



Chapter 1: Arrival

“Welcome to Alice Springs. Hope you had a great flight, and enjoy your stay!” That was the phrase that blasted over the loudspeaker as Clover and I hauled our luggage across the room.

“Quick, we need to get to our bus!” I said, my arms heavy from my suitcase.

“I know Henry! I’m going as quick as I can, my legs are asleep from sitting on the plane for so long.” She groaned back at me. The heat was dreadful, and I wish I was out on a **beach** with my feet in the sand. We’re not used to the heat, the sun never shows in Bristol and we never traveled anywhere else. That’s why our parents were so excited for this exchange.

“It will be good for you to get some sun,” they said constantly.

We made our bus, but only just thanks to the late plane times. On the trip to our new town, I noticed we were on a one way road for most of the ride. After what seemed like forever, we were outside our host family's house. We said thank you to the bus driver as we hopped off and I thought I heard him say “Welcome to Kilgariff, you’ll never want to leave.” That was strange. Maybe it was just something they said around here. Aussie slang. We greeted our host family and went inside to set our beds up.

Chapter 2: Friend

My eyes opened groggily to the sound of Clover yelling at me. I groaned as she threw a pillow at me.

“Hurry up! We’re gonna be late, idiot!” Clover rolled her eyes. I stood up resentfully, knowing we had to go to school. We said goodbye to our new family, and as they said their goodbyes, their eyes were exhausted and their expressions emotionless. Clover looked at me with concern, and I just shrugged. As we walked into school, the air had changed. I thought about how odd it was as Clover and I checked our schedules.

“I have English first, how about you?” Clover asked. I let out a sigh of relief as I showed her my schedule, which also showed ‘English’ for our first period. She squealed excitedly as we made our way to the classroom. As we entered the classroom, I paused. Something wasn’t right. My gut was telling me that something was eerie about this place. Clover didn’t seem to notice, so I pushed away the feeling of discomfort. A girl walked in with a sweet smile.

“Oh hello, you guys are new right? Come sit down!” She exclaimed, overly enthusiastic. “Yeah we are, thank you.” I said to the girl as Clover and I hesitantly sat with her. She introduced herself as Alice, and as she was telling us about the town, something caught my attention. “I love it here, it’s like you’ll never wanna leave.” Clover and I looked at each other but we were interrupted by the teacher and the rest of the class walking in.

*

I exhaled the air I’d been holding in all day as the bell rang, meaning our last class of the day was over. Clover and I spent the rest of the afternoon playing cards and talking about our classes. As I brushed my teeth, I thought about what this year will be like, and what I’m in for this time. I rolled into bed, and my eyes immediately began closing. I woke up to find myself looking around in our classroom, but it wasn’t our classroom. The walls were tangled with vines and an unknown black substance dripping from the wood tables and plastic chairs. My heart rate began rising, and my throat started closing up. A sharp pain went through my body like electricity, as a hand grabbed my face. Alice? No, she looks different. Scales wrapped around her clothes, and her eyes... “Hello **friend**.”

Chapter 3: Clover?

I woke up with my heart pounding.

"Scales?" I blurted out, sweat dripping from my hair. I was still in disbelief. Eventually I brushed it off and carried on with my morning. I stumbled my way to the kitchen, Clover patiently waiting for me with a bowl of cereal on the counter.

"What took you so long, your cereals' gone soggy."

"Sorry.. Nightmare." I said, sitting down and chewing my cereal. I could see Clover's face go blank as she finished her food. I was about to ask her if she was alright, but I was interrupted by Bill barging in from the front door. By the time I looked back at Clover, she had already left to get ready.

*

The walk to school felt as if there was a metal wall between us. As soon as we reached school Clover faded into the crowd while Alice came dashing towards me.

"Hey **Friend**." My heart skipped a beat as she smiled, and I swear I saw fangs. I was frozen in position, my chest caving in and my stomach twists. The world surrounding me began to feel like a puddle, the ground beneath me melting as everything became dark. Very dark. Blank.

*

"He's waking up!"

"Quick! call the nurse!" I slowly regained consciousness, headaches started to blister as I opened my eyes. Clover was beside me, squeezing my hand while Alice came rushing in with a teacher behind her. The teacher gave me a quick medical checkup and discharged me from the nurses office and was told to go home to rest. When I stumbled out of the school, Alice stayed back at **school** while Clover decided to take me home, letting me rest on her shoulder. It felt comforting, feeling her warmth shielding me. Once we got home I started feeling a lot better, a heavy weight brought down by shoulders, it was clover, tears soon rolled down her face as she was tucking her head into my arms.

"I'm sorry.." she said, hiccuping in her words.

"Why are you sorry? It's not your fault." Assuming she was just guilty I went to go hug her back but she pushed me away. I paused and watched as she walked upstairs towards her room. Questions slowly started to fill my mind but shook it off.

By evening I was in the kitchen making myself a sandwich when there was a knock at the door, walking towards the door Clover came out of her room.

"Henry! Are you feeling better?" It was Alice.

"Hah.. yeah I'm feeling okay."

“Woo! Ok, great. I’ve got the BEST idea, how about we explore our school. Today students said there were blood stains in one of the old classrooms but the school blocked it off”. Her enthusiasm threw me off guard for a second.

“And in what way is this a good idea?” Clover spoke up from behind. “I mean we’re literally talking about trespassing into our own **school** just for some make believe, “PLUS Henry’s isn’t well”

“Uh well-“

“Henry said he’s fine, stop being boring and come on”. Alice gripped into my arm and pulled me outside.” After a back and forth conversation Clover eventually gave in and we set off to our **school**. When we arrived the place looked abandoned giving all of us chills. We decided to go straight to the room to get it over and done with. The door was locked up by a key but Alice brought a hair clip to get through. And just like Clover said it was just a fib. Alice and I chose to go home but something was odd.

“Clover?”

Chapter 4: Searching

The classroom was empty, apart from Alice and I. Clover was gone, she had been with us when we came to the school to explore. I thought it was a good idea to investigate the school. Alice said it was better at night.

"Clover?" I called nervously, I got a reply back but to my surprise it was Alice who emerged from the shadows.

"It's fine, she's probably just gone to look in another classroom...maybe there's more bloodstains." Alice looked at me with a smile and laughed, I saw a flash of sharp fangs and a flash of scales. I shifted my feet around and tried to smile back. "Yeah...yeah, she probably just wandered off..." I sighed and glanced around hoping that she would appear smiling and laugh at me for being worried, but she didn't.

The silence started to feel strangely intense, I felt oddly claustrophobic even though we were in an open classroom, I laughed nervously and tried to think of something to say, luckily I didn't have to, Alice headed to the door of the classroom and held it open, smiling and gesturing for me to walk out.

Alice watched me **tiptoe** out of the classroom cautiously, there was no light on and it seemed eerie and worrying. I mean it was nighttime so it makes sense. Though I couldn't shake the feeling of caution and regret of coming to the school with Alice, I still had to find Clover though so I couldn't go back to our exchange carer's house yet. What would they say if I showed up without Clover with me? I had to find her.

"Hey, uh, Alice? We should find Clover, it's not like her to just disappear, especially at night." I felt sick to my stomach as I explained to Alice that I had to find Clover. Alice's happy expression changed, she looked puzzled and after a few seconds she looked emotionless and almost judgmental. I suddenly became aware of how quiet it was. I stuttered, "I-it's just that it's nighttime and she could be in trouble and I should find her." Alice smiled again. I couldn't understand how she could switch facial expressions so quickly. "Just look tomorrow, it doesn't really matter, does it? It's a small town, she's not gonna go far."

I took a deep breath, I didn't want to make Alice upset. "Alice. I have to find her. I'll see you tomorrow." I turned around before she could stop me from leaving. I could tell she was grinning. "See you tomorrow friend."

Chapter 5: Something odd

I walked down the street unsure how to feel. I'm sure Clover is just at home. Where else could she be? Lost at school? Kidnapped? I start overthinking the possibilities of Clover's whereabouts. I should never have left her alone in this weird town with it's weird people. I walked around the abnormal and deserted shops and homes. The whole town was like a labyrinth, with endless alleyways and twists and turns. I saw somebody in the street, standing so perfectly still. Everywhere I went, something was wrong. I turned back the way I came, lost in thought. I don't know... then I saw her out of the corner of my eye. Standing in the shadows. "Clover!" I yelled to see if it was her. All of a sudden she started running, not towards me but away from me. "Where are you going, Clover?" I couldn't just stand here so I started chasing her. I chased for a while but I swear she was faster than usual. Then she stopped, she stood still for a second before collapsing. I ran over to her and knelt down beside her. Her eyes fluttered open and she said "You can't escape" Before passing out again. I worriedly look at her lying in my arms, her cheekbones hollow and eyes black. I snapped out of it and focused on getting her home and safe. "Alright Clover, let's go home." I picked her up, carried her home and put her into bed.

Chapter 6: This place is weird

The house was filled with a dull, empty silence. I felt eyes burning into the back of my head. My shoes squeak on the polished wood as I spun around. Clover. She stood there, eyes red, chest heaving, gulping down the stale air in the corridor.

"Clover?" I whispered as she stared into my eyes. "Clover, are you okay?"

"No," she mumbled. "Henry, she's mad. Alice I mean. There's something wrong, we have to leave!" She cried out, her eyes darted around the room. A loud creak sounded from the bedroom up the hall. Clover clapped her hands over her mouth, shaking.

"Henry!" She squealed into my shoulder. I pulled her back into the laundry room, the air **fresh** with soap. My feet caught on a bright white shirt, coffee stains painting the front. Footsteps skipped down the hallway, steel capped boots kicked open the door to the room. An old man in a tradie outfit stared down at us.

"What's happening? I heard screaming?" Bill asked, taking in the scene. He had graciously welcomed us into his home now here we were, making a mess in his laundry. "Sorry Bill, we didn't think you'd be home this early." I mumbled, "Clover spilt her coffee on her shirt and we came to clean it." I smiled innocently. But Bill's face was plastered with confusion.

"But Clover don't drink coffee do she?" He studied me. I swallowed my fear, Clover tried too but it came up in loud choking sounds, hands wrapped around her stomach. I watched her, the sounds were so aggressive it sounded as if she would choke up a lung.

"Well best be off, we have places to be." I pulled Clover up and we raced out of the room, leaving Bill questioning how a fourteen year old girl could be wearing one of his size 20 shirts.

*

She slammed a heavy book on top of her folded jeans and zipped up the duffel bag.

"Right let's go! Now." She grabbed my hat and pushed it into my bag.

"Clover, chill. I can pack my own bag!" I pulled it out of her hands and moved across the room to stare out the window. "This place is weird," I mumbled. "It feels off, like we shouldn't be here, but somehow..."

"You never want to leave?" Clover whispered. "Or that you shouldn't ever leave?" She watched me, her eyes glassy and mouth as flat as a line.

"Let's go, we'll miss the bus." I turned my face to the ground and practically ran out of the room. I would do anything to keep from looking at Clover again. Those dull, lifeless eyes cursing me. I shivered. It wasn't cold, in fact sweat was dripping down my face. The water clouded my vision, made the road blurry. I didn't wipe it away. We had one goal, get out of this damn town.

Chapter 7: It's starting to make sense

"Oh come on, come one, COME ON!" Clover was pacing back and forth around the seats, shaking her arms and rubbing her eyes. We were anxiously waiting for the bus, and I was still really confused about everything that had gone on. I kept looking over my shoulder, not exactly sure what I was looking for. Nervous habit. My knee was bouncing uncontrollably, and my foot was starting to ache.

"Clover, calm down. We're gonna be okay. You got your passport?" I reached into my backpack and sighed a breath of relief as I felt a small leather booklet underneath my clothes and drink bottle.

"Uh huh." Clover replied.

"That wasn't convincing." I started to say, but was cut off by the sound of the bus pulling into the station.

"Finally! Let's get out of this weird town." We hopped on the bus and it was empty - makes sense, because it was 2 in the morning - so we sat right up the front. Clover took the window seat and I took the aisle seat next to her, holding her hand tight.

"It's going to be alright."

*

"It's been a while Henry, when are we gonna get to the airport? I feel like I'm going delusional, I swear I've seen that exact tree like six times." Clover slurred, clearly exhausted. I didn't tell her this, but I had seen that giant gum tree multiple times, too.

"Do you want me to ask the bus driver about it?" I nudged her with my elbow.

"Mhhhhh." Her eyes were closed, so I decided not to disturb her.

"Excuse me? Bus driver? How long until the airport?"

"What do you mean? I thought you'd never want to leave." He turned around and grinned at me, and I saw a flash of sharp teeth and blue scales flicker across his face for a split second. I suddenly felt cold and goosebumps started prickling up my arms. I turned to face Clover, who was asleep, and suddenly my whole body went numb when I looked out the window. Alice.