

We The Fallen :
A Dark Age Resurgent

#3 Father and Son

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Bug Out

“Don’t tell me to shut up, kid,” His Father scolded again, “You’re lucky I’m not gonna leave your ass behind.” Kent was almost immune to his father’s threats, he had been for a great many years. It was an abusive game they’ve played most of the time, A game only, until it wasn’t. “Well, instead of berating me like a child, you can tell me what’s going on?” His father didn’t take his eyes off the dining room table piled high with years of collected survival gear... Kent waited for the answer from his father, but it was obvious he didn’t have one.

They had gotten all the camping gear, their grab and go bags. Kent added his compound bow and arrow to the kit, and now his father was adding the contents from their gun locker. Ammunition stacked up on the edge of the table. Kent gave his father another questioning look. “You need to stop being a pussy.” The older man told him. “I didn’t say anything. I’m just, ya know. Not sure this is necessary.” Kent said.

The older man looked toward the front door, there were a number of popping sounds, “Those are gunshots, not firecrackers.” “Yeah... but,” Kent was at a loss. His father gave him a victorious smile, although it was partially hidden by the signature mustache he wore. It would have been the most obnoxious feature of the man, but Kent acknowledged that it gave off the right effect when the man was in his full police uniform. He wore all of it right now, but he left the button shirt open, which showed off the officer’s Kevlar armor vest and a white tee underneath.

All of Kent’s life, he had bonded with his father over camping trips and hunting ventures. Musing over talks of civil breakdown and other more unique forms of shit hitting the fan. It was probably the only area where they had common ground, but he had never taken the talks as anything more than

idle musing, he certainly never thought he'd actually wake up in the dead of night to his dad screaming, "Wake up. It's time to go."

"That's not your regular vest." The son remarked. The father nodded and adjusted the carrier slightly, Kent could tell he hadn't worn the heavy trauma plate armor in a while, possibly years. The older man handed Kent another vest, it smelled with the must of sweat and everyday usage. Ed "I just didn't want to hear you bitch about how heavy this plate carrier is, so ill just wear it for now until you're less of a cunt." When Kent stood motionless trying to figure out what made the old man so intent that wearing the heavy armor was so important, sure there were gunshots out there but... He was scolded, "Just put the damn thing on."

Kent did as he was told despite the overwhelming scent of his old man's sweat mixed with excreted alcohol on the armor, "Thanks, Ed."

Edward and Kent Marcuso lived on the south side of the town, just a few blocks from the water. It was a cush area right before the houses became decadently large and too ludicrously costly for the average working family. Kent remembered well that as the houses got larger and their yards fancier, the more likely he and his friends would be chased off those quiet back roads by some form of private security as they pedaled by on their bikes. In contrast, as one went the other way, away from the mansions and toward the expressway, the houses became smaller, the yards more cramped and people angrier. His father frequently remarked how the Police's credit union had been the only thing that made it possible to attain the decent home they lived in, he was proud of his home and how he had managed to keep it even through the messy divorce with Kent's mother. That he was suddenly so quick to abandon it spoke mounds to the sincerity of his belief they were in danger.

"It's got to be some kind of WMD." Ed said, "Something they never publicly announced before, it's the only thing that makes sense." His father placed two long rifles on top of the pile of gathered gear and began un-securing the safety-trigger locks, One was a Military styled AR15 rifle, and the other was a modernized M14. Kent had got to play with both on occasion at the range or when the family went hunting upstate. Handling the firearms was a long steeped Marcuso family tradition, he had never seen his father treat the firearms with anything but respect, but today the old officer was moving hurried, with none of the reverence for proper caution Kent had grown accustomed to.

Whatever the officer had seen out there had him rattled, Even more so than he was letting on, and his father was never one to hold back an opinion. All Kent knew was that he was getting ready to enjoy a little herb and was all set to chill the night away alone while his father pulled his usual Friday night shift, and then suddenly, he woke up feeling like crap to his father screaming all hell at him. From what he gathered, the man had never made it to work,

and that somewhere between home and there, his car died. "Are you sure it's all really that bad? Ya know, maybe you should be at work right now and do your job."

"People are going crazy in mass numbers, there's shooting happening in every direction. No, there's no job to go to." Ed spat, "People are killing each other out there, Not just one or two, but on like every street corner. Do you get that?"

"Yeah, Yeah, I get it." still, Kent couldn't help but feel his father was overreacting or exaggerating.

Kent's thoughts were broken by another loud rumble, The storm may have slowed down, but its thunder was still strong enough that when it echoed, it made it hard for him to think clearly.

He took a deep breath and tried to make logical sense. Thunder, gunshots and no power. Those were the only bits he could be sure of. He and his old man often had half-joked about what they'd do if some kind of apocalypse hit. Now it looked like they were actually doing it. Part of him desperately wanted to believe this was all an overreaction, but he couldn't directly refute his father, they had thrown fists for less. "Okay. What can I do to help?" Kent said. "Get that crate of MREs from the garage." Ed barked.

Kent snapped to it and made his way through the dark house, he bashed his leg on the leather couch in the living room as he moved but managed to feel his way to the connected garage and after bumping into a number of other hidden obstacles, found himself standing in front of their spare refrigerator, His father mostly used it to store abundant amounts of alcohol, but the bottom drawers had a collection of heavily preserved meals ready to eat... The delicacy that they enjoyed on every outdoors venture. He pulled two cardboard crates out of the fridge, each typically had about a dozen meals in it and carefully began making his way back to the kitchen, he mused at how many of the preserved meals they had sampled through the years, the current brand they had gotten from some survivalist .com depot store, and he thought they tasted pretty decent as opposed to some of the cheaper ones they'd gotten in the past. The boxes of food wouldn't last very long, he knew, and as with every outing he'd ever gone on, he found himself trying to do whatever he could to live off the land first, as he crossed the living room he heard some commotion outside, and instinctively pressed himself up against a wall to try and get a peak.

Two figures were yelling in the streets, he could not make out the details of the people they were as much of a blur as the indistinguishable words that exploded from them. He inched away from the window to get back to his father's side. As Kent left the living room, he heard the thumps and skittering of glass from outside, and Kent guessed that the yelling had escalated to the throwing of things, he wanted no part of it.

Ed was in the hallway watching his son approach. "Are they all like that?" Kent asked. "Some are much worse. And then there's us." They both heard the skirmish outside escalating, screams, and the sounds of blunt force trauma echoed into the kitchen. His father looked grim, a long moment passed before either of them moved. When the scuffle outside faded Ed began sorting through the supplies again, "We're going to the marina, we'll commandeer a sailboat, cross the bay and head inland." "Why don't we just take the car?" Kent asked. "I told you already, the car's dead. Anything needing a battery is dead." Kent remembered now, His father's truck died a mile or two down the road as he was heading off to work... Ed hadn't elaborated on the journey back. Kent had heard his father's words but discounted them as panic, now he wasn't so sure.

His father handed him the M14 "Rule One. Do not shoot me." Kent stared blankly, "Rule Two. Aim this only at something you're sure you have to kill." Kent felt the heft of the rifle, "And most importantly Rule three. Do NOT shoot me." Ed let go of the weapon allowing for Kent to adjust his grip, "I know how to use it." It had been a while since he last had, three or four years at least. He was at least a foot taller now than he was back then, he remembered it knocked the hell out of him back then, the bark of its .308 round scared the hell out of him, but now that he was full-grown, he wondered if the weapon would be as intimidating.

He knew a little about the rifle, it was a Pre-Vietnam era weapon that was meant to replace the ww2 era Garand as the US's primary line weapon. Powerful and accurate but cumbersome. His father had configured it as a marksmen rifle with a powerful scope and bipod. Kent reached for the magazines, grabbed one and inserted it into the weapon, it took him a few tries to get the alignment right but it clicked in with a foreboding sound. Kent decided to not charge the weapon with a round yet, he figured there would be less chance of a mistake if there was nothing in the chamber, hopefully, there wouldn't need to be a reason to change that. Ed began the same mantra he had done every time he had taken Kent to the range since he was old enough to stand upright "Remember what I always say about firearms... Once that trigger is pulled..." Kent finished the line for him, "There's no taking it back."

Things quieted down outside, and the two methodically packed up their assets into every square inch of their packs as they could. Tools for fire-making, tools for water purifying, a solar-charged radio, hatchet, gas lantern, two single tents, minimalist cookware, spare clothes for cold weather, sleeping bags, binoculars, compass, old USA atlas. Ibuprofen for pain relief, multivitamins for malnutrition, with plastic tarping to cover the top of the packs to reduce all of its exposure to moisture. Kent lashed his compound bow to the outside. In forty-five minutes, the Marcusos were set to live off the land as they had practiced for recreation dozens of times in the past.

Now they just had to wait until a torrential downpour eased up, no sense in walking around out in the deluge that had so suddenly hit. The Father and Son sat in the living room and said very little. The minutes ticked by. The popping sounds of gunshots dulled to thuds in the rain, and the random shouts of people nearby were suppressed in the heavy rain. It was almost enough to appear tranquil.

Kent looked about the familiar room, worn leather couches directed toward a large flat-screen TV neither of them had time to use much, an almost sterile and neglected fireplace with plaques and police memorabilia along the mantle. There were little in the ways of family pictures on the walls, certainly none of his mother or anyone from his maternal side of the family. As far as he knew, the only picture present with any extended family was in was one from homecoming, a picture where he stood in his Football gear standing along with Ed in his PD uniform, a much older man stood between the two with peach fuzzed hair loosed in mats across the thinning skin of his scalp. It was his grandfather, Ed's father. Where Ed and Kent were darker-skinned showing their Portuguese ancestry, the old man was bone-white Caucasian. The old man had passed a year after the photo had been taken from cancer, of what kind Kent never knew for the old man had kept his ailment a secret until the absolute end. Ed never talked freely of the matter, other than the sudden passing never surprised him. He would simply mention that his parents had done the same exact thing ten years earlier with Kent's grandmother. Kent was too young to remember her.

There was a pitter patter of movement outside, the two men sprang to alertness. Definitely footsteps. The Marcuso's then heard a second pair and then a third. Kent heard the creaking of the gate latch that led to the backyard. He tried to follow the movement as it disappeared out of the line of sight of the front window, at the very same moment, the father and son heard the front doorknob starting to twist and turn. Someone was trying to get in. There were hushed whispers now, but it was a very poor attempt at concealing their noise.

Voices carried through the door now, "Just break a window, no one cares." A male's voice cracked. The doorknob jiggled back and forth. Another voice more squeaked, "It's dead-bolted, the credit cards not gonna work." "Fuck off, I know what I'm doing." The squabbling continued until a girl's voice overpowered them, "Why don't you just knock first?" The voice was familiar, the male voices immediately scoffed at the idea. Ed had his pistol in his hands just inside the doorway, his head was switching between focusing on the commotion on the front door and whoever was sneaking around the back of the house.

This could go bad, Kent knew. But the people outside don't seem like the crazed people he watched earlier. Instead, the people on the other side of the

door sounded afraid... terrified even as they tried to break into his home. One dumb move would be all it took, of all his dad's cop stories that one he took most to heart. He risked peaking out the window, they might see him, but he needed to know more.

He was glad he did, Kent immediately recognized the form of his friend Merry. Her unmistakable platinum blonde hair was soaked in the rain. Next to her was her boyfriend Andy. They were high school sweethearts and long-time friends of his, Andy was one of his youngest adolescent adventure pals, and Merry would always be the girl from down the block who they always passed as the two biked around town... That and Kent's earliest crush. He had less time to spend with them now, but they were still family to him. Kent reached for the door. Ed looked at him and shook his head 'No.'

"We know them," Kent said but Ed didn't look like he wasn't going to back down. His old man's face said it all 'NO.' "They're coming in one way or another... Don't shoot me okay?" Kent said as he reached for the doorknob.

The door opened, and the group outside yelped in fear.

The younger Marcuso stepped from the doorway so the intruders could see him, "You should have just knocked."



An Old Playground

He tried to collect himself... and perhaps recall how he had gotten there. The bolt of not quite lightning tore through his home, that much he knew, but the rest was hazy. It was like transitioning from one scene in a dream to another. There was a before that he could vaguely recall and an after which he was currently aware... but there was no connecting the two. One moment he was with his brother, and then every nerve in his body started to scream. He remembered the cottage starting to burn as the panic seized him, he was pretty sure he could recall starting to run from the flames at all speed, but that was it... And judging from the new scrapes and bruises that were starting to register, he had collided with a number of objects in his hysterical flight.

He looked around, noting the surrounding trees and fences beyond, there were wood chips and mulch underneath him, a boardwalk that ran toward a pond, a few dozen feet away was a small fence and a scattering of children's playground toys. He could hear the rusty creaks in the wind when the rumbling from the storm faded, they were a calming presence to his mind as he processed the data and knew where he was. The park was a little more than two miles from his home, yet the complete lack of recollection as to how he got

there was suddenly very far down on things to weigh on his mind.

He thought of the beautiful bolt of blue that struck his home, his propane tank was spitting its white jet of heat, and flames ripped up from his roof. He remembered there was some kind of explosion, and he ran in a panic.

I saw my house burn. The thought hurt, his entire adult life of work had gone into making his home, but the loss was only part of the pain he felt. He had plans for the place, it had long been his intention to fix it up and sell the little place when the market was right. It was a long-term plan sure, but he always thought that maybe one he'd be able to afford a nice large place to start his own family... maybe he'd have enough room to look after mom and dad when they were old enough to need such things. The pain he felt didn't come from any material loss of a building but from the denied plans from a far-off future.

As absurd a thought as it might be, David pondered what any of it was for. He had spent his entire adulthood in that house, slaved away his twenties to pay for it, he planned to eventually pay it off and sell it and move somewhere beautiful. He tried so hard to dig himself out of the lower-middle-class trap, to make his hours count... to do better than mom and dad could do. Then, in one night, it just all goes away.

And his selfishness sickened him, he knew that all around him was death, that something had just happened that broke the typical patterns, and somewhere within, he knew that he was damn lucky to still be alive. Part of him felt that he didn't deserve to have been one of those to survive... *what made him so special?* They were dark thoughts, grossly self-indulgent as well, but there was an honest truth about them.

"Dave!" a familiar voice cried, "Where are you man!?" David forced some deep breaths, and it lent just a bit more clarity. "I'm over here," He said. Cracking twigs and rustling of wood chips announced Luke's arrival. His brother also tried forcing himself to catch his breath, "Why are you running from me?" "I'm not, I mean... I don't think I was," David thought somberly, and then cautiously added, "I had to get away from the house."

Luke nodded, perhaps half understanding, or at least choosing not to address that there was a lot left unsaid there, "It's gone man, I'm sorry." David noticed that his brother had either the compulsion or forethought to have brought his backpack with him.

He could smell the scent of fire in the air, *was he smelling his home burning?* Or was it one of the many other houses that were currently kindling under the freakish lightning? David remembered how he was trying to look after others before his sudden panic. "Where are the others?" Luke's face turned worried, "Everyone freaked out and scattered... even the ones that were barely conscious... It was like they just woke up and bolted. The lightning struck right next to our propane tank, and well, there was fire. The blast knocked me on my ass, and I stood up just in time to see you disappearing into the woods."

David became aware of a sneaker lace being loose and painfully knelt to tie it, after he looked to his brother, "Thanks for that, by the way... chasing after me, I mean." It was the clearest thought he yet had. Luke Shrugged, which said all he needed, he rooted through his bag for something. Eventually, the brother produced a small flashlight and clicked it a number of times, the flashlight remained dead.



No-Ones Welcome

Water dripped off the three intruders as they stood in the doorway. "Well, Come in," Kent said. "But don't get too comfortable. You're not staying long," Ed said as their soggy forms spread around the living room, the blonde girl shuddered at the officer's threat. The trio of would-be intruders entered carefully and stepped into the dim room, they put their arms out and tried to avoid bumping into anything in the unfamiliar environment. Andy & Merry's features just barely showed in the lack of light. That and another rotund boy, Kent, barely recognized him as one of Andy's neighbors... Frank.

Frank immediately slumped into one of the worn leather chairs despite being soaked from the rain. The other two guests condemned the boy's rudeness by swatting him back to his feet. "Sorry," He said.

"It's alright," Ed said impassively, but Kent heard his father's rage simmering underneath the tone of voice, Ed wanted their visitors gone.

Kent knew he'd likely catch hell for letting his friends inside, but he hoped his father's wrath would be delayed long enough for him to realize that they were clearly coming in one way or another. They could have just sat in the dark waiting for his old friends to force their way in right into a gun barrel, but that could have led to any number of accidents or rash decisions. Ed probably was thinking the same thing, which is why he wasn't kicking them back out to the street already. His old man was many things, stubborn, prone to spikes in anger, spiteful when he felt he was cheated, but he did keep most of it in check until he knew how to best react... at least most of the time. There was some rattling at the back door to the house, Kent had almost forgotten about the fourth intruder.

"Who's running around in our backyard?" Ed grumbled at the trio. "Josh Webber," Andy said in a whisper. His father groaned, "I'll bring him in." Kent was relieved to see his father easing up ever so slightly. He asked the newcomers, "What do you guys think you're doing?"

The three looked downward for a long moment, and Kent wondered what

was so hard, he thought he made out a mixture of sadness and shame on their faces, but he couldn't be sure in the dark. "We thought it might be safe here," Andy said. Kent heard noise coming from the kitchen. "By safe, they mean thought we were dead and wanted to take our guns," Ed said as he half dragged another visitor into the room. Josh was tall and lanky, he was a part of Andy's other group of friends, Kent had hung out with him on occasion, but he had never really gotten close, just acquaintances passing in the halls. "No!, that's not it. We just..." Josh tried to explain Ed pushed the boy onto a couch.

"It's true," Merry said with a sniffle, "It seemed like a good idea at the time." Kent saw his father smirk a bit, "It actually is, it's what I'd have done in your position." Ed's voice had shifted from accusatory to sympathetic, the girl's honesty seemed to make him warm somewhat to the kids. "Everyone sit," Ed commanded, they did so.

To Kent, Merry was the adorable girl from down the block all her life, Kent and every friend he knew had nursed a crush on her for their entire youths, at least until Andy won her affections. She sat on the couch soaked head to toe. She and Andy were connected at the shoulders... as most young lovers, they were often in a state of permanent hug. She began to sob, "My Mom and Dad... they started fighting, they fought before but...The things they said to each other... then they were clawing at each other drawing blood, I tried to stop them, but then they both came after me." The girl spit out each word between gasps for air Andy squeezed her, "You're safe now. It's okay..."

"You guys were always those hunter-survival types. So we thought, If someone knew what to do, it'd be here." Andy tried to explain. "That and the guns," Josh added. The dripping of water off their clothing echoed in the house as the moment stretched. "So what are we going to do?" the fat boy Frank in the corner said.

"Well, I am going to get my shit ready, and you all are going to think about what you plan to do." His father said passively as he turned from the group...

Kent grabbed his pack and brought it back to the living room, his guests sat in silence but looked at him. The boys quickly started poking at the gear on his pack. The fat boy immediately reached for the compound bow. Kent handed it to him to look at, and the boy meekly tried to draw it. "Don't ever release the string unless you're firing an arrow from it," Kent warned. Frank quickly put the bow down, "Why not?" "Because without the arrow to transfer the energy, it all goes right into the center of the bow and can snap it," he tried to explain. "What?" How?" The round boy asked, but Kent wasn't in the mood for giving an elaborate lesson. "Just treat it like a gun okay? Always treat it like it's loaded. Even if you know it's not." "What does that even mean?" Frank said, clearly befuddled. Kent chose not to elaborate and remembered that he had quite a different upbringing to many of his friends.

He watched as his friends fiddled with his well-worn hiking kit, then a

thought occurred to him that left him more than a bit uncomfortable. He and his father had dabbled in their outdoor adventures for years, always they had operated with the premise of 'If shit hit the fan' they had made many games consisting of what-ifs and scenarios to test their knowledge, read novels from modern-day trackers, preppers and survivalist types to learn all they could. But all of it was a hobby... now that the day they prepped for was potentially here, he found himself hesitant. What if the freak lightning storm would resolve by morning? He was unsure. What if once the power went back on, everything would be normal? Perhaps he should wait and see. He saw a flaw in all the survivalist thinking he had endured in the years past. It all had relied on the absolute knowledge that shit had indeed hit the fan. They had based all their plans on an arrogant assumption that somehow they would KNOW without a doubt that things were beyond salvage. That they would know that just up and leaving home would be the right choice, their scenarios and fantasies had been based on the idea that there was no other choice, and they had boldly assumed that they'd be able to see the signs ahead of time. In reality, he was not sure about any one of those things and bugging out was nowhere near the only choice...

How could he possibly make a decision like that based only on some lightning and some panicked strangers? It occurred to him that in all their collective reading and practice in the arts of bushcraft, one topic that was never discussed was the effect of one's optimism holding them back from action during the critical window of time. All those articles and novellas that dealt with the subject hardly spoke about the hypothetical 'point of no return', that very critical window where it's viable to pull the trigger and go full survivalist, but details on how to recognize that key moment were always glossed over, if mentioned at all. Kent found himself continuously hoping that dawn would come and things would be normal again.

"We're gonna take a boat across the bay and head inland," Kent said.

"Goddamn it Kent!" Ed barked.

Kent Looked over in surprise, "What?" "You don't think before you blurt out every little thing, how do you know you can trust these kids? Think, man!" "Because they're my friends!" The son replied. He heard things rattling in the kitchen and thought it best to check on the old man, the visitors shifted uncomfortably as they most likely questioned the wisdom of even coming to the Marcuso household.

"What's the problem?" He asked. "I just told you." Ed slammed something onto the table, Kent couldn't make out what it was. "We can't trust anyone," His father growled. Kent didn't understand, "They're not just anyone. They're some of my closest friends." His father was incredulous, "It doesn't matter!" "Why? Why doesn't it matter?" Kent almost pleaded. Ed clearly wasn't going to elaborate.

"Isn't it better that there's other people okay out there?" The son asked. "You just don't get it, kid! You haven't seen what's going on out there." The conversation heated, Ed could be very spiteful when he wished, he once made Kent trek an extra five miles back to the car during a hike because he forgot his hatchet, something they didn't even need it that particular venture. But since it was part of his 'rig' Ed saw fit to punish him for it.

The girl appeared in the doorway, "We can leave if you'd like." The two Marcuses looked at Merry. Ed scoffed, and his mood changed entirely, "What's done is done... as long as no one does any psycho shit." Kent gave his father a nod of thanks and breathed a sigh of relief.

The words came out of Ed with obvious resistance "Fuck, I guess we'll need to commandeer a big boat." Kent was grateful that Ed gave in on his own accord, his head throbbed, and he was not prepared for another fight with his father. They moved back into the living room, where the other boys waited nervously.

Ed switched to his police voice, it was a practiced tone, deeper and implying authority, "Listen up."

"We're going to get off the island and head upstate... camp out until whatever this is blows over." They all looked on. "I think Kent wants you to come with us," Kent nodded appreciatively.

The soggy house guests began asking questions, they raised concerns for family guessed at the cause of the effects, ultimately they questioned if any of the old man's plan was necessary. Andy wanted to check his sister's house, Merry wanted to find her grandma's, Frank wanted to use the opportunity to loot the local Walmart, Josh stated no desires of his own but mocked each other's concern. Kent was torn, he understood their worries and wished to find their loved ones, the group fought over staying together or going separate ways, he still was not sure if the situation even warranted 'bugging out' the way Ed planned. Though the two had both spent some time sailing a few years back, they had spent the better part of a summer joyriding on one of Ed's coworker's sloops. It was a cheap little vessel, but by the end of that season, they had proven themselves to ably crew the small boat. Despite that, both had to accept they were not experts at the art and certainly didn't have the familiarity to try any of it in the dark.

After several minutes of wildly varying suggestions about what they should and shouldn't do, Ed used his police voice again, "Let's try it this way." The room went silent.

Kent saw his father stare directly at him, "I am leaving right before dawn, I am getting on a boat, I am getting off this island, I am heading upstate." He broke eye contact with his son and looked at their guests. The older Marcuso said cheerily, "You all can join me. Or not."

"Do whatever you want, but I leave in two hours," The officer said as he

patted Kent on the shoulders. The others nodded slowly. Though he still questioned if they truly had to leave home at all, his father, on the other hand was utterly convinced. "There's two or three hours before it starts getting light out. My son and I will be gone before then." None of their guests even suggested an alternative idea. Kent heard how serious the man's voice was, there would be no talking him out of it. Kent could only hope things changed by morning and the whole end of the world escape plan could be called off.



Safety

Luke felt the exhaustion overtaking him. It had all moved so fast in the last hour, and now that he had a moment's time to reflect, he could only recall a terrifying flashing montage of burning buildings, clouds exploding above and asphalt blurring beneath. That he caught up to Dave was a small mercy, he had never seen his brother run so fast. It had taken nearly everything out of him to keep from losing him in the panic, and Luke knew that his body would be paying a heavy toll on it. He already felt the aches and pains in many places.

The old park was some sort of revolutionary war landmark, if he remembered correctly, one side had set made in these woods and staged raids during the early months that the country fought to make itself. One would never know it by its modern-day appearance with swings and see-saws, unless they happened to read a single plaque in one corner of the perimeter.

He heard gunshots popping off. Though most were distant, every now and then one was loud enough for Luke to consider ducking or hiding, the sudden pops came from any direction. He hadn't had much experience in real-world firearms besides from what he'd seen on TV and was beginning to realize there was quite a difference, he was pretty sure the sounds meant people were dying all around them and it frightened him, but he also did not know why and that made it horrifying.

The air was rife with anxiety and rain... it was starting to fall again as they sat at some benches. At first, they were indifferent and at least momentarily content to hide there out of sight and to let their breathing become quiet and even, maybe not calm... there was nothing calm about their situation, but they were able to recognize the temporary reprieve. The park itself was little more than a collection of trees and a boardwalk surrounding a small pond with some kids playsets in one corner. People would come here in the day to walk the boardwalk for a small dose of nature amidst the suburban

strip mall county. In all entirety, the park was at most a quarter of a mile squared, the swings and other children toys bobbed in the darkness illuminated only every few moments from a thread of lightning gliding overhead.

The drops of rain were starting to hit harder and their fury came in full very quickly. The ground around the brothers quickly formed puddles and became soaked. Luke was used to stealth rains in the springtime, it often happened when he camped up in the mountains but down here in the suburbs, it was a bit rarer... Especially since he had double-checked the weather for his party.

He laughed out loud at that, there were no forecasts of freak lightning storms making people hysterical either. David looked at him with mixed concern and curiosity. His laughter was cut short when echoes of man and a woman screaming reached them, suddenly both brothers were very quiet trying to guess the location of the noises.

The screaming seemed directed towards one other, on any other day, Luke would discount it as a lover's quarrel. A loud one certainly, but not the kind of thing that he'd give a moment's thought to, but on this night, danger was everywhere. The screaming continued to escalate, the brothers could hear weakened thuds and crashes echoing under the growing rainfall. A few more crashes accompanied the sounds of broken glass, and then the screaming went silent.

"Safety..." Dave gasped after more silence. He leaned against a wooden sign that read No dogs, no fires, no jogging: Parking 27\$. Luke retorted with, "What?" "We need to find safety...or at least shelter." His brother explained, "At least somewhere to hide." Luke was thinking the same thing.

As far as he could figure, they had two options The Elementary school about a mile down the road or the fire department another three blocks past that. "The School. Or the Fire Department. Whichever you think." There was no guarantee that either of those places would be safe at all, but it was a start.

"What about Mom and Dad's house?" Dave asked. Luke shook his head, "You hear those gunshots? Do you think we'd get that far?..." he thought of the four miles or so they'd need travel and eventually added, "We'll go right to them when things calm down."

David at first seemed baffled by the mention of gunshots as if it had just occurred to him what the sudden sounds were. "Isn't there supposed to be a bomb shelter or something in the school basement or the Firehouse? Wouldn't there be other people heading there?" Luke hadn't thought of any of that, he doubted that there was any chance that help simply was awaiting them. But he did know there were brick walls and bars on the windows at either. His brother continued, "We can stop at the school first since it's closer and see if anyone's there, then go further if we have to."

They both nodded. Luke picked up his backpack, and they walked.

Slowly, and carefully they cleared the woods and scaled a chain-link fence. They soon found themselves scurrying across the cut grass and the part baseball part soccer fields toward the redbrick building.

They were completely soaked by the time they got to the Lakedale Elementary property, Luke hadn't been at the building since he moved on to middle school some ten years earlier but he noticed the building had a bunch of work done to it since his day, it now looked more like a fortress than a place of learning. They had been talking of adding a new wing to the building even back when he was a student there, and sometime in the last few years, they finally got around to it, apparently when the school was overhauled the designs included bars on every window and cameras in every hall and a myriad of other heavy-handed security features that added an exorbitant sum to the cost of the project. He remembered Mom gossiping about the board meetings involved in that fiasco, that after a brief period of outrage at increased taxes, the community just considered it the cost of doing business in a post 9-11 USA, his mother had mentioned the cost was astronomical.

The school loomed large as they crossed across the sports field, most schools in their state tended to have enough land for the building and a few athletic fields, usually a baseball diamond and football field. As they approached the building, Luke noted that it seemed completely closed. There was no one waving with flashlights and open arms, there were no signs that said 'Emergency Relief' or 'Safe Here'. The building looked just as shut as it would be at any other night well after operating hours, with the heavy downpour, the building even looked a lifeless gray.

The brothers were about halfway across the sports field, and Luke was about to suggest just passing the building by when he noticed something different... just a flutter in the corner of his eye, but he was sure there was something to it. Something moved behind them, maybe two or three hundred feet, as he turned his head to see it better, it stopped. *Something is there*, he thought, *and it doesn't want to be seen...* Luke pretended to not notice the change and casually just kept sweeping his head, looking behind before looking back toward the school building.

He forced himself to look forward, all the while trying to keep his paranoia in check. *Could the person following them mean ill? Could they have a weapon? Could there be a gun pointed at his head right now?* After a few moments of feigning calm, he did another turnaround, this time a bit quicker, and again the figure stopped moving on the far side of the chain-link fence of a baseball field.

Was the figure perhaps too scared to reveal himself? Or was the very fact whoever intentionally kept hidden enough to be threatening given the situation they were in? Dave seemed to pick up on Luke's apprehension... Luke confirmed it with a wide exaggerated smile and said casually, "Someone's following us." Dave's eyes

stayed fixed forward, "What should we do?" he said in a hushed tone. Luke was unsure, torn between turning around and saying 'hi' or running the woods again.

He looked to the school building and an old memory popped into his mind. Once, a long while ago, he got suspended for climbing onto the roof. Back then, he had climbed up a decent tree with easy footholds that was within arm's length of the roof. It was a simple hop over, one that he had done on a dare from his best bud Vinnie, and one that he ended up paying for time and time again in chores and housework... His parents were less than thrilled at having to meet with the principal on the matter. That very convenient tree had long been removed, but he had always wondered about something else.

"We keep walking like normal.... When we get to the corner, follow me." Luke said. Dave just kept walking. The remaining hundred feet went quickly, soon they rounded the corner of the school.

Luke broke into a full sprint as he pivoted out of line of sight to their stalker, his brother followed right on his heels.

The younger brother stuck right to the wall as he ran, quickly searching each nook and corner as he ran, looking for the specific object he was always curious about.

Most of the school was a two-story box with barred windows and heavy metal doors lining the entire ground level, effectively keeping all those terrorists out... But there was a wing of the building where offices, halls and loading areas that only ran one story. In the seconds after his sprint, they were upon the school's administration area, where all the offices and whatnot were positioned. The brothers dipped into a small alcove in the structure of the building, a small ten-foot niche that hid them in three directions. There was an emergency exit door there as well, yet it was something entirely else that he was looking for.

Luke looked at the pipe curiously... He had passed this spot a hundred times a year when he was a student, and despite the heavy changes to the place from his youth, this particular alcove had hardly been touched in all that time. The big metal pipe was part of the gutter system, likely one of the major areas for dispersing falloff from the roof, a solid six inches of iron that sat snug to the red brick wall of the school, several metal brackets kept the pipe braced in place effectively bolting it to the wall. If one were so inclined, they'd be able to use the pipe as a ladder he had thought of it often in his youth, now he'd get to test the idea. He put weight on it, and the old pipe held.

Luke unstrapped his backpack and handed it to his brother, "Hand it up in a sec." Luke always loved to climb, he made it a purpose to climb every tree in his back yard, when that no longer offered any challenge, he started investing many of his free weekends upstate hiking trails of the Catskills and climbed a great many of the infinite numbers of rock inclines. It was just

something he did, he made it up the gutter and onto the black tar roof fairly quickly.

David quickly tossed up the bag and climbed the pipe. He wasn't as active as his brother, so it took a bit more time, but he made it without problem. The downpour made the climb slightly more difficult for both of them, but it also might have helped hide any noise they had made while doing it. The entire task took no more than fifty seconds, enough time for their stalker to catch up, but only if he were chasing at full speed. The two ducked down and waited to get a better look at their tail.

It was about a minute before they heard the slogging footsteps, they got louder and more distinct. The splashes grew and then echoed directly below. They held their breath.

After a long length of time, the footsteps and splashes began again, this time shrinking back into the noise of rainfall. Curiosity overcame Luke, and he peeked ever so slightly over the edge of the roof and could finally make out the lone figure creeping away, the heavy rain concealed much of the form but it was obviously male, carrying what was probably a baseball bat. Luke guessed he was in his forties and noticed the stalker seemed to be acting differently now that he had lost track of the Brothers. Assuming of course, that they had been being followed to begin with. The stalker suddenly double thought and turned to check behind himself. He diligently scanned spots at ground level for threats as he wandered away, but never seemed to notice the brothers watching from above. Luke only saw the man's face for a moment but what he saw spoke of something between guilt, confusion and anger. More so, he looked desperate to use that anger on something, Luke was glad he hadn't tried to speak to him...

They waited a long time. The rain had already saturated them completely, the sudden roaring downpour also did much to mask any sound being made out there. Eventually, they felt it was safe enough to talk. They quickly decided not to press their luck traveling any further. They had no idea how many more questionable people were out there... no need to risk it between that and the brutalizing rain.

It was an easy decision to take their trespassing another step further. David picked up one of the many rocks that had made their way up onto the roof, and Luke pulled out his machete, ready to bust in a window.

Ironically the window they approached was already open. It only opened out at a small angle to allow air in, but this allowed Luke to put his arm in and open a larger adjacent emergency exit window. The exit window creaked open, and then they climbed in.



The Silent School

The school was dark, much like the rest of the buildings they passed. Its walls however, looked more secure than any house could, There were black scars that tracked across the building where the freakish lightning glanced it, But the old stone construction seemed to withstand most of the damage, unlike the residential houses they had passed. The brothers had both gone to school here in their youth and had seen the old schools insides a few times over the years, public elections and community events happened here occasionally, and David couldn't help but feel the walls shrank just a little more with each year that passed... Yet fear lurking in that darkness on the other side of the opened window was palpable... He climbed inside.

David sat down on the teacher's desk and observed the room, the times tables were written out on one side of the room, and the mnemonic "Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally" was scrawled across the blackboard. On the other side of the room, posters of the united states and miscellaneous portions of the world overlapped each other competing for space on a cluttered wall.

Luke was rifling through his pack. David could see red glints and strokes of blue reflecting off his brother's glasses. The last hour was insanity, suddenly so much had become irrelevant, he couldn't help but try to make sense of what was going on, couldn't help but wonder why... Just as quickly he had a moment of clarity, 'why? We weigh ourselves down with *why*- Especially when things are not in our control. Like when you're car won't start... You think it should, but you simply don't understand *why* it won't. The anger at not understanding keeps growing until you either open up the hood or just call a friend for a lift. His metaphor dissolved as he told himself 'Now'.

Stop drifting...he forced himself to focus on now... Because right now, Why wasn't offering any help at all.

Luke Finished searching his bag, and moved his hands in a quick motion, a sound of cracking plastic echoed in the room. The room began to glow in a dim green from one of the chemical light sticks that Luke kept in his kit, another cracking echoed and then a second light was handed to David. The room grew to be bright green.

David was lost in thought again, but he appreciated his brother's penchant for prior preparation.

He was thinking about that beautiful sky. "Dave." He thought how the gorgeous blue bolts would arc across the sky, how they'd fork, and how when they intersected, there would be this brilliant burst accompanied by a loud bassy thud. The crackle and... "Dave!"

Now. He shook his head, swallowed hard and answered, "Yeah." "Cover

up the light a bit, cup it in your hand like this," Luke demonstrated with his. "Expose just enough to see. We may not want others knowing we're here," Luke explained with tired confidence, his voice suggested he was somewhere between terror and panic, but his advice showed he was mentally trying to power through it...

"Okay." The older brother said. He let his eyes adjust to the light and then covered up his lucidity by voicing, "We should try to find that bomb shelter."

They cautiously made their way down from the 2nd floor to the 1st, and then to the basement, in the green gloom of their light-sticks they could slightly make out the tangle of pipes that must have gone to and from the school's boiler room, intermittently they saw signs that said "Fallout shelter" with an arrow. They followed the arrows until they came to a door. David had expected to see giant metal doors or something, but the shelter was little more than a windowless room where old desks and filing cabinets were heaped from floor to ceiling.

He smelled electrical fire, but could find nothing burning, only a fuse box with residual smoke clearing. "Fuck this place," Dave said in frustration. Luke nodded, "I'd feel safer upstairs... if it wasn't for the freak storm out there." They gave up on the clustered basement, Disheartened they dragged their tired selves toward the stairs again.

As they made their way back upstairs, they heard a noise that froze them in place.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

The sound was muffled and distorted from echoing down the empty halls.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

And then a feminine voice followed the echoes "Helloooo?"

Thud. Thud.

"Please! Is anyone in there?!" the voice pleaded.

The sound of the girl's voice unfroze them, and after a moment of hesitation, they ran toward the sound. It originated from the main entrance of the school, where four pairs of doors all remained locked, the voices were on the outside.

"Please! We need help!"

David could hear other voices as he got closer. He remembered passing through these very doors when he was in his first years of grade school, he had tripled in height since then. In the moment of distraction, he calculated that had to of been almost twenty years ago.

Thud. Thud. The sounds were lighter now.

He tried to cover his green light as he peered out the viewport, four or five hazy shapes shifted about through the door, they all seemed terrified. "I see

you moving around in there..." "Please, let us in!" the girl's voice said.

David met his brother's gaze on the other side of the doorway, neither of them was sure what to do.

Luke shook his head 'no', either distrusting the voice, or afraid, or wanting to investigate more first. His brother was often not one for acting until he had all the details. Usually, it was a practical and methodical habit, But at that very moment, there were lives at risk.

David however, wanted answers now... Perhaps the people on the other end of the door would have some. He spoke up loudly, "We don't have keys, we got inside a different way."

Luke winced in protest, but it was already done. He regained himself and added, "Stay right here. We'll show you how to get in." they both made for the stairwell. They were back through the window they originally entered in soon after and looked down at the new comers.

Without the doors in his way, David could make out details.

There were six of them, one girl and five guys, one of the men looked older, maybe in his early forties, and the rest of the group looked like teenagers. The older man watched their backs with a long rifle in hand, one of the younger boys held a similar firearm, a fat boy made grunts as he tried to force the bars off a window without success.

David wasn't sure he liked the idea of sharing their new hiding spot with six strangers, But the events were already in motion and he couldn't just ignore their pleas. Besides, they had come here to find help... Maybe they had found it.

"Up here!" Luke shouted. And he pointed to the pipe they had used to climb up. Dave could see the mayhem out on the streets, fires stretched for blocks around them despite the periodic deluge, and the lightning still cut across the skies. The sounds of screams and gunshots were much worse than before. He could understand their desperation. He and Luke set to helping each person climb up.

The First up was a male of athletic build with curly hair, as soon as he made it up, he turned to help the others, he helped a skinny blond guy up and then pulled the girl up nearly with one hand, another lanky male and a heavier set kid climbed up, then there was only the older man. The first one to make it up, the one with the curly hair yelled, "Dad! Let's go."

The older man turned and scaled the pipe equally as fast as the others. All eight of them then took a few seconds to catch their breath.

The first thing he noticed was the large guns that two of them had slung on their backs, he hoped their owners were sane...

It was David who broke the silence, "I'm Dave." he offered. "Luke." his brother said. Neither David nor his Brother took their eyes off the weapons

their new guests carried.

The older man nodded and said "Ed." and then gestured to the others starting with the girl, "The cute one over there's Merry Beth, Andy, Josh, Fred," The heavyset kid protested, "Frank actually," Ed ignored him and moved on pointing at the curly haired teen with the rifle "and my son..." the teen interrupted "Kent." After shouldering his rifle, he added, "Thanks, we've been hiding from every asshole out there." Ed ducked low on one knee, the rest of his group mimicked him, David thought it was probably a good idea to keep a low profile and did likewise.

David's eyes adjusted, and he finally recognized the older man's Uniform, "You're a cop?"

"Yeah, I was just on my way to work when this all happened... Never got there." The officer said. "Do you have any idea what's going on?" David asked hopefully. "Not a clue, nothing works, no cellphones, no landlines and the PD scanner near blew up in my face. And then people going fucking crazy... We were trying to head south, but there was just too much craziness, you two are the first normal people we've seen."

David didn't see much resemblance to one another, but it was dark. Ed wore a salt and pepper mustache that covered most of his mouth and a short kept haircut while the son wore his hair long and unkempt. Comparing the two would have to wait though, as they heard a lot more noise down on the street.

David started hearing more foul screams down on the streets, "Let's get inside and not attract any more attention," His words were punctuated by shouts and gunshots coming from down the road, "Everybody inside." he said. Luke began helping each into the window and relative safety.

Ed took a moment to peek over the roof ledge observing the source of the sudden noise, and David joined him.

He risked his own glance over the side and inched up next to the Police officer. People ran to and fro, they darted up and down the road without any sense. Some were alone, others were in small groups, Some were barefoot and wore soft clothes like they had just gotten out of bed, others had stripped naked, others were fully clothed and carried weapons. He saw fires starting to spread from the apartment complex across the road.

Among the madness below, he saw a fat man hobbling along, Nervously looking around while carrying a rifle in one hand, his other arm hung limp at his side.

He looked frightened or perhaps lost among the chaos of the mob. David wanted to cry out, perhaps help him to safety behind the brick walls as he had with Ed and his group. Then the fat man detected some kind of motion approaching too close behind him. It was an elderly lady, at least into her sixties, she had just exited an apartment and stumbled toward a car. David

assumed she must have just woken up to the insanity.

The fat man saw the motion of the car door opening and screamed a horrible, baleful cry at the motion he saw. He then fired, the woman's torso erupted in red, and she fell. The sound from the rifle alerted others of the mob, and a mob advanced toward the fat man who continued to howl. David and Ed ducked their heads to avoid being seen by the man who was now no more than 50 feet away. They heard the rifle spit four more times, then the man was running away still howling in between heavy huffs and gasps... the forming crowd gave chase.

David and Ed waited until the man's voice and those pursuing were far, far off. More lightning carved through a line of trees and houses a few hundred feet away, they ducked into the window and the dark of the school. Dave brought up the rear with Ed. Luke led the way downstairs after cracking another chem light for their new guests. He thought of the woman, she was certainly no threat, why had the fat man chose her out of all the other targets and chaos going on? She was about the same age as his mother... The thought stabbed at him, he needed to find the rest of his family, but to go out there was suicide. *Now... focus on the now*, he told himself. David knew that to dwell on anything else right now would simply make him more powerless.

They made the couches in the principal's office their resting spot. The eight of them collapsed in chairs and sofa seating and awed at the blue bolts of light that still darted past in the clouds. Heavy rain was beginning to echo on and off the roof, not the subtle drips they had already been landing but a constant thundering of heavy rainfall... sounds that promised more storms to come. The office overlooked an alcove of grass in the center of the building, a few trees and a walkway that was obviously never used, no windows to the streets helped the office feel safer than most others in the school. David was tired, The adrenaline was running out, and he sorely wanted to pass out...

They rested and sat in silence. Luke grabbed a few tea lights from his bag and lit them, the little lights helped lend a bit of calm. Brutal rain and loud belches of thunder howled above, and the ground shook beneath. Thunder, rain, and silence. They took turns. David listened.

Then he heard something far off and hazy. People telling tales of their first few minutes after waking... David tried to listen to the story, but everything became dark. Even in his exhaustion, he was aware of things moving around him, perhaps judging him, but it mattered not - the tension released as he embraced the quiet deepness.

"So what's the plan?" a familiar voice asked. David woke with a jump. He hadn't even noticed himself growing tired or felt sleep approaching, but he struggled to open his eyes and lift his head all the same. Only a few minutes

had passed, judging by the tealights. "Don't know." An unfamiliar voice answered. David opened his eyes to see Luke and Ed in discussion. He started to mumble but having just escaped his half dazed sleep the powers of logic were slowed, as was his ability to form coherent speech. The best he could do was, "We... can't... can't stay." "I know. But we don't have any alternatives really," Luke replied. David assumed that while he dozed, they had all been silently trying to figure out some course of action, But nothing realistic stood out.

The boy Kent spoke out, "I don't see why we can't stay here. At least until the weather clears up." David noticed how no one in his group seemed to have an opinion other than the boy's father, of which he had gotten the separate impression that Ed was a man who would always weigh in with his opinion...

"...the problem is that we have no idea what's happened," Luke stated the obvious, which kept everyone on the same page. The blond Haired Andy added, "Even if we did, we still have to worry about what's out there." "At least it wasn't a nuke." The officer said. "How do you know?" Luke asked, "Well, for one thing, we're not on fire right now."

"We don't know if it's just here, or how far it goes." The curly Haired Kent added.

"How far does what go?" Andy asked with a hint of irritation.

"The Destruction? The Mass hysteria? How widespread is this whole thing?" Kent snapped.

"Yes exactly! Is any help coming? We need to know that!" Merry added. She was a cute girl, David thought, he noticed more than one of the boys followed her words intently. She had that girl next door kind of innocence. She had bright gold hair, which she wore long and had sharp, smart facial features, she wore jeans and a black tank top which gave just the right hint at good curves. She sat next to Andy with a hand on his leg.

"We have to assume that we're on our own for now," David concluded, he did not want to address the unspoken part of the girl's question. The other two boys, Josh and Frank kept quiet through the talk, but all nodded at David's assessment. Soon the silence returned. On a normal day about now, most of them would almost be waking up and readying for work or school.

After a time, they set to scavenging the place, Merry found some candles in a filing cabinet, Luke fiddled with the contents of his pack and helped her light them, the heavysset boy Frank found a handset radio, which squealed with static for a few seconds before crackling out. Kent found a gigantic keyring in the principal's desk, easily over a hundred keys for places in the building. Andy made jokes about the wall of photos of school staff and then found a baseball bat tucked away in a corner.

They soon found themselves searching the building for anything else

useful. Dave and Luke went with Kent, Andy and the girl. Ed took the others down another hall. They made rounds of the school quick, grabbing blankets, coats, and anything they thought could help them through the night.

He could hear rummaging from the other group and its echoes through the halls, they really didn't find anything of value but just moving with half a sense of purpose helped him focus. They still had no idea what to do, no idea where to go and no idea of what was going on outside the thick walls.

But at least for that moment, they felt partially safe. The stone walls muted the violent chaos outside, and David hoped also muted their movements within from the mobs wandering about out there. Still, moving with a sense of purpose, however trivial, did much to lend him a sense of calm, the small task at least was directing his energy toward something.

They were in one of the science classes with the high desks and lab sinks, the sky was just beginning to brighten with a new day. David was lost in the moment, he was just starting to allow thoughts other than the now to creep back in, his family: asides from Luke, he had a mother, a father and a sister, his parents lived close by, but his sister lived far upstate. Tears began to well at the utter helplessness he felt to do anything for them. He wanted to go right now to find them. Maybe Luke and he could make it to the old house like they had made it to the school. Maybe Mum & Dad were okay, hiding in their basement or in another strong, safe building like this one.

And then he noticed movement from the windows.

Beyond the security bars, he could make out the shape of a man looking at them. He favored the weight on his right side and held something in his right hand. The recognition hit. It was the fat man he had seen from the roof... he still held the rifle.

David looked straight down the barrel of it. Bloodshot, crimson eyes locked with his own, dirt and vomit-caked facial features sneered as his grip tightened on the weapon, "Get down!" David shouted as he flung himself to the ground.

The rifle's first shot shook the inside of the classroom as metal hissed through the air past his head. He heard two more rapid booms come from the weapon and shattering glass crashing onto the tiles around him. His ears rang.

Behind him, there was screaming. Shrill screams in between grunts and gasps. Luke was yelling too, "Dude stay still! Don't move! Don't move." and there was weight shuffling behind him. Luke and Andy struggled to stay out of sight. David heard Merry scream from the hallway. Kent held Andy still.

Luke was pinned down somewhere behind David, He yelled to the officer's son and the rifle he carried, "Kent!"

Another two booms came from the window, more glass and pieces of wall landed around him. It didn't make sense, why shoot at them? They were no threat. He was helpless, laying between two lab desks, out of the crazed man's

line of sight, but if he even slightly moved, it would give him away. The gunmen howled sounds that almost sounded like words, but David couldn't understand any of them. Glass shards from broken lab beakers cascaded around him.

"Kent!" Luke screamed again. "I... I..." stammered the boy as he charged a round into the rifle.

"Fuck.... Fuck!" Andy howled. "Andyyyy!" wailed the girl from the hallway. The gunman snarled and tried to fire again, but this time the weapon went 'click', David knew this was his chance and tried scrambling to his feet, but before he could take a step, he heard five rapid smaller gunshots whiz overhead from the opposite direction.

The boy Andy continued to howl, only this time quieter, weaker. There was no more snarling from the window, David looked up to see blood drips on the window that the gun had come from. "Everyone stay down," Ed shouted from the hallway. He advanced slowly and carefully with his pistol beaming like a laser to where the gunman was. Dave noticed the officer's drawn gun and its barrel steaming, he peered out the window and confirmed his kill. "Clear," he yelled. David noticed the police officer still had his rifle slung across his shoulder and had relied instead on what he assumed was his service pistol, The older man's motions with it were well practiced, and there was a fluidity to his motions that made the older man seem two decades younger.

"I need help here!" Luke shouted. He and Kent were attempting to tend to the Wounded Andy, the boy was crumpled against a desk, and a pool of blood collected beneath him. He had a bubbling hole to the upper right of his belly, just below the ribcage.

"Hold pressure right here!" Ed screamed at his son, Merry came from the hallway and tried to forced her way to her boyfriend, "Andy! Loveee! Andy!" she pleaded. The officer knocked Kent's hands away from maintaining pressure on the wound and used his own much larger hands to clamp down where the blood oozed. "Kent, take her away, get everyone back to the office," he ordered. "No way, I'm helping right he-" Without another word, Ed slapped him in the face with just enough force to knock his large son back. Kent looked incredulous. The older man looked to bite down his anger and explained, "I can't help him if you're all in the way. Take her now." Kent seemed to realize the older man was right, or he simply knew he couldn't win and dragged the girl away as she kicked and screamed. It took the other two boys to keep her from clawing her way back.

Ed looked to David and his brother, "I need you guys to help." They nodded. Dave saw the stress lining the older man's brow, "Whatever you need." "Grab some cloth, towels, sheets whatever..." David quickly grabbed the stack he had found earlier and thrust them to the cop, Quietly he said, "Are

you sure these will do anything?" Ed nodded in concession, "I've been to more than a few of these." He looked to the doorway where the others were standing and finished his sentence in a whisper, "It might or might not... let's hope the kid's lucky today."

David had never seen a gunshot wound before. To him, the wound barely looked threatening at all, there was little blood at the wound itself, and it more looked like someone stabbed Andy with a sharp pencil. He was thankful someone was there who had. Ed turned the boy to his side and exposed the giant exit wound on his left, clotted blood fell from the wound as Andy was moved... Ed's job had given him at least rudimentary first aid training, which was more than anyone else. David and Luke scattered to find anything they could.

Andy was breathing shallow and fast, His skin was moist and cold, and the blood from his gut was spreading too fast. The officer quickly Padded and dressed both sides of the wound using the sheets. He wrapped the gold-haired teen's wound alarmingly tighter and tighter until the blood stopped showing through the fabric. There were no more words coming from the blond boy, just short breathes. The bleeding seemed to stop, "What should we do? Should we move him back to the office?", "No, we shouldn't, but it's not safe here, so we have to," Ed muttered in anger. They used another blanket to drag him back to the office where they could at least keep him warm and watch him.

David did not know the boy, but the tragedy still hit him. He knew all too well that that Fate could have been his, had he not seen the figure in the window, or it could have been Luke had he simply been in Andy's place. David doubted he'd be able to handle such a scenario, he knew he'd likely have been paralyzed in fear, he'd probably powerlessly watch a piece of himself die with his brother, never to return. Also, he knew that if he hadn't ducked when he had, He would be the one bleeding to death now.

They managed to bring the bleeding boy back to the office, where they rested him on a couch. Ed tied the sheets more effectively in the light and elevated his legs to offset the blood loss. There was no way to call for help, and it was not likely any help able to come. All they could do was watch helplessly as the blond haired boy lay clinging to life.

