies. Skye and Mark looked at her with fear in their eyes.

Looking at the book on the bag’s top, Shawne would take it with her left hand, and in the seconds she held it, the woman would throw it on the road, beginning to walk away, having no intention of turning back.

The old man walked up to the book, and as he crouched to get it, he would take it, placing it back inside the vehicle. He breathed in while looking at Shawne with sadness in his eyes.

CHAPTER 69

Jackson stood on the edge of a building, not moving far away from the city. The old officer looked at the height beneath him, a height that had separated him from the far road beneath. Thoughts circled his mind, memories both before and after.

“Dad, where are we going? Dad!”

“Quiet, son. Daddy’s going to make everything alright again... Don’t you worry now, okay?”

Peter turned around to look at his boy one more time as they were passing down the road of southeastern Colorado, heading towards the local police station.

Peter spoke bitterly as he looked at his son. “Look, Jacob, my boy... Daddy loves you, okay?” Tears were dripping from his eyes. He bit his teeth. “Remember that, alright?”

His 10-year-old son expressed his confusion toward his father. He looked around the seats of the car. “Dad, why are you telling me this? Where’s mom? Dad?”

Amid a second, the driving vehicle had halted. Peter, a 30-year-old military veteran, opened the door and walked outside. His brown hands were risen in the air, as several police officers surrounded the man and his son, Beretta Model 92s, pointed upwards.

“Sir, turn around and crouch on your knees with your hands behind your head!”

The experienced officer yelled. Jackson being his name...

.
. .
.

Jackson: “Huh, I guess it is time, my friend...”

Jackson, an entry police officer of the Colorado State Penitentiary, spoke to his friend, with whom he developed a protective relationship during the last ten years. “You know, I’ll actually miss you, Pete. Huh, however crazy that sounds...” He laughed as he was walking with Peter through the endless corridors of the prison. Bleak colors of grey surrounded them as they walked, echoes of violence and sorrow being heard farther away with each step they took.

*Peter wiped his right cheek as he was slightly smiling. “Oh Jack, you fucker... Who says it’s over? We’ll still be friends, **won’t we?**”*

.
. .
.

Bofur walked to the back doors of the trailer, and upon opening them, the man had called for the people inside to exit. And it was among those three people that Peter crossed eyes with one, shock running throughout his body.

Jackson: "P... Peter?"

The ex-officer spoke in mutual shock, spreading his eyes, still not believing who it was he was looking at. Without a moment's thought, he rushed up to Peter, hugging him.

Peter: "Jackson?"

Jackson: "My God, Peter... You're alright..."

He continued, tears finding their way out.

*Jackson: "You do not know how happy I am to see you again, **friend...**"*

The cold winter wind touched his skin, as Jackson continued to think, now turning around, stepping away from the edge.

Closing his eyes, he made a **promise** to himself he knew he would try to fulfill until the very last breath he would take.

CHAPTER 70

Now sitting in the driver's seat, Kenlee twisted the key inside the ignition, remembering how he would feel as the sound of the engine came to life.

The old man would look back at the two children behind him, knowing that he would try to keep them safe until his last.

.
. .
.

Remembering the echoes of the past, Kenlee would move onward.

AUTHOR CONTACT

Dear reader, I thank you for picking up and reading “Echoes Of The Past”. It is with my sincere thoughts that I hope you have enjoyed the story you have read.

However, if there are elements you might have not enjoyed, or perhaps, elements you would like to find out more about, I invite you to contact me through the following contact details, where we can engage in many future conversations.

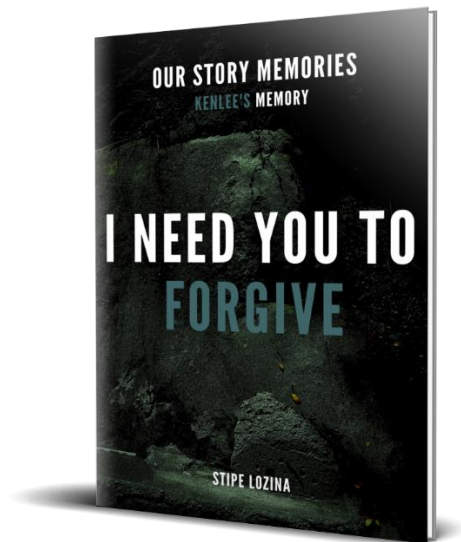
As always, I would truly be grateful for your review on Amazon & other retailers this book is available on. A review from a reader like you means the world to me.

MY PERSONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS: stipelozina@stipelozina.com

WHAT COMES AFTER?

After the events of “Echoes of the Past”, the story of our characters continues, engulfed by memories.

“OUR STORY MEMORIES”



This is the story of the character **Kenlee** from "**Echoes of the Past**", set **after** the first book of the "**Our Story**" trilogy.

"Hush, sweetie... Everything'll be alright..."

SYNOPSIS

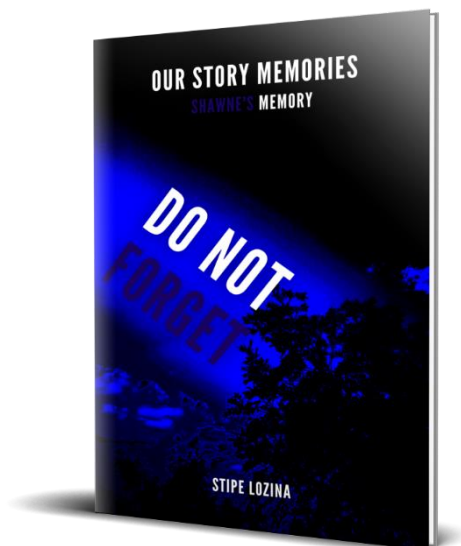
"As the story of "**Echoes of the Past**" comes to its **conclusion**, the old man, **Kenlee**...

Is left to **care** for his son and the girl he met by the name of **Skye**...

Knowing of the **dangers** the outside world holds for all of them, there is **nothing** he will not do...

In order to keep them **safe**."

AVAILABLE ON AMAZON & MULTIPLE RETAILERS WORLDWIDE



This is the story of the character **Shawne** from "**Echoes of the Past**", set **before** the first book of the "**Our Story**" trilogy.

"I... I love..."

"Don't, honey..."

"... I love you..."

SYNOPSIS

"With modern civilization coming to its **end**, Shawne is left **alone** to care for her child...

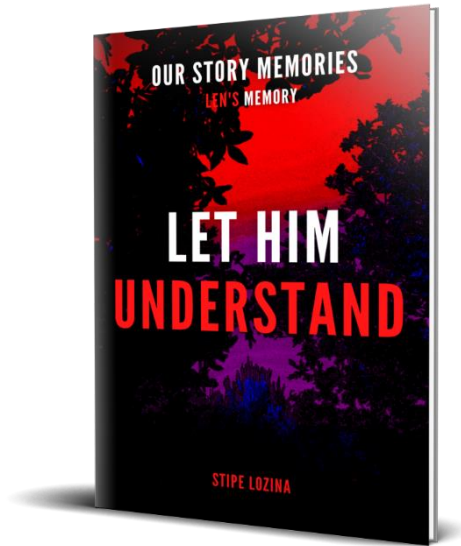
With the swift passing of **time**, the lone woman is met by several **people** who, together...

Have formed a **group** of their own...

Aiding her in the **mourning** of her child's passing, is her **family**, a family that holds her as a point of **interest**, a point to **protect**...

No matter what **threats** they may come **across** during **their** fight for **survival**..."

AVAILABLE ON AMAZON & MULTIPLE RETAILERS WORLDWIDE



This is the story of the character **Len** from "**Echoes of the Past**", set **before** the first book of the "**Our Story**" trilogy.

"Ah... Now, that... That was a blast! Would you not say so, Lenny boy?"

SYNOPSIS

"Len, both a **husband**, as well as a **father** of two blessed **children**, his daughter **Irene**, and his son **Lucas**...

Is left to ensure the **safety** of his **family**, as they find themselves at the stepping stones of a **new** world...

Over the course of time, **together**, they meet a **group** of dozens...

Calling themselves, The **Shadowed**...

Who, not to his present **knowledge**...

Will **break** the father **down**..."

AVAILABLE ON AMAZON & MULTIPLE RETAILERS WORLDWIDE