

## Their Days

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# **Their Days**

by [west\\_haven](#)

## Summary

A 30 Days Writing Challenge where I wrote 30 individual drabbles about The Last of Us with a one word prompt to get me going. Any character is fair game. COMPLETE.

## Notes

This is a 30 Day Writing Challenge I did where every day, I wrote something having to do with the prompt in the list. They are not in any real order, but these stories do flesh out Joel and Tess' story before Ellie comes into their lives, and then after. A few chapters deal with post game, in Jackson, with Ellie dealing with what happened to her.

There are three fics that are about Marlene, and Ellie's mother, Anna. And of course, there are a handful of Ellie and Riley chapters dealing before they got bit.

So go, get started!! :D

# Silence

His skin began to crawl the moment he dropped down the gaping hole in the building, his feet landing on the next floor down. Joel stood still for a moment, taking in the silence and trying to determine what to do next. At least, it was silence at first. Then drawn out moans started to echo through the dark rooms, punctuated by an eerie clicking.

Joel tried to control his breathing but whenever any infected was near, he couldn't help but imagine all the different ways he could die. A runner could jump on him, yelling in a broken voice while beating his face in. One could trap him against a wall and tear a chunk of flesh out of his throat like it was nothing. Or a clicker could catch him by surprise, pull his head to one side and rip his jugular out like it was a bloody, stringy piece of candy.

Those thoughts never helped, but they were as vivid in his mind as if they've happened a million times. He took a deep breath and finally summoned the courage to move his legs forward and take out the infected that blocked their path.

The first two were easy to strangle once he caught up with them, though the strong, rank smell of their decaying corpses in front of his face was excruciating. But after crushing their windpipes, they soon went limp and quiet in his grasp.

In the next room, a clicker stood hunched to one side in a terrifying, inhuman pose. Joel wiped his sweaty hands on his dirty pants and he started towards it with a makeshift shiv.

Suddenly, a loud cry caused him to jerk up and he only had a few seconds to realize a runner was racing towards him from across the room. The infected ran into him, swiftly pinning him against a wall with incredible strength. It roared in his face and tried to bite, but Joel quickly braced his arm against it. With a strong shove, he pushed it off of him causing it to stumble. That's when he saw the clicker was on his trail too.

Instinct screamed at him to run and Joel wholeheartedly listened to it. He could still hear the strangled screams of the last runner chasing him which caused him to speed up. When he rounded the corner, he saw a brick laying on the ground so he swiftly grabbed it and turned, having only a split second to aim. Luck was on his side because it hit the creature's face, allowing him extra time to whip out his revolver and line up a shot between its eyes.

He felt a quick rush of perverse satisfaction when it fell, rotting brains dripping out of its broken skull, but he didn't have a second to waste. A loud, frantic clicking noise was coming closer to him, so he scrambled for a bit of broken brick and tossed it as far away from him it could go. The clicker shrieked and followed the noise, convulsing and roaring at it. Joel pulled out the shiv once more and quickly stalked it. His heart beat loudly and it echoed in his ears, but he was almost done so he tried to stay focused.

The clicker was directly in front of him, still confused by all the noise. He readied the shiv and was about to plunge it in its neck when it spun around and tried to grab him. Joel's left arm swung out, holding the clicker away from his throat as his other hand hastily dove the

shiv into its twisting neck. With a twist, it finally went slack and Joel gasped as he pushed the body away from him.

Finally, it was all over. He saw the multiple broken, infected corpses around him and suddenly the new silence felt deafening to his ringing ears. His heart still raced in his chest and he tried to take even breaths. He rubbed a hand over his sweaty face and more than anything, he was relieved he didn't die today.

# Tough

Tess gritted her teeth as he started to clean the harsh knife wound on her upper arm. Joel touched it lightly with a damp rag and it burned, making her twitch and growl lightly.

"Hold still, damnit."

She groaned but still obeyed him, rolling her eyes. He noticed the look and shook his head.

"You have got to be more careful. You can't keep on doing stupid shit like this."

"How about you save the lecture, okay? It's not like I haven't heard it a million times." Tess grimaced when the wound stung again, causing her words to end with a snarl. "Easy!" She hissed.

Suddenly, Joel's fist hit the table, causing her to jump slightly. "Fuck, Tess, this isn't a joke!" He glared at her, his eyes looking hurt and angry.

For a moment, they stared at each other. They both were tired and dirty with varying degrees of wounds and scrapes. Joel glanced at the scars trailing all over Tess' arms, some old with age.

"We try to be tough," he finally started, still looking at her scars. "But we can't do this forever."

She fought the impulse to scoff at him, but she knew that would only piss him off even more. "What's the alternative? Go on vacation and share martinis with some clickers?"

Joel couldn't help but snort out a short laugh. "Well, minus the clickers, yeah, that would be great." He gave her wound one last swipe and then reached for the bandages.

Tess opened her mouth but couldn't find a decent reply. Joel was still looking at her but when the awkward silence between them grew, he sighed and began fastening the bandages on her arm.

"I don't know what else to do." She spoke after a minute, clenching her fist tightly. "You know, other than being tough." His hands stopped.

"If I stop, even for a moment..." Tess trailed off, her eyes wandering to look out the window.

Joel gave her covered wound a final look over and then studied her. "I guess I could understand that. I won't ask again then."

His tone was so resolute, she felt a bit confused. Even though he ended up agreeing with her, she didn't feel like it was a win at all. She wanted to apologize somehow, but Joel was already getting up and going to the other room.

Tess looked down at her freshly bandaged arm and appreciated the handiwork. She flexed it some which caused her to wince when she felt a quick flash of discomfort. With a deep breath, she continued to move it, trying to work through the stiff pain.

It was time to be tough again, whether she felt like it or not.

# Smile

"Oh no, oh wait, give me a second— this one is too funny!!" Ellie was shaking with laughter and she could barely speak. She covered her face with the joke book, trying to hide her red face.

Joel stood there as she tried to collect herself. After the months they've been together, he was starting to get amused by her random jokes. They had been fewer recently, though, after their trek through Pittsburgh, but he was relieved that she still had a few in her after their hardships.

"Okay, okay, okay, here we go." She snickered again, interrupting herself. " 'A dyslexic man walks into a bra.' Get it? Get it, Joel?" She didn't even let the joke breathe before she started giggling again.

He snorted in response. "That was bad. But still good."

"I know, right?" Her eyes lit up at his response.

"How about if I had one for you?"

Ellie's jaw went slack and her eyes went wide. "No fuckin' way, you have a joke for me?!"

"Sure, I got one. Let's see...." Joel pretended to think about it a little to drive Ellie crazy with anticipation. After almost a minute, he decided to strike. "Alright, so, 'I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.' " To punctuate the joke, he stroked his own straggly beard.

Ellie was quiet for a moment before bursting into the loudest laughter he had ever heard from her. He couldn't help but chuckle with her, but then suddenly, a roar erupted from their left and three runners exploded from a small house, stopping their joke session in it's tracks.

Somehow, Ellie was still laughing as she ran for her life and Joel made the quick decision to hold off on telling her jokes.

# Storm

Joel blinked a few times and squinted at the road, still trying to stay awake. After the long trek through Boston and Lincoln, the word 'exhausted' was an understatement. As he drove, the soothing sound of rain falling on the truck didn't help, though the sporadic booms of thunder kept him from dozing.

He heaved a heavy sigh and tried to crack his neck. Ellie stopped looking out the dreary window and eyed him. After a few moments, her stare unnerved him. "What?" He said simply.

She raised an eyebrow and replied, "You look like you're gonna pass out. Maybe I should drive."

He let out a sharp bark of laughter, causing Ellie to glare at him. "Okay, fine. Let's just crash into a tree or something. You know I don't mind."

With her words, he eyed the tree-lined road and grudgingly realized that she was right. At the pace he was going, he was gonna crash sooner or later. He slowly began putting on the breaks, which brought a huge, excited smile to Ellie's face.

"Alright, we'll do this. Just don't drive so fast in the rain and don't brake so fast either. If you do, we'd skid righ--"

"Right, yeah, okay!!" Joel was already regretting this. The moment the truck came to a stop, Ellie was already outside and on the other side of his door. For a moment, he just looked at her, standing in the rain. When she started beating on the window, he couldn't help but smirk as he switched seats with her.

The girl was so excited to adjust the seat and the mirrors. She fiddled with some of the knobs and was really amused by the window wipers. Her eyes comically followed them and watched as they wiped the rain away.

"Ellie. Let's get a move on." Joel finally said.

"Aye, aye! All aboard!!" He didn't even have the heart to tell her that she was mixing her transportation phrases up. Instead, he sat there as she started to accelerate, her eyes bouncing from mirror to mirror. *Thank god there are no other drivers on the road*, he thought as started to get comfortable.

A few minutes passed and Joel already started to doze off. Suddenly, Ellie spoke up. "Hey, Joel, could you grab something out of my bag?"

"Yeah, what is it?" He mumbled, reaching into the back seat for it.

"There should be a walkman in there, with a tape. Put it in for me, please?" Her gaze hardly left the road as he pulled the item out. Joel had to give her credit, she was actually a good



driver.

He ejected the tape she stole from Bill's and inserted her tape. Before he could comment on the music choice, Ellie was saying, "And don't worry, I promise to put in your tape when you drive. I just...." she trailed off. He was struck at how unusually serious she sounded.

Her hands clenched the steering wheel and she took a deep breath. "I just needed to listen to this tape again."

Joel simply nodded and settled back into his seat. *Of course it's love songs*, he thought. He closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind. The rain continued and soothed him into a light sleep.

## Snow

She inhaled a shaky breath and rubbed her hands together, trying to keep them warm. With her eyes closed, she could ignore how stained with blood they were. What she wouldn't give to be safe with Joel, maybe back in summer even though it was full of painful memories. Instead, he was lying on a makeshift stretcher in a basement in the middle of a snowstorm.

Constantly, she checked him and his shallow breaths worried her so much she could hardly move. Joel could actually die, leaving her alone and without a clue of where to go next.

Ellie sat there, head in hands, trying to concentrate on what she needed to do. All she wanted to do was sleep, but anything could happen to Joel while she was dozing. So she heaved one last sigh and stiffly got to her feet. She hadn't checked the house for supplies yet, so she decided that would be the best thing to do.

The house was freezing but she still searched the bare cabinets and closets in vain, trying to find anything left behind by other scavengers. She felt a rush of joy when she found a dusty, half full bottle of water and immediately grabbed a small pot to wash her hands. Ellie poured just enough to get her hands wet and she practically groaned as she wiggled her fingers in it. Joel's blood was finally washing off and it was one step that was making her feel more normal, more capable to handle this situation.

She looked out of the kitchen window out into the snow, still falling steadily. Back in the Boston quarantine zone, snow was a fun novelty. The last time it snowed, she and Riley ran out of their classes the moment they were over and had a gigantic snowball fight.

Ellie stood there at the window and suddenly started laughing, hands still dripping wet with water and blood. She couldn't help but laugh when she remembered that fight, about how Riley got the upper hand but then she tackled her in order to get even. She smothered snow in her face and they both were so happy for those few hours. The Fireflies didn't exist and the Infected didn't either.

However, her laughing tapered off when she remembered the mall, remembered Riley's last moments and the weeks after where she felt so lost. She couldn't let that happen again. She can't.

"I uh, better get back to Joel." She said out loud to the cold, empty kitchen.

# Blade

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She rubbed her eyes lightly, exhausted but unable to sleep. The lit candle on the table was terrible to read by but she still strained to finish another chapter. This book was a favorite from before the outbreak, so Anna reads it in attempt to go back in time, back when it wasn't life and death and the dead.

From behind her, she heard an almost silent footstep. She whipped her switchblade out from under the book and twirled around, ready to attack.

"Jesus! Anna, calm down."

She let out a groan and then rubbed her stomach. "Fuck, Marlene, don't sneak up on me like that. I bet the kid got whiplash or something."

Marlene raised an eyebrow. "Is that actually possible?"

Anna scoffed and turned back to her book. "Well, what do you want?"

"Wow, I had forgotten how you don't like your friends visiting."

"I am almost nine months pregnant, there isn't a lot I like right now." She sighed and ran her fingers through her hair.

"Then I'll keep it brief then. My plan is becoming reality. I'll be moving out soon."

Anna jerked around again, wincing before glaring. "You mean your little militia group, it's happening?"

Marlene's stare didn't waver under Anna's. They both were silent for a moment before Marlene spoke. "What do you want from me?"

"Oh really," Anna huffed. "We're really gonna go there? Jesus, I wanted a friend who would stick by me. You know, since me and my unborn child doesn't have anyone else in this fucked up world." Marlene rolled her eyes.

"And if I fix this fucked up world, then it would be worth it, wouldn't it? The Firefli--"

At that, Anna couldn't help but get up. "The Fireflies? Fireflies, really?" She mocked with a sneer.

"We're light in the darkness. Small, bu--"

"Yeah, and then they die in captivity. You know that's what's gonna happen, right? You're naive, Marlene."

Marlene's mouth opened and her hand raised. Anna didn't back down, though; she was never afraid.

"Just...." Her hand lowered and she sighed. "Fuck, Anna. Why are you doing this? I want to make things better. I want to make things better for you."

"What good would "better" be if I didn't get to share it with anyone? With you?"

Both women stared at each other, awkward as always. They'd rather speak with fists than words, and in Anna's delicate condition, that was out of the question. She sat back down.

With a deep breath, she picked up her switchblade off the table. Anna twirled it in her hands for a moment before suddenly throwing it at Marlene, who quickly twisted out of the way. It missed her and hit the wall behind her.

"Wh--what the fuck was that for??"

Anna just pointed, gesturing for Marlene to look behind her.

She slowly turned and saw that the wall was covered with bits of paper, all with words on it. The knife was sticking to a scrap with the name "Ellie" on it.

Marlene slowly started laughing and Anna joined in, clutching her stomach as she snickered. It was just the kind of absurd thing to break them out of their fight.

For now, their argument was forgotten. And it would only be another few weeks before little Ellie would be born.

## Chapter End Notes

Happy The Last of Us one year anniversary!!!

# Wind

He tiredly leaned on the rails, letting it support his weight as he watched the still landscape before him. Thankfully, today's watch was uneventful; the only things he saw were a few deer near the trees and plenty of birds flying overhead. The sun was setting now, washing the blue sky with soft purple and bright orange. He felt the breeze blow over him, ruffling his hair and he couldn't help but close his eyes and enjoy it.

Tommy had to think that the one real positive he could find about life after the outbreak was nature. The stars were always brighter and the sky clearer than he could have ever imagined twenty years ago. It definitely made him all the more thankful to be alive, even though he suffered tremendously to get to this point.

As he was cracking his neck, he felt someone walk up beside him. His face lit up when he saw who it was. "Hon, what you doin' up here?"

Maria smiled kindly and then pressed a warm mug into his hand. "Thought you might like this."

He closed his eyes and inhaled the welcoming aroma of the hot tea. He could smell just a hint of lemon, which is his favorite. With a dreamy smile, he grasped one of his wife's hands and pecked a kiss on her cheek. "Thanks, you always know just what I need."

"Yeah, I know you'd be lost without me."

Tommy looked her in the eyes, honest and serious. "You know I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Well, I would. I would have gotten to you sooner, back when you really needed it." Maria looked away, back at the sunset.

He was silent for a moment before voicing his thoughts. "No, I... I think it was meant to be like this." Slowly, she looked back at him. He continued, "I mean, I had to find my own path. My brother wasn't it. The Fireflies weren't it either. But finding my place in a community, in a home... it was just what I needed. That, and a good cup of tea, of course."

The sun had almost set by that point and a strong gust of wind rushed over them, prompting Tommy to sip his tea again and wrap one arm around Maria. He passed the mug back to her and she quietly drank from it as well.

"You know I love talking to you, but it's getting cold out here. Why don't we continue this back home?"

He smiled and leaned his cheek into hers. "Yeah, that sounds nice. I'll see if one of the boys can take over for me. Meet you in our room?"

"Of course." She pulled him over for a brief kiss. Before parting, her hand lingered, cradling his face softly. Then Maria nodded and walked away, lightly jogging down the steps.

Tommy took one last look out beyond the lookout post, taking in the finally dark sky with the last rays of sunlight lightly spilling over the horizon. He did want to enjoy it more, but the breeze picked up again and a nice, warm invitation to join his wife was far too tempting to ignore.

## Foot

Tess groaned as she fell into the lumpy, smelly sofa she happened to be cursed with. She kicked her feet up on the coffee table, gently, or else it would break again. She rested her legs for a moment before fiercely kicking off her dirty boots. A toe poked out of a new hole in one of her socks, so she made a mental note to mend it later. For now, she wiggled them off and threw them across the room.

Finally, she was as comfortable as she could ever get. Her head rolled backwards, resting on the top of the couch. She hated this couch, but it was something to rest on, so that was something. Tess let out another exaggerated groan as the table wobbled under her legs.

Her semi-peaceful moment was interrupted by Joel who all but jumped onto the couch next to her. He looked innocent and she could tell he was in a more playful mood than usual.

"You are an asshole." She started, glaring at him with no real heat.

"All I did was sit down, *princess*."

Tess snorted. "Fuck that, I'm your *queen*." She drawled with a smirk.

"Yeah, that sounds about right." He shook his head, smiling.

"You know," Tess huffed. "I miss being able to get comfortable. I ache all over and this couch is so shitty, I want to shoot it." She knew she sounded like a spoiled child, but everyone was allowed moments to be selfish.

Joel was quiet for a moment before looking over at her, not directly, but out of the corner of his eye. "Well, I can't do anything about the couch, but I know what I *could* do."

"You're gonna get me a new couch?"

He scoffed and pointed at her feet. "Put 'em on my lap."

Tess completely stopped for a moment. "*Excuse* me?"

He just widened his eyes at her and pointed at his lap, which made Tess want to laugh. Joel must be in a mood today. Not one to resist his charms, she plopped her feet on him, not too lightly, which made him snort and roll his eyes.

Then one calloused hand took the heel of her foot and started to squeeze it, slowly starting to move up the entire sole. Tess' eyes widened and her head fell backwards again. "Oh, *Texas*," she couldn't help but moan.

He added his second hand, caressing all the tension out and even moving up to rub her ankle. It wasn't a professional massage by any means, but it still made her body tremble. Joel looked over at her, practically purring like a kitten and he smirked. She didn't even care, as long as he didn't stop.

When he moved to her other foot, she let out another groan and the blissful smile on her face widened. He began to knead it firmly but then he stopped for a moment. She started to growl but then he took his fingernail and slowly raked it across the bottom of her foot, from bottom to top. Her growl turned into a surprised gasp.

"Okay," she started, voice shaky, "You're hired. You have to do this every day now. Twice."

Joel snorted and shoved her feet off his lap to her immense dissatisfaction. "Now you're trying your luck."

They both sat there for a moment, Tess blatantly staring him down. She could swear his face was turning a light shade of pink under her gaze. Quietly, she tried to sneak her foot back on him, but that's when he finally got up with a chuckle.

She'll have to find a way to pay him back, that's for sure.



# Cold

It was a really pleasant day, it really was. The ride was pretty comfortable and Ellie had never felt safer than she did riding a horse with Joel. She was constantly looking up into the clouds and pointing out shapes, or asking about the trees and flowers they passed. Joel humored her, which she really appreciated.

But then a storm rolled in, way faster than she had ever seen. Joel grumbled as the first raindrops fell and then swore loudly when it really started pouring.

"Wh-what should we do?"

He grit his teeth and narrowed his eyes. "I think we're maybe a mile away from another town. You feel up to outracing a storm?"

"Well," she shrugged. "I'm already getting wet, so we might as well."

Not wasting any time, he urged Callus forward, faster than before. The rain whipped at her face and Ellie started to regret agreeing to riding through the weather like this. The faster they rode, the harder the rain fell and colder she became. She curled behind Joel further, not caring that she was practically clinging to him.

"I think we're almost there, Ellie, don't worry." She heard Joel mutter over the rain.

Thankfully, on the horizon, a few buildings came into view. They galloped into the small town and scoped out the place. One house had a small garage and even though the door was falling off, it seemed better than staying out in the rain. Joel hopped off Callus and led them inside the gap.

"Jesus! That was somethin'." Joel looked around the garage, pistol in hand, already exploring and making sure the place was safe. He turned and when he saw Ellie, his eyes widened.

"Oh shit, I am so sorry!" He holstered his gun and started to rub his hands up and down Ellie's cold, damp arms, trying to warm her up. Her clothes were soaked, causing her to shiver.

"N-nah, it's okay. I, just, uh, am kind of cold. No biggie."

Joel huffed and rubbed her arms harder. "Alright, now I'm gonna scope the place out, make sure it's safe. Keep on rubbing your arms and I promise I'll find a blanket or something."

She meekly nodded and began following his instructions. He quickly readied his gun again and slowly opened the door to the house.

Minutes passed. Ellie was still freezing but the entire time, she was worried about Joel. She closed her eyes and tried not to think about finding him mauled to death in another room.

Suddenly, a large towel was wrapped around her shoulders. Her head jerked up to see Joel, also with a towel hanging off his head. "This should help."

"O-oh man, that is the best." She tried to be enthused about it, but she was feeling so drained it was hard to function right. She followed Joel into the house and he was already pushing her towards the couch.

"And, I uh, found you this too." He gestured to a pile of clothes and a blanket. "They're shorts and a shirt that you could change into while your clothes dry."

Ellie was so touched, she started to give him a hug but then she realized how soaked she was. She laughed and awkwardly stood there, still wanting to show her appreciation. With a chuckle, she grasped Joel's hand and gave it a firm handshake instead.

Joel snorted and returned it, shaking his head. "You really are a weird kid. Go to bed, I'll see you in the morning."

And that night, even though she was on a worn out couch with a blanket that smelled funny, she had never felt better.

# Pencil

He gripped the stubby, worn pencil and attempted to write his usual note. As he wrote, he snorted at his words and hoped they'd be appreciated. Just when he was about to sign his name, the pencil broke, causing him to curse. Well, close enough, he thought shrugging.

With a sigh, he slipped the note in it's customary spot. It's been so long since they've started leaving notes, it seems like routine to write one every morning. They don't get to see each other much since they are both so busy with their business which kept them occupied with trading and moving product.

With that, he gets to work. The day passed quickly enough and just as he thought, when he got back home, no one else was there. Though it was expected, he was still a bit disappointed he was alone.

He looked by the door and saw his note from that morning was gone. A new note on a tattered piece of paper was in it's place.

He reached for it and couldn't help but smile slightly in anticipation. But when he unfolded it, his face fell and he instantly felt sick.

"Fuck you," the note started in a familiar scrawl. "I'm gone. Bye."

And that was it.

He chuckled darkly and started to mutter to himself.

"Well fuck you too, Frank. Fuck you too."

After that, Bill continued to jot down notes, but he never expected a reply ever again.

# Nose

Both girls were almost asleep, each sharing earbuds and listening to music together. Their arms were wrapped loosely around each other, comfortable and relaxed. Occasionally, they'd have a sleepover and for once, they'd feel like actual teenage girls.

Lightly, their noses brushed each other's and a wide grin grew over Riley's face.

"You know what this is called? An Eskimo kiss."

Ellie couldn't help but giggle. "You mean that actually has a name? Wow. I wouldn't have thought of that."

"Yeah my dad, he--" Riley's voice broke unexpectedly at the thought of her father. She cleared her throat and started again. "He, uh, would play with me when I was a kid and he'd always give me one with his hugs."

The memories of her parents caused her to shiver and she instinctively curled into Ellie's arms further. She mumbled into her neck, "Sorry, I didn't mean to be such a downer."

"Ah, it's okay." Ellie smiled down at Riley. "This just means next time, it's my turn."

"Pssssh. Nah, you gotta stay stable for the both of us."

"I'll see what I can do th--" At that moment, their tape stopped, signaling the end of that side. Riley groaned and immediately untangled from Ellie to turn it over again.

"I always flip," Ellie pointed at the tape, "when that happens."

Riley snorted as she settled back next to Ellie. "Oh jeez, that was terrible. Like, really bad."

"Yeah, that was kind of forced... I'm sorry."

They both giggled and Riley lightly ran her hand up Ellie's arm. "Alright, so I just decided. Fuck the past, we gotta make new memories. So...." She trailed off and gently touched her nose against Ellie's again as their song played again.

## Promise

For once, Tommy was nervous. Not a "there's a whole pack of clickers between me and the door" nervous, but the general "I have no clue what I'm doing here" kind of nervous. And he really didn't know, or why. He pulled at his shirt uncomfortably; he never liked wearing black. Still, she was waiting for him. He took a deep breath and walked out of his room.

He tried to stay calm as he walked down the stairs. They had agreed to meet outside of the mess hall and he couldn't help but shake the entire time. Thoughts of his brother popped into his head, remembering how life treated him so badly. But he didn't want to think about that, especially right now.

He opened the door outside and was stunned by the sight. It was dusk and someone must have found a truckload of white Christmas tree lights. They were strung all over, adding a lovely, almost magical glow to the normally drab courtyard. Everyone clapped when Tommy entered, making him feel even more self-conscious.

But then he looked over and saw Maria, waiting for him. Even though she was wearing a plain, white dress, she had never looked more beautiful to him.

"Well, Tommy," She smiled, shaking her head. "Get up here, you idiot!"

He chuckled and started over at her. "I can't believe... I can't believe everyone went all out like this!"

"It's not every day that a wedding happens, you know. Even if it is just a small one." She clasped his hands and squeezed them.

"So, are you ready?" He whispered. He was surprised at how his nervousness faded when he saw her because he felt only excitement now. She nodded.

Tommy took a deep breath and turned to the small crowd of people at their side.

"Alright, so Maria and I really appreciate ya'll being here today. And thank you so much for the lights, they make this look like a real wedding." A few people hollered and clapped.

"Yeah, that's what we need. More than anything, in times like this, we need the normal things to keep us grounded."

He looked over at Maria and more than anything, he wanted to kiss her. But he knew that'll come later, so he continued. "And I have been blessed to find this woman here."

"Oh, that's bullshit, I so found you." The crowd burst into laughter.

"Okay, my lady has spoken. I'm blessed to have been found by her. Better?" He peeked over at her and she winked.

"So, I'll, uh, try to make this brief. More brief." Tommy chuckled and turned back to Maria. "I've been trying to survive for so long, I'm stunned that I'm standing here in front of you. Not just surviving, but actually living a *life* now. And I promise I'll support you and keep you safe, in sickness and in health."

Her hands squeezed his tighter. "And I promise that I'll do the same. I'll keep *you* safe because if you die... a part of myself would go with you." He noticed a few tears pooling at her eyes to his surprise. She doesn't usually get choked up like this. "All I want for us is to be together for as long as we can."

Now he really couldn't help it, so he finally broke down and kissed her. For that moment, they blocked out the cheering and laughing crowd, focusing only on each other. He could feel a smile on her lips and Tommy's heart could have exploded from joy.

He broke away and started laughing. "Hon, I think I did that too early, I'm sorry."

"But we know what happens next. I take this man to be my husband."

"And I take this woman to be my wife. I'll love you forever." Tommy felt a tear streak down his cheek, matching the ones flowing down her face.

Now it was time for their official kiss and they wholeheartedly delivered. He clutched her to him and tried to commit this moment to memory so he'd never forget it. And then with a grin, Tommy scooped Maria in his arms, causing her to burst out laughing.

"Alright, everyone!" She spoke out to the crowd. "Now we all have some more work to do, so let's get to it!" She wiggled her eyebrows at her now husband, who turned a little red. Everyone catcalled and hollered before scattering or starting towards the dam.

Tommy stood there for a moment and took in the twinkling lights, how the setting sun looked and the feeling of his new wife in his arms. It's things like this that make living completely worth it.

"Thank you, Maria. Just... thank you."

# Necklace

"Oh, no way!!"

Joel loved how excited she looked; it really warmed his heart and made him feel like he was doing something right. And even though he didn't understand some of the things she likes, he could tell it was harmless. He smiled at her, nodding. "Yeah, happy birthday! You like?"

Sarah held up the necklace to inspect it further, running her fingers over the shark tooth charm. "You have no idea! Can you put it on me?" She turned her back to her father, brushing her short hair to one side and handing him the necklace.

He slowly clasped it around her neck, careful not to pinch her hair. She immediately looked down at it and grinned even wider. "Ohh, it looks so cool!" She adjusted her bracelets too, making sure she was in top form.

"Now you're all set, aren't you? Lookin' like a clown now?"

Sarah scoffed, "Yeah, takes one to know one, dad. Nah, I need to get my ears pierced next!" She fiddled with her bare earlobes and stuck her tongue out.

He raised an eyebrow, kind of worried. "Now why would you wanna do that? They look fine the way they are."

"But dad! Just imagine them with gigantic diamonds!" Her eyes went wide, trying to act serious but she couldn't help but laugh.

"Oh, so now I gotta get you gigantic diamonds. How old are you again?" He shook his head, smiling.

"Old enough to still want you to sing for me, that's what." She turned and flopped on him, loving the way his arms immediately wrapped around her.

"Alright, alright, I guess I could." He cleared his throat dramatically, causing Sarah to giggle and shove at him.

*"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you,"* He lightly sang for her with a smile, brushing a strand of hair off her face. *"Happy birthday, my baby girl, happy birthday to you."*

"What, that's it? I paid top dollar for this concert!"

He snorted and gently shoved her off his lap. "You didn't give me a dime! But I guess you can repay me in a few months for *my* birthday."

"Yeah, I'll make it great." Her eyes sparkled like she already had an idea. "Hey, and dad?"

"Yeah?" He suddenly was hugged by her, not just a little hug, but a full, tight hug.

"I really appreciate this. Spending time with you, that is. It's worth more than the necklace, that's for sure."

Joel chuckled and squeezed his daughter tighter. "Well, then I'll spend even more time with you next birthday, how about that? And we'll see about fixin' those ears of yours too. Can't promise diamonds, but I'll see what I can do."



# Mind

Life was quiet in Jackson, Ellie quickly noticed. Gone were the days of fast paced running from infected and fighting for their lives. They had to fight off bandits, true, but nothing like how it was with Joel on the road. It was actually *living* and she didn't exactly know how to deal with that.

She had never had this kind of peace before, where she didn't have to worry about being moved from place to place or surviving out in the wild. It was pretty refreshing, at least, until she realized that not having those problems allowed her to focus on the other things in life.

Ellie would be sitting on the porch, idly waiting for Joel to come home when she'd suddenly see in her head someone she had killed on her journey. The first time it was just some hunter from Pittsburgh, so she just shook it off and chalked it up to her mind playing tricks on her.

It started happening more frequently, though. She would be tending to the horses when she'd vividly remember how it felt to kill someone, hearing their cry as they died. She'd wake up in the middle of the night, thinking there was a gun in her hand. In that moment before she's fully awake, she'd aim at the door, ready to shoot. But then she'd finally come to her senses and remember that it's safe here.

The worst thing about these phantoms was when she'd remember David. The feeling of him on top of her never left Ellie, his eyes crazy but his voice calm and deadly. In her head, she's already killed him thousands of times, feeling the splatter of blood on her face, and hearing his screams while she drove his own machete through his face, over and over again. And worst of all, there was that perverse satisfaction of murdering him, of seeing that bastard die by her own hand, that was what disturbed her the most.

In her nightmares, Joel never saved her from that burning building and from beating David's head into the ground. She ceaselessly stabbed him, watching his face turn into something completely unrecognizable. Upon waking, she'd feel sick and exhausted.

There were no monsters in Jackson, but there were plenty in her mind.

One night, the cycle continued and nightmares were persistent as usual. She would relive winter and it would lead up to the smoky restaurant. Ellie couldn't believe how quiet David was, causing her to peek around every corner countless times trying to pinpoint him. His taunting had ceased so all she heard were the creaks of the building starting to collapse around them.

A plate broke, causing her head to jolt up in the direction of the noise. Her hands started to shake and she could feel her heart hammering in her chest. Her skin crawled when she saw David slink into the kitchen, crouched down but with his machete marking his position like a flag.

When she started to get closer, she realized that she had an advantage; David hadn't seen her yet. With a surge of triumph, she raced at his back, knocking him over. She didn't waste any

time in beating him, her fists crashing into his face and neck.

"You motherfucker!!" She roared, strength pulsing through her arms. "You can't do shit to me!! You're dead and I'll--" Her voice died due to her rage. All she wanted to do was murder him, to watch him die again. The thought scared her, but this was the only way she knew how to win.

"Ellie-- jesus, STOP!!!" Strong arms pushed her away, knocking her off David. Her arms were being restrained and immediately, instinct kicked in and she broke away. She launched at the new attacker and punched him, ignoring how her hands screamed with pain. Ellie got in two sharp punches before she was grabbed firmly, arms tight against her chest.

"Fuck, NO!!!" She screamed, feeling angry tears stream down her face.

"Get a hold of yourself!! Ellie--" Suddenly the voice was familiar. She wasn't at the lake resort, she wasn't with David. Her eyes opened and she gaped in shock.

Joel's cheek looked swollen and his nose was bleeding. It was dark in her room but she could plainly see the damage she had done to him. "Oh fuck, oh fuck." Ellie breathed, completely in shock at what she had done. She wordlessly looked down and saw her knuckles were scraped and bloody.

"I...." She tried to catch her breath while still trying to process what happened. "God, Joel, I could of... I was gonna *kill* you...." She trailed off in horror before clutching to him, finally allowing his arms to circle her.

"Shhh, it's okay, it's okay." Joel squeezed her tighter, as if it could protect her from all the bad things out in the world.

"I just-- fuck, I can't do this. Everyone I've killed, I see them all the time. They never let me forget them. And David--!" She couldn't even finish the sentence.

"Oh, Ellie, *Ellie*...." Just the tone of his voice started to soothe her a little, but only a little. "Ellie, look at me."

Terrified, she looked up at him and tried to ignore the wounds she had given him. Seeing the blood drip down his jaw only made her cry again.

"Shhh, baby girl, now listen." He spoke calmly as he cradled her face in his hands. "I see them too, sometimes." Her eyes widened at his words. "Yeah, I can't forget them either. They're in my head and I just can't kick them out."

"Well, wh-what do you do?" Ellie stuttered in disbelief.

"I wish it was easy, I really do. But over time, you become...." He took a deep breath. "Numb to it."

"But that's...." *Not fair*, she finished in her head.

"Not a real answer, I know. All we can do here is the best we can. You take what hurts you and..." He heaves a sigh. "And you let it make you stronger. I mean, you packed a hell of a punch there, kid. Good job." He dryly chuckled and finally wiped the blood from his nose, only to have more slowly drip down towards his lips.

"Oh my *god*, I am so fuckin' sorry, you have no idea." Her eyes were wide with shock and she quickly took a bit of her bedsheet and clasped it over his nose. It was just silly enough to crack a smile out of her.

"Now see? Don't think of yourself as a bad person. You recognize your mistakes and you own up to them. Anyone we've killed didn't give us a chance, which is why...."

"We...." Her voice broke and she cleared her throat. "We did it to survive. But now we have to survive what we've done."

"Something like that. Anything else on your mind? Or can we talk in the morning?"

Ellie shook her head, exhaustion finally catching up to her. "Could I, uh, sleep in your bed for the rest of the night? I promise I won't try to kill you again." She let out a humorless laugh and another tear streaked down her face.

"Of course you can, c'mon." He got up and pulled her to his side, wrapping an arm around her shoulder as he led her to his room.

They reached his door before he spoke again. "And Ellie, I..." She looked up at him, silently questioning him. "I wanted to say I'm sorry."

Confused, she furrowed her brow. "About what?"

"That day at the ranch house, way back before we went to the University. I, uh." He looked away, pain and regret showing in his eyes. "I said some hurtful things that I never really apologized for."

*You have no idea what loss is.*

Those words hurt, they still do. Ellie was quiet for a moment before looking back up at Joel.

"Now see? You're not a bad person too. So don't..." She swallowed before giving him another fierce hug. "So don't think of yourself like that either."

He returned the hug before slowly saying. "I really appreciate that."

"We can be fucked up together, okay?"

"I think that's just what we need. Now let's at least try to get some rest."

She nodded while her hand lightly massaged her knuckles, ignoring the traces of blood on them. They'll get through this somehow. They always do.

# Books

It was past lights out, but she didn't care. This book was one of her favorites, so she sat there squinting with a weak flashlight lighting up the pages. Whenever she happened to find any books, she would quietly slip them in her backpack, and the more interesting the cover, the better.

She read about mysterious supernatural tales, brave knights and every once in a while, she'd come across some chilling horror novels. Those she tried to save because they were so intense, but she still couldn't tear herself away from the words.

But most of all, Ellie preferred the stories about space. She constantly imagined how it would be, floating over the Earth, so far away from the infected and these worldly problems.

Up there, there was no gravity and no sound, which sounded awesome, she thought. She'd be alone but she'd have the entire planet to look at. Some of the books had fantastic pictures on the front of the Earth that looked like a gigantic, beautiful marble. It intrigued her and she was curious about if it really was as beautiful as those pictures made it to be.

At night, she'd look out her window and she couldn't believe how far away the moon was. If only she could visit up there and take in the view of the galaxy all around her. From here, she could only see the stars as tiny dots, but maybe up there, she'd be able to see what they really are: planets, suns, all full of possibilities.

Some books she read weren't fiction and actually talked about the stars and planets some. She tried to pinpoint the planets as they described, but she only got confused; the sky didn't look the same as some of the pictures in the book, to her immense disappointment.

Since she couldn't match what she read with what was over her head, she decided to name them herself. Most of them were named after book characters she enjoyed, but then she named them after people she knew. One bright, sparkling star was simply called, "Anna", which cheered her up thinking that her mom was a star. That definitely sounded cooler than heaven.

Ellie sighed, finally closing her book and stirring from her thoughts. She was feeling unusually restless tonight, and the book was helping immensely, but it also only made her want to go to the stars that much more.

She hopped up from her bed, pulled on a pair of pants, her jacket and sneakers, and then quickly peeked from her dorm door. Luckily for her, it was quiet so with a smile, she escaped from her room. Her most recent book about space was safely under her arm.

There was only one place she'd go alone in the middle of the night, and that was to Riley. Thankfully she was pretty close by, so she was easy to get to. Silently, she opened her friend's door and snuck in.

"Is that you?" A voice from the dark room asked.

"Yeah, yeah, it's me." Ellie replied, happy to hear Riley's voice.

A small light flickered and the room was suddenly softly lit. "So, you come here often?" She could now see the grin on the other girl's face.

Ellie scoffed, walking over to plop on Riley's bed. "Oh yeah, all the time. Especially when I can't sleep."

"Oh yeah?" She perked up, peering into Ellie's eyes. "What's up?"

"Ugh, you know. The stars." She gestured upwards through the roof with her book. "It's hard to sleep knowing I'm not up there with them."

"Well, you know what we can do about that, right?"

"Steal a spaceship?"

Riley giggled, shaking her head. "No, how about something more probable? C'mon, let's go."

She blinked as they snuck back out of the room, whispering, "Wait, where are we going?"

"Aw, just follow me." And that's all she said as they tiptoed through the dorm. They went outside and crept onto a fire-escape, making their way up the side of the building.

"Ah, there we go." Riley muttered as she looked up when they got to the roof.

Ellie's jaw dropped and she couldn't believe how the stars looked even brighter tonight. "Oh, no way." She whispered, eyes glued to the heavens.

"So yeah, this is as far as I can take you." Riley's voice dropped to a whisper, almost like she was embarrassed. "Y'know, to the stars."

"Well, you did a fantastic job, so thanks." She finally lowered her eyes and looked at the girl beside her. "Now let's enjoy your work." She sat and laid back on the roof, ready to look at the stars again. Riley joined her and sighed, smiling at the beautiful sight in the sky.

Minutes passed in comfortable silence and Ellie snuck a glance at Riley, only to see she was peeking back at her as well. She could feel her face turn pink and she went back to staring upwards.

"So uh," Ellie started, slowly pointing out a star in the sky. "That's gonna be 'Riley'."

Riley grinned and reached a hand too, pointing out a star nearby. "And that one right next to it? That'll be 'Ellie'."

She giggled at that and bumped shoulders with the older girl. She stayed pressed by her side though and without thinking, their fingers intertwined. It felt so natural, so good, just like the stars.

That was the first night that Ellie wanted to kiss Riley. However, a small fear started in her at the same time, dreading what would happen if she acted on those feelings. In her mind, the other girl was just as desirable and unobtainable as the stars.

But at the same time, the stars were still beautiful to look at from afar. And that was something she could hold onto.

# Deal

Joel knew he was in for it as he walked into her apartment, immediately seeing her race up to him with a scowl on her face.

"Where the *fuck*," Tess breathed. "The FUCK have you been??"

He scoffed. "Well, it's great seeing yo--" But he never got to finish that sentence. Tess was never one to slap someone, so instead, she punched him right across the jaw. He reeled backwards, glaring at her.

"Fuck you. You can't walk in here after *days* of not checking in and just casually joke about it." She huffed and through her anger, he could see that layer of worry she was trying to hide.

"Jesus, I'm sorry, but I just...." He trailed off, unable to say what really happened. It was the end of September and every year around that time, he just shuts down. Before Tess, he would wander by himself and when he would come back, no one had missed him. It didn't help his depression, but it was what he always did. However now, he had someone waiting on him, something he didn't realize before he headed out at the beginning of the week. Over a decade of being alone made him forget how it feels to have someone who actually cares.

"Just *what*, Joel? I fuckin' hate it when you don't talk."

He threw up his hands in exasperation, growling at her, "What do you want me to say?"

"I *want* you to tell me what you were doing! And, y'know, to let me know when you're just gonna fuckin' split on me."

"It's just--" He inhaled and in that moment, Tess glared at him, daring him not to finish that sentence again and give her another reason to hit him. "It's just how I deal with things. It's how I *cope*."

She rolled her eyes and ran a hand through her hair. "Well, you can't just leave without saying. We're partners, remember?" She still sounded upset, but not as angry as she was a second ago, to Joel's relief.

"Yeah. Yeah, I know, Tess." He tiredly replied. "I'm not used to having someone waiting around for me."

"Well, you better get used to it. You're good, Texas, so I wanna keep you around."

He felt his lips twitch in a sly smile, which felt surprising to him. Joel was actually feeling normal for once, at least, as normal as anyone could be this side of the apocalypse.

"Alright, so," She hesitantly started again, "You got any more plans on ditching me anytime soon?"

"Not planned, no. I guess you're stuck with me." Grinning made his cheek sting from where she punched him, making it more of a twitch of his lips than a smile.

"I'll live. Well, you ready to work?"

He nodded and they made their way back to her small, makeshift office. She stopped in the doorway though, looking over her shoulder.

"I'm sorry I hit you." Tess averted her eyes, murmuring. "I guess that's how *I* deal with things."

"And I'm sorry I left you. It won't... it won't happen again."



# Avoid

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It had been months since they finally moved into Jackson and Ellie's mood was only getting more sour as time goes by. After a while, what happened in Salt Lake City really started to sink in, making her grow more angry and distant to everyone around her.

But most of all, the main person she avoided was Joel. She'd see him at the house they now live in together and her irritation would flare up, causing her to shut herself back in her room. Ellie didn't entirely understand her sudden aversion to him, only that she *knew* he was lying to her about the incident at the hospital.

The thing that she kept on thinking about was what he said in the car. Joel had said that they had stopped looking for a cure, which sounds believable enough. But for her to be drugged and in a hospital gown, that sounds like they were *still* looking. They wouldn't have done that for nothing. When she made that connection, she seriously started to question everything that had happened.

It was a fuckin' lie, and that was why she was avoiding Joel.

She decided to try to unwind a little bit with some target practice with her bow. Ellie checked into the makeshift range and immediately started. With a calm breath, she'd line up her shot and nearly every time, she'd hit right in the center. She would take a shot, retrieve the arrow, then take another. It felt like it was working on making her feel better, at least, until she saw she had an audience.

When she saw Joel out of the corner of her eye, she tensed up and missed the shot, hitting the wall behind the target.

"Oh, ouch. Sorry to mess up your shot."

Ellie scoffed and gave him a scathing look. *That's not all you messed up*, she wanted to say.

He noticed the look and his brow furrowed. "Ellie?" He questioned, looking at her with concern.

She shook her head, ignored him and tried to get back to her practice, notching another arrow in place.

"What's th--" He started towards her and she instantly turned on him, bow raising on instinct. Her heart stopped at what she was doing, but she blinked and stood her ground.

Joel jumped and glared, fists clenched. "*Ellie*, what the hell are you doing?"

"I trusted you." She finally spoke in a hard voice unlike her own. "I fuckin' trusted you and--!"

*"What are--"*

Her eyes lit up in anger. "Just leave me the fuck alone."

She saw how hurt and confused he was, but it didn't matter; she was hurt and confused too. He opened his mouth like he was going to speak, but she took a deep breath and yelled.

*"Get the fuck away from me!!"*

He stopped in his tracks, eying her raised bow and before slowly walking away. He slammed the door on his way out, not even looking back.

When he was finally gone, she dropped her bow with a strangled cry. This was so fucked up. What could she do now?

Chapter End Notes

TO BE CONTINUED IN PROMPT 19: FORGIVE

## Soft

The sweltering heat was overwhelming, causing his skin to prickle and his legs to move slower. He took a deep sigh as they continued walking, feeling even more nervous than usual. Without the group, Henry felt extremely anxious with only his little brother quietly trailing behind him.

"Sam--" He started, looking behind him.

"Yeah, still here, Henry. It's cool."

He scoffed, shaking his head and wiping some of the sweat off his face. "Sure, you're so cool. I keep forgetting."

Sam looked up, a small grin on his face. "Well, at least, I *wish* it was cool. It's so hot out here."

"I know, if only there was something I could do...." He quickly looked around them, seeing a few houses with large yards separating them, full of trees and overgrown grass. "You at least wanna sit down for a second?"

"I thought you'd never ask!" He suddenly ran to the nearest tree, causing a brief flash of panic in Henry's head. His shout died in his throat though, realizing that it was useless to try to tame his little brother when he mentions a relaxing break.

When they both settled by the roots of the tree, they shared a sigh of relief. It was still hot, but being out of the direct sunlight made a huge difference. Henry opened his bag and searched for his bottle of water. Upon finding it, he immediately handed it to Sam.

"This is all we have, so go easy on it, okay?" He said softly. His brow furrowed, already worrying about their dwindling supplies. They'll have to do something about that soon, he thought, as he shuffled around, taking another inventory mentally.

His tense expression eased when he saw the small, pale blue blanket tightly folded up in the bottom of his backpack. Without thinking, his hand wandered to it, lightly rubbing the worn, soft material.

Henry knows why he's held onto this relic of the past. It was Sam's blanket, and before that, it was his own baby blanket. He felt guilty, harping on his little brother to only carry what's necessary but here he was, with a *baby blanket*, in summer even. But it knew of the simpler time before the infection and remembered what he couldn't.

He couldn't help but press his face into his hand as he thought. If he could change anything, he would have given Sam a proper childhood. Sometimes in his dreams, he had flashes of his childhood, before his parents died. They made him feel happy, which made him realize it's something that his little brother never had the chance to enjoy.

It ate him up inside knowing that Sam could never have that carefree joy. So instead, he'll know of his own unwavering protection, trying to make this world safer for him.

"Henry, you cool?"

He dryly laughed, closing his eyes, and tried to forget those sad thoughts for a moment.

"Yeah, I'm cool, buddy. I'm cool."

# Forgive

## Chapter Notes

### CONTINUATION OF PROMPT 17: AVOID

She slammed the door to their house, not caring about the loud noise at all. Storming into the kitchen, she that saw Joel was listlessly sitting at the kitchen table with an empty mug in front of him.

"Alright. Fuckin' tell me."

He turned to her and she nearly jumped at the look in his eyes. They looked so gone, so lifeless, that she was now regretting her actions at the range. Her rage cooled a little.

"I-- I mean. Joel." She started again, this time more gently. "*Please* tell me the truth."

Joel slowly opened his mouth but it looked like he was having trouble finding the words to say. Ellie closed her eyes. She stood in anticipation of hearing what actually happened, her body shaking with nervous energy.

"They were...." Her eyes flew open at his words, catching the look of pain on his face. "Marlene was going to kill you for the cure." At the mere mention of that woman's name, Ellie could feel tears building, ready to spill. She was afraid to find out what happened, now that she was about to finally know.

"And they, uh." He heaved a weary breath before continuing. "They weren't even gonna let me... say good bye."

She could already feel like her legs couldn't support her, so she quickly slumped down at the table with him. Her fists were clenched white in front of her. "So...." She began again. "What happened?"

"I broke you out of there."

*Obviously*, she wanted to say. But now wasn't the time for being an ass. She took a deep breath. "And what about Marlene?"

He looked away, cradling his head in one hand. That alone told her what he had done, but she wanted him to say it. "Wh-what did you do to her?"

"I killed her." Joel whispered. That was when her tears began to fall.

Her voice shook as she tried to process what he was saying. "So not only did you kill her, but you... you took away my *choice*, what *I* wanted to do with my life?"

His head jerked up to her, his eyes meeting hers. "Ellie, I didn't mean it like that. I couldn't watch another little girl die."

"So you were being selfish." She stated.

Joel closed his eyes and slowly nodded. "Yes. Yes I was. I don't regret it though."

"You basically said, 'fuck the world, fuck everything.' Only thought of...." Ellie cradled her head in her hands, "This is fucked up. I don't wanna just die, but... I wanted to be the cure, I wanted to save people." *I wanted to save Riley*, she didn't add.

"Well, you saved me." She looked up, slightly taken aback. "And I was so far gone, it should have been impossible."

For a moment, they didn't say anything. A few stray tears were still flowing down Ellie's face as she frowned at the table, trying to choose her words wisely for once.

"What you're saying here... it won't fix everything an--" Joel made a sound like he was going to interrupt her, but she glared at him, stopping him in his tracks. "And it won't fix me. But... thank you for finally being honest with me."

"I didn't intend to hurt you."

"Well, you did. Which is why I'm still pissed at you."

He nodded, understanding. "I'm willing to try to talk about it though, if you'll be patient with me."

She heaved a deep sigh and looked back down at the table. "Well, you'll have to be patient with me, too. I can't...." She trailed off. She thought about Marlene, about how she should have talked to her more and asked about her mother. That was gone now; so many opportunities were taken from her.

"I don't expect you to forgive me." He slowly said with a heavy voice and got up, leaving Ellie alone in the kitchen.

A brief surge of rage coursed through her, causing her to pick up the empty mug on the table, arm poised to throw it against the floor. She was glad he didn't ask her for forgiveness because right now, she didn't know what to think.

Ellie slammed the mug back on the table and stalked back through the house, looking for him. Joel was sitting on his bed, lost in thought.

"I appreciate you saving my life." Her sudden words made him jump, eyes wide. "I mean, I wish there was...." Her feelings were too big to put into words, so she just shook her head. "I can't forgive you, not right now, but I appreciate it."

Joel nodded solemnly. "I've always got your back, baby girl."

Ellie gave him a tense smile and walked away. There was at least the first step towards recovery and acceptance. She didn't want to live hating Joel forever, but she just needed some time.

# Sharp

She ran up the stairs, almost running out of breath, and didn't stop until she got inside her apartment. She noticed she wasn't alone in there, but that wasn't anything new. A few years ago, a little after she met Marlene, the other woman started to sleep at Anna's place more than her own, mostly for safety. But they were also lonely, so there was that.

"Jesus, what the hell? Is everything okay?"

Anna took a deep breath and slid down the closed door, landing on the floor. "There was... an infected... on the way back... so I ran...."

Marlene bounded up at that, instantly even more worried than she was a moment ago. "Any bit--"

"No," She cut her off. "I'm clean."

They both sighed as Marlene joined her on the floor. "That's a relief. Think it was a smuggler again?"

"Probably. They're the only ones who go in and out so frequently... and if one gets bit on the outside, then they bring it inside...." Anna rubbed her temple wearily.

"That's fucked up."

She just nodded in response, already almost falling asleep right there at her door.

"Oh so, I got you a present." Her head jerked up at that, eyes suddenly lit up. The look made Marlene burst out laughing. With a sly grin, she pulled a small switchblade out of her pocket and presented it to Anna.

"No way, that's perfect!" She lightly took it and extended the blade, inspecting it.

"Now watch out, it's sharp." Anna gave her a scathing look.

"Knives are *sharp*? Holy *shit* Marlene!!"

"Fuck you too. But see? It's small enough to keep with you, even at the clinic."

"I knew it." The other woman's eyes widened, her face questioning. "See, you're not such a *bitch* after all."

"Oh, har har."

"Aw, don't worry, you'll always be *my* bitc--" Anna realized how that sounded and snorted with laughter.



Marlene punched her in the shoulder, acting overly offended. "There's no way I'm your bitch!!"

"Yeah, sure." She rolled her eyes and flicked the switchblade closed. "No really though, thank you for this."

"No worries. I wanna keep you safe, after all."

"I know you got my back." She smiled but then yawned. "Now I'm bushed. You comin' or not?"

Marlene grinned after Anna, who was already getting up. "I guess I could stay...."

# Teeth

She still couldn't believe it's been years since it had happened. Some days, it felt like it had just happened, the scars still fresh and her emotions still raw. The one constant is the bite mark on her arm, marring her pale flesh.

Ellie could see the marks of the individual teeth that bit her, feel how it's raised slightly with each tooth. When she met Joel and Tess, the wound was still pretty new. The first lines were red and angry, with welts of infection around it. It always mystified her because the bite looks terrible, but she is still not infected.

More swelling occurred by the end of that first year, leaving her with numerous scary looking bumps around the scar itself. She would always look at it, worrying about if it was getting worse and if she'd wake up one morning, brain warped by the infection. Would it be worse with it being so prolonged? She may feel the infection breaking her skull apart from the inside, changing everything about her.

And as trivial as it may sound, she used to *love* wearing tank tops in the summer. But now, wearing two itchy layers year round was great in winter, and unbearable in summer. Ellie felt so stupid for bemoaning her clothing choice after she got bitten, but it just shows how much of her life got turned upside down. Forget being comfortable in her clothes anymore, she wasn't comfortable in her own *skin*.

Having that handy reminder of her mortality right there on her arm? That scared the shit out of her. But having that reminder of Riley's last hours, forever tattooed on on skin? That was unbearable.

However, if there's something about Ellie, it's the fact that she keeps on fighting.

She started to try to change her point of view on the matter, after she got older. The scar on her arm was a memento of one of her worst days, sure. But if she closed her eyes, she still heard their song and remembered how it felt to kiss Riley: soft like a feather, extremely chaste. Then Ellie remembered the look on her face after, seeing Riley light up with a beautiful grin.

It was perspective, she realized. She couldn't erase the terrible things in life but she could certainly focus on the good ones. And she's certainly had some good.

# Dying

Pittsburgh was turning into a real headache.

The fight was sudden and quick. Before she knew it, Joel was bashing a plank into a guy's face, watching as the blood splatter on him and the wall. He looked downright like an animal, growling with his eyes frozen in a glare.

Another man entered the room, gasping at the sight of Joel beating his friend to death. He hastily started to load his shotgun and her mind went into overdrive. Ellie saw her chance and scrambled for something to throw at the guy.

"*Hey, motherfucker!!*" Her hand clasped a bottle and she threw it just as he was raising the barrel. It glanced off the gun, shattering and startling the man.

Quickly, she ran towards him, switchblade in hand and dug it into his throat. The man's scream bubbled and died as she still pushed the blade into him. She fell with him, bashing her leg on the hard floor, but at least he was dead now. She retched the knife out of him and tried to ignore the gross amount of blood on her hands.

She turned and saw Joel gasping for breath, having already finished with the other guy. Ellie slowly walked over to him, wiping her switchblade on her already dirty pants.

They stood there for a moment, coming off their high. Joel went to wipe the sweat off his face but when he noticed the blood staining his fingers, he scoffed and must have thought better of it.

"So, uh...." Ellie broke the tense silence, voice hoarse from yelling. "What did the corpse say to the Devil?"

She paused for only a moment before continuing. "I've been *dying* to meet you!"

The look on Joel's face was blank at first but then it dissolved into a fierce scowl. "Are you *serious*?"

Immediately, her face colored with embarrassment and shame. Before she could even get a word out, he was already walking away.

"I'll, uh, work on it, I guess."

# Rock

The fact Ellie was glaring at the wall in her dorm room on a nice Saturday, instead of actually doing something, was pissing her off. She had been sitting on her bed all morning with a book on her lap, but she wasn't paying attention to it at all. Her thoughts were with Riley.

When said girl finally strolled into her room hours later, a grin on her face, Ellie was still mad and freely letting it show. Riley's smile faltered and then turned into a confused frown.

"Uh, what's up Ellie?"

She scoffed and brushed some of her hair out of her face. "That's what you gotta say? '*What's up?*' Of course."

Riley glared right back and walked a few steps closer. "What the hell crawled up your ass and died today?"

"So where were you last night?"

That simple question caused Riley to stop, eyes slowly widened in realization.

"Now you remember, huh? So where *were* you?"

Her mouth opened, but she closed it and swallowed. "There was.... I met up with these Fireflies-- they were around my age for once and they--"

That's when Ellie bounded off the bed and got in Riley's face. "Of *course* it was the fuckin' Fireflies. What, you wanna run with your new friends now, so you just ditch your best friend?"

"Oh, you know that wasn't what I was doing at all!" She threw her hands up, annoyed.

Ellie got uncomfortably close to her friend's face, voice dropping down to a harsh whisper. "I know you wanna throw your life away and join those assholes, so why don't you do it already?"

That harsh slap of words hit Riley hard, confusing her for a split second before her rage set in. Before she could even say anything, Ellie was already out the door, angry tears building at her eyes.

She had to get out of there, she had been in her room for too long and it was driving her crazy. Her feet moved without her thinking and suddenly, she was at the mall.

*Their* mall.

"Fuck!!" She said, then repeated it louder. She kicked a bit of debris, trying to get out her frustration.

Ellie found a rock on the floor and picked it up, throwing it into a little dried up water fountain. Then she picked up another and aimed for a window. With a crash, she hit it and the glass shattered, falling into the mall. It felt good, so she kept on doing it just to hear the noise and feel the destruction.

She shouldn't have said that to Riley. She really shouldn't have. But Ellie couldn't help it, she felt betrayed and enraged. She threw another rock and it actually missed, clattering back down to the ground. She scoffed, ran towards it and kicked it, watching it skid across the floor.

"Ellie, I'm...." A voice echoed from behind her, startling her. She turned and Riley was there, shoulders hunched and looking small for once.

"Ellie, fuck, I'm sorry for ditching you. I just...." She crossed one arm over the other, averting her gaze. "I guess I don't know what I want. I want the Fireflies, but I want you too. I mean--" She cut herself off, trying to find the words that didn't sound weird. She huffed and shook her head. "Nah, yeah, I want you too."

"Just..." Ellie trailed off, kneading her forehead with her fingers. "Just gimme a heads up on these things. I was angry this *entire morning*, but at the same time, I didn't know if you were even still *alive*." She looked up at Riley, her eyes showing how hurt she was feeling.

Riley took a step forward. "I'm sorry you worried."

Ellie regarded her for a moment before bending down and taking a rock in her hand. She pressed it into Riley's with a wan smile. Riley winded up her arm and threw it as hard as she could, finally breaking the window that Ellie was trying to break when she walked in.

They stood there as they watched the glass fall but only Riley was still smiling.

"I'm sorry about what I said earlier." Ellie whispered.

"I knew you didn't really mean it. But I understand where you're coming from."

They both sighed and Ellie picked up another rock. "Well, ready to rock?"

## Sick

The first time she accidentally breathed in spores, she got pretty sick afterwards. At first, Ellie thought the infection was finally catching up to her. She couldn't stop throwing up and sneezing, which together made her completely miserable. Her fear grew until Marlene discovered her at her apartment, sick and crying.

She blinked the tears from her eyes and anticipated another wave approaching. Marlene had went out earlier to get some sort of medicine, but it wasn't like she could run around and say she needed the cure for spore inhalation. The thought of spores again caused her to groan and lean back on the cool floor. Something cold helped she found, but she was still restless and *uncomfortable*.

"This is kind of like what being hungover is like," Marlene had said with a small smirk. If that was true, then she knew she didn't want to drink because this was *excruciating*.

While lying on the floor, she felt the urge to sneeze and when it came, it didn't hurt as much as earlier. She was still coughing and sneezing when Marlene came in the door, looking at her with a mix of worry and pity.

"Jesus, it really *did* do a number to you."

Ellie couldn't even respond and just gave her the most pitiful look she could muster. The woman snorted and wet a rag for her, placing it on her face.

"Alright, now c'mon, Ellie. Try to get some rest, concentrate on the nice cool rag for me, okay?"

"--*that work?*" She couldn't even get out a complete sentence, so Marlene just nodded like she understood.

The last thing she remembered that day was Marlene lightly brushing her hair as she rested and for that moment, she knew what it felt like to have a mother. Ellie was certain that feeling of being loved was what really made her feel better, more than any medicines or cold rags combined.

# Broken

"It's been nice doing business with you," Tess smiled at the man lying on the floor, blood dripping out of his nose.

"Fuck you, *bitch*."

Joel couldn't help it when he kicked the man in the face again, harder than the last time. He chalked it up to reflex.

"Isn't he charming?" She pointed at Joel and knelt down at their former client on the floor. "I'd watch what you'd say because he's got plenty more kindness to go around."

She couldn't help but lay the drama on when they were dealing with some clients because a lot of them responded to cheap scare tactics. After the years of dealing with the asscrack of Boston, they learned how to bend it's residents to their needs. And when they don't pay out, that's when they make personal house calls.

Tess looked up at him, squared her jaw and nodded, meaning it was time to go. He wordlessly followed her.

They were almost out into the hallway when suddenly, he was grabbed from behind. The man's arms circled his neck and tried to topple him over. Their client certainly had more balls than they thought. Tess spun around at his surprised grunt but before she could intervene, Joel was already grappling the guy and smashing him down to the floor.

He got two punches in before the man attempted to flip him. Joel was momentarily stunned as his arm slammed into the ground. With him pinned down and the man on top of him, Tess took the opportunity to break in and grab him, pulling their assailant away. She swung him against the wall, pinning him with her forearm and her knee.

"Now that wasn't smart, asshole. You could have been fine, but no, you had to try something *stupid*."

"What ya gonna do about it?" The man hitched his chin defiantly.

"Oh, lemme show you."

Tess immediately shoved the man back into his apartment, got him on his knees and then drew her gun. She didn't even hesitate to fire a bullet into the back of his head.

For a moment, she was quiet. But then she turned to Joel. "C'mon, let's get out of here. Someone may have heard the gunshot."

He started to reply as he shook his arm, still throbbing with pain, but that's when he noticed something.

His watch was broken.

It was fine a second ago.

Joel had never stopped what he was doing so fast.

Suddenly, everything was too much for him. The smell of blood from the body behind him overwhelmed him, and it was like he was reliving that night in Texas over ten years ago.

His skin grew clammy with sweat and he started shaking involuntarily. His mind was clouding over with memories that he had been fighting to repress.

*"Goodnight, baby girl."*

Tess was already walking out the door when she turned, looking at him curiously. "Did you sa-- Joel? Are you... okay?" She moved towards him, leaning in slightly. Blood was lightly staining her clothes, making even her reek.

With a strangled groan, he pushed her away and all but ran out the door. For the first time in months, he was making his way to his own apartment, instead of the one he practically shared with Tess. He needed to be alone.

He hadn't felt this weak since it all began. The memories were bubbling to the surface and he kept on seeing Sarah give him that very watch, her laughing and him joking. That played over and over again in his head, like a broken record.

Joel wanted to throw the watch away; Joel wanted to keep the watch until he died.

He didn't know what he wanted except that he wanted his daughter back.



# Gone

She slammed the door as loud as she could and she swore she could hear Marlene knocking something over in their apartment. She didn't care, she just had to get out of there.

They had another fight again. As of late, they were getting more and more frequent; it genuinely puzzled her. They had such an easier relationship when they were younger and Anna would give anything for things to be simple again.

All Marlene wanted was her damn group and when she wasn't planning about what to do, she was trying to come up with a suitable name for them. It was all she did now and it annoyed her to no end. Gone were the days of them actually spending time together, which really hurt.

"Gah, just fuck her!!" Anna said to the empty air as she was leaving the apartment building. It was getting close to curfew time but she knew of at least one place that ran a little after hours.

It was a shitty place hidden in an alleyway, behind a few sets of doors. On the outside, it looked like the regular abandoned building. But people in the know knew what it was. It didn't have a name other than, "The Bar". Prices for drinks were pretty high, but she got a slight discount for working at the clinic; she had probably stitched up just about everyone who frequented there.

The place was pretty dark so it could remain hidden and there wasn't any music playing. There was only the hushed whisper of its patrons, sipping their drinks with minimal conversation. A few heads looked up when she entered and even fewer people nodded a 'hello' to her.

Anna sat down at the bar and made eye contact with the bartender. The man looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "Huh, it's not too often that Anna Williams frequents my humble establishment. Any particular occasion?"

"Shit sucks, how's that for an occasion?" She didn't mean to say it so harshly, but it at least gave the man the hint that she wasn't here for a lot of idle conversation.

"Well, how about something to help you forget that shit?" He was already edging a glass of amber colored liquid to her. "First drink will be half off because 'shit sucks' is certainly a valid occasion. Just don't let the others know, though."

She chuckled and took the glass in her hand. "Why thank you, sir. You're too kind." With a gulp, she downed the drink, feeling it burn all the way down. Maybe this will help, she thought wryly.

Her eyes watered some but she still ordered another drink. And then another. She had a pocket full of ration cards and a lot of anger, so she wanted to do *something*. For at least a little while, she wanted to forget about Marlene.

And for a while, she did. But when she woke up next to a man she only vaguely recognized, she felt extremely guilty for being shitty to her. She immediately got her clothes on and left, going straight for her apartment.

Marlene was still there, staring at one of her books with tired eyes.

"I'm sorry, I'm... I'm just so sorry." She collapsed on the couch and looked at her, seeing the hurt in her eyes.

"I can't change, Anna. You can't ask that of me." Marlene replied hoarsely. "Be pissed at me, I don't care. But this is *me*."

"I'll be pissed at you, that's a given." She took a deep breath, trying to will her headache away. "But I'll love you all the same."

Marlene looked up and a second later, Anna was kissing her. It was chaste, unlike the passionate kisses they've shared in their past. This was different though; Anna had never said she loved her before.

Her heart broke when Marlene broke the kiss, pain still flashing in her eyes. She kept her close though, tightly wrapped in her arms.

"I'm sorry...." She whispered into Anna's shoulder.

However, the damage was done. No amount of apologies or kisses would fix things between them. A few months later, her pregnancy started showing and Marlene never really talked to her the same way ever again.

# Road

It was a really good ride, it really was. Nothing said 'happy birthday' to your little brother like motorcycles and a long trip cross country.

Tommy looked ecstatic to be riding and every time Joel looked over at him, he was reminded of a dog hanging his head out the window. The road was long but it was a gorgeous day out. It wasn't too hot and it didn't rain the entire trip, so he definitely thought someone was looking out for them.

He was looking forward, still going at a steady speed when Tommy motioned to him, and then to a gas station they were coming up on. Joel nodded and they slowed down, pulling into the small parking lot.

"Ah man," Tommy exclaimed, stretching his arms as he dismounted and took off his helmet. "That really gets to you after a while! When did we even stop last?"

"I reckon it's been a few hours." Joel flipped his helmet off with ease and rubbed his back some, as it was still tingling from the vibration of the road.

"Well, would you mind grabbing me a coke? I gotta go piss."

Joel snorted and took off his leather riding gloves. He slapped his brother across the shoulder with one, smirking. "Anything for my little brother's birthday."

"I need to have birthdays more often then!" Tommy called backwards as he made his way to the bathroom.

"Do not push your luck!!" Joel hollered back, shaking his head. He stood by their bikes for a moment, just enjoying standing up and stretching. It had been a long day, that's for sure, but it has been fun.

He looked down the road and wondered exactly where they were. The same stretch of highway seemed to go on forever, but with this nice riding weather, it was a blessing. He didn't really want it to end, at least, not today.

*We'll have to get Sarah out here though*, he thought, rubbing his beard. Seeing his little girl on a bike would be scary, but he knew she'd have fun. She'd probably enjoy it more than being watched over by the neighbors. Sarah had glared at him when he had said 'babysat' so he was trying not to use that word.

"Joel, where's that coke?" Tommy was suddenly beside him with an eyebrow raised.

"Ah, shit, sorry. I was lost in thought."

"Aw, don't you be worryin' about Sarah, now. She's fine and we'll get her a nice souvenir or something." Tommy snorted, grinning. "Like a deer head or one of those tit mugs--"

"Jesus christ, you are so stupid," Joel couldn't help but laugh. "We are not getting my daughter a deer head. Or a--" His voice faltered and he suddenly felt self-conscious. "Or a *boob cup*." He practically whispered.

"My brother said 'boob cup.' Now I *know* this is my birthday."

Joel groaned and pushed Tommy towards his bike. "Get ready to go, I'll go get your damn coke and then we are not talking until we stop next."

As fate would have it, one of the cups with a pair of comically large breasts on it was taunting him from one of the shelves inside the small service station. He groaned internally but then decided to get one for Tommy.

It'll be a great birthday souvenir. But if he ever shows it to Sarah, Joel will not hesitate to kill him.

# Sky

"Tess, c'mon, wake up," he murmured, shaking her lightly. She rolled over with a glare and thank god her gun wasn't in reach because if it was, Joel would be dead before he could blink.

"Why the hell--" She yawned, then tried to continue when another yawn interrupted her. "Why the *hell* are you waking me up at the asscrack of dawn?"

"Actually, it's *before* the asscrack of dawn, but don't let me correct you."

"I am gonna kill you."

He chuckled and hugged her, though she only stiffened and actually growled at him. Tess in the mornings was certainly a monster, Joel was finding out. "Could you save it for later? I got big plans."

"Shove your big plans up yo--" She didn't get to finish that sentence because he gave her a quick kiss on the lips. Tess glared but couldn't help but break a small grin.

"Now get dressed. We're going out."

After more grumbling, he finally got Tess out of bed. He grabbed his bag and lightly placed his hand in the small of her back, guiding her to their destination. They made their way to the top of their building while she still rubbed some sleep out of her eyes. It was dark outside but it was gradually getting brighter.

He sat her down at the ledge and took a seat next to her, smiling. Joel wrapped an arm around her waist and even though she was still a little pissed about being up so early, she settled down in his embrace.

After a moment, the sun began to rise and Joel could feel her chuckle into his chest. "Such a fuckin' sap," he heard her whisper, but he ignored it.

He didn't know what brought this on, wanting to see the sunrise with her, but he was trying not to question things when it comes to their relationship. It was better to go ahead and do it, rather than not and regret it. The sky looked so beautiful though, and it was things like this that people shared with those they love.

"Alright, so this sunrise is nice, don't get me wrong. But is that *it*?"

With a grin, he grabbed his bag and pulled out a small flask and handed it to her.

"Oh, *now* we are talkin', Tex."

# Change

When Joel went to her with a question, he was pretty sure he already knew her answer. Ellie had been anxious for a few weeks now and she always looked a little fidgety. She got tired easy and just didn't act the same as usual. Retreating into books was something she normally did, but not this frequently. So he thought he knew what to do: a little change in scenery may do her good.

He lightly knocked on her door and called her name, and when he got a sleepy, drawn out "yeah" in return, he entered. She was in her bed, covered in books. Many of them were open all around her, almost like she was trying to read them all at once. He didn't question it and instead sat down on a corner of her bed that wasn't occupied.

"I didn't do it."

Joel blinked. "Huh? What ar--"

Her eyes widened and she immediately cut him off, flapping her hands around. "OH shit, then never mind then. What, uh, can I do for you, Joel?"

He rolled his eyes and continued. "Well, can I talk to you?"

"Sure, what's up?" She perked up, showing that she was giving him her full attention. One of her books hit his knee and he gently pushed it aside.

"Alright, well. I've been a little... concerned about you recently." Her smile faltered and she looked away from him. "You've, uh. Been a bit more distant than usual sometimes, especially out and about in town."

"It's just--" She started but he cut her off, raising his hand.

"No, no, I'm not saying it's bad. I've been kind of feeling it too. How long has it been since we've came here, to Jackson?"

Her brow furrowed for a moment, thinking. "At least a few years. I've practically lost count."

"So how would you feel about a little...." He paused for a moment, trying to find the right word. "Vacation?"

Ellie's eyes lit up, she jumped lightly, ignoring the books that fell to the floor. "That would be the best!!! Can we really go out somewhere??"

He chuckled and leaned down to pick up the fallen books. "Sure, sure. And, I've been working on a little surprise to make it even better."

"You mean your motorcycle project?"

Joel's jaw dropped. "Who the hell told you!?"

Ellie smirked, looking really proud of herself. "I figured it out myself. You know you can't hide things from me."

"Man," he huffed, smiling. "And here I thought I could surprise you."

"I'm still really excited, though. I think this will be just what we need, some good ol' you and me time."

"Well, then it's settled. You sure were easy to convince. Now I just gotta get Tommy's approval."

Hours later, when he finally worked up the nerve to talk to his brother, he found that getting Tommy on board would be harder than he thought.

"A *vacation*? Joel, that doesn't make a lick of sense."

Joel groaned and scratched a hand through his hair. "Just-- alright, we've been in one place for so long, we wanna just stretch our legs--"

"You think that feeling is worth putting that girl in harm's way? You're not as young as you were when you crossed the country to get her here."

"And Ellie isn't as young as she was back then either. So what's your point?" His eyes narrowed, trying to get Tommy to back down.

"You know things aren't as easy as it used to be. We can't just get on motorcycles and ride away from things." Joel's eyes widened at the reference to back before the world went to shit, when things really were easier. It hurt twice as much considering that basically was his plan this time around too.

"You *cannot* tell me what to do. At all. You hear me?"

"Oh yeah, yeah, I hear you." Tommy looked into his eyes defiantly. "I can't tell you what to do, but I sure as hell could make sure you can't come back here."

Joel's heart stopped. "Would you really do that to me? To *Ellie*?"

He stopped for a moment, considering his older brother silently before sighing. "You're right. I couldn't do that. I just...." He sighed again, looking away. "I wish you'd reconsider."

"We'll come back, I'm sure of it." His voice softened. "You know she's as good a shot as anyone else-- better even. But with the shit she's been through, she gets nervous when things are normal. I can't say I blame her."

"Meanwhile, I'd give anything for things to be normal. I wouldn't give that up."

"Well, we'd always have a home here, if you'd let us come back."

Tommy smirked, shaking his head. "You know I can't keep the assholes out of here." Joel wryly chuckled with him. "Alright, so where are you heading?"

"Ellie mentioned something about the beach, and it sounded important to her. So what's better than a beach vacation?"

"You know your motorcycle idea isn't very practical in this day and age."

"Does *everyone* know about my motorcycle?"

Tommy lightly hit his brother on the shoulder. "Well, we ain't blind. Get back here in one piece, you hear?"

"Yeah, I hear you."

"I hear you too!!" Ellie's eyes suddenly peeked from one window, one that was missing its glass. Joel scoffed and Tommy shook his head and made his way out the door. She gave him an energetic thumbs up and he couldn't help but feel like this really will do them some good.



# Sleep

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Her eyes felt heavy and tired; she couldn't help but close them. It had been a long day and it was late, plus the couch was comfortable. He was on the other end, probably half asleep too. It was comforting to have him near, she thought idly.

For a little while, she lay there asleep. Her dreams were vague but had a true happy feeling to them. She wouldn't be able to remember any of them later, though.

Before she knew it, she woke up slightly as she was picked up and carried upstairs. She was so tired, she still couldn't open her eyes. His arms were warm and safe around her, making her feel protected. It seemed to take forever to get up the stairs though, and she realized he was going slow so he wouldn't wake her.

He lightly placed her on her bed and she felt his hand run through her hair. "Good night, baby girl."

Finally, she found the energy to reply tiredly, "Night, Joel...." She opened her eyes and blinked a bit of the sleep out of them.

He was still standing there, slightly smiling at her, but there was a tear slowly trailing down his face. "Why're you crying?"

Joel rubbed his hand over his cheek, looking surprised to find it was wet. "I just...." He trailed off like he couldn't find the words.

She yawned as she spoke, "Well, thanks for putting me to bed. Why don't you get to sleep too? Or do you need me to carry you?"

He scoffed and laughed shortly, which made her smile. "Alright, good night, Ellie."

As he walked out of her room, Joel realized he could get used to living like this again.

## Chapter End Notes

Okay, so there we go, this was thirty days of me writing every day. Thank you guys so much for reading them, the kudos, and the comments here and on Tumblr.

I am pretty proud of myself for this, so believe me, I'll be re-reading these myself just to get a feel on how I'm progressing as a writer. I LOVED writing a variety of characters too, but the Joel and Tess, and the Anna and Marlene ones were particularly interesting

to do. Oh right, and the two Tommy and Maria ones were so cute to do, it was great trying to write for a couple who aren't entirely fucked up, like the previously mentioned two couples.

I loved writing the pre-infection ones, like with Sarah and Joel, but at the same time, wow, they are really tragic because of what happens later. The Sarah's birthday one really tore me up and I hated myself for writing it, rofl. You guys are lucky because this chapter here, about Sleep, really was gonna be a straight up retelling of Joel putting Sarah to sleep that last night, but then the idea came to me to recreate it but with Ellie in Jackson, and I so like that idea better; I think it says more.

The ones in Jackson with Joel and Ellie would have to be my favorites. Mind, aka the one where Ellie accidentally punches Joel, felt like such a great and real scene to me. The two parter of Avoid and Forgive too were really powerful and I feel really proud for writing them.

But yeah, I am really happy I was able to stick with this and take it all the way to the end! Special thanks to Cat and Rachel who were my partners in crime and wrote along side me. It was fantastic to read their stuff dealing with the same prompts, seeing how they tackled them in different and amazing ways.

And don't worry, I'm sitting on a few more stories, so this won't be the last of me! :D

And of course, please tell me if you liked a particular prompt! I would love to hear it!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!