

## Chapter 1 - Camping.

She shivers under the threadbare blanket, her thin fur bristled beneath her once pristine powder blue nightgown. She is nestled between two other girls - her sisters, though not by blood - far away from the camp's fire, where the rest of the raider men sit. And some raider women - but she struggles to think of them as women. No woman would talk like they do, carry such great weapons, harm others like these ones did. She could only imagine what her pa would think, confronted by such unseemly sights. She could almost imagine his voice - "On their way to becoming sinners, I tell you. Those poor women, the men in their lives have practically led them up the Devil's doorstep. Be thankful you were raised right, Missy."

Missy shook slightly, curled between the two other girls. He couldn't say that, of course. They killed him this morning. Bashed through their walls, shooting the men, snatching up the prettiest girls, and leaving the rest to die. Her sisters - the rest of them, not just the ones with her now - had always been terribly jealous of her. She had fur white as snow, soft as silk, with orange spots freckled along her face and body. Her ma used to joke it was because they accidentally sprinkled some cinnamon on her when she was a baby. "They'll get over it, Missy." Pa would say. "Your sisters will be your greatest help when you get married one day, and have your own litter. They'll learn you were born with a gift, and they'll learn to appreciate that gift." She's sure they appreciate it, now.

Her and her sisters aren't allowed near the fire, but she isn't sure why. Olivia, a little dove girl a year or so younger than herself, thought maybe it was to keep them cold and weak so they couldn't run. Jude, a light brown raccoon, just thought it was to make them feel lesser. Either way, Missy was very gosh darn cold! And she felt... weird.

There was a great black dog, watching them. A jackal, she thought he was, but she couldn't be sure. Tall, with his head fur shaved short, ears pricked high and eyes wide as he watched them. Watched her, really, with those deadened gray eyes. It didn't seem like the other ladies had noticed, but she certainly did.

Hate was an awful strong word, but she was not using it lightly when she thought she might hate his eyes on her - even as she tried to sleep, now, she could feel his gaze. She cracks open one of her hazel eyes, and - yes - he is staring at her, still. Perched on a milk crate by the fire, eyes planted on her snowy face. She turns over, trying to ignore his presence. Trying to ignore what all of them had taken from her. Even if he was the one that gave her the shoddy little blanket, she resented him. All she had done thus far was turn the other cheek, as she was taught, and it's only gotten her cold, hungry, and stalked by a big ugly mutt.

One of the raiders had stood by the three for most of the day, cycling out when they got bored or tired or wanted to do whatever raiders wanted to do. Right now, it was a woman with an unlit cigar hanging from her mouth, a big gun Missy didn't know the name of over her lap and a tired, unimpressed gaze trained on the ground. She looked up suddenly, at someone who must be standing behind Missy. She felt her stomach twist uncomfortably as they spoke - she knew it must be the stalker.

"I can take over watch if you want." The stalker (she thought, at least) rumbled, voice scratchy. He sounded like a smoker. The woman on watch smiled, giving him a knowing look - though Missy has no clue what exactly it is she knows. It scares her.

The woman barks out a laugh and shakes her head, taking the cigar between her fingers and cocking up a brow at him. "Uh huh. Doubt you'll be doin' much *watching* with your hand down her pants, bud." Missy hears a scoff from the stalker. "Just, uh.. Mm... Y'know, take her for a ... hah, bathroom break. I'll cover for you." She winks, then leans back again and sets the cigar back in her mouth.

Missy's arm is suddenly grabbed by a warm hand, and she lets out a yelp as she's yanked up by the stalker - definitely just a dog, now she's close enough to see - his eyes not on her. He mumbles out a thanks to the woman, silvery flecks she hadn't noticed before shimmering in his fur as he turns and begins hauling her off towards the woods.

"Wait- wait, stop-" She sputters, pushing at his hand with little effect. Her sisters open their eyes, staring, baffled as she's pulled away from their huddle. Olivia moves her arm, readying herself to stand, when the raider woman hisses at her to stay put, snapping her fingers at her like you might a pet. The dog man doesn't react, his eyes trained forward on the trees.

Missy kicks and whines the whole way as she's dragged into a small thicket, too scared to make a loud noise lest he hurt her, or the other raiders hurt her, or a sinner managed to pop up. His warm hands left dirt on her light fur as he pushed her against a tree. "What do you-"

He shushes her, placing a finger to her lips. He begins to speak, but she isn't listening much. He just *shushed* her. Missy lets out a little growl before clamping her teeth over his dirty hand. The dog curses loudly, and slaps her across the face.

"You stupid fucking-" He stands as she falls, holding his hand and growling at the air around them. Missy's hand trails up to her face, feeling tears begin to well in her eyes. She didn't think she bit that hard. She almost felt... bad. "I'm trying to help you here, you-!" He pauses as he turns back around, seeing her teary eyed stare, like a fearful child. Conflicting anger and pity flash across his face, until he groans, quietly shaking his head. The dog sighs, and turns to crouch in front of her, eyes boring into her own.

"You don't belong here. You can't go home. Do you understand that." Missy nods slowly, sniffing. "Good. I want to get you out of here. Will you let me help you do that?" She stares a bit blankly at him. The dog - the raider, stalker dog - wanted to ... help her. Help her escape. Whether or not she should trust him didn't really cross her mind, she was mostly just confused on... why her?

"My... my sisters..?" She feebly spoke. The dog's expression seemed to soften, and he reached forward to brush back one of the strands of her long fur.

"You don't need to worry about them." His nose twitched, flashing his fangs just barely before returning to normal. "They'll be treated well enough. No one here wants to hurt them, or you, you just... do not belong among men like these, yeah?" She nodded, losing the tenseness in her body and scooting barely forward, which seemed to surprise him just a bit as he pulled his paw back. "Besides, I saw how the girls were lookin' at you. Awful jealous. When I pulled you away they were whispering, but, ah... No use in telling you all that."

Missy frowned. That didn't surprise her. She thought they were finally in this together, that maybe her Pa's advice about them had been right, but no. No, of course not, they couldn't put aside their stupid jealousy. They'd fit right in among murdering lying raiders, she's sure of it. She huffed a little breath and crossed her arms. "In Sanctuary they always been mean..."

The dog man smiled at that, and stood up, offering his dirty, unbitten hand to her. She hesitantly took it, and was pulled easily to her feet next to him. "Well, just seems like all the more reason to stick by me, yeah?"

Missy finds herself smiling, just barely, and she nods. She didn't think she would feel comfortable around the stalker-dog - especially not more so than her sisters - and yet. He makes his face a bit more serious, and bends down to scoop some dirt in his paws, smearing it over the chest and hips of her nightgown. She tries to push him away, but he doesn't seem much bothered by her attempts. Even if she's comfortable with him, he is awful rude!

"This is my only nightgown!" She whines as he dusts off his hands, looking her over for a moment.

"Yes, yes, once we're out of here I'll get you new clothing. You'll be fine." He speaks, reaching forward to brush over her chest again before pulling away. "We have to stay in that camp for the rest of the night, which means it has to be convincing that we, uh. Fooled around. You understand?" She didn't, but she nods anyhow. "Good. Now, when I march you back in I need you to give a real good sad fox act. Like you *really* hate bein' here."

Missy giggled. "That won't be too hard around you, mister." He looked confused for a moment, before shaking his head and reaching for her arm. He was much more gentle as his warm hand clasped over her, this time, guiding her back towards the

camp. She could feel her tail sway slightly behind her. She hadn't had a friend before, other than her Pa.

"C'mon, girl. No smilin'." She mumbles out an apology, pulling her ears back to rest against her head and forcing her body stiff, frowning and trying to look... hurt. He said hurt, right?

The man led her back into the camp and past the girls, who she glared at as they passed. The raider woman called out to them, making her jump - did she know? Was she going to hurt her? Hurt him?

"Hope you're having fun, vixen!" She shouted, her smile scary. It reminded her of the sinners, faces fixed with permanent stilted grins, all teeth exposed and ready to bite you, tempt you into their sinful hell. She swallowed. "Charlie. Take her back by morning, at least. Bud gets pissy if he thinks he ain't got first pick, and she's *real* pretty."

The dog man - Charlie? Was his name Charlie? That was a pretty name for him. She felt herself swooning, just barely. She wasn't allowed around boys much, and she felt maybe that Pa's rule about that was doing her a bit more harm than good right now. But gosh, she sure was hot under the collar.

Charlie scoffed and smiled, baring his teeth back at her. "I know, trust me. I won't be long, don't worry." The woman nodded and waved them off, and Charlie - *wow, Charlie*, - continued to lead her through the messy camp. Littered cans and bottles of beer that he carefully danced her around, big, scary women and even bigger, scarier men still laughing around the campfire, and crates with big guns peeking past the lid. Gosh, what Pa would think.

"Here," Charlie spoke softly, leading Missy to a ratty little plastic tent on the outskirts of the camp. She crawled inside, feeling his eyes on her as she shuffled into the cramped space. It simply had a puffy sleeping bag, a canteen, a lantern, and a stuffed rabbit. Charlie crawled in right after her, looking silly in the small space as he zipped up the entrance and turned the little lantern on low.

He picked up the rabbit, his ears flicking back as he gestured awkwardly with it, then handed it off to her. "It, uh, I, um... One of the guys grabbed it for his - I stole it off one of the guys. Thought you would like it." He cleared his throat and picked up the canteen, uncapping it and also handing it off to her. "And I don't think you've had a drink since this morning, ain't you?"

Missy smiled and set the rabbit in her lap, taking the canteen with both hands and sipping at it. She sighed, trying not to be greedy, but she hadn't actually had a chance to get to breakfast before she'd been nabbed this morning. The water felt like liquid gold down her throat, and she took a few more sips before wiping her mouth and handing it back to the intently staring dog. She let out a little nervous giggle, not used to such close attention on her by someone so... well. Intimidating.

Charlie looked away suddenly. laying back against the floor of the tent and swallowing, readjusting his jeans. "You can, uh, take the sleeping bag. It ain't too comfortable, but it's better than the dirt like before."

Missy stared for a moment. He was trying really hard to be kind, and it was terribly endearing. She almost wanted to ask him to just share the sleeping bag with her, but she can only imagine how her pa would balk at such an idea. She's not even sure they both would fit in it, with how big he was ...

"Thank you, Charlie..." She spoke, testing out his name on her tongue. She liked it an awful lot. She giggled watching him look over at her and swallow again, slipping into the sleeping bag and hugging the stuffed rabbit close to her chest. If she didn't think too hard about it all, she was just on a camping trip with her friend. That was all. That was all.

## Chapter 2 -

Missy awoke with an aching back, Charlie hunched awkwardly over her in the small space of the tent.